CHAPTER – 3

THE MAJOR PRACTICES
3.00 THE MAJOR PRACTICES

Religion is a matter of practice and not just belief. As we know that religion is a comprised body of beliefs and practices. Yet more generally religion is understandable to all through rituals, or actions relying on basic religious concepts and beliefs. The religious practices, i.e., ceremonies or rituals are the expressions by which people can construct relationships with each other and with the higher divine authority. These are the means to fulfill the religious sentiments too. Moreover most of the rituals or religious ceremonies have a social dimension and are done with reference to groups of people. The way of performances makes the rituals unique ones and often becomes the identity of those communities or tribes or groups of people. As Emile Durkheim expressed that religion has a binding role for societies — religion brings people together and makes them feel part of a larger cohesive whole (society) (Durkheim:1964).

Religious rites and ceremonies are the volitional aspect of a religion. Religious ceremony or ritual is a set of actions, performed mainly for their symbolic value, which is prescribed by a religion or by the traditions of a community. A ritual may be performed on specific occasions, or at the discretion of individuals or communities. It may be performed by a single individual, by a group, or by the entire community, in arbitrary places, or in places specially reserved for it, either in public or in private or before specific people. The purposes of rituals are varied; they include compliance with religious obligations or ideals, satisfaction of spiritual or emotional needs of the practitioners, strengthening of social bonds, social and moral education, demonstration of respect or submission stating one's affiliation, obtaining social acceptance or approval for some event or sometimes just for the pleasure of the ritual itself.

Whatever be the meaning, it is a fact that the ritual plays the most important part in vitalising a religion or a religious tradition of a community. And the religious or ritual behaviour too is an important and vital element of a person cultural life although among these some have included blood sacrifice along with offered seasonal crops, special food, drink and much more.
Rituals of various kinds are a feature of almost all the well known societies including past and the present which includes along with the various worshipping rites and sacraments of organized religions and sects, e.g., the rites of atonement and purification, oath of allegiance, coronation, birth, marriage, funerals, before and after winning over the wars, special events like excavation tanks, building up of temples, wishing longevity of the king and the kingdom, seasonal festivals as determined by the solar and the lunar calendars and by the cycle of the seasons are also lead by the rituals.

The rituals or religious ceremonies are found as either family ceremonies or community ceremonies or village ceremonies. Rituals can be performed individually or communally, depending on this, rituals are divided into major and the minor ones.

The Tai Ahom religion is a ritual oriented religion. Therefore a number of major and minor rituals are found in it which are performed very festively. The Tai Ahoms still practice their traditional religious rites and ceremonies having a linkage with the Tai culture of the South-East Asia. Most of those rituals are socio-religious ceremonies. Although in course of time the Tai Ahoms were much influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism yet they did not give up their own traditional religion, beliefs and practices.

The rites and rituals are just the ways to show the humble submission, respect and love, oneness with each other in a social atmosphere mosaic with ritual attachment. Seasonal crops, fruits, drink etc. are offered with prayers to giving thanks and seeking blessings from the Divine. Religious practices may be studied under two heads- Major and Minor. Both are performed either regularly at certain periods of the year or annually at the definite point of time or these are also performed on certain specific occasions and are performed in accordance to the need of a person, or a family, or a community, village as well as the country. In the Tai Ahom religion religious ceremonies or rituals can be performed individually as well as communally.

The Tai Ahom religion is comprised of both sacrificial and non sacrificial religious ceremonies and with basic belief in ancestor worship. And in most of the major rituals blood sacrifice is a must. This chapter is an attempt to focus on the major religious practices still performed by the Tai Ahoms.
The followings are the major religious ceremonies of the *Tai Ahom* religion:

i) *Me-Dam Me-Phi*,

ii) *Um Pha*,

iii) *Rikkhon*,

iv) *Phura Lung*

### 3.01 ME-DAM ME-PHI CEREMONY

The *Me-Dam Me-Phi* (*Me* – worship, *Dam* – dead, *Phi* – spirit or god) is a socio-religious ceremony of the *Tai Ahoms*. It is a community ancestor worship.

The literal meaning of ‘*Me-Dam Me-Phi*’ is the worship of dead and gods. ‘*Dam*’ means the ‘dead’ and ‘*Phi*’ means ‘god’ or ‘spirit’ or the higher transformed form of the dead. The *Tai Ahoms* believe in the divinity of the dead and so worship the dead as god.

This major socio-religious, communally observed ceremony is based on the cult of ancestor worship. Its antiquity is as long as the great *Tai* race. It ordinarily means offering oblations and taking care of the dead (ancestors). But looking deep into its philosophy, the celebrations suggest the invoking the life force in human life to secure social control for solidarity, vitality in national life both at the time of national peril as well as in the time of peace and prosperity, success and failure (Buragohain 2005:1). This ceremony is performed annually. At present the 31st January is the stipulated date for performing it instead of performing it in the month of *Dinha* (*Chaitra*).

This ceremony has been performed from time immemorial. The *Tai Ahom* chronicles give us the record of such performances in the past. *Tai* prince Siu Ka Pha has first introduced this ritual in this part of the country, *Mung-Dun-Sun-Kham*. Reference of this fact is found in the *Ahom* chronicles. As per the chronicle, *Chao Lung* Siu Ka Pha while coming down form Mong-mao, had crossed many mountains and hills. After crossing the *doi-la-ling*, arrived at *Nam-ruk*. There he collected and stored many things like pigs, hens, ducks etc at one place. The king worshipped the *dams* of mother, father, grand mother, grand father, the *dam* of the house, the *dams* of the leading persons. The worshipping was performed in a big way. The King saluted by kneeling, bowing down. After worshipping the main dam of the house and the king
prayed to the forefathers, ‘When I passed through Mong-Kang, I faced no difficulties. Therefore, there should be no untoward dangers in my case. I desire to occupy countries and I should be victorious in all cases. With this desire, I offer my prayers. O! my Chao-Pha Phet-Khan-Kham Chao-nuy-ru oi!’ (Phukan et al. 1997-98:44). Siu Ka Pha again performed this ceremony at Longtewkat (near to Charaideo) and again after establishing the Ahom Capital at Charaideo the king performed this form of ancestor worship to seek blessings.

The Tai Ahom chronicles gave references of this ceremony whose antiquity is as old as the Tais. It is said in the chronicle that when the princes Khun Lung and Khun Lai were sent down from heaven to the place Mung Ri Mung Ram by the Lord of heaven Lengdon, goddess Jashing Pha gave them the advice that—

‘at the end of a year, you worship us by sacrificing an elephant. Next year worship us by killing a cow and a buffalo. We bless you to be undisputed kings. Your grand father, the lord of thunder, desires to send you down to rule the earth. We wish you to govern the earth with prudence. We wish, you will not forget our advice. When the month dinha (Chaitra) comes and all sorts of flowers, the wild orchids and Sheng Pha (chingkora) flowers begin to blow you must select a day and offer annual sacrifices to the gods and worship them. Lengdon with all the eight hundred thousands gods will descend to the earth and take your offer of annual sacrifices with them. Then your kingdom will remain safe’ (Barua 1985:16).

This advice was followed by them and Siu Ka Pha and the other Tai Ahom kings have followed the advice and performed the ceremony with great honour. Even today the Ahom people observe this ceremony presided by the priestly clean. The three priestly families are the present custodians of the Tai Ahom religion.

There is a Khek-Lai (Kheklaï, Manuscript No.6) Me-Dam Me-Phi, which is also called Lit lai Me-Dam Me-Phi where the procedure of worship of gods and Dam Phis is found. As per this Khek Lai in Me-Dam Me-Phi worship, an octagonal ho phi constructed temporarily by bamboo sticks and thatch. Me-Dam Me-Phi while observed publicly it becomes a socio-religious festival.
Me-Dam Me-Phi is a public worship of ancestors. Me-Dam Me-Phi is a traditional religious ceremony of the Tai Ahoms. In this ceremony the Chao Phi or presiding gods (the natural forefathers) and Dam Chao Phi (dead ancestors above thirteenth generations) are worshipped. They are:

1. Khao Kham
2. Ai Leng Din
3. Jashing Pha
4. Jan Chai Hung
5. Lengdon
6. Chit Lam Cham
7. Mut-Kum Tai-Kum
8. Dam Chao Phi or Chao Phi Dam (forefather above thirteenth generations of the living family)
9. Ra-Khin
10. Ba-Khin

The requisite articles are: Khao Chan (raw rice), Kai Cheng (holy fowl/specially raised hen), Kai Khai (eggs of hen), Luk Lao (rice beer), Mak mu (betel nut), Bau plu (betel vine leaf), Khring (ginger), Man nga (mustard oil), Klu (salt), Kui (banana), Oi (sugar cane), Ban Phai (lamp), Num Che (milk), Nam oi (molasses), Nam Thum (curd), Khai nuk pet (eggs of duck), Ching kora or blok sing pha (a kind of sacred leaf), Maihang (a raised platter made out of bamboo), Laru karu (sweet meat, not baked), Chup tao (a waterful pot to wash mouth), Tangkak (a receptacle stand made of banana sheath).

At first the priests (Mo'sam, Mo'hung, Mo'Plong) construct an octagonal ho phi (house) by bamboo sticks and thatches where six raised platters are placed in a row under a roofed shed on the ground for the gods – Jashing Pha, Jan Chai Hung, Lengdon, Chit Lam Cham, Mut-Kum Tai-Kum, Chao Phi Dam. On left side of the main platform two platters are built for Khao Kham and Ai Leng Din. A white cloth is hanged out in the back side of the ho phi. Right side of the main platform two platters are made on the ground for the evil gods Ra Khin and Ba Khin.

Before starting the ceremony the priests sprinkle the nam nga pulok (nam: water, purifying water; nga pulok: ambrosia or chingkora flower mixed water) three
times to purify the place, to purify articles of offering and to purify the gathered people; and chant the hymn. The substance of the hymn as collected from Mo’lung Tileswar Mohan is:

‘Oh’ the Lord Phura! Ancestor gods we salute you and invite you. Today the priests Mo’hung, Changbun, Mo’plongs are observing Me-Dam Me-Phi at Moran of Mung Dum Sun Kham and invite you by preparing the ambrosia nam nga pulak. Please, come and bless every one from the child to the old one by giving them knowledge, justice. Today we offer our oblations to you on this Me-Dam Me-Phi. We have purified all these by sprinkling chingkora mixed holy water. At the end of the year again you are worshipped. Oh’ the gods of the country! The descendants of you are suffering from strange miseries, misfortune, diseases etc. May you grant us happiness, long life and well being by driving out all shorts of evils, diseases etc. We truely invite you to come down and give us blessing’.

The priests again prepare nga pulok and chant: ‘Today we have prepared sacred ambrosia (nga pulok) by mixing honey, sugar, milk, curd and butter. Truely, come down and bless us. Oh’ the Lord above our head! We salute you’. With the chanting of the hymn, the chingkora flower mixed holy water (nam nga pulok) is sprinkled over by the priest to purify the place, articles and people. And the embrosia is distribited to partake by all.

By chanting the above welcome hymn and sprinkling the nam nga pulok on the articles and all the gathered people along with the priests, they all chant the prayer which is called ‘Ai sing lao’.

The meaning of the prayer is thus: ‘Oh’ the supreme God overhead in the sky! Pha Tu ching Phrong Hum! The creator of the Universe. He is all pervading, Omniscient, Omnipotent and Infinite. He is the sustainer of the Universe. The Supreme Lord of the holy scripture, Peyn kaka. Oh’ the lord above the head! We salute you. Oh’ the divine scholarly forefathers Ai ke Kheyn, Ai Ke Kham, Ai Chang Sing, Mo’Ching Pha, Mo’Laokhri, Pujakji, Jashing Pha and their descendants Mo’hung, Changbun and Mo’plong, we salute you all’.

After chanting the Ai sing lao (prayer) the priests start performing the ritual. Although the first shed is offered to Khao Kham, the presiding deity of water, yet the
ritual starts with the worship of *Pha nuru Lengdon* because he is the main god and the progenitor of the *Ahom* kings. At first the priests chant *Ao-Tang* (welcome hymn) incantation to all the gods.

1) **Lengdon**: ‘*An nang chao nuru chao kao oi* (3 times)

\[
\begin{align*}
Chao & \text{ Pha phet Kham Kham bong Kham,} \\
\text{tu} & \text{ mounng tu te luk re pha Chang Dam} \\
\text{chong} & \text{ chao yanang yanang moung kep chong bun} \\
\text{chong} & \text{ chao yanang yanang moung kep chong kham} \\
p & \text{ pi pai nang lai dai} \\
\text{khun khai na lai chom,} \\
\text{chung mou chao chung mou Phi} \\
\text{chao nu ru chao kao oi, chao nu ru chao kao oi}. \\
\end{align*}
\]

Meaning: Oh’ the Lord above our head! You are the Lord of the wealth of the universe. You are the Lord of creation and destruction and the whole world of life is sustained and maintained by you. A year has come, so at the end of this year we are offering worship to you. We are inviting you. Please, come and partake our offering.

The offering articles are: In a raised altar made of bamboo sticks three packets having three eggs of hen, three packets of rice beer, three pieces of betel nuts and betel leaves wrapped with *chingkora* flower; three packets of fine aroi rice mixed with mustard oil, salt and ginger, three earthen lamps; along with these packets of fruits (banana, sugar cane), a *chup tao* are offered. A hen has been sacrificed by strangulating the throat, three pairs of betel nuts and leaves on a *tangkak* are given on three pairs of banana leaves by keeping the inside part upward.

Under the *maihang* of *Lengdon*, an altar has been given to an attendant called *tekela* having one packet of rice mixed with salt, ginger, mustard oil, fruits, rice beer, betel nut and leaf wrapped with *chingkora* flower, one egg of hen. All are offered on a banana leaf lying on the ground by keeping the inside part downward, it is called Hindu *bhogia*, because the Hindus keep it that way in the rituals.

2) **Khao Kham**: ‘*Chao nu ru chao kao oi*

\[
\begin{align*}
Pu & \text{ Khao Kham choi kum-ja Khao Kham choi khen} \\
p & \text{ u dang ri ja dang ri - pu tai ta ja tai kum} \\
\text{mlon ching pha nam khe khon pan lai rom} \\
\end{align*}
\]
nam la la chit - chan ka khe lan
rik ching boi chung mou chao chung mou phi
boi mou chao kao oi.
Chao nu ru chao kao oi’.

Meaning: Oh’ the supreme forefather! You are the prime ancestor parents. You are all pervading from river to the ocean as a mother water, as a father water, we salute you. Please, come and partake our kind offerings.

Offerings: Two packets of rice beer, rice mixed with salt, ginger and mustard oil, two pieces of betel nut and leaves wrapped with basil (tulsi) flower, a pair of eggs of duck, two pairs of betel nuts and leaves, a lamp, a tangkak, a pair of earthen lamps, fruits are offered on a pair of the banana leaves (forepart) lying its outside part upward. The offerings are given on the shed or platter made on the ground. The priests construct a ho phi or mad ghar from banana sheath. Inside this ho phi all the offerings are presented to the god of water Khao Kham.

(3) Ai Leng Din: ‘Chao nu ru chao kao oi

Ai Leng Din phu khru bao Lengdin phu ngeu
Mo’ mun cham mlon cheng pha chit chan lan moung
teo chi moung kang moung teo moung tam moung phi
ti chit chan rik ching boi mou chao kao oi’.

Meaning: Oh’ the great fore father! You are the primordial Father-Mother Earth, esteemed Master of three scholars, Lord of seaven earths, Lord of three worlds – heaven-earth-netherland. We salute you. We are requesting you to come and partake our offerings.

Offerings: Three packets of rice mixed with salt, ginger, mustard oil, three eggs of hen, three packets of rice beer, three pieces of betel nuts and vine leaves wrapped with chingkora flower, a lamp, fruits, a pair of betel nuts and leaves on a tang kak, a chup tao are offered. All these are offered on three pairs of banana leaves lying upward.

Again outside the ho phi of Ai Leng Din made of a kind of straw, an another platter is given where a packet of rice with ginger, salt, mustard oil, a piece of betel nut and leaf, one egg of hen, a packet of rice beer, fruits are offered.
(4) **Jan Chai Hung:** 'Chao nu ru chao kao oi  
_chao Pha Jan Chai Hung ngi Khai Pha lan  
_Khai Mou Lengdon tek pin chao  
_Khao Kham Leng Din tek pin khun  
_rit lang chong kin tai lak nang, chong kin kham  
_chao nu ru chao kao oi'.

Meaning: Oh' the Lord above our head Jan Chai Hung! You are the master of the gods of entire universe, heaven and earth. You are as powerful as the god Khai mou Lengdon and Khao Kham Leng Din and even you can take their seats. We are inviting you Khai mou Lengdon and Khao Kham Lengdin. Please, come and have seats in the assigned altars. Oh' the great forefathers, great fathers. We salute you.

Offering: Two packets of ginger, mustard oil, salt mixed rice, two eggs of hen, two pieces of betel nuts and leaves wrapped in chingkora flower, a lit wick, two packets of rice beer, a chup tao, fruits (banana and sugarcane), a pair of betel nut and leaves on a tang kak, all the articles are presented on a pair of banana leaves.

An altar is made under the maihang for an attendant of Jan Chai Hung. On that altar one packet of the above offerings are given except the lamp (kak phai), pairs of betel nut and leaves are offered on a tang kak.

(5) **Chit Lam Cham:** 'Chao nu ru chao kao oi,  
_Chao Pha Ai Pha lan Chao Pha Nget Chai lum  
_Chao Pha Bao ho Khe Chao Pha Bao Plong moun  
_Chao Pha Rin Kan Moun - Chao Pha Bao Teng Cha  
_Chao Pha Bao Luk Pha, Tang Lai Kha oi.  
_Hit di hit khen - choi kum choi khen  
_Boi mou chao kao oi'.

Meaning: Oh’ our great forefathers! The Lord of seven lakhs thunders and storms, light, dew-fog, rivers, lakes, seas, ocean, hail and storm, wind. Oh’ the gods above our head! We are inviting you. We are offering you many articles. Please, come and take your assigned seat.

Offering: A packet of ginger, salt, mustard oil mixed rice, a piece of betel nuts and vine leaf wrapped with chingkora flower, one egg of hen, one receptacle full of rice
beer, a lit wick presented on a pair of banana leaves, one chup tao, a bunch of betel nuts on a tang kak (Sometimes the articles are given in seven packets to the seven deities of Chit Lam Cham).

No offering are given under the maihang for any attendant.

(6) Mut-Kum Tai-Kum: ‘Chao nu ru chao kao oi

Phi Mut Kum Tai Kum, Khun Tun Khun Ban
Phi Cheng Ban
ke khoao jao lu kam hit di hit khen
boi mou chao nu ru chao kao oi’.

Meaning: Oh’ the great forefathers! Oh’ the sun god and moon god, the gods of light and heat! We are offering you oblation, we are inviting you, please come and accept our offering and make us all good, we salute you all.

Offering: Offerings are same with that of Chit Lam Cham.

An altar is given to an attendant of Mut-kum Tai-kum which contains the above articles in one packet.

(7) Jashing Pha: ‘Chao nu ru chao kao oi,

Chao mo’lik mo’lai

tun ru moung len kham chao mo’ngeu
chao pha-ko-rulai chao pha kham ching moung
chao pha peyn ching moung-ha-chip-puk mo’ru
cham chip puk mo’ching
lai ching moung tyu chao lai ching moung tyu khan.
ngek bo chen tam la chao ko chonik ru
phu ko chonik kham
Ai Ke Khen Ai ke Kham Ai Chang Ching Jashing Pha
Mo’Laokhri Pujakji Moungti Jashing Pha Cheng Kham
hit di hit khen boi mou chao kao oi’.

Meaning: Oh’ the Lord overhead! Oh’ the primodial scholar father, fore fathers, Master parents of knowledge and learning! You are the first knowledge giver. You are the Lord of all knowledge, the great Master. You are the wise forefathers above fifty and thirty generations. You are the creator of first letter, sentence and the creator of
the sacred scripture. You are the primordial Master of three wise scholars. You are the master of all the eight scholars – Ai Ke Khen, Ai Ke Kham, Ai Chang·Ching, Mo'Laokhri, Pujakji, Moung ti, Jashing Pha Cheng Kham. We salute you all. We are inviting you, please come and take your seats and make us all good.

Offering: On a pair of banana leaves lying upward, three sheds are given with rice mixed with salt, ginger, mustard oil. These are offered in the name of three original wise scholars and all the wise forefathers. In the three sheds, three eggs of hen, a lit wick (kok phai), three pairs of betel nuts and vine leaves on a tang kak, one chup tao, three pieces of betel nuts and vine leaves wrapped with chingkora flower, fruits are offered.

Under the maihang an altar has been given to the attendant that contains one packet of rice mixed with ginger, mustard oil and salt, an egg of hen, one pair of betel nuts and vine leaves, a piece of betel nut and betel leaf, a packet of rice beer (nam lao).

(8) Chao Phi Dam: ‘Chao Phi Dam, Dam Pu lin Pu mon nuk tu rang
Dam ti moung Dam nak chak khak tai pay pin Dam
ka chu khai pin phi
chu rik ja ju rok chu ti moung klong
chao nu ru chao kao oi’.

Meaning: Oh’ the great ancestors, forefathers! You are transformed to Phi by uniting your self with the nature after the earthly death and with your upliftment over the thirteenth generation. From the Dam of the house (moung Dam) you got the place of Phi. You left and become god in that way through which you come. Oh’ the great forefathers we salute you. You are offered oblations. By partaking these lead us to the good.

Again the priests chant: ‘Chao Phi Dam chip cham puk mo ru
Chao Phi Dam chip chi puk mo ching
Tang lai khao oi, heu hit di hit khen choi kum
choi khen’.

Meaning: Oh’ the forefathers above thirteenth generation! Oh’ the forefathers above fourteenth generation! We salute you all.
Offering: In the maihang of Chao Phi Dam on a pair of banana leaves two packets of rice mixed with ginger, salt and mustard oil, two pieces of betel nuts and betel leaves wrapped with chingkora flower, two packets of luk lao (rice beer without mixing water), a pair of hens egg, a lit wick are offered. But in this altar chup tao (washing bowl filled with water), tangkak are not given.

Under the maihang a separate shed is given on which the above oblations are given in one packet.

Ra-Khin Ba-khin:  ‘Chao nu ru chao kao oi
Khin Cho Pha - Khin Cho Khin, Khin ai lang
Khin chi lik chi-lai-Khin heu han
chao nu ru chao kao oi’.

Meaning: Oh’ the gods Ra-khin Ba-khin! The creators of diseases, ill happenings, mental and physical pain and miseries, madness. You got the place of unnatural gods from that of natural. We are inviting you, please come and accept our offering. Oh! the forefathers, great fathers make us free from all kinds of diseases.

Offerings: The altar of Ra khin and Ba khin are given separately outside of the main platform (ho phi). This altar is made on the ground from the right hand side of the ho phi. In the altar of Ra khin, on a pair of banana leaves two packets of rice (mixed with ginger, salt and mustard oil), two hen’s egg (instead of two black chicks) are offered. Tangkak, kok phai, chup tao are not given here.

Again in the altar of Ba Khin on a pair of banana leaves three packets of above offerings are given. But three eggs of hen are given instead of three black chicks.

No separate altar is made for any attendant.

After arranging all the articles, the priests chant the welcome hymn (Ao Tang) to all the gods. The Ao Tang incantation is made to invite or call the corresponding gods and deities and ask to take the assigned seats to partake the oblation.

The Ao Tang hymn:

‘Ao tang nang na pang khang na jang nang na pang
khang na phun. Tong mou kup tong bun tong
mou kup tong pha blok ching pha ka ring chang
blok ching pha ka ring plai. Mak mou kup
bou plu di hom rao mak mou kup bou plu di hom khen.
Khao chan di hom rao khao chan di hom khen.
Khring tuk nu klu tuk teu hom riyn riyn hom cha cha.
Kai khai di hom rao kai khai di hom khen.
Luk lao deng kam nang kham luk lao deng kam nang let.
Ao tang kai me thao ko khen khao po kai di kho kai cheu phum tak. Kok phai di hom rao kok phai di hom khen.
Mak mou phu leng bou plu phu leng. Chu mou chao chu mou phi. Boi mou chao kao oi’.

The meaning of the above hymn:

We are inviting you, please come to partake the offerings of the worship. You are offered on tender banana leaves, fine rice mixed with ginger, salt and mustard oil, luk lao, eggs of hen (and duck), lit wick, pieces of betel nuts and vine leaves wrapped with chingkora flower. The fowls are given to each of you. You are invoked to come and occupy your assigned seats to partake our oblation. Oh’ the great ancestors, forefathers, we salute you!

After chanting the invoking or welcome hymn the priests chant the offering hymn (Kin Tang). The Kin Tang hymn runs as follows:

‘Kin tang nang na pang khang na jang nang na pang khang na phun. Tong mu kup tong bun tong mou kup tong pha blok ching pha ka ring chang blok ching pha ka ring plai.
Mak mou kup bou plu di hom rao mak mou kup bou plu di hom khen. Khao chan di hom rao khao chan di hom khen.
Khring tuk nu klu tuk teu hom riyn riyn hom cha cha.
Khai kai di hom rao khai kai di hom khen.
Luk lao deng kam nang kham luk lao deng kam nang let.
Kin tang kai me thao ko khen khao po kai di kho kai cheu phum tak. Kok phai di hom rao kok phai di hom khen.
Mak mou phu leng bou plu phu leng.
Chu mou chao chu mou phi. Boi mou chao kao oi’.
The meaning: We are offering many articles on a banana leaf. Please, accept our oblation. Pieces of betel nuts and vine leaves are wrapped with chingkora flower. We have given fine rice mixed with ginger, salt and mustard oil. Hen’s egg and pot full of rice beer are given, please accept these too. With these we are offering fowls to each of you. We are inviting you to partake these offerings by taking the assigned seats. Oh’ the great forefather, the great fathers! We salute you all.

In the *Kin Tang* hymn or offering hymn the priests chant the hymn thrice by addressing the names of the offered articles and with each of the chanting the priests pour the rice beer thrice on the rice beer pots made of banana sheaths.

All the articles are offered corresponding to each god by chanting an inviting hymn called *Ao Tang* or the incantation used to invite the gods to partake the offerings. After chanting the offering hymn and next to it *Jon Ming* or hymn for seeking blessings is spelled during the *Me-Dam Me-Phi* and *Um Pha* ceremony. The *Jon Ming* hymn is thus:

*Jon Ming:* ‘Chao nu ru chao kao oi.

*Jon khon rao Jan khon ming, Jon ju ru nang lang lao kao.*

*Jon ju thao nang lao khi. Ja ruk hok poy Dam,*

*ja ruk hok poy khin riyn pi ja pin ban.*

*Lan pha ja lon ming run pin thum cham mlon mak kho-kham ka choi. Di dai moung thao dai ke,*

*Run thao rum ke tu khao tu ke jon khon rao jon khon ming.*

*Chao nu ru chao kao oi.*

*Moung ban kun phu bao man kun phu ngign man ko li khai*

*Phu chai man ko’ po’ man, me man luk man, nang man pi kai pi nang heu chip cheo ban.*

*Khai chip khai neu oapat oot kho, kha kap, tong kap, kha kap,*

*du kap, hu rang pak mai ja heu han kai lut put jaheu han,*

*Khek klong din deng let ak ja heu han, ma bu rong haija heu han, hu tai, pe nga tai, kun tai, phrit phra chi.*

*Kun phu-bao phu ning li khai phu chai man ko hu tim ren mu tim khok kai tim chun khai tim lak, ji ren ji khao chong lang. Ka neu ka teu kun jon kin khao bou chut dai ban heu*
phai klang tang ja heu han nam klang tang ja heu khum.
Nuk jang bu dam ka bou phuk rin mou bou phu ko' phat
pha dit ja phan mai ching ru, ja phan mai jon khon rao
jon khon ming'.

The meaning: Oh’ the supreme God, forefathers, ancestor gods Chao Phi, Dam Chao Phis! By partaking our offerings with satisfaction please, give us blessing. By driving out all the evils do bless us to be able to serve you with devotion. Bless us to have a long life of thousands and thousands days just as much as the hairs we have on our head.

Protect the youths, children, elders and younger, brothers, helpers within the territory. Protect from dizziness, fever, disease, outrage. The ill omens like- the tail of cow become twisted, the howling of jackals in the gate, hen lays shapeless egg, the pounding pedel shed bleeds, buffalo dies, cow dies, man dies, protect us from all these and give blessing so that further such evils may never happen in future. By driving out the far waves to the far, grant unto us wealth with vigorous family stock with healthy child, rich in buffalos in peg, cows in cowshed, pigs in shed, the front and the back granary may filled with rich harvests, may the fire never extinguish (in kitchen), like the continuous current of oil the flow of food may never break, unless and until the melon sink in water, stone float, bless us to live a prosperous life.

After chanting of the above blessing hymn the priests began to chant the farewell hymn or Boi Tang to the gods.

The hymn: ‘Chao nu ru chao kao oi.
Kin lai lai boi lai lai lai boi mou chao,
lai lai boi mou phi. Kin cham, bat cham, bat jao
poi ka ju ha bat, ru ka bat poi tao ma,
chup mou di - ma kin. Chup mou, ka mou, len mou,
aa pak bai na bai, nam tao din nam phat chi’.

Meaning: Oh’ the gods overhead, please take your way with comfort through which you were invited, by partaking our oblation with satisfaction. We have made many mistakes in worshipping you, in our speech and invocation, what we should do first but have done it later, what we should do at last done earlier. With your kindness
please, excuse and forgive us for all these faults. You are given farewell by washing your mouth and hands with the holy water, please take your way to return through which you came.

With this the priests sprinkle the holy water (nam nga pulok) three times over the mailhangs and pushed away them. And the ceremony comes to an end with the pushing forward of the maihangs.

Before starting the ritual the priests keep the holy text Lit Lai Peyn Kaka at the front of the maihangs. The above required articles to each god are given in the Me-Dam Me-Phi performed publicly but in a short way. In a full fledged Me-Dam Me-Phi red fowls are offered to each god, except Ra-khin Ba-khin. The eggs are offered instead of fowls (if fowls are offered then a kind of fried rice flakes (akhoi or cornflakes) are also offered in a full fledged Me-Dam Me-Phi. Total twenty seven fowls are offered and two are additionally offered in case of publicly observed Me-Dam Me-Phi. This may be the minimization of the heavy expenditure and blood sacrifice done in a community or public Me-Dam Me-Phi. And we can say that this is the provision of performing this ceremony in a small scale way so that everybody can observe it.

The Tai Ahoms, particularly the priestly families firmly believe that during the Me-Dam Me-Phi ceremony the ancestors physically come down to partake the oblation. Performance of this ceremony is to seek blessings in every sphere of life from the ancestor gods and forefathers.

The Me-Dam Me-Phi ceremony at present becomes a socio-religious festival and not a ritual only. It is a grand socio-religious ceremony. The Tai Ahom kings performed this ceremony from the very beginning with Siu Ka Pha’s advent to this part of the country. Many references are recorded in the Ahom chronicles on performing of Me-Dam Me-Phi. The Ahom king Chao Pha Shuhummung alias Dihingia Raja (1497-1539) after defeating the Kacharis in 1536 A.D. performed Me-Dam Me-Phi (Barua 1985:77). Siu Kleng Mung alias Gargayan Raja (1539-1552) observed Me-Dam Me-Phi celebration at state level after the victory over the Mughal (Barua 1985:73). In Lakni Mungrao and in the month of Dinsham (Magh) in 1563 A.D. the Koch king invaded this part of the country and sent a messenger named
Ratikanta with a view to make friendship and for peace with the *Tai Ahom* king *Chao Pha* Siu Kham alias Khora Raja. After the compromise *Chao Pha* Siu Kham performed *Me-Dam Me-Phi* and offered sacrifices to the gods and the dead (Gait 1967:90). In *Lakni Khutshi* (1606 A.D.) in the month of *Dinching (Aghon)* retuming back to Garhgaon after the war with the Musalmans and Kacharis near to the junction of Kapili and Maru dayang rivers *Chao Pha* Shusheng alias Pratap Singha performed this ceremony and offered oblations to the dead and sacrifices to the gods (Barua 1985:85,86,97). Again in 1615 A.D. before the war with the Musalmans the king with all the *Tais* worshipped the gods and offered oblations to the dead and spirits in Dikhau mukh (Barua 1985:98). Again in 1616 A.D. after defeating the Musalmans at Agiabandha the King performed Rikkhon ceremony and returning back to the capital and performed *Me-Dam Me-Phi* (Barua 1985:100). *Me-Dam Me-Phi* was performed by the King *Chao Pha* Shusheng in the month of *Dinshi (Phagun)* in the same year (Barua 1985:104). Shupungmung alias Chakradhwaj Singha (1663-1669) after his brother's defeatation by the Mughals to wipe out the ignominy as faced by the subject and nation in 1667 A.D., in the month of *Dinkam (Sravan)* held a council with the three Dangarias and other officers and expressed that - 'My brother Chao Pha Siu-Tam-La did not make any offer to our forefathers. So the Musalmans could come to our country and devastate the province. The Karis and Hajuas were massacred and all people suffered great misery. Now, I wish to propitiate ...gods by offering sacrifices and to make offerings to the forefathers. The people at large, should be collected and offerings should be made ... I wish to know your opinion'. In replay the Buragoahin said, 'In the ancient time, your forefathers used to do the same thing when they were overtaken by any such misfortune. They, thus, regained their former powers' (Barua 1985:195-196).

During the regin of Shunyeupha alias Lakshmi Simha in the month of *Dinruck (Baisakh)* in 1771 A.D. a beam of the principal house of the royal residence gave way. For this the *Deodhai* priests examined the legs of fowls and advised the king that ‘The spirits of the dead have taken shelter in the house, so the beam has given way. If you, now, offer sacrifices to the gods and the dead, everything will, then, be right’ (Barua 1985:319-320). Thus the priests performed *Me-Dam Me-Phi*. 
Again when Chao Shurempha alias Rajeswar Simha died, his dead body was burnt as per Hindu system but later on after the calculation found as unfavourable as examined by the legs of fowls, the Deodhai priests told that ‘this action was not good and so there was disaster in the country’. With due permission of the king the priests made an effigy of straw of the late king and burnt down it in the bank of river Brahmaputra on a auspicious day and the remains of the effigy was brought to Charaideu hill and put into grave and entombed it. The priests perform then the worship and sacrifices were offered to the dead kings altogether (Barua 1985:325-326).

Chao Pha Shuden alias Chandra Kanta Simha performed Me-Dam Me-Phi or the worship of the spirits of the dead after the death of Kamaleswar Simha (Chao Pha Shuheng) whose dead body was conveyed to Mulberry garden where it was burnt down and a mound was raised upon the grave. The three priestly scholars were entertained with a grand feast by killing buffaloes and hogs. And the Brahmins and Ganaks were offered gold and silvers. The Deogharia, Kharkhari Barbarua and Bar Deodahi Barua worshipped the spirits of the dead and offered oblation (Barua 1985:374-375).

After the British invasion in Assam, Me-Dam Me-Phi could not be performed for a long time. Yet, however since 1945 this socio-religious ceremony was performed at Charaideo. And later on this ceremony comes to be an annual socio-religious festival than to a ritual and people are observing it district wise, and even in many places under the same district, primarily in the districts of upper Assam.

Although in the days of Ahom rule elephant, buffalo, pig, duck, fowl etc. a variety of birds and animals were sacrificed to the gods as well as to the ancestors. Now-a-days, in the town areas eggs are given instead of pig and fowl.

At present day celebration of this ancestor worship, a community feast is also held among the Tai Ahoms and the non-Ahoms irrespective of their caste, creed, status etc. Side by side in this celebration an open meeting on current issues concerning the status of religion is also organized and is participated by a large number of intellectuals and general mass. There are some competitions like Quiz, art competitions are also held among the school going childrens and youths.
3.02 **UMPHA CEREMONY**

*Um Pha* is a grand religious ceremony where the principal powers of the *Tai Ahom* pantheon and the gods and goddesses of Hindu Pantheon and of local tribes are worshipped altogether with blood offerings of considerable grandeur.

Since 1253 A.D. when the *Tai Prince Chao Lung* Siu Ka Pha established the capital of *Ahom* Dynasty at Charaideu permanently, this grand ceremony has been performed. It is said the *Tai Ahom* chronicles that in Lakni Mungkeu, Siu Ka Pha constructed a town at Charaideu adjacent to a small hill. He sacrificed two horses in order to propitiate the gods and he adored the gods by offering a vessel full of silver at the foot of a tree (Barua 1985:47). And this was the first performance of *Um Pha* ceremony as said by the scholars.

The word *Um Pha* (*Um*: consecration, *Pha*: god) signifies 'consecration of god' or simply we can say - 'devotion to god'. According to Dr. Padmeswar Gogoi "*Ompha* is the worship of Lengdon, the Lord of heaven and the other gods too (Gogoi 1976:12). It was performed by the king with considerable grandeur and innumerable animal sacrifices. Dr. Numal Gogoi suggests that *Ahom* word 'Um' is synonymous with the Burmese word 'Yun' which means to 'believe in'. 'Pha' means God. Thus the compound word 'Umpha' signifies a belief in the heavenly gods (Barua 1999:28).

According to Dr. J.N. Phukan the *Ahoms* not only worshipped their own gods and goddesses, but also due to acculturation, some local gods and spirits were accepted for a better harmony with the local people (Phukan 1981:33-34). The *Ahom* kings after their Hinduisation, besides worshipping their own gods and goddesses, also picked up gods and goddesses of their subjects and incorporated them into the *Ahom* pantheon. Therefore, there was no clash with the local tribes in the matters of religion.

Again the basic belief of worshipping of the local gods and goddesses is that gods are the original forefathers and so the descendants can not be separated from their parent gods. Hence whenever the *Ahom* kings win over the local tribes then they also win over their gods. In this way the local gods were included in the galaxy of *Ahom* pantheon. And this is also due to the liberal religious policy of the *Ahom* kings.
Um Pha has been a state ceremony since Chao Lung Siu Ka Pha’s reign. The chronicles gives a number of references of this state ceremony from the very descent of Khun Lung and Khun Lai, the grand sons of Lengdon, the Lord of heaven, who were sent down by a golden ladder to rule the earth with the instruction to perform the religious ceremonies.

The ‘Deo Buranji’ gives the reference of the instruction given by Lord Lengdon and Jashing Pha to Khun Lung and Khun Lai, thus:

“Lengdon said to Khun Lung and Khun Lai, the two brothers ‘I advice you to act wisely ...I wish to send you down ...I send down Puphishu also there. He is directed to dwell in a large tree and reign in the forest. The tree is known as Tun rung rai (peepul tree) and he will be Lord of it. When the month of dinpet (Ahar) comes and the lakes and rivers be full of water, Puphishu should be adored by all the people by sacrificing buffaloes. Thus propitiated, he will keep you all safe and sound ...I give you a box containing an image of the great goddess. You must be always careful of your charge ...I give you a tasked elephant. I give you a pair of Kai sheng mung (fowl of holy country) to take with you. You will calculate future events with their beaks, entrails, and legs. I give you an embroidered cloth. I give you a pair of drums. When you may be in war with a neighbouring tribe you must inform me by beating the drums or if any tribe seeks war with you, do the same thing, then you are sure to get victory over the enemies. When there will be no rain, if you inform me by beating the drums there will be rain. If the sun doesnot shine, beat the drums, there will be sunshine. When there will be no light, inform me, I shall send down the light god, to give you light. If there will be a battle, inform me. I shall send down eight lakhs of gods who will cut down all the enemies to pieces as cloths are torn to pieces by a storm’. The Tais (Ahoms) should eat the flesh of the heavenly fowls. You will then be in possession of stores of wealth. I give you a sword. All the people of the country will pay you homage” (Baruah 1985:11).

Again Jashing Pha said to them – ‘Your grandfather the Lord of Heaven is going to send you down to the earth to rule over it.... We all bless you. At the end of a year you worship us by sacrificing an elephant. Next year worship us by killing a cow and a buffalo... When the month Dinha (chaitra) comes and all sorts of flowers, the wild orchids and shengha flowers begin to blow you must select a day and offer
annual sacrifices to the gods and worship them. Lengdon with all the eight hundred thousands gods will descend to the earth and take your offer of annual sacrifices with them. Then your kingdom will remain safe' (Barua 1985:14).

Later on, this worship of gods performed as per the advice given by Lengdon, Laokhri and Jashing Pha is known as Um Pha. This Um Pha is also called Saipha or Chaipha, but in ‘Saipha’ ceremony only the gods of the Tai Ahom pantheon are worshipped. No worship of other gods and goddesses of Hindu pantheon and other local tribes is done.

However, in Um Pha ceremony all the gods of Tai Ahom pantheon, Hindu pantheon and of local tribes are worshipped altogether. In other words it can be assumed that Um Pha is a public ceremony based on social harmony and integrity. It includes all the religious beliefs and practices within the same arena of religious atmosphere. The religious fulfillment of all the people – the Tais and the others got satisfaction through the liberal religious policy undertaken by the Ahom kings. It also shows their future perspective.

And therefore, in the days of the Ahom kings the priests calculated the favourable time for worshipping the gods by examining the legs of the holy fowl (Divination). And as per the divine instruction from the days of yore and till today beating of drums specially called ‘Maduli’ is a must in the Um Pha ceremony.

There are a number of instances of performing this ceremony during Ahom rulers, i.e., in the reign of Shuhummung alias Dihingia Raja before and after the war with the Chutias in 1522 A.D. and 1524 A.D. Um Pha ceremony has been performed at Charaideu, Chao Pha Shusheng alias Pratap Simha (1603-1643 A.D.) in 1640 and 1643 worshipped all the gods through Um Pha ceremony at his royal palace. Chao Pha Shupungmung alias Chakradhvaj Simha worshipped the gods at Charaideu and made offer of sacrifices to god in 1668 A.D. and in 1670 A.D. at Agiathuti. Shujin Pha performed this ceremony in the month of Dinsham (Magh) in 1677 A.D. at the Borpahar hill by offering cows, buffaloes to the god Langkuri and also offered animals to the God. Chao Shupatpha alias Gadadhar Simha performed it at Charaideu. In 1745 A.D. Chao Shunenpha alias Promatta Simha performed this at Charaideu. Chao Shunyeupha alias Lakshmi Singha after the examination of the legs of fowls done by
the Deodhai priests performed Umpha ceremony by sacrificing a white cow. King Lakhmi Simha in the month of Dinship (Bhadra) in 1770 A.D. at Garhgaon worshipped Langkuri and performed Saipha and Um Pha in the same year in the month of Dincipit (Ahin) at Charaideu, again in the month of Dinching (Aghon) the king by sacrificing a buffalo to the gods perform the Um Pha ceremony at Charaideu. In 1775 in the month of Dinching the king performed Saipha ceremony at Charaideu. Chao Pha Shuhitpungngam Mung alias Gaurinath Simha in 1781 A.D performed the worship of all the gods known as Saipha and in the same year the king at Garhgaon planted a Batbar and there he offered sacrifices to the gods. The king at Rangpur after the calculation of a favourable date made by the Deodhai, Mohan and Bailung priests performed Um Pha ceremony. One white buffalo, one white cow, and many white fowls, ducks and pigeons were sacrificed to the gods. All the heavenly gods were duly worshipped. The king after having a consultation with the Buragohain dedicated a copper building and a gold idol to the gods (Barua 1985:55-58,118,126,196, 207,251,279-280,315-318,330,337-338,356,370). In the reign of Shuhengpha alias Kamaleswar Simha's Um Pha Deo Puja was performed on the side of the Kapili river by the one Nagarial Mohan Barua and one Meki Deodhai in 1799 A.D.

The above references are recorded in the Tai Ahom chronicles. After a long gap the Ahom intellectuals have formed the Sadou Ahom Sammilon or ‘Sadau Asom Ahom Sabha’ on 13th May 1893 presided by the first president of Asom Sahitya Sabha Raibahadur Padmanath Gohain Baruah; Sadou Asom Buranji Sanskriti Samgha in 1955, Mohan Deodhai Bailung Sammilan in 1962, Patsaku central Tai Academy in 1964, Sadou Asom Phuralung Samgha in 1972 etc. to revive the Tai heritage. And with their effort, on 31st March in 1974 in the Rang ghar pavilion (Sivasagar District) Um Pha ceremony has been performed for the first time after the independence. This ceremony was performed on 9-11th July, 1980 in Amlakhi Deosal for the second time. In 1992 on 5th, 6th, 7th April this was performed for the third time. The last Umpha was performed on 23rd, 24th March 2004 in the same Amlakhi Deosal, Lakua. The next will be in the year 2016.

The Um Pha was a grand state ceremony in the days of Ahom Kings and performed occasionally. At present this ceremony has been performed at an interval of every 12 years in Rangagarah Amlakhi Deosal. It is a well known fact that this
Deosal was formerly in Charaideu and in the reign of Gaurinath Simha, his chief officer Purnananda Buragohain shifted it to the southern bank of Dichang river in Rangagarah under Niz Khaloi Ghugura Mouza. Although some views held that the sal is situated in the place surrounded by Amlakhi (Phyllanthus emblica) trees, thus it is named Amlakhi Deosal. But one Ahom priest Chao Bani Deodhai Barua (Barbam, Niz Khaloi Ghugura) argues that the Tai Ahom etymological meaning of Amlakhi is thus:

\[Am\]: perfect / full

\[La’\]: install

\[Khi\]: possess / regain; ‘Regained or fully installed shrine’. Hence to him, although there were Amlakhi trees, yet the name has no connection with that.

There are seven sacred shrines in Charaideu namely - (i) Mo’Lai, (ii) Ka-Lai or Dai, (iii) Hukum, (iv) Bantung, (v) Ho’Phi Pha noung ru (Roun Pha), (vi) Chum Ghar (Roun Chum) and (vii) Cheng/Seng Deo Ghar (Roun khun Seng) (Barua 1999:32).

The Ahom Kings performed all the worships in these seven shines. Besides these one Raiz paria Deosal in Longkak Jamunamukh area, Henduri Pukhuri Deosal in Simaluguri (Ramu gaon) are also two sacred shrines of the Tai Ahoms. As per the information from Mo’lung (priest) Harbeswar Hatibarua, Hatibarua Village, in order to continue the worship of the gods of the Tai Ahom pantheon and to secure the Tai Ahom society the priestly clans have set up Deosal in various places, such as: Amguri Deosal in Jajali Lechahihabi Mohan Deodhai Gaon under Mahmora Mouza, Bahguri Deosal in Bor Sahaki Mohan Deodhai Gaon under Mahmora and Khaloi Ghugura Mouza, Rangagarah Deosal in Garia Deodhai Gaon under Khaloi Ghugura Mouza. Hatibarua Deosal under same Mouza, Bailung gaon Deosal in Bailung Gaon under Bakata Mouza, Bor Deodhai Deosal in Bor Deodhai Gaon, Jahuar Deosal (under Bakata Mouza) in Boiragibar Mohan Deodhai Gaon, One Deosal in Simaluguri Ramu Senduri Pukhuri paar Mohan Deodhai Gaon, one Deosal in Saring Amguri Mohan Deodhai Bailung Gaon. At present Bakata Bordeodhai Sal is the only active sacred shrine where various rituals are still performed.

All the Deosals are situated under Bakata and Khaloighugura Mouza and Sivasagar District. Deodhai, Mohan and Bailung priests still observe this Um Pha
ceremony at an interval of five years in the Maz Gaon Bor *Deosal* by sacrificing a cow.

In Rangagarah *Amlakhi Deosal* at an interval of twelve years the *Um Pha* ceremony is performed in full fledge and very festively as a grand socio-religious ceremony.

The followings are the treatises on the procedure of performing *Um Pha* ceremony written in Tai language:

1. *Charaideu Bor Bidhi*, DHAS. Folio No.10.
3. *Um Pha Puja Bidhi*, preserved by Tileswar Mohan, Bakata Parijat.
4. *Khek Phi Um Pha*, preserved by Vidya Phukan, Bakata Patsaku.
5. *Um Pha Phi Kun Aan Lao*, preserved by Puspa Mohan, Bakata Parijat.

**The *Um Pha* ceremony:**

The *Um Pha* ceremony is a grand socio-religious ceremony and is comprised of tripartite functions, including the worship of three sections of gods:

1. The gods of the *Tai Ahom* pantheon, worshipped in the central altar known as *Bor Deosal*.
2. Gods and goddesses of Hindu pantheon, worshipped in the north and left of the central altar commonly known as Hindu *sal*.
3. Gods of the Wilderness and of the frontiers worshipped in the west, known as *Habi Deosal*.

**1. Bor Deosal**

The worship of the gods of the *Tai Ahom* pantheon in the central altar. The following gods of the *Tai Ahom* pantheon are worshipped in this *Bor Deosal*: *Khao Kham, Ai Leng Din, Lengdon, Chit Lam Cham, Mut-Kum Tai Kum, Jashing Pha, Jan Chai Hung, Chao Phi Dam, Ra-Khin Ba-Khin*.

(i) *Khao Kham*, the presiding deity of water
Offerings: A round shaped altar is made on earth with banana stems. On the tender frontal part of three pairs of banana leaves or *kou pat* (*Alpinnia allughus*) three packets of rice mixed with ginger, salt and mustard oil, three eggs of duck, one lit wick, three pieces of betel nuts and vine leaves wrapped with *blokjong* (*lakhimi*) flower, three bunches of ripe bananas, there pieces of sugar cane, sweet meat (*mithoi*) or rice cake, three pots (*thula*) full of rice beer (*luk lao*: rice beer made without mixing water), one potfull of water for washing mouth (*chuptao*). All the articles are placed in the single domed *ho phi*.

Water god *Khao Kham* is also worshipped in *Lakhimi puja, Me-Dam Me-Phi*, in household rituals as well as in life giving rituals (*Rikkhon*) to get longevity etc.

The *Tai Ahoms* as a branch of *Tai (Mao)* race is very much concerned with water just like the fish with the water. Hence there is a famous saying among the *Tais* – ‘where there is water there are *Tais*’. Water is essential for life, thus is worshipped as a life giving principle. We find a similar view among the early Greek philosophers. According to philosopher Thales (624 B.C.-550 B.C) of Miletus, the coast of Asia Minor, water is the ultimate reality. He viewed that ‘the principle of all things is water, that all comes from water and to water all returns’ (Stace 2005:21). According to Aristotle (384B.C.-322 B.C.), Thales’ opinion of asserting water as the ultimate reality may be based on the fact that ‘the nutriment of all things is moist, and that even actual heat is generated there from, and that animal life is sustained by water,... the seeds of all things posses a moist nature, and that water is a first principle of all things that are humid’ (Stace 2005:21-22). Again in *Yogini Tantra* there is a statement that, ‘*Tatra Jadjajjalong Devi tat*’ or ‘where there is water there is a goddess’ (Borgohain 2007:148). In the *Tai Ahom* religion also the god of water *Khao Kham* is worshipped in all the rituals by the *Tai Ahom* priests as water is the source of life or the basic building block of all matter and the worshipping platform of *Khao Kham* is constructed at the first of the line of altars.

(ii) *Ai Leng Din*, the presiding deity of earth.

Offering: An altar is made of bamboo sticks and ribs of banana leaves and a single domed *ho phi* is temporarily made to worship *Ai Leng Din*. 


The following articles are offered on three pairs of the frontal part of banana leaves. Two packets of salt, ginger and mustard oil mixed boiled rice packed with banana leaf (tupula bhat) in a triangular shape. Nine boiled eggs of hen, two pieces of betel nuts and vine leaves wrapped with chingkora flower, rice cakes, one oil lamp, two packets of rice beer, rice flakes (akhoi), two pieces of sugar cane, ripe and raw bananas, nine hens, one spotted pig etc. Two bunches of betel nuts are also offered to Ai Leng Din.

The above items are offered in one packet on a frontal part of a banana leaf, it is placed in front of the ho phi (on the ground).

(iii) Pha Nuru Lengdon, the Lord of heaven.

One holding house of raised platform on bamboo stilts with stairs upto the ho lung is constructed. One drum is kept to the right of the ho lung. One white elefant is constructed with banana stems and it is placed under the ho lung. On a raised platter (maihang) particular dresses, ornaments (bangles or gam kharu, ring, earings (keru), turban, chain or necklace etc) made of banana stems are kept for the Bor deuri (Bor-head, prime; deuri – priest). The Bordeuri is also given a shirt and a kind of cloth to cover his lower part of the body, commonly called churia. This is called 'hu-chung' in Tai Ahom language.

Offerings: On a raised tray (maihang) inside the ho lung the following articles are offered:

Two packets of rice, two pieces of betel nuts and vine leaves wrapped with chingkora flower, rice-cake, sugarcane, rice beer, raw and ripe bananas, eggs of hen, earthen lamp, salt and ginger are offered on a three pairs of the forepart of banana leaves and all are placed on three fences made of thin split bamboos.

One packet of each article is given under the raised ho lung to the attendant or tekela. Along with the above articles nine white fowls, nine boiled eggs, one white calf of a pig, one perfect calf (cow) of red colour without any deformities are offered to Lengdon. As per the rule the Bor Deuri should sacrifice the calf (cow) with a giant axe by putting on the requisite clothes (shirt and churia). But now, instead of an axe the Bor Deuri sacrifices the calf with a stick of guava tree. By clubbing with a guava stick the calf is sacrificed to Lengdon. After clubbing the calf to death the head priest
cuts the throat of it and takes out the blood to boil in hollow bamboo with joints (chunga). The chopped meat of the calf is mixed with salt, ginger, mustard oil and the blood are offered on the maihongs. The boiled pieces of blood are reoffered by putting in small split bamboo pieces. In the same way other birds and animals are sacrificed, all are put in such bamboo receptacles. The Bor Deuri then seats on a high stool made of bamboo posts and pieces covered with banana leaves and gives out future predictions to the bystanders. From the very beginning of the ritual it is believed that a kind of supernatural power or spirit (Sheng) is possessed by the head priest and so he could be able to sacrifice a calf just by a clubbing with a guava stick, and could tell about future happenings and the required things as the solution of any problem.

During the worship, birds and animals are sacrificed either by clubbing to death or cutting the throat or by strangulation. There is a wooden post called Kot-lak or Phuk Chang behind the central pavilion where the animals and birds are tied up for sacrifice.

(iv) Chit Lam Cham, the guardian deity of seven natural powers.

Offerings: A raised house, with a single roof made of banana stems, is constructed on six bamboo posts. The raised house is divided into two parts. In the left, one maihang is given and in the right side seven fences are placed on which seven pairs of foreparts of banana leaves are placed. A receptacle stand of eight intersticed bamboo posts is made and placed on the leaves. On the seven receptacle stands seven packets of the following articles are given to seven deities: pieces of betel nuts and vine leaves wrapped with chingkora flower, rice mixed with salt, ginger and mustard oil, eggs of hen, lit wick, rice beer, bunches of betel nuts, one black pig.

One item of each articles with seven fowls are offered on the ground on a forepart of banana leaf.

(v) Mut-Kum Tai-Kum, the gods of light - the moon and the sun.

Offerings: On a raised platform (maihang) two packets of the above articles are offered to Mut-Kum Tai-Kum. Such one packet is offered on the ground with two hens.

(vi) Jashing Pha, the presiding master of knowledge and learning.
Offering: On a raised platform three packets of the above articles are offered and one such packet of articles offered on a forepart of banana leaf placed on the ground. Three hens are offered to Jashing Pha.

(vii) Jan Chai Hung, the Lord of the gods.

A raised house made on four bamboo posts is constructed, inside the house two fences are placed on a raised maihang. On two pairs of the foreparts of banana leaves one receptacle stand is placed where two packets of the above articles are offered. Two hens are offered to Jan Chai Hung.

One packet of each article is offered on a fore part of a banana leaf is placed on the ground.

(viii) Chao Phi Dam, the forefathers above thirteenth generations as counted from the living ones.

Offerings: On a raised platform (maihang/phun) pieces of betel nut and vine leaves wrapped with chingkora flower, rice mixed with salt, ginger and mustard oil, eggs of hen, rice beer, one lit wick, a bunch of betel nuts, hen etc. are offered on a pair of the fore part of banana leaves. Two packets of these articles are offered to Chao Phi Dam. An another packet of one egg, one piece of betel nut and vine leaf wrapped with chingkora flower, salt, ginger and mustard oil mixed rice is offered on the ground.

(ix) Ra-Khin Ba-Khin, the presiding deities of evil powers.

Offerings: A platform is made on the ground for the two evil deities. On a fore part of a banana leaf or kau pat the above articles are offered. Two black chicks are offered to Ra Khin and Ba Khin.

The priests offer the articles to all the gods of the Tai Ahom pantheon by chanting the welcome hymn (Ao Tang) addressing to all of them three times along with the names of offered articles.

The Ao Tang hymn to Khao Kham:

‘Chao nu ru chao kao oi,
Pu Khao Kham choi kem ja Khao Kham choi khen
pu dang ri ja dang ri.
Pu tai kem ja tai ta. Mlon ching pha nam khe
Meaning: Oh’ the supreme forefather! You are the prime ancestor parents. You are all pervading from river to the ocean as a mother water, as a father water. We salute you. We welcome you. You are offered on a maihang, on a fore part of a banana leaf, pieces of betel nuts and vine leaves wrapped with basil (lakhimi) flowers, rice mixed with salt, ginger and mustard oil, eggs of duck, one luk lao, one lit wick, bunces of betel nuts are offered on a tangkak. We invite you, please come and take the seat, oh’ the fore fathers!

After the chanting of the welcome hymn (Ao Tang) the priests chant the offering hymn (Kin Tang) to gods. The Kin Tang hymn is same with the Ao Tang hymn. While chanting the Kin Tang hymn instead of pronouncing the word ‘Ao Tang’ the word ‘Kin Tang’ is pronounced. After the chanting of Kin Tang or offering hymn the priests chant Jon Ming or Jon Tang hym or blessing hymn which is same with the blessing hymn chanted in Me-Dam Me-Phi ceremony. After the end of Jon Ming hymn the priests chant Boi Tang or farewell hymn which is also same with that of Me-Dam Me-Phi ceremony. After chanting the farewell hymn the priests sprinkle the nam nga pulak (water mixed with chingkora flower) over the maihangs and push ahead these and with this the worship comes to an end.
(2) Hindu Deosal

The second pavilion of worship of the gods of Hindu pantheon is commonly known as Mong-tao Mong tam or Hindu pang. In this pavilion four goddesses along with other twelve local gods and goddesses are worshipped. They are namely, Mahadeo, Phi-Me-Thao or Gossaini, Bor Baoli, Maju Baoli, Haru Baoli, Khetar, Ai na bhoni, Sat Gharia, Panch Gharia, Dong dongia, Apeswar.

The worship is thus:

(i) **Mahadeo:** A single roofed house is made of banana sheath. Inside the house a pair of banana leaves are placed in two parts on which rice cake, two pieces of betel nuts and basil (tulshi) flower, ripe bananas, salt, black pepper are given. On the top of the house an oil lamp is placed. A pair of pigeons, a pair of fowls, a pair of ducks, one white goat, one earthen pot for cooking, tonglati (a special kind of groove or canes) and basil leaves are given in a small pot (ghat).

(ii) **Phi-Me-Thao or Gossaini:** A single roofed house is constructed with banana sheaths. Inside it three pairs of banana leaves are placed on which betel nuts and vine leaves, rice cake, ripe bananas, three betel nuts, pieces of betel nuts and leaves, basil flower, tonglati are offered. Three ducks, four fowls, a pair of white goats, one pair of pigeons, black pepper grains and salt are given. One earthen lamp, one earthen pot for cooking are also given. A white perfect buffalo without any deformities is offered with a string of basil leaves placed around the neck of it. There are three earthen pots placed for holding the sacrifice. One earthen pot with tonglati and basil flower is placed there. A pair of banana leaves is placed to cover the seat of the priest made of banana sheath.

(iii) **Bor Baoli:** A small house is made of banana sheaths where three altars are made. On each altar raw bananas, rice cake, betel nut and leaves, pieces of betel nuts, tonglati and basil leaves are presented. Three chickens are offered to Bor Baoli. On three containers made of banana sheath black pepper and salt are given. A pair of pigeons, three ducks and one earthen lamp are offered. One earthen vessel for cooking, three earthen vessels and basil leaves are also required. One earthen pot with water and basil flower along with tonglati are offered to Bor Baoli.

(iv) **Maju Baoli:** Same offerings are made in this platform of Maju Baoli.
(v) **Ham Baoli:** A small house is made of banana sheaths where three altars are made. On each altar raw bananas, rice cake, pieces of betel nuts with basil leaves, betel nut and vine leaf, one lamp are offered. One goat, three fowls, three ducks, a pair of pigeons are placed for sacrifice. One earthen cooking vessel, three earthen vessels of sacrifice are also placed. A seat is made of banana trunk by placing a pair of banana leaves on it for the priest and one earthen pot full of water with basil and *tanglati* leaves is given.

The above goddesses are known as *Nang-rai, Nang-Khai, Ai me Nang.* They are worshipped as they could protect from diseases and epidemics. They are believed as the goddesses of epidemic diseases, small pox, chicken pox, meseals etc., so they also need to be satisfied by worshipping.

(vi) **Khetar:** An image of *Khetor* is made in the shape of a broken left hand from straws or banana stems. Javelines are placed on both sides of the image which is dressed with yellow garments and is holding one flute, a violin (*Bina* - a musical instrument) on one hand. Before the image two banana leaves are placed, on which ripe bananas, rice cake, pieces of betel nuts, wholesome betel nuts and vine leaves are offered. A pair of fowls along with a recaptable is given to be used for sacrificial offerings (for holding blood of the victim).

(vii) **Ai na bhoni (Nine or Sister):** Three boats are made of banana sheaths. One image of a winged lady and an oar are placed on the boat. In each boat nine compartments are made and in each compartment rice cake, ripe bananas, one piece of betel nut are placed on banana leaves. In the middle part of the boat one small roofed house is made and under it on a pair of banana leaves one raised shed is constructed from banana stems on which raw bananas, raw rice cake, three pieces of betel nuts, three wholesome betel nuts and vine leaves, *tanglati* and basil leaves are offered. Raised shed (*maihang*) with one oil lamp in the middle part is placed in each boat.

The above offerings are offered to *Ai na bhoni* or the nine sister goddesses they are namely – *Rekreki, Dhekdheki, Kua Khati, Chila Khati, Akakhi, Chourangi, Godhi, Gerali, nawar tingot ubhat Nachanti.*
(viii) **Sat Ghana**: A platform is made on the ground, on which ripe bananas, raw rice cake, two pieces of betel nuts, two wholesome betel nuts and vine leaves are offered. A bowl (dung) made of banana sheath for sacrificial offerings (holding blood) is also given.

(ix) **Panch Gharia**: The above articles are offered to five persons (minor deities) Selkonwar, Malkonwar, Goria Raja, Moria Raja, Dhuba-Dhubuni. It is said that the above ones were met by Siu Ka Pha during his way towards this part of the country and thus they are also given oblations.

(x) **Dong dongia**: An image is made of banana stem and sheaths. Nine arrows are placed in the side of the image. Dong dongia is offered oblation from the four sides of it. Ripe bananas, pieces of betel nuts, raw rice cake, whole some betel nuts and vine leaves are presented on pairs of banana leaves from the four sides of the image. Nine receptacles of banana stems for sacrificial offerings, one earthen pot, nine chickens, tonglati and basil leaves are offered. The head of the statue is donned with red or white flowers. One goat (brown coloured), a pair of ducks, a pair of pigeons are sacrificed to Dong dongia. At the side of the oblation of Dang dongia, a shed of oblation of ripe bananas, raw rice cake, ten oil lamps, one chicken, pieces of betel nuts with flowers are offered to an attendant (tekela).

(xi) **Apeswari Sabah**: Nine pairs of banana leaves are placed on the ground. Nine bunches of nine varieties of bananas are presented. Raw rice cake, nine betel nuts and vine leaves along with tonglati and flowers are also presented on the banana leaves. Two banana stem's receptacle for holding the victims blood, two oil lamps, salt and black pepper grains are offered. To the attendant, one receptacle of banana sheath is given. Four bamboo sticks are placed near the receptacles and these are tied with thread at the top just like an umbrella. Black, red and white lines are drawn with an opening on the front. This is called Mangal pota. The Mangal pota ritual signifies the rainbow in the sky.

In the Hindu Deosal, hymns are chanted in Assamese language because the gods and goddesses are the local gods of Hindu pantheon. The prayer is:

'O Hari! O Ram! Hail to the great god Siva and the old mother Devi Subachoni along with their attendants Ikola-Sikola, Yajali-Sojali, Bidhi-Bidhata, Tamuli-Tekela, local
gods: Goria Raja, Moria Raja, Sel Konwar, Mal Knowar, Dhoba-Dhubuni, Chamar and Dhulia Raja, Panch ghoria and the goddesses of epidemics, diseases and small pox and nine sister goddesses! You are the creator of kings and kingdoms. You give wealth to the have-nots, offspring to childless. You break the good trees and support the broken ones with prop. You destroyed sadiya and established Nadiya, you demolished the ditches and made power. You have destroyed the Diuras and made Siu Ka Pha the king. How are people blessed by worshipping you. You favour your votaries with offspring, conquest, food, wealth and office. O' the great mother, we are offering you a black goat, fowl, duck and pigeon for the well-being of us all.

There was neither land nor water in the hoary past. The sun and the moon moved on their own path. The gods of heaven existed in space. The four counsellors devised a boat made of clay. The earth emerged but who witnessed it. Who cut its navel? The owl hooted in the branches of trees. The corner frog cut the navel. God Brahma created, Visnu preserved and Rudra destroyed. The gods of heaven were put in proper places. There was nobody to negate. There was no god for worship. Since that time gods were created for men to worship.

O' the great mother! What happens to us your votaries? We rear cows and buffaloes but they do not bear offspring. We cultivate land but do not get sufficient products. We meet with loss in business. We are deprived of worldly success and enjoyments. Again within the household many strange and inauspicious things happen. Banana blossom burst out of the trunk and double-cluster of plantation appears. Hens crow, snakes and iguana enter the sleeping rooms. Thunder bolt falls within the homestead, buffaloes wallow in mid-fields. Witnessing all the strange and ill omens, we, your worshippers are reminded of approaching your holy and secure feet for protection. The astrologers have suggested us that these are due to the faults of our transgression to the will of the great god Siva and goddess Devi Hubachoni with her attendants. We humbly offering you on this auspicious day with our insignificant offerings for the general well-being and amelioration of epidemics, diseases and misfortunes of all sorts, O' Hari! O' Ram!'

During the worship in Hindu Deosal priests are found as possessed of supernatural power. The priests by possessing the divinity shows some unnatural
things i.e. Ghila Khel or the dance and play made by the priests slitting the animals (goat) and birds with their teeth and taking blood.

Again the person who sacrificed the buffalo in the Gosaini Sal also possessed divinity. After an interview with Dharma Ranjan Barua (the sacrificer of buffalo during the last Um Pha ceremony, Amlakhi Deosal, 2004), it is known that from four or five days before the Um Pha ceremony, he became indifferent to his family and other usual works. He remained isolated and he could not take his meals too and he began to felt something unusual happened to him. On the very day he went to the ceremony and took the charge of sacrificing the buffalo. But after sacrificing the buffalo, he could not even remember how he could do so.

(3) **Habi deosal**

This third altar is called Habi deosal or the worship of the gods of the earth's boundary. The following gods are worshipped in this division of worship: Langkuri, Nang Si Chao, Pu Phi Siu, Likha Chaman, Gatial, Chan Palik Hu-Palik, Khetor, Jokh, Bhut, Bagh-Baghini, Garakhia, Jakhya, Jol-Bak.

(i) **Langkuri**, the Lord of mountain: An image is made with banana stem and sheaths. Three pronged artifact in the shape of a trishul is made at the head of the statue of Langkuri and these three are wrapped with kou pat (Alpinnia allughus). Three layers of kou pats are installed in the earth vertically before the statue. Pieces of betel nuts and leaves stitched and folded with kou pats, three betel nuts wrapped with kou pats, ripe bananas, three raw rice cakes, fried rice powder, baked rice cakes, mustard oil, ginger, bitter cane (calamus viminalis / family palmae) are offered. Three chickens are placed on kou pat leaves, three receptacles made of kou pats, three receptacles of banana sheaths and stems where rice beer, salt, black peppers are given. One black calf of pig is offered to Langkuri.

(ii) **Nang-Si-Chao (Kalimati)**: Nang-Si-Chao is a local goddess. A shed is made on the earth with kou pats. Two pieces of betel nuts, betel nuts and leaves (wholesome), one black hen are offered. The other articles are same with that are given on the altar of Langkuri.
(iii) **Pu Phi Siu / Puphishu (Bar Chaman)**, the Lord of the jungle: A raised platform of bamboo or wood is made, on which seven layers of *kou pat* leaves are placed. The posts of the platform are covered with *kou pat* leaves. Seven pieces of betel nuts, seven whole some betel nuts and leaves, seven hens, seven female pigs, one red-white spotted dog, seven receptacles (made of *kau pat*) full of rice beer are offered to *Pu Phi Siu*. A bow made of tender bamboo sticks, one piece of cane is used stringing the bow, two drums, two bamboo with joint are made as the drums one of them being covered with *kau pat* are placed, inside it the tablets of *luk Lao* (rice beer is made from these tablets which contains a mixture of a number of medicinal plants) are given. The other one is also covered with *kou pat* leaves inside of which tender cane mixed with salt, mustard oil, ginger are placed. The two drums are tied inside the bow and the packets of food articles are tied outside of the bow in seven wrappings of threads. At the middle part of the bow seven pieces of betel nuts folded with *kou pat* leaves and flowers are tied up. At the end of the worship, the bow to which a chick is tied is taken by the deoris while dancing (by playing with the bow). The sacrificial victims (birds and animals) are sacrificed by cutting half of their throats called as 'letjoy'. A red coloured dog is offered to *Pu Phi Siu*. The legs of the dog are tied to the four posts of the raised platform after mixing the legs with mustard oil, salt and ginger and wrapped with *kou pat* leaves.

(iv) **Likha Chaman**: Likha Chaman is a jungle deity. A raised platform is made below a tree on four posts. Three layers of *kou pat* leaves are placed on that platform. Three chickens are offered to *Likha Chaman*. In case of *Likha Chaman* no bow and dog are given yet the other articles are same as that of *Pu Phi Siu*. One (*Aohatia*) packet of the above articles are given (to the attendant) on the ground.

(v) **Gatial**: Gatial is a local god. A raised platform on four posts is made on which two layers of *kou pat* leaves are placed. Two betel nut pieces, two wholesome betel nuts and leaves, two receptacles, a pair of red chickens are offered to *Gatial*. Other articles (rice cakes etc.) are same with *Pu Phi Siu*. One packet of the above articles are given outside the platform.

(vi) **Chan-Palik Hu-Palik**: Chan-Palik and Hu-Palik are the guardian deities of cows and buffaloes. A shed is made on earth where a piece of betel nut, one wholesome betel nut with leaves, one receptacle, one fowl is offered on a banana leaf.
(vii) **Khetor**: Khetor is an evil spirit. An idol is made with a flute and guitar. On a shed, raw rice cake, ripe bananas, a receptacle for sacrificial offering, salt, pepper grains are offered to Khetor.

(viii) **Jokh**: Jokh is the name of a ghost. An image of Jokh is made. On both the sides of it two javelins are kept. A garland of snails is put around the image. In front of the image, on a pair of banana leaves raw bananas, raw rice cake, ginger, salt, black pepper grains, one betel nut piece, a wholesome betel nut with leaf and a fowl is offered to Jokh. The fowl cooked with chopped banana stems (*pachala*) and fried rice powder is offered with boiled rice.

(ix) **Bhut**: Bhut is a ghost. On the ground, a shed is made. On a pair of banana leaves raw banana, raw rice cake, a receptacle of banana sheath, salt, pepper grains, one fowl is offered. The fowl is cooked with fried rice powder and chopped pieces of banana stem and offered with boiled rice. A wholesome betel nut and leaf, a piece of betel nut are also given.

(x) **Bagh-Baghini** or tigers both male and female: A shed is made on earth. On a pair of banana leaves raw bananas, betel nut piece wrapped with a (betel) leaf, a wholesome betel nut are placed. Salt and black pepper mixed raw rice cakes are offered in three parts on leaves. Three chickens are offered to Bagh-Baghini.

(xi) **Garakhia**, a herdman: One fowl, rice beer, betel nut and leaf, banana, rice cakes are offered in one packet to Garakhia or the herd man.

(xii) **Jakhya**: Jakhya is a ghost. Four bunches of banana, one fowl are offered on a pair of banana leaves.

(xiii) **Jol-bak** or ghost living in water: A fowl is offered to Jol bak, a minor evil water ghost.

In the *Habi Deosal* the gods of the *Tai Ahom* pantheon and the gods of local tribes and *Hindu* pantheon are worshipped altogether. Langkuri, Pu Phi Siu, Nang Chi Chao (*Kolimoti*), Likha Chaman, Chan Palik, Hu Palik, Khetor, Jokh, Bhut, Bagh Baghini etc. are worshipped as they all are residing either in mountain or in trees, or in jungle. The meaning of *Habi Deosal* is the *Deosal* for jungle residing deities. *Habi* means jungle. In the *Habi Deosal*, Langkuri is worshipped as he is the ancient god who resides in the mountain. He is worshipped by chanting the hymn:
Langkuri:  ‘Chao nuru chao kao oi
An nang chao kao oi, Khun Theo nga Lang Kuri Po Phi Khru me phi nga. Tang mung-ba mung khu teu pha ba myung nga.
Jim myuo phun di bou mi nga. Rin lung tek pin chao.
Rin lung tek pin khun. Doi ngin doi kham mou hit khon.
Doi ngin doi kham mou hit chao.
Cham ru rak ao khon tek pin chao.
Kon pha phouk rang moung tu ju.
Chao nu ru chao kao oi’.

Meaning: Oh’ the god overhead! Oh’ the ruler of the Universe, in the ancient time as there was none to rule. You are the presiding god of the huge mountain. You are the primeval, oldest god. You are the god of gold and silver. You are the god with a trident holder.

Lankuri is equated with Lord Siva by the Brahmin priests as he resides on mountain and the holder of trident etc.

Nang Chi Chao:  ‘Plao kham deng chit nang chit bun phu
ching khen ku-ber boi nyuo han
chao nuru chao kao oi’.

Meaning: Oh’ the goddess! The daughter of Kuber, Kolimoti you are dwelling in the jungles, we salute you.

Pu Phi Situ:  ‘Khun Thao Lung lai nyau kham Khun thao Lung Che man che tham lung phu khrphu ngaeu dun deu di mou
lak ru lam deu dim lak han.
Dun mai ngaeu hee kho ren kha nai ngaeu di tho nan.
Chao nu ru Dam Chao nu ru den chao dhi tin chao oi
mou wai long ma tao hong kham khwan
chao nu ru chao kao oi’.

Meaning: Oh’ the parent god! You are the presiding deity of the peepul tree, you are the creator of the earth, we salute you.
Pu Phi Siu is the god of Wilderness, one of the ancient gods who dwells in Tunrung rai (peepul tree) and reign in the forest. A red coloured dog (Ma nang) is sacrificed to Pu Phi Siu.

Likha Chaman: ‘Po’ Likha Me Likha ban lem tem tun mai ngeu hee tho ren, kha mai ngeu him non chao nuk dam nuk dein chao choi nyoi choi han’.

Meaning: Oh’ the great parents god of Chaman! You reside under the trees, dwells in the bamboo trees, live under the bamboo trees, sleep below the trees. Oh’ the great parents of Chaman!

Chan Palik: ‘Ho nyam nyam, khai ynam ynam, ho phok khai phok, chao nu ru chao kao oi’.

Meaning: Oh’ the guardian deities of cows and buffaloes! We salute you all.

Bagh-Baghini: ‘Chu phok chu-dam chu ynam ynam
chu deng chao nu ru chao kao oi’.

Meaning: Oh’ white, black, red leopards! We salute you. May you never take or eat our domestic animals i.e, cows, buffaloes, goats etc.

Khetor: ‘Phi leba pi kan ko pi tao mu...’

Meaning: Oh’ the deity Khetor! We are worshipping you so that you never bring any evil, ill fortune to any one of the family.

Phi Gatial: ‘Phi Gatial kham phai pha, Phi leba phi ka nok phi tao nyou phi nam chao la. Chao nu ru chao kao oi’.

Meaning: Oh’ the deity gatial! The sthala devata, bak, ghost, witch (male and female), water ghost, we salute you all.

In the Habi deosal the priests chant the welcome hymn to all the gods, deities, ghosts residing in jungle and water and offering hymn is chanted to all by addressing the names of the offered articles. After that a hymn is spelled out to all to seek blessings from them and after that the priests chant farewell hymn to all the gods and ghosts. At the end of the worship the priests sprinkle holy water nam nga pulok over the articles and platforms and with this the priests end up the worship in Habi Deosal. In Habi Deosal in case of some deities, statues or images are made to worship but in
the Tai Ahom religion no idolatry is there. So, the worship of such deities with their temporarily made images shows the assimilation of the idol worship as a influence of Hinduism and local tribes over the Tai Ahom religion.

The Um Pha ceremony is a day long ceremony. It starts with the very dawn and is observed for two or three days. The whole worship is divided into three divisions and three priests divide themselves into three groups in accordance to the three divisions of worship. The worship begins with the worship of the gods of the Tai Ahom pantheon which is called Bor Deosal. In this pavilion the worship is performed in the Tai Ahom traditional way by using Tai Ahom language in chanting the mantras (Ao Tang, Kin Tang, Jon Tang and Boi Tang). In the Hindu Deosal the priests were seen as possessing some kind of supernatural energy or power during the worship of gods. Sometimes they used to wear strange dress and their behaviours were found to be different ones. On the very day of worship, as per the divine instruction a drummer announced the beginning of the ceremony by beating the drum (Kong-Lung) at dawn. Then the priests began to light the oil lamps and incense sticks. They would let loose their individual offerings (birds, animals etc.) from the tying post (Khot lak) and keep before the lamp-stand (Lak Kui Leng) having twenty five earthen lamps on it and the priests lead away to their individual altars for sacrifice. The priests after arranging all the articles and altars, prepare the sacred ambrosia called naya pulok (milk, butter, curd, sugar, honey) and sanctified holy water called nam nya pulok in a big bowl by chanting divine hymns and partake this holy water (chingkora flower mixed water) themselves and sprinkle it over the articles in the altars, birds, animals for sacrifice. The preparation of holy water is followed by a hymn which is called Nam jariu jara. It is same with that of chanting of Nam jariu jara in Me-Dam Me-Phi.

In Bor Deosal a calf is sacrificed to Lengdon, the Lord of heaven. The sacrifice of the calf in Bor Deosal in the last Um Pha ceremony in 2004, was done by Bor Deuri Lakhminath Katoki (Patsaku, Kokilachuk). The other birds (duck, hen, fowl, pigeons), pigs are also offered in this Deosal corresponding to each god. Luk lao or rice beer is offered to each god. Offering of rice beer is a must in the worshipping of gods of the Tai Ahom pantheon. The Bor Deosal pavilion is constructed permanently. But according to some priests the culture of using natural things like the
different parts of banana tree, bamboo tree etc. should be there in making of maihang (altar), ho lung (raised house) etc., otherwise this art will be go slain in course of time.

3.03 RIKKHAN / RIKKHON / RIKKHWAN CEREMONY

_Khon_ ceremony is performed by all the Tais. 'Rikkhon' is a kind of grand state religious ceremony which is performed as a victory celebration in which the priests invoke (rik) long life (Khon). The full expression being Rik Khon Moung Khon which means calling for the well-being of the king and the country. A great sinner is also expiated by the performance of the Rik khon by the Deo dhai (Mo'sam), Bailung (Mo' plong) and Mohan (Mo'hung) priests. The sinner is looked upon as dead to society and is given new life by the priests by performing this Rikkhon ceremony (Gogoi 1976:15).

The Tai Ahoms believe in 'khon' as an element or unit of vitality, life force, long life, energy etc. They believe in the plurality of khon, for instance, eye, nose, hand, finger, legs etc. all possess khon. The seats of khon are distributed all over the body. These khons make an individual energetic, healthy and brave, active and strong. Although losing of khons may happen to anybody – children, youth, old aged person etc. If a person get fright, stumbled, fall sick, become weak, fall in water, involved in sin and crime, suffered from mental anxiety and complexities then it is believed that some of the khons of his body have gone away. And these fled or lost khons gave up the human body and fly away to reside in water (sea, river, stream, lake), jungle, mountains and trees, big and huge palaces, houses, the herbs, fruits etc. In order to calling back of these lost khons the Tai Ahoms perform the ritual 'Rik khon'.

_Rikkhon_ (rik – call, khon – longevity) is a _Tai_ word, Rikkhon is the ceremony of longevity or invoking higher powers and energy to grant long life to the village, the country or kingdom, the rice, person, the bride / bridegroom, the sinner etc. The same kind of Khon ceremony is found among the people in central Thailand for recovering a child who suffered from a fall or scared.

In Tai Ahom community also Khon ceremony is performed for the recovery from illness, fright etc. The Ahom kings performed Rik-thon, Ban-Khung-mung or Rik-Khwan-mung for prosperity, happiness of the people of the Kingdom, to subdue
the revolution against the King and for success in wars. *Rik-Khon-Phra Khanmit* was performed for keeping the sword in order (Chetia 2005:145). The *Tai Ahom* chronicles recorded the fact that when *Lengdon*, the Lord of heaven handed over the *Hengdang* (sword) to his grandsons Khun Lung and Khun Lai, he advised that the sword should be kept in order, in a proper place by performing ceremonies (Barua 1985:12-13).

The *Lao-lung* of *Laos* are performing *Rik-khwan* ceremony just before marriage (Savada 1995:130-131) and the same ceremony is still performed by the *Tais* of Thailand at the wedding ceremony (Kanittanan 1981:7). Similarly at the *Chaklong* marriage ceremony of the *Tai Ahoms*, *Rikkhon* is performed to gain new life, to obtain longevity of the conjugal marriage life along with happiness and prosperity.

There are many instances of observing the *Rikkhon* from time immemorial. According to the *Ahom* chronicle, *Lengdon*, the Lord of heaven, when he sent his grand-sons Khun Lung and Khun Lai to earth for ruling the country, he advised them to follow moral rules and in order to purify the sinner, they should prescribe him to perform *Rikkvan* ceremony along with the sacrifice of animals (cows, buffaloes) to get a new life. In *Tai Ahom* chronicle, it is stated that: “If you wish to purify such person (the sinner), you must collect all the people and inform Lengdon by by sacrificing ten cows. All the holy things are to be collected there and ‘Shengdeo’ too. The culprits should kneel down before the heavenly king. A feast should be given by killing cows and buffaloes. Gifts should be offered to all. The culprits should be allowed to drink a quantity of that water with which shengdeo be washed. Then he should perform ‘Rik Khvan’ ceremony” (Barua 1985:16). This shows that the *Tai Ahom* monarchs believe in *‘Rikkhon’* as purifying ceremony, by performing it a sinner can be purified or refined and could have free from the sins and crimes that he made. This very notion of purifying any misdoer has grown up among the *Tai Ahoms* from the instruction given by the Lord of heaven, *Lengdon* to his grand sons Khun Lung and Khun Lai, who were the forefathers of the *Tai Ahoms*.

There are many historical instances of performing *Rikkhon* ceremony during the reign of the Ahom kings. ‘King Siu hum mung alias Dihingia Raja (1497-1539) performed the Rikkhon after defeating the Chutia King Dhitnarayan’ (Barua 1985:54-
Again ‘King Siu hum mung performed Rikkhon at his victory over the Kachari King Phukloimung and the Kachari Khunbao (Deka Raja)’ (Barua 1985:58-60). ‘After the surrender of the Kachari King Detsheng to the heavenly king, the Rikkhon is performed by the Ahom Kings’ (Barua 1985:66). ‘Chao Pha Siu hum mung performed the ceremony Rik-Khon Moung Khon Ban or a ceremony in which, Lengdon, the Lord of heaven is worshipped by offering sacrifices to grant long life and prosperity to the king and the country, after defeating the Musalman general Hushankhang’ (Barua 1985:73). Chao Pha Siu hum mung’s son Chao Pha Siu kleng mung alias Garh Ganya Raja performed Rik-Khwan after defeating the Koch King (Bhuyan 1962:42 & Barua 1985:81). ‘Chao Pha Shusheng (1603 A.D.) performed Rikkhon ceremony after defeating the Mughals at Agiabandha’ (Barua 1985:100). ‘Chao Pha Shusheng alias Pratap Simha returned to his capital in triumph and performed the Rikkhon ceremony’ (Barua 1985:102). In the chronicle, it is stated that ‘next morning, the kings planted a banian tree in the name of the eldest brother. They offered salt to the people and came back to their palace’ (Barua 1985:21). This hints about Rikkhon and this is the first instance of planting trees for the longevity of the king and his country. And so, ‘Chao Pha Shuching alias Naria Raja planted an Ayubbar (a banian tree planted for long life) on the day, Kapcheu. Again on the other day Raicheu, the king planted a Batbar in the north’ (Barua 1985:130). By planting trees like banian it is believed to possess longevity by the Tai Ahom kings. Again ‘after succeeding the Khamtengia Nagas and the Kham Jangia Borgohain, King Shuchingpha performed Rikkhon ceremony with the help of one Lantumphe Bailung at the bank of the river Khereo. Before this ceremony the king left Tai bankhun with impunity and sent him to plant a banian tree on an elevated place at the bank of the river khereo’ (Barua 1985:137).

‘Chao Pha Shutamla alias Jayadhvaj Simha (1650 A.D.) on the 7th day (Kapcheu) of the month of Dinruk (Baisakh), ascended the Hingarighar and he brought Chumdeu to the Hingarighar and put the idol on the throne. He passed seven days and seven nights with great amusements. On the day Khut-Shinga, the king planted an Ayubbar (a life giving banian tree) on the hill Chariadeo. Again on the day Plekngi, he planted a Batbar. On the day Kapshan, the king planted a banian tree near the Malai temple’ (Barua 1985:144). In this way at the time of the Ahom kings, the
Rikkhon ceremony was performed by planting banian trees persuading the Khon or longevity of the Kings. The banian tree is the symbol of long running life. Like the huge and long living banian tree the kings may have their life and their country to be live long with peace and prosperity.

Again in G.C. Barua’s “Ahom Buranjī” it is stated that, ‘Chao Pha Shujin (1675-1677) ascended the ho lung, in the month of Aghon and at the moment of Kaikhan, and he placed the box containing Chumsheng, open on the throne for the moments, Baiban and Kinban. After this the king ascended the throne. He made presents to all the Dangarias, the Phukans, the Baruas, and the people at large. Seven days and seven nights were passed with great amusements. Guns and cannon were fired, drums beaten, and horns blown. In the month of Dinsham (Magh) on the day Raini, the king left Taimung and planted an Ayubar at suffry. Then conveyed ‘shengdeu’ on an elephant to his ho lung and offered sacrifices to the heavenly gods. On the day Banru, the king planted a banian tree at Malai Deoghar. On the very day he planted a Batbar” (Barua 1985:243). Thus Rikkhon ceremony is performed at the time of coronation ceremony of the Ahom Kings and along with the sacrifice of animals to gods and ancestors, planting of banian tree and Batbar is performed as a part of it to persuade the khon or long life of the king and the country.

In Tungkhungia Buranjī, it is stated that ‘on the thirteenth day of Ashar,1614, Gadadhar Singha (1681-1696) alias Chao-phā Shupat (Shupatpha) uttered religious incantations on the Brahmaputra and performed sacrifices attended by prayers and accompanied by the offerings of goats and ducks, where he implored the gods to bless him with a life consisting of a hundred years’ (Bhuyan 1990:26). In the book ‘Ahomar Din’ written by Hiteswar Barbarua substantiate that ‘Rikkhon’ means (Rik – invoke, call; Khon – longevity) invoking long life. This ceremony is generally performed on the occasion of the installation or coronation ceremony of the king or on the occasion of victory in a war or at the time of disasters and omens; and when a child fell in water (Barbarua 1981:438). By performing this ritual, khon or longevity is pursued to come back to its original place in the body.

Rikkhon is a religious ceremony to invoke long life. This Rikkhon can be termed as:
Muang Khon Ban: This ceremony is performed to get longevity for the life of the Village and the Kingdom

Rik Khon Moung Khon: Invoking higher powers and energy to grant long life to the king and the country.

Rik Khon: a) Invoking long life for the bride and bridegroom
b) Invoking long life for the frightened and sick child and person.

Rik khon can be performed in three ways:

(1) Phai Not or Haru Phai or Leng Phun Rik khon
(2) Phai Kang or Maju Phai or Cham Phun Rik khon
(3) Phai Lung or Bor Phai or Ha-Phun Rik khon

1. Phai Noi Rik khon:

This kind of Rik khon is performed to worship the Khao-Kham, Lord of water, by offering a single platter or pang of oblation. Here there is no need to establish any phun or maihang (raised platform). The requisite articles in this pang are: on a pair of banana leaves, a pot full of rice (khao chan), one egg of hen (kai khai), three pairs of betel nuts and betel leaves folded with blok singpha flower (mak mu kup bau plu), banana, orange (mak dao), sugar cane etc. are offered. This pang is placed on a white cloth in a fishing scoop or Jakoi (a fishing device of triangular shape made of bamboo sticks). The Tai Ahom priests (Mo’lung) arrange the oblation very orderly. After arranging this they carry a fishing scoop and offer oblation in three sheds comprising of three eggs of duck (pet khai), three sheds of rice, three pieces of betel nuts and betel leaves folded with basil flower (blok mita) and a pot full of water from river or pond.

On arrival of the bank of river or pond, the priest carrying the fishing scoop begins to scoop in water. Before diving the scoop the priests chant mantras and prayers to Khao Kham as thus:

‘Chao nu ru chao kao oi.
Pu Khao Kham choi kum ja Khao Kham choi khen
pu dang ri ja dang ri pu tai kum ja tai ta
mou mun seng mlon kham nynek khan kham pan lai rom kan tu te chao nu ru chao kao oi.'
Ao tang nang na pang khang na jang
ao tang nang na pang khang na phun tong mou kup tong pha
blok mita mak mu kup bou plu khao chan di pet kha
chung mou chao chung mou phi
chao nu ru chao kao oi'.

Khao Kham is again invoked in another way:

'Pu Khao Kham soi kum ja Khao Kham soi khen
pu dang ri ja dang ri
pu tai kum ja tai ta
mou mun seng mlon kham
rynek khon kham pan lai rom kan tu te
chao nu ru chao kao oi.

kun phu bau man ko
khon tuk tao khon ming ao khon tuk ao khong ming
khek chao ao rik ma
Mo' Laokhri, jim si, jim mou poi ju ban
kao khon mung kao sum dai kao pai ju tam
khon koma tena chao kao oi'.

Meaning: Oh' the Lord overhead in the sky! The Lord of water Khao Kham, you are the first grand forefather and mother. You are pervasive in the waters of rivers and seas. I am offering betel nut and betel leaf folded with blok mita flower, a pot full of rice and three eggs of hen to you all. Oh' the supreme lord above in the sky! I am praying you, please come. Oh' the supreme Lord above in the sky! We pray you to grant long life as great Mo’Laokhri. Oh’ the great grand fore father! We are calling khon to come. We are calling on behalf of the child, please come and reside the khon in'him. We are praying for a long life like Mo’Laokhri. We are scooping up so that the khon may come.

The mantra to worship Khao Kham is collected from Mo’lung Tileswar Mohan and it is as follows:

'Chao nu ru chao kao oi, pu Khao Kham soi kum ja Khao
Kham soi khen. Pu dang ri ja dang ri.
Pu tai kum ja tai ta. Mlon sing pha nam khe khon pan lai rom.
The meaning of this hymn is thus - Oh’ my Lord overhead in the sky! The Lord of water Khao Kham, you are the first great parents, forefather and mother of water, you are pervading in rivers and seas. You are offered betel nut and betel leaf folded with lakhimi flower, mustard oil, salt, ginger mixed rice, one egg of duck, one shed of luk lao, an earthen lamp all are arranged in a tang kak with a bunch of betel nuts. Oh’ the forefather you are cordially requested, please come and partake our offerings.

The above hymn is generally chanted in the ceremonies, i.e, Me-D’am Me-Phi, Um Pha etc. where earthen lamps are lighted, rice mixed with mustard oil, salt and ginger is offered. But in case of the worship of Khao Kham in Rikkhon ceremony, earthen lamp and luklao (rice beer) are not given.

After chanting the hymn, the priest scoop over the water three times. And he again chant the hymn to Khao Kham –

‘Chao nu ru chao kao oi
Nam la la pang bun heo ti phi phrang hai han na,
Khon tuk ao khon ming, khok cheu ao rik ma,
Mo’Lao khri jim ching jim met poi.
Ju ba chao nu ru chao kao oi.
Khon ko ma tena chao kao oi.
Kun phu bao man ko.... Khek cheu ao rik ma
Mo’Laokhri jim ching jim mou poi ju ban
chao nu ru chao kao oi. Mo’ ngen mo’ kham tip choi choi
han khon tuk ao khon ming khek cheu ao rik
ma Mo’Laokhri jim ching jim mou po’
Ju ban chao nu ru chao kao oi’.

Meaning: Oh’ the great forefather! The khon may lost by seeing the waves of sea. The khon may come back from that. We are scooping the Jakoi, the khon would lift up on it. Grant a long life like the great master Mo’Laokhri . Oh’ the great forefather we are calling again khon, to come on. We are invoking on behalf of the boys, on behalf of the girls, grant a long life of thousands of days like the great Master Mo’ Laokhri. We are scooping so the khon would come back.

Whatever is caught by the scoop, that (fish/ crab) is placed on the fishing scoop and the priests with that come back to the house and whatever is crossed by them on their return way, they sing by addressing that object. When they come across a jungle, they sing:

‘Ti thein moung heu ti phi phrang hai han na
khon ko ma te na chao kao oi.
Kao Khon moun kao ku chum dai kao pai ju tam’.

Meaning: If the khon is in admiration/attraction of the jungle then it should come back from that to reside in the body.

In case of sky, they sing: ‘Kham nin dav tam pha heu ti phi phrong
hai han na
khon ko ma te na chao kao oi.
Kao khon moun kao ko chum dai kao pai ju tam’.

Meaning: If the khon is in fascination with the evening star in the sky then it should come back from that to stay in the body.

In case of garden: ‘Ti chun blok ti phi phrong hai han na
khon tuk rao khon ming
khon ko ‘ma te na chao kao oi.
Kao khon mou kao ko chum dai kao pai ju tam’.
Meaning: If the *khon* is in fascination with the flowers of the garden then it should come back from that to reside in the body.

In case of orchard of oranges: ‘*Tun mak dao ti phi phrong hai han na*

     *khon tu ko rao khon ming*

     *kao khon mou kao ko chum dai kao pai ju tam*.’

Meaning: If the *khon* is charmed with the sight of the trees of oranges, then it should come back form that to the body.

In case of big house: ‘*Roun lung hai ti phi phrong hai han na*

     *khon tu ko rao khon ming*

     *kao khon mou kao ko chum dai kao pai ju tam*.’

Meaning: If the *khon* is charmed with the sight of big house then it should come back form that to reside in the body.

In case of treasures: ‘*Mo’ nginx mo kham*

     *tip choi choi hai han na*

     *khon tu ko rao khon ming*

     *kao khon mou kao ko chum dai kao pai ju tam*.’

Meaning: If the *khon* is in fascination with the gold and silver treasure then it should came back from that to reside in the body.

In this way, the priests return from the river by singing the hymns. Whatever they cross in their way i.e, bamboo trees, woods, jack fruit tress, long roadway, temple etc. they sing by addressing the object that they met. If they meet a three ways road or house they give blessings. It shows that the *khon* could be attached to some objects living or non living. At the courtyard of the sick person’s house the priests assemble and make a round and will sing or chant the *Jon Ming* hymn. The hymn runs as:

     ‘Heu jon pan, jon ken jon ju ru nang lao kao
     jan ju thao nang Lao khri, tha ru hok pai dam,
     tha ru hak poi khen .Nuk jang bou dam ka bou
     Phouk rin bou phouk phak dit ja ban mai ching ru
     Khek chiu ao rik ma
     khon tuk rao khon ming
     jim chi jim mou poi ju ban ma te te’.
The priests then ask the patient that whether the *khon* or life force returned after seeing the *Rong ghor* (play house), *Talatal ghar*. Then the answers is given as-'came came'. Again, he is questioned, whether his *khon* or life force came back after watching the sports or not? Then the answer is-'came came'. Then the priests bless the sick person three times each and give a little bit of rice on the hand of the patient. And the fish caught by the fishing scoop is cooked and should eat with boiled rice at dawn before the caws of craw. The priests then chant *Boi Tang* hymn and resumes the ceremony.

It is said that *batia* (a kind of small fish with golden brown colour, Nemachilous botins) fish should be scooped up, because it is a good sign for the sick person. This fish is long living and can live even in dry mud. So, they expected especially a *batia* fish or a living entity. Now a days if crab, prawn fish, frog are scooped up then these are also cooked for the patient.

This *Haru Phai* or *Phai Noi* ceremony is performed in case of children, when they frightened, chalked, when they become ill, met with any fatal accident, burned, fall in water, get afraid of animals and other unnatural happenings and powers.

The *Tai Ahom* priestly clans still perform *Rik khon* ceremony like other *Tai* groups of the entire South East Asia. During field study one *Rikkhon* ceremony was observed in Sepon Hologuri village. On 19th July, 2002 in Atul Phukan's (*Deodhai*) house this *Phai Noi Khon Ming* is observed to get well his daughter from a chalk. A tragic road accident happened in the month of (3rd May, 2002) *Bohag* at night. The girl was sitting on the lap of a lady in side the car. During that accident the lady along with other seven passengers died. The girl was fortunately alive but got frightened. So, in order to get well and recovered from the chalk the priests Tileswar Mohan and Mahendra Barua performed *Phai Noi Khon Ming* as a *Tai* belief in *khon* and to regain a lost *Khon* as per the *Tai* traditional ritual.

In *Leng Phun Rikkhon* or *Phai Noi*, one raised platform is made to worship *Lengdon*, the Lord of heaven.

2. **Maju Phai or Kang Phai:** In this *Khon Ming* following gods are wroshipped i.e. *Jan Chai Hung*, *Pha nuru Lengdon* and *Jashing Pha*. Three maihangs (altar) are made to *Jan Chai Hung*, *Lengdon* and *Jashing Pha*. The requisite articles are:
In the altar of Jan Chai Hung, on a pair of banana leaves, two pieces of betel nuts wrapped with chingkora flower are placed on a tangkak are offered. Two bunches of betel nuts, two packets of salt, ginger, mustard oil mixed fine rice, eggs of hen, two containers full of luk lao are offered.

In the altars of Pha nu ru Lengdon and Jashing Pha the above articles are offered.

At the side of the maihongs in a fishing scoop with a triangular shape made on that same day, a double folded cloth (cheleng sador) is placed, on that an altar is made. The same articles as given in Phai Noi Khon Ming are also given here. At the left side of the altars, on a disc a packet of a mixture of milk, molasses, sugar, butter and honey is given, along with it ripe bananas, sugar cane, oranges are also given to the sick person. A packet of luk lao is given on that altar. A few rupees, gold, silvers are placed on another disc to the sick person and he is made to sit on a bamboo met (dhora) and the priests prepare the nga pulok and take a bit of it. The family members and the sick person are given the nga pulok to partake and after that the priests chant hymns to the gods as:

'An nang chao nu ru chao kao oi.
Chao pha phet khan kham bong khan kham
tu moung tu te luk chao re pha chang
dam chong chao yanang yanang moung kep chong bun
yanang yanang moung kep chong kham chao pi pai nang lai dai,
khun khai nang lai chom, chung mou chao chung mou phi nu ru
chao kao oi. Chao nu ru chao kao oi.
Chao Pha Jan Sai Hung ngi khai pha lan chan
Khai mou Leng din tek pin chao. Ngao kham Leng din tek pin khun
rit lang chong kin tai lak nang chong kin kham.
Chao nu ru chao kao oi.

Chao nu ru chao kao oi. Chao mo lik molai Tun rum len Kham Chaom ngeu
Chao pha ka rulai chao pha kham ching moung.
Chao pha pen ching moung. Ha chip puk mo 'ru.
Cham chip puk mo 'ching. Lai ching moung tyuo chao.
Lai ching moung tyuo khan ngek ba' cheng tam la
The welcome hymn is addressed to Pha nu ru Lengdon, Jan Chai Hung and Jashing Pha. The hymns are same with the hymns chanted in Me-Dam Me-Phi and Um Pha ceremony.

The priests after chanting the Ao Tang and Kin Tang hymns, go to the river or pond where they worship and offered oblation to Khao Kham. The priests scoop over there and scoop up whatever they get as if they catch the lost khon of the sick person. After arriving at home the priests bless the sick person by chanting a Jon Ming hymn and they chant incantation of Kang Phai Bidhi as follows:

‘Chao nu ru chao kao oi.
Khoi mak tang lung ti phi chang
Chao nu ru chao kao oi’.

Meaning: Oh’ the forefathers, great fathers! You are offered oblation with fruits and all. Bless a long life. Oh’ the great gods, great forefathers! We salute you.

Like Phai noi, in this form of Khon Ming too, the priests scoop over what they cross in their way to bring back the lost khon.

This ceremony is performed in case of the adults, youths and the elders who are mentally disturbed, abnormal, frightened etc.
The priests resume the ceremony with a farewell or *Boi Tang* hymn after chanting *Jon Ming* hymn. These hymns are same with *Phai Noi Khon Ming*. The *Kang Phai Khon Ming* is performed as per the instruction of *Kang Phai Bidhi*.

3. **Lung Phai or Bor Phai**: *Bor Phai Khon Ming* is specially performed to get long life or well being of the king and the country. In this ceremony the following gods are worshipped: *Khao kham, Jan Chai Hung, Pha nu ru Lengdon* and *Jashing Pha*. Maihangs are constructed to *Jan Chai Hung, Pha nu ru Lengdon* and *Jashing Pha*. The articles of oblation are same as that of *Kang Phai Khon Ming*. But here salt, ginger and mustard oil mixed rice (*khao chan*) is not given. Instead of this fowls are offered. Two fowls are offered to *Jan Chai Hung*. Three fowls are offered to *Lengdon*. *Jashing Pha* is also offered three fowls. The welcome hymn and offering hymns are same with *Kang Phai Khon Ming*.

In this *Lung Phai Khon Ming* ritual, the priests sacrifice the fowls and on a pair of banana leaves specially raised and purified fowls are sacrificed by chanting powerful incantation. This process is called *Tham Kai*.

The priests afterward clean the legs of the fowls and with the help of the legs they began to examine or make calculation for the country in future events.

After the examination with the legs of the holy fowls the priests and the people goes to a river or a pond to worship and offer oblation to *Khao Kham*, the Lord of water. After chanting the same *Ao Tang* and *Kin Tang* hymns to *Khao Kham* the priests scoop over the water three times by chanting the following hymn—

`Chao nu ru chao kao oi. Ti moung dun sun kham
le man ko' hit chao ao tuk ma ao khon ming .
Chao nu ru chao kao oi. Ja Khao Kham choi kum
Ja Khao Kham choi khen, pu dangri ja dangri nam,
Khon ko’ma tena chao kao oi le, kao oi le,
kao khon mou chao chi – khen dai kao pai ju tam.
Khek chao ao rik ma ao rik khon, khon koma tena
chao kao oi'.

Meaning: The *khon* or longevity is calling in the country *Mung Dun Sun Kham*. Oh’ the great God, grant a long life. Oh’ the father of water, mother of water, the *khon* of
the country is lost. We are calling the khon back to its place. We are scooping, oh’ the life come up with the divings of fishing scoop.

The priests return to the place of worship to the trinity along with whatever they got by scooping and after arriving at the place, they make round three times and chant Jon Ming hymn. After chanting Jon Ming hymn they chant farewell or Boi Tang hymn and with this the ceremony comes to an end. All the above mantras of Rikkhon ceremony are collected from Mo’lung Tileswar Mohan, Dinanath Changbun Barua and Medini Madhab Mohan.

In the days of Ahom kings, along with the performance of Rikkhon or Rik Khon Moung Khon they implanted banian trees. This is called Ayubod and Bat bod implantation. The belief of implanting banian trees symbolises the long life expecting for the king and the country. Like the long living banian tree it is wished that the life span of the king and the country may last long.

In Rik Khon ceremony the worship of Khao Kham, the presiding deity of water is must. Water is the source of life. Where there is no water, there is no life. The worship of Khao Kham signifies the importance of water in all the spheres of life. Water is the most essential element to carry a life and thus water as a deity is worshipped with great devotion.

The Tai Ahoms believe that khon is responsible for the bodily existence, personality, character, humour, health and so on. If the khons leave the body then the body can not survive. ‘khons’ are the units of vitality as well as life. Like the human body, village, house, rice, peddy field, kingdom, country etc. also have khons. Thus, in order to continue a smooth long life line, the Tai Ahoms perform the Rikkhon ceremony.

Thai scholar Ranee Lertluamsai holds that every city has a spiritual life line. It floats in the open air and increases in energy. A complete picture of the lifeline of the city belief connects if from the high hills and mountains, of the entire province, straight up from the expanding city to the sky. The word ‘muang’ or ‘moung’ in the Tai Ahom language has several connotations. It includes the area of governance, within the country, territory, earth and universe. In this case, muang means governing
The Tai Yais too take the same meaning for the word ‘jueng’ or muang or city (Lertluamsai 1998:55-56).

The Rikkhon ceremony seeks to recapture a life line, including the lifeline of a city. Various khwan deal with the lifeline of a mung (city), and they must be stable and secure. If a city has a condition which is not normal, the khwan from this life line will become loose and drift away. When this happens, the lifeline will shudder, shake, and trumble all the way down to the city, causing an unstable and insecure society rife with wars and hostilities possibly even in its own downtown. A formal ceremony to call the khwan, by the entire society, must be held to stabilize the situation and correct the imbalance. Through this ceremony, the entire society calls the khwan of the society to return to the life line of the muang (city) again (Lertluamsai 1998:56-57). The ceremony is used on all levels of society, regardless of rank. It stresses the mobilization of many groups of people. These groups come together to perform a single purpose, essentially to strike a balance between nature and people or the community, between resources and production and manufacturing, between rulers and citizens and between ancestors and descendants. In an effort to secure prosperity and health for all citizens, the energy and power of various institutions of village (baan), city (muang), government, military, economics, manufacturing and production, all must be strengthened. Ahom documents note the calling of the khon ceremony was performed in order to secure or unite the muang (city, society). It had the potential to create intervals in crises, like wars, hostilities and riots.

Likewise various Thai and other Tai societies that hold khon ceremonies to call the khon of individuals and of the city, the Tai Ahoms also hold group ceremonies of calling the khon, particularly when someone is sick mentally or physically.

The ‘Rik Khon Moung Khon’ ceremony was a grand ceremony as observed by the kings during their rule for the sake of the king and the kingdom. The life of a country with all the aspects affects the life of the people. A mere country is also given a spiritual dimension in the Tai Ahom religion. The wellbeing of the country will bring wellbeing, peace and prosperity to the king and the subject. The country, king and the subject are the three parts of the body. The whole body have khon and the khon being reside in the proper places of the body is a sign of good health of the whole body otherwise it would face damage or ruin. Although Rik Khon Moung Khon
is not performed today, yet Rikkhon ceremonies are performed by the priestly families as minor family rituals.

### 3.04 PHURA LUNG CEREMONY

The Tai Ahom religion is a ritual oriented religion. Blood sacrifice is a must in the rituals of the Tai Ahom religion except Phura Lung ceremony. The God Almighty is the supreme Lord from which all the gods originated. The worship of the God Almighty is generally known as Phura Lung where no blood sacrifice is required. He is so supreme and impersonal that no earthly offerings are necessary to propitiate and satisfy Him. God Almighty is identified with the divine light. In this religion also the God Almighty is the Divine light who is transcendental, Infinite and eternal, primeval and thus in the worship of God Almighty only lights are offered. In this ceremony hundred and one earthen lamps are lighted.

The etymological meaning of Phura Lung is (Phura: God, Lung: great, large) the worship of great God. In the Tai Ahom religion Pha Tu Ching Phrong Hum is the God Almighty. He is also known as Phura.

The Ahom Lexicons gives the meaning of ‘Phura’ as ‘a name of a spirit’ (Barua and Deodhai Phukan 1964:73). The same meaning is also found in ‘The Ahom-Assamese-English Dictionary’ (Barua 1920:136-137). Again the Ahom Lexicons gives the meaning of ‘Lung’ as ‘great’ or ‘large’ (1964:123) and ‘Phura Lung’ is stated as ‘the religious scripture of the Ahoms’. Again ‘Phra’ refers to ‘the name of a God’.

Dr. J.N. Phukan has shown the difference between ‘Pha’ and ‘Phura’. To him ‘Phura’ is not derived from ‘Pha’. ‘Phra’ means God and ‘Pha’ means god. The Buddhist Tais recognized Buddha as ‘Phra’. Being a Godless religion there is no mention of God except Gautam Buddha. So, to them ‘Phra’ is none other than Buddha (Barua 1999:57).

Again, he viewed that the word ‘Phra’ has been found is various forms in Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Java, popularly as Phura, Phora, Phaya, Pra, Bra, Prah, Porha, Puraha, Phula, Pula and Pulai. But the actual meaning and origin of these words were not known to the scholars at that time. In 1886-87 A.D a govt
archaeologist and professor of Pali language in Bengun College, Dr. E. Forchhammer has brought a clear analysis of the term ‘Phura’ on reliance of (the two plates on stone pillers as discovered in Middle Burma) the two tablets which are Ma-Jede stone plates as written in four languages – Burmese, Pyu, Pali and Mon. The Pali term ‘Buddha’ has been written in Burmese language as ‘Purha’ which is also pronounced as ‘Phaya’ or ‘Phra’. In Burmese language ‘Phaya’ or ‘Phra’ is used to signify Buddha. To some scholars Purha, Phaya or phra are not from Burmese language. To them it came from a common language spreading over the South East Asian countries. And perhaps from Pali or Sanskrit this term has been derived. In Thailand, Laos and Burma ‘Buddha’ is called ‘Phra’. The Buddhist Tai groups of Assam too call ‘Buddha’ as ‘Phra’ or Chao Phra and the Buddhist temples are called ‘Kong Phra’. In a wider sense the word ‘Phra’ is used to signify a King or great persona (Barua 1999:57-58).

The Tai Ahom manuscript ‘Laitu’ or ‘Lao Phala’ which contains the story of deluge or ‘The Flood and new Creation from a gourd’. This manuscript was translated in to Assamese by G.C. Barua and a few Deodhai priests (names are not found) and published in October 1901 from Dibrugarh as he was appointed as Ahom Translator in 1894 by Sir Edward Gait, the Honorary Director of Ethnography at that time. In the preface of the book entitled Lao Phala, G.C. Barua mentioned about Phura Tara Along (Barua 1901:11). The meaning of Phura Tara Along is ‘Enlighten Perfect Brahman’. To him the Ahoms were Buddhists. Their religious texts were ‘Phuralung’ and ‘Nemimang’ that preaches non-violence. The same view was found in the ‘Asam Buranji’ as translated and edited by Padmanath Goahin Barua (Goahin Barua 1937: 36-37). But in the 19th Edition of Asam Buranji as published in 1937, Padmanath Gohain Barua viewed that the Ahoms are the royal Tai People who came from Shyam province of the valley of Irrawati under Burma. Then they were the Vaisnavite worshippers of ‘Phura lung’ or ‘Lord Visnu’ (1937:63). Some scholars also viewed that earlier the Ahoms were the Buddhists. They were the followers of a mixed form of Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism because of the existing sacrificial rituals or tradition. Dr. S.K. Bhuyan holds that Min Mang Phura Lung is the Bible of the Ahoms and this religious text was brought to Assam by the Ahom priests in the days of Siu Ka Pha (Bhuyan 1989:30). The clear evidence of influence of Buddhist-Hinduism on
the Ahoms were found and it could be certained on the basis of the religious text. According to Khyetradhar Borgohain, Amitabha or Padmapani Avalokitesvara Buddha is the Phura of the Ahoms and his dhamma or wisdom (prajna) is Tara and the divinely enlightened sadhaka sangha is called Along. Khyetradhar Borgohain delivered this in his presidential speech/address at the all Assam Buddhist conference, March, 1946, Baligaon, Upper Assam (Asomat Bauddha Dharma, Published by Krishna Kanta Boragohain, 1946, Jorhat). But it is to be noted that Khyetradhar Borgoain interpreted Phura Lung worship as Buddhist form of worship and 'Phura tara along' as Hinayani. But Amitabha or Padmapani Avalokitesvara is not the Buddha of the Hinayanis. Hinayana Buddhism accepts Buddha as the ethical teacher, not the God or Amitabha or so and so. Thanuram Gogoi viewed that the Ahoms belongs to Phralong sect. Thanuram Gogoi was the president of ‘The Buddhist Society of Phralong Culture of North East India’ which was formed to preach phralung culture, in 1964. The Phralong sect is a section of Mahayana Buddhists....Reknown historian Dr.Padmeswar Gogoi also viewed that the ancestors of the Ahoms might have brought down to Burama a kind of mixed Buddhism form Yunnan. But more probably the influence of the Theravada Buddhism of Burma which made them to perform Phura Long, which is probably a variant of Phralong. Phra long refers to Lord Buddha. Phura Long puja is performed by the Ahom priests with Buddhist devotional songs in Tai Ahom language and with great illumination by placing one hundred and one oil lights... The origin of this ceremonial worship without animal sacrifices appears to be the Jataka story of the Buddha prevalent in the Thera-vadi Buddhist societies. But the form of the worship itself was developed by the Mahayanists. According to him the essence of Ahom Buddhism is Phura Tara Along. It is same as ‘Buddha Dhamma, Sangha’. Ahom Phura or Phra is Buddha, Tara is Dharma or Dhamma, Along is Sangha (Gogoi 1976:16). But later on from the above Hinayani form of Phura Lung or Phura Tara Along has been drawn to Mahayana sect. He has written an article in 1974 where he stated that ‘the Tai Ahoms worshipped a deity called Phura Tara Along, which (Phra Tara Along) refers to goddess Tara Almighty. It seems later Buddhism transformed Phura Tara Along into Buddha-Dharma-Sangha. Tara must have been one of the chief deities worshipped by the ancient that migrated to Assam’ (Barua 1999:64). From this, it can be assumed
that for Dr. Gogoi the Ahoms were Buddhists and the Phura Lung is a part of the Mahayana sect of Buddhism.

Another Ahom scholar Dr. Lila Gogoi in his work ‘Tai Sanskritir Ruprekha’ showed that the Tai Ahoms were Taoists. To him the ‘Tao’ is infinite, unlimited and perfect which is the centre of Taoism. And the realistic philosophy of Confucianism got mixed with Taoism. He also maintains that the ‘Tao’ is the Phra Tara of the Ahom (Gogoi 1994:58). He also maintains that the Ahoms who came to Assam were Buddhists at the early stage. Construction of roads, excavation of tanks, planting of trees on the road sides, Chaklang (marriage ceremony) and the scriptures are although reflects the Buddhist culture yet the Ahoms were actually Taoists and believes in sacrifice.

On the other hand, the Tai Ahom priests perform the ‘Phura Lung’ ceremony as a Tai Ahom’s religious ceremony and never accept this to be a Buddhist ritual. To them ‘Phura Lung’ is the worship of Pha Tu Ching Phrong Hum, the God Almighty. In this context Chao Bimal Borpatra Gohain maintains the view that ‘Whatever is done in the propitiation of Chao Phura is called Phura Lung’. This is not a newly created religious ceremony. The exact starting of this ceremony is not known. Yet the Ahom chronicles give the evidences of performances of Phura Lung during Siu Pat Pha alias Gadadhar Simha (1681-1696) while the Rahdoi tank was excavated in Tung Khang. And during Siu Khrun Pha alias Rudra Singha (1696-1714) while Joysagar Tank was excavated in Sivasagar, a grand ceremony (Bor Sabhah) was performed and according to the scholars this Bor Sabhah is the ‘Phura Lung’ and the Ahoms are still performing the Bor Sabhah which is nothing but the transformation of Phura Lung ceremony only (Duarah 2004:83).

In the holy scripture of the Ahoms Lit Lai Peyn Kaka the starting of ‘Phura Lung’ is stated as –

‘Pak Peyn kaka chon chou kham doi ma lung moung nam na oi.
Heu pang mut chi khring jao chu ko na ’mum- bou mun
Chegn ji nang lu kling khru boi mou chao kao oi.
Chao chu tang ngeu chu kao oi’. (Deodhai Barua 1983:3-4).
Meaning: Oh' the Master of learning or word or knowledge! You got a vast wise country while coming down with Lit Lai Peyn kaka to install again the Peyn kaka in the world. After descending, you find a high land and there you find the existence of life by perceiving ants and the webs full of spiders. Then your mind is filled with excessive joy and pleasure and there you began to institute the worship of the great Phura. By installing Peyn Kaka innumerable lamps were enlightened by you as an eldest daughter, you offered worship to Him by saluting. In this way by offering ritual to Chao Phura or the great Phura you have offered devotion as a gift that watered it life and fulfilled your wish by messaging the news of coming of Phura.

Tai priest Bani Deodhai Borua has defined Phura Lung as an ancient religious tradition. The term ‘Phura Lung’ is a constitution of three words: Phu, ra and Lung (Chao P.Gogoi and B.Gogoi 1994:64-65). Phu means ‘to float’, ra means ‘wide or much’ or ‘a hanging stick and bind tightly’. Lung means a container {Turn). Thus the philosophy of Phura Lung is an aggregation of ‘seeds, stored in a tum, carried or hanged on a stick, and the responsibility of preservation and cultivating there is given on Him. For this reason, the seed will not be destroyed or has no end. It is preserved in the unending granary. Phura Lung is the realization of the harmonisation and identification of the seen and unseen, matter and consciousness. The significance of Phura Lung is thus – Preservation of existence, Re-creation and the Recognition of the manifestation.

Phura Lung is an important non-sacrificial religious practice of the Ahoms. The following manuscripts contain an elaboration of the ritual ‘Phura Lung’:

1. Phura Lung Puthi: One hand written Phura Lung Puthi, Folio No.41 preserved in the Tai Museum, Sivasagar. This manuscript elaborates that at the beginning there were no gods and men. There were no air, no animals and plants. The God Almighty Pha-Tu-Ching-Phrong-Hum, after thousands of years He thought of creation. Then He created Phu Kat Kham, a pair of spiders which weaved eight pillars and from their excretion the Earth was created. Then they copulated and gradually from them gods and goddesses, men and animals were created. There was no ruler in Mung-Phi at that time and one god named Puk-Phi appeared and began to rule the country. But his rule led to wrong doings and irregularities. Then Heu Put Khing took the incarnation of Phura and the king of Moung Phi also took the ways of Phura in ruling the country.
Moung Phi and this has united the heavenly abodes of the gods and there was orderliness and unity. But then Phura has no image or shape but He was shining in the void like a bright flame. And the worship of this Phura is Phura Lung.

In this Phura Lung Puthi it is stated that after death the dead becomes a Dam Phi (Dam - Dead, Phi - god) or in Assamese 'mritak devata'. The Ahoms believe that the continuation of the tradition of Dam Phi rituals started from the very beginning. Thus the Phura Lung Puthi gives the concept of Phura and 'Phi'.

There are two other Phuralung Puthis preserved by DHAS, Govt. of Assam and Dimbeswar Baruah, Sagar Bera, Patsaku.

2. Doya Phura Puthi: The Doya Phura Puthi (preserved by Tileswar Mohan) elaborates that before the creation of the world there was nothing except Doya Phura, the absolute reality. He created the world and he began to serve goodness to all the beings by incarnating or manifesting Himself into different modes or images and began to be propitiated by worshipping.

3. Nemimang Phura Ngau Cheng bong Phura Puthi: (Nemimang Phura Puthi is preserved by i) Tileswar Mohan ii) DHAS. Folio No.1153 (A) & Nemimang Phralong: DHAS. Folio No. MS 1148). This Nemimang Phura Puthi also explains that Nemimang Phura took the name Ngau Cheng bong Phura and became a great creator by following the ideal of Nemimang Phura and ruled the heaven or Moung/Mung Phi in a great orderliness. As a result the whole country was in peace and prosperity.

It is also found that the Nemimang Phura and Doya Phura explains the doctrine of Phura Lung and tell about the incarnation of Phura which seems to be same as the Jataka stories of Buddha and thus to some these have the overtones of being influenced by Buddhist literature. But in fact, the manifestation or so called incarnation of Phura is explained here without recognizing or giving any reference to Buddha.

Khyetradhar Buragohain in his presidential address at ‘All Asom Buddhist Conference’, viewed that the Phura Lung ceremony of the Ahoms is Buddhist religious ceremony and this is stated in the book ‘Nemimang Phura’ (Barua 1999:63). Dr. J.N. Phukan also stated that the Tais habitating in Mong mao of Yunnan Province, the inhabitants of the border region of Burma are still practicing the 'Phralong'
tradition and they were Hinayani Buddhists (Barua 1999:67-70). He also stated that the other Phura Lung Puthis preserved in DHAS, Gauhati, are the Jataka stories only, and these Puthis were started with the devotional sayings addressed to Lord Buddha.

There is a manuscript titled Nemimang Phralong (MS 1148, DHAS) preserved in DHAS, Govt of Assam, is a story of Buddhissatva king Nemi or Nemiraja. The whole content of this manuscript is based on Lord Buddha and the Jataka stories specially the incarnation (Phralong) of Buddha as a prince Nemi Mang of Mithila. The story further narrated that Nemi Mang was a religious king and at his old age he went out of his royal palace for peace in the forest. On his way he slept on a big stone, then a god Chaopha Phet found his seat in the heaven to have become very hard like a stone and when he looked down to earth, he found king Nemi Mang sleeping on a hard stone. Then Chaopha Phet came down to earth and advised the king that he could ascend to the heaven on the strength of his noble works.

When the other gods of the heaven wanted to see Nemi Mang raja then god Chikka sent Not Matali to bring the king to the heaven. Nemi Mang was taken to Lengdon, the King of heaven. Nemi Mang raja saw the hell below as well as the heaven where there is no suffering, no cold no heat. He has found the heaven with its beautiful places, flower gardens etc. He also could see why a person goes to heaven or to hell below.

King Nemi Mang came down to earth and his subjects were very happy to see him. Then the king advised his subjects to be good, follow the good principles in life, obey the rules of morality, worship God, obey and respect their parents and the old ones so that they could achieve the heaven. Otherwise they would go to the hell.

The above story of Nemi Mang Phrang Along or Nemi Mang Phuralong is definitely a Jataka story written in Tai Ahom language.

According to the Tai Ahom priestly clans the Phura Lung ritual is the worship of God Almighty. To them Phura Lung is a purely Tai Ahom religious ceremony. This worship can be performed either publicly or individually.

The Phura Lung ceremony:

The Phura Lung scripture speaks that at the very beginning there was nothing except Phura and Phura is without any shape or image. He is shining in the void like
a bright flame. The scripture also states that *Pha nuru Lengdon* worshipped *Phura* with lighting on hundred and one lamps in raised mounts (*lak*) which is placed on the middle of an octagonal platform. Thus in this worship the *Tai Ahom* priests install the holy text ‘*Lit Lai Peyn ka ka*’ and with the lighting of hundred and one lamps worship the God Almighty with great devotion and offer prayers to Him to seek blessings to remove ills, sorrow, ill fortune, all short comings and bad happenings. From this it can be assumed that *Phura Lung* is the worship of impersonal Great God Almighty in benign grace and without blood shed. This worship is the original traditional worship of Great God of the *Tais* from time immemorial.

The requisite articles are:

The stem of plantation tree or banana stem, hundred and one receptacle (*Dung*) made of banana sheaths, Pieces of betel nuts and betel leaves wrapped with *blok ching pha* flower, coins, mong or cereal (*Vigna mungo*), fine rice, mustard oil, salt, ginger, hundred and one lamps, bamboo sticks, one three faced earthen lamp (earlier earthen lamps are not used only lit wicks are used), flower, incense sticks, betel nut and vine leaf, banana leaves.

In *‘Phura Lung’* ceremony a *ren chao cheng* or an octagonal house is made and is covered with a white cloth as the walls. Inside the house an octagonal platform is made and in the middle of this platform a *lak* or stand is made of a banana stem with hundred and one devices to hold the hundred and one lamps. In front of this *Lak*, *Lit Lai Pak peyn kaka* is placed. The three *Mo’lungs* (priest) take their seats towards the east and start praying, thus:

*‘Chao nu ru chao kao oi*

*Chao Phura along*

*Chao Tara along mun hung Phura*

*Kka’ le ra ni pan*

*Khrup tang boi mou chao*

*Khrup tang boi mou Phi, chao kao oi’.*

Meaning: Oh’ the great Almighty! You are the master of creation. You are the Absolute reality, the Father and Mother. We remember you as the supreme God. Oh’ the Supreme Father!
After praying God Almighty the priests pray to install the Lak or stand and chant:

‘Chao nu ru chao kao oi (3 times)
Chao Phura Along, Chao Tara along,
Khut din dai, lak puk bai,
Hit di hit khen, choi kum choi khen’.

Meaning: Oh’ the Lord above our head! You are the absolute reality. In rememberance of you, today the Lak is installed to enlight hundred and one lamps to worship you.

In the east the priest kept a raised Sarai (stand to hold oblation) with one cloth, three folded pieces of betel nuts and betel leaves, three wholesome betel nuts (both sides are cut down) and three betel leaves, a rupee is offered on it. This is called Ko’mai ha Jon Ming. After offering the Sarai the priests place Peyn Kaka on a stand and enlight the lamps on the Lak, this is called ‘Kui leng lak cham kok phai’, and offer incense sticks, and chant:

‘Chao kao oi, (3 times)
Chao Phura aa ka ru leng Puk rulai,
ke chi plao, nai jao oi .
Peyn ka ka thap bai, hen hit chao.
din-ban khen dai, hit di hit khen,
choi kum choi khen. Chao Phura,
chao Tara along, chikia rani pan boi mou
chao kao oi’.

Meaning: Oh’ the Great God! You are the first creator. We install Peyn Kaka to worship you. We offer in the name of Phura Tara Chikia so that the day, date, time, Tithi-Naksatra become favourable.

After placing the Peyn Kaka the priests prepare Nam Nga Pulok with the ingredients - a pot full of water, one hand long stick made from the middle devider of a banana leaf, gold-silver copper minerals are dipped in the water, the front of the stick is tied with a bunch of ching kora flowers and with this stick the priest give the bystanders the holy water and sprinkle the water over all the articles. The priests again prepare nga pulok by mixing milk, sugar, curd, butter and honey on a banana
receptacle (Dung). They themselves eat the ambrosia and give it to others, and with this they start the ceremony. The priest began chanting the Ai ching lao prayer with folded hands upward and kneeling down —

‘Chao nu ru chao kao oi. Pha Tu Ching Pbrong Hum oi. Pha Lai bet Pha Pin bet, Pha Phura tara along Chikia rani pan boi mou chao kao oi. Chao kao oi, Pak peyn kaka chon cheu kham doi ma lung moung nam na oi heu pang mot chi khring jao chukna mo; mun bou mun chegn ji nang lu king khu boi mou chao kao oi. Chao kao oi. Ai ke Khen, Ai ke Kham, Ai Chang-Ching oi mo’chingphra Mo’Laokhi Pujak ji moung ti Jashing pha cheng kham kon tun man mo’ru mo’ching kon tun man mo’, Khao rang rao kon tun man cham-mo chai-mo plong kon tun man, Cham mo’mun bai jim kon tun man, thuk tang lai boi mou chao kao oi’.

Meaning: Oh’ the supreme God Pha tu Ching Phrong Hum! You are the Lord of bet, the Lord of Phura Tara, the knowledge of Peyn Kaka. You are the master of knowledge. Oh’ the great fore-fathers – Ai ke Khen, Ai Ke Kham, Ai Chang Ching, Mo’Cheng Pha Mo’ Laokhi, Pujak ji, Jashing Pha Cheng Kham, Mo’khao rang rao along with the fore-fathers of three priestly clans, your descendants Mo’ sam, Mo’sai, Mo’plong’ by instituting this ceremony, salute you all.

After chanting this, the priests and the followers throw flowers to the Lak and began to read out the Peyn Kaka and also sing the qualities and attributes of Phura. Just like the Sikhs (Sikhism), the Tai Ahoms also make bhajan Kirtana of the Omkara, God Almighty. In Phura Lung ceremony, ‘Phura’ or God is referred as:

‘Chi ki a-ke yent
Oi bong Phura
Oi bong Tara
Oi bong a long’ (Gogoi & Gogoi 1994:64-65).

Meaning: Chi-to remain / to exist; ki-tied up; a-wide; Ke-Seed / exist; Yent-bunch, germ; bong - to protect; ta-sow; ra-much; long-emptiness. The meaning is thus ‘to remain existing amidst the wideness, preserving and protecting the germ of the seeds of old tree and sowing the seeds and manifest the greatness of creation of living and non-living’.
Few lines of Phura song are given below from Peyn Kaka (written on Sanchi bark, writer and year unknown, preserved by Tileswar Mohan (Lit Lai Peyn Kaka:1):

‘Pin nang jim mou bou mi phi mi chang cha ka kun

La la ju chi plao bou mi lum’.

Meaning: In the very beginning there was nothing. No gods and men were there. There was no air.

‘Chao Phura chao Tara, Phura Tara along oi’.

Meaning: Oh’ the God, the father of creation, the supreme cognition! You have designed or created the universe by your Divine power and remain immanent in it.

‘Ngau mi tu cheu dip ngang mi chinga tu

cheu moung chi ching’.

Meaning: Only the condition was developed, just to be enough for the emergence of ‘word’ or ‘sound’.

‘Ngau mi tu cheu cheng din, cheng ban ngang kup dao,

Ngau mi teu pha pai mi den’.

Meaning: No condition is developed to be enough for the creation of the moon, the sun, the earth planet, stars.

‘Poi Plung leng jen pin thek chang rang ngatum

cheu phun cham chang jau’.

Meaning: Later on, the Absolute or Supreme Reality arose with an image of a task of elephant.

‘Ju mou Po’ juan man ko’ heu tang chao khaika rok pin chao’.

Meaning: After long days, the Supreme reality again become the Lord of gods.

‘Pin di ta khen moung deu’ Chang Phi ti pen te jau’.

Meaning: After His appearance, He became the god Chang Phi

‘Ma’ ka’ kha chu aa ngau bou ju tam kao kao ring kha run rai’.
Meaning: The great Wise has surrounded the nine directions in a *kha rung rai* shape (the nine directions: East, West, North, South, North-East, North-West, South-West, South-East, Zenith-Nadir).

‘*Phipoi ao tang nam pulok ma cheu niiu chao khiring kham bai*

*Chop ching ching ram dai*’.

Meaning: The embrosia is sprinkled over the matters by the gods.

‘*Lut put bou mi pha, lut put bou mi plao*’.

Meaning: The Supreme God remained suspended in the sky like a bee hive, like a half boiled egg in shape.

‘*Ten len Pha Tu Ching Phrong Hum*

*ju chao bou khen klang rao nang pheng.*

*Nga ru ri phok tan kan lut put*

*bou mi pho pha ung it pho’ pha*

*Nga ng mi pak khan ching.*

*Kao ko’, lak ju lak koi chong*

*Pheu bou lang hung rang*

*Ten len phak jau poi ten’.*

Meaning: The supreme reality *Pha Tu Ching Phrong Hum* with his divine power expanded Himself like a big drum. Yet without having any organs or parts He was suspending in the vaccum. After gradual expansion of Himself, ultimately burst out with tremendous furious sound. And with this, sparkling fragments were flying out and scattered in the space. Then being getting conscious again (within) Himself has created as a spider and began to loom and joined the webs by making an orbit and remained in the center.

After chanting of *Phura* songs the priests proceed to finish the ritual and let the followers to pray ‘*Chao Phura, Chao tara, Phura Tara Along oV*’.

‘*Chao kao Pha Tu Ching Phrong Hum, nam kham Tara mou phe chot bung*’.

Meaning: Oh’ *Pha Tu Ching Phrong Hum*! You are the supreme cognition, we all are remembering you.
"Chao kao Phura, Nemi Mang Phura, Doi Phura oi along oi".

Meaning: We, the descendants of Mohan, Deodhai and Bailung are remembering you as You are manifesting Yourself into different forms.

The Phura Lung ritual ends with the Jon Ming hymn chanted by the priests, the hymn runs as:

‘Phura raign pan Tara juign pan mou poi
khen khun rao oi juign pan’.

Meaning: Oh’ the supreme Father, the Truth! You are the supreme Self of the circle of Samsara. You installed the insight knowledge. At the very beginning as a Master of time, as a Supreme doer, You have always instituted the new creations. You are the Wise Master of creation. You remained eternal attributing the voice or tune to it.

Thus, in this way the Tai Ahom priests worship Phura, the God Almighty by singing the attributes of Phura.

The Phura Lung ceremony is also performed individually or by a family. In case of a family worship the following articles are required –

Banana stem, banana leaves, receptacles made out of banana sheath, bamboo, 12 earthen lamps, one three faced lamp, thread, coins, rupee, pieces of folded betel nuts and betel leaves, flowers, fruits, incense stick.

The prayers and hymns are same with that of Phura Lung ceremony as performed publicly. On an octagonal platform the Lak is installed. Peyn Kaka is placed at the front of all the offerings.

Thus Phura Lung is a worship of God Almighty who is the ultimate creator of all. The priests have attributed a number of qualities on to Him, such as,

‘Phura Tara, O’ Chao Phura, Along ke man tara
Chikia Phura’ (Barua 1993:5-6)

Meaning: Oh’ the Supreme Self, the ultimate Self. Oh’ the Supreme self as Truth.

‘Phura’ is equated with Truth and He is called the supreme self. God Almighty Pha Tu Ching Phrong Hum is attributed as the creator, preserver and supreme cognition.
He is the creator, sustainer, protector of creation. His greatness is eternal, unending. He is divine light of three worlds. He is the nourisher and father of crops, food etc. This supreme reality has incarnated Himself as Ke-Khao Chao Thao lung ngam. He is the supreme cultic father of green crops and the peace giver. He showers the creation of food and his nourishingness.

The Phura Lung ceremony is still performed by the Tai Ahom priestly clans in a non sacrificial way either individually in their houses or publicly.

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Hymns collected from Tileswar Mohan, the mantra is found from Dinanath Changbun Barua. The manuscript is Dam-Phi-Ram or Ahom hakalor Dam phiram. This mantra is chanted for Khao Kham and is worshipped in Um Pha and Me-Dam Me-Phi ceremonies.
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