CHAPTER -VII

CONCLUSIONS

The establishment of the Ahom kingdom in the Brahmaputra valley about 1228 A.D., and the domination of the Ahom rulers for a continuous period of six hundred years is itself unique in the history of North-East India. Due to the lack of proper attention to the study of the Ahoms and their culture, perhaps because of the language barrier, it is not sufficiently focused in the mirror of Indian history. In recent times, however, the attention of the historians, both Indian and foreign, have been drawn, that too, because of the persistent efforts of some Assamese scholars, to the study of the Tai-Ahoms and their colourful cultural heritage. These studies, albeit belated, have brought forth the glorious contributions of the Tai-Ahoms of Assam to the development of human civilization.

Siou-ka-phā, better known as Chāo-lung Siu-kā-phā, leaving his paternal kingdom, Mung-māo-lung, came down covering many an unsurmountable barrier, and established the Ahom kingdom in the Brahmaputra valley. Chāo-lung Siu-kā-phā is the architect who built the foundation of the Assamese nation by “uniting seven families into one family,” and broadly speaking, he may be regarded as the “builder of the Assamese nation.” During the long reign of the Ahom kings, the kingdom was developed into new height in all spheres.—social, economic, political and administrative, religious and cultural. The
accounts of Shihabuddin Talish, who, as official historian, accompanied Mir Jumla, the Nabab of Bengal invading Assam, throw immense light on the Ahoms and their kingdom. (vide, Padmeswar Gogoi, *The Tai and the Tai Kingdoms*, 1968, pp. 438-448.) The writing of the past history of the Ahom kings and the contemporary events, including those of the neighbouring people, can be found in the annals of the Ahoms, only.

Today, the Ahoms are included in the Hindu cultural milieu. Even then, they retain some of their own distinctive cultural traditions, particularly in the sphere of religious beliefs and practices, as is manifested in their performance of me-däm-me-phi, Omphä, Phrä-lung, Deo-bän, Rik-khwan, etc. The terms of addressing the family members and other relatives may be distinguished from the mode of address and manners of other Assamese people. The marriage system of the Ahoms, called Chak-long, manifested itself an impressive characteristic picture.

Marriage is a very old practice current in the human society from time immemorial. The mode of solemnisation of marriage differs from people to people. Incest taboo is a deciding factor, and it is followed by the people. Marriage serves important purposes, such as deciding the identity of the legal father, mother and the children. Marriage gives the husband and the wife not only the monopoly of sexuality, but also the rights over property, relationship of affinity and, finally, the formation of the nucleus of a family. In the present context, the Hindu Law defines eight forms of marriage of which four are regarded as approved ones. There is no such classification in respect of Ahom
marriage, and the well established form is the Chak-long marriage, the practice of which is followed from the days of Nāng-hun-phā as referred to in the Ahom chronicles. There are prohibitive degrees of relationship barring the boy and the girl to be united. Cousin marriage is restricted. In the early Ahom society, there were plurality of wives among the affluents, who had status in the royal courts, but now monogamy is the established practice.

The Ahom language is very old, now becoming almost obsolete. But there are a large number of manuscripts in literary Tai-Ahom language preserved in the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Govt of Assam, Guwahati, which are yet to be translated into any other language.

The Ahoms carried with them customs that have been followed. Some of these customs have been mingled with or adopted by other societies in Assam. Some of these customs, more particularly those relating to marriage, are still followed by the Ahoms. To ask for the hand of a suitable girl for a boy, the parents of the boy have to engage some of their near relatives as 'go-between'. The origin of this practice goes back to the legendary period, when Leng-don sent his emissary, named Mo-lau-khrie, as the 'go-between' to ask for the hand of Nāng hun-phā, the daughter of Ak-kāi Mo-hung as stated elsewhere (vide Chap-V). After having the consent, it is customary to examine Bān-cheng (fowl bone oracles). The collection of water from a flowing river or tank on the marriage day is a compulsion. To have bath by the
groom or the bride with medicated water (sanctified water) is one of the remarkable customary procedures of the Ahoms. The burrying fowl’s eggs, coins, knife and betel-nuts under the rostrum of the ‘bei’. ‘gāthiyan khunda’ on the second day of the marriage are instances of Ahom customs. The showing of respects (sewa) to the parents on the occasion of the Bihu-samkrānti by the newly married couple, to wear dresses like riha, mekhela of muga silk are part of Ahom culture.

Acceptance of ga-dhan or “bride money,” termed by the Hindu pandits as the “sale of the bride,” is not at all traceable in the Ahom society. In some cases, the parents of the groom offer money to the parents of the bride as a token of good gesture for the performance of the marriage ceremony, but this does not involve any purchase. Again, the manner of address to the elders according to clan group in the Ahom society is not prevalent in any other people of Assam. The habit of eating pupā of muga and edi (endi) cocoons is still continued. The tasty and delicious preparation of edi-pupā may lead one to jump to the conclusion that it is cooked from duck’s eggs. Use of edi or muga pupā has its medicinal value for clearance of bowels.

The selection of a girl, as stated elsewhere, is done through the help of a ‘go-between’ first and, thereafter, the parents of the boy finalise it. The marriageable age of a girl should be sixteen years or above, and that of the boy must be above eighteen years. To find out an auspicious day for marriage, Bān-cheng (fowl bone oracle) was done
in earlier days, but now horoscopes of the boy and the girl are consulted. Invitation to marriage is done by offering ‘pañ-tamol’ (betel-nuts). To-day, however, the procedure of invitation by printed letters is followed. Welcome gate, pandal etc. are constructed; a bei for bathing the bride/groom attracts attention of everybody, but the most spectacular is the mañala (Skt. mandala) that can be found in respect of Chalk-long marriage only. The mañala is of two types—one, a circle-figured, the other a lotus-figured, on which 101 earthen lamps are placed with wick and oil to burn. The bathing of the groom or the bride is done by pouring sanctified (Āp-tāng) water on the head after anointing the body, particularly the face and the hands of the bride or the groom, with a paste specially prepared from pulses, turmeric and mustered oil. During the days of the Ahom kings, the marriage ceremony was continued for several days, but now it is a three day affair. The progressive outlook of the Ahom society made changes, and it is confined to two or one day. Joran-diya, pāni-tolā, gāthiyän-khundā, doiyän-diya, s(h)uwaguri-tolā, etc. are some of the performances related to the Chak-long marriage. The bridegroom with his best-man and other relatives goes in a procession to the bride’s house. The Chak-long is done in the bride’s house. The wedding apparel of the bride are made in attractive designs. The groom is to wear new dresses, preferably chougā-chāpkan.

Rites and rituals constitute an integral part of the Ahom Chak-long marriage. Remembering the forefathers and making oblations by
offering food to them is also found in other people. Ceremonial feast is common in all the societies. Rik-khwan (āyu-tolā in Assamese) and Deo-bān (prayer to the respective gods) are to be performed before the final day of the marriage. The purpose of these rituals are—praying for the longivity of the bride and the groom, propitiation to gods for their pleasure and to bless the would be husband and wife and, finally, to avert any misfortune or eventualities. The observance of the rites and the rituals virtually helps the doer to be enthusiastic and courageous in solemnising the Chak-long. As the days passed by, the Ahom people confined themselves only to some of the rituals, like na-puruṣar-cāul-khuowā, community feast, pāni-tolā, bathing of the bride and the groom etc. The practice of receiving the bridegroom ceremoniously while arriving at the bride’s house is still in vogue.

The Chak-long is the most colourful and enjoyable part of the Ahom marriage. It is mingled with social and religious ceremonies resulting in a harmonious way towards a better world. Besides, the conjugal life for a nucleus home, the aim of the Chak-long appears to be,—

1. to make a promise by the bridegroom in the presence of all the gathering, and facing the madala to subdue the wicked persons, to promote good will and friendship among the honest ones, to protect the country from the hand of the willy enemy, to uphold dharma to prevail over and, further, to protect his wife, her children and the family in future and their wealth;
2. to look for a better generation;
3. to establish the rule of dharma;
4. to enhance the trust/faith in the Supreme Almighty; and lastly,
5. the prayer to unlimited horizon in the sky.

The unique and impressive picture of one hundred and one lamps, burning on a most decorated madala very easily catch the imagination of the wedded pair towards the world of beautiful vision for fulfilling the hopes of future life. Chak-long snapped not only the most respected pair on the occasion, but also encourages the unmarried boys and the girls to enter the altar on the marriage day. In it lies the human virtues, the dharma of mankind, propagating peace and harmony—to become respected and responsible man and woman in the society. Chak-long encourages unity and patriotism, the most essential qualities of the human society to announce in a louder voice that, "the maternal uncle is not greater than the motherin-law." (deśatkai mōmāi dāṅgar nahay-Assamese), the clarion call of the great Ahom General, Lachit Borphukan, at the famous battle of Saraighat, between the armies of the great Mughal Emperor Aurengzeb and those of the Ahoms.

The prayer ‘Chāo nu-ru chāo kāo o’r’ (O’ my Lord above my head in the open sky) emphasises faith in one Supreme Being. Chak-long transforms the inner being of the married couple, moulding them to a new vista of their imaginative world; the advices received from the mo-lung makes them alert to tread on the path of worldly affairs with caution, to be kind and helpful to others, and with an obligation to
look after the parents in their old age who are unable to earn money for their livelihood.

The complete performance of the Chak-long ceremony also aims at achieving the religious and social objectives that lead them towards a better society with the aim of national integration and love for the mother land.

Chak-long is another form of Phra-lung (Figure.), the prime religious ceremony of the Ahoms. One hundred and one lamps placed on a conical tree-like structure when flattened to the ground, resembles to that of the picture of a madala. It is not a marriage ceremony, only; the perimeter of the Chak-long is so wide and high that its performance fulfills all other religious ceremonies.

A comparative study was made regarding Chak-long marriage of the Ahoms with that of the Homa-Vivāha of the Hindus. Homa-Vivāha is described as a saṃskāra, but the Chak-long marriage directed itself to the religious and social aspects. The comparision is discussed in Chapter VI along with the legal position in various aspects.

Lastly, it is concluded in the tune of Lord Denning that, Chak-long 'shall not weary them nor the years condemn, at the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remeber them (Chak-long).’