

# Folk songs centering around locally produced Rice-beer by Ahoms of Dhakuakhana

(Special mentioning of songs sung in death anniversary)

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## 1. Introduction

Assam is a land of various tribes and communities. Diversified Assamese culture flourished due to its various tribes, their beliefs, mindsets etc. Assamese culture is a result of evaluation occurred due to many cultures like Aryan, Kirat', Dravid, Nikhad<sup>1</sup>. The various tribes and communities of Assam and their traditions, customs, festivals, folk dances, ward robe etc. have enriched the heritage of Assamese culture.<sup>2</sup>

Traditional cuisine is an important part of the culture. The heritage and uniqueness of a single tribe can be determined by their food habits. A significant feature of traditional cuisines of Assamese tribes is locally produce wine. The wine plays an important role among the various communities of Mongoloid tribes of north east. Wine or rice beer is known by different name in different communities as – karbi- HARLANG, HOROP, HORO, bodo- JUMAI JOU, HIRNAI JOU, ROUCHI, Dimasa- JYO DIMA, Tiwa- JYO, PAHAN MOD, DHARABURI MOD, Rabha- SOKU, Garo- CHYO, Tai-Ahom-XAJ, LUKOLOU, NAMLOU, Khasi- KA-WAIN, Missing- APOUNG, Sonowal kanchari-MADHAB PURUSAR RAKH, Hajong- RUHI, GHAMANI, Sarania kanchari-MERA, Mech Kanchari- LAOPANI, XAJ or MOD, Deori- SUJE etc.<sup>3</sup> It has been observed that mongoloid tribes of Assam have unrestricted use and consumption of locally produced wine. From the ancient time various societies of Assam has been celebrating various festivals and various events and devote to their own proclaimed lord in their own religious ways. In these types of occasions wine is mainly offered to their lord.<sup>4</sup>The consider wine as sacred and therefore they offer it to their lords. The wine is used for two purposes- one is religious and the other is festival.

The Ahoms, who contributed in glorifying the Assamese culture also traditionally used wine. They called it 'XAJ-PAANI' or 'LUKOLAU'. The Ahoms also considered wine as sheared and used it in various rituals. The Ahoms possess a long oral tradition and many songs are center around wine. Though the inner themes of these songs are same, it has got diversity due to its extensive use. In this research we have tried to introduce Rice-Beer (Xaj-paani) and we have also tried to discuss the songs used by the Ahoms of Dhakuakhana.

### 1.1-Aims of Research

Folk song plays an important role in folk culture which cannot be excluded. Through this medium we may get the thinking of the people of a particular community. Still the people of Dhakuakhana which comes under the Lakhimpur district these folk songs and lyrics are publishing orally. Since ancient time the Ahom people used XAJ-PAANI as traditional wine and many folk songs centering XAJ-PAANI are sung by the people of this area. Specially orally use of the songs and music has covered them with a new layer. Therefore it is become very necessary to study about the traditional songs. So the aims of the Research is-

1. To discover the songs related to Rice-Beer or Xaj-paani which are used orally by the Ahoms of Dhakuakhana
2. To analysis the meaning of songs and various rules & regulations related to the rice-beer.
3. To enlightened the songs that is related to the rice beer in a particular society.

### 1.2 -Range and procedure of the research:

In this research paper, we have tried to study about the rice-beer (Xaj-paani) used in death rituals of 'Poka Ahom' of Dhakuakhana within the scope of Study. We have used descriptive and analytical method for the purpose and done field study for securing informations about folk songs related to rice-beer.

### 1.3- source

As a main source the information that we have received from the general people of the Dhakuakhana and songs related to XAJPANI has been preferred mainly and we have used various books and articles as secondary source of information on Ahoms culture and their traditional wine.

## 2. Introduction to Xaj-paani or Lukolau

Among the huge Tai community, Tai-Ahom plays an important role in its tradition. The first Tai group that came to Assam is generally known as "Ahom" and also known as 'Tai' or 'Shan'.<sup>5</sup> Ahoms are included in the huge Mongolians community and Shyam-chin language family. They had oldest and exceptional culture. Under the leadership of Sukafa Ahoms came to Assam through Patkai Mountain and entered the upper Assam from Mao-Lung state of North Brahmadesh (Mynmaar).<sup>6</sup> When Ahoms came to Assam along with them they brought their own language, literature, dishes, religious traditions and many different social rules but still then with the time cycle they accepted the regional culture, religion and language and contributed to Assam's united culture's development.

Along with language, literature and religion Ahoms food items or dishes also describes and inaugurates their wonderful culture. Cultural thinking can be identified by their traditional food, procedure of preparation of local recipe and the way to eat the food. Like the other Mongolian communities of Assam the use of wine is also popular among the Ahoms and wine is the necessary part of their cultural life. They named their traditional wine as XAJ-PAANI, LUKOLAU and NAAMLAU. Lukolau is made of water that comes out of rice is respected wine. Generally it is used in festivals although guests are treated with it. Once upon a time the relative male members of village used to drink Lukolau sitting together. The owners get hurt if they could not serve the guest with the Lukolau. In the death anniversaries they use to offer the Lukolau.<sup>7</sup>

In order to define the history of wine or alcohol we have to face some perception of people. In case of Ahoms also if we want know about the history of their rice-beer then also we have to hear the various perceptions of the people but difference can be noticed among them. According to the belief of general people the grandson of Lengdon, Khunlung Khunlai when come down to earth from the heaven by the golden ladder he brought the SOMROKH or LUKOLAU along with him. From that period Somrokh or lukolau or Xaj-paani is used among the Ahom community.<sup>8</sup> On the stage of Assam it is said that when Saulung Sukafa came down through the Patkai Mountain he brought the Xaj-paani with him.... It may be due to the offerings that used to be made by the ancestors of Ahom during the pujas for which the Sukafa brought the rice beer from the Thailand with the various different things.<sup>9</sup> Therefore Tai-Ahoms demands that from that time the use of Xaj-paani in Assam daily life continuing.

Tai-Ahoms society is mainly an agricultural society. They make Xaj-paani from the various farming products. Different tribes may have named the wine differently but maximum tribes use the similar procedure to prepare the wine. But all tribes prepare wine or Laupaani according to them. Among the communities more or less two types wine or Laupaani is in use. They are prepared from normal rice (aaro saual) and sticky rice (Bora saual). According to the rice wine varies taste. Ahoms uses both sticky and normal rice to prepare the Xaj-paani.

To prepare the Xaj-paani the first and primary requirement is Mumps (used in rice beer) or medicine. After crushing the normal rice the flour which comes out is mixed with different leaves of different plant to prepare the Mumps. To prepare the Mumps Assam's communities uses wild medicine. According to tribes medicines difference can be seen. In ancient time people used 101 medicines to prepare the rice beer Mumps although those plants are not available in the Assam's forest at present. Therefore at present they use 5, 7, 9 or 11 types of grass medicine to prepare the mump. At present Ahom people uses following wild medicine to prepare rice beer mump- 1.Xaj plant<sup>10</sup>, 2. Xoru manimuni ,3. Bor manimuni, 4. Wild peeper, 5.Wild chilly, 6.Jack fruit leaf, 7.Guava leaf 8.Water guava bark (to make the beer sweet), 9. Kopu Dhekia, 10. Newly born leaves flesh of pine apple (to make the beer sweet), 11. Central stick of Jack fruit (to lightened the colour ) 12. Bihlongoni. 13. Sugarcane leaf etc. After collects the above listed leaves and rush with the rice to prepare the mump (many of them crushes the leaves only and then crushes with the rice),mix the wild medicines with rice flour and mix with desired amount of cold water and one or two old mumps are crushed and mixed with new mumps and makes new mumps. If old mump is not mixed it will never generate the layer. These old mumps are known as main mump (ghai pitha).<sup>11</sup>This old mumps mixing process is named as Gahimora by Tai-Ahoms. Reason of Ghaimora is old contains 'yeast' fungi among them and these helps the new mump to be lighter and blowing. After mixing the rice flour with main mump and wild medicines particular shaped mumps are made and kept on bamboo net (saloni) for 3 to 4 days. For the sweating of the mump first bamboo net is covered with the layer of paddy grass and spread Bihlongoni (a wild leaf) on desired amount and again spread Bihlongoni and paddy grass respectively. After 3 or 4 days mumps are brought out and kept under the sun to dry and then places above the fire so that it may absorb smoke because only smoke absorbed mumps are eligible for preparation of the rice beer. After absorbing smoke mumps becomes lighter and meets required qualities.

At the time of preparation of rice-beer (Xaj-paani) Ahom ladies follows some rules and regulations. At the very beginning they brooms and washes the place thoroughly where the rice beer is to be stored. Ahom ladies do not eat any food while keeping the rice beer. Because they have a belief that if they eat and keep the beer their lord will not accept it.<sup>12</sup> After following the rules that is to be followed in order to prepare the beer they deeps some quantity of rice under the water for some time and brings up of the water and put it into 'SEWASORU'<sup>13</sup>(utensil used to prepare beer) and place on the boiled water pan that is above on the fire. They place two pieces of banana tree bark in such away vapour of the boiled may directly go to the Sewasoru and at the meeting point of both utensils are tightly packed with a piece of cloth. Slowly slowly the vapour boils the rice inside the pan and then boiled rice (this is sewa rice) is speared on banana leafs to get cooled. After getting cooled required amount of crushed mumps are mixed with Sewa rice with negotiable amount of water. Later some people keep this mixture in pot and some people keeps in bamboo bowl. After some days when juice (Rash) or Rohi leaks out from the rice kept in the bamboo bowl then it is transferred to pot and closes the mouth of pot by bamboo leaves and prepares the rice beer. According to science the wild medicines present in the mump hold Yeast the fungi and reacts with the glucose present in the boiled rice and produces wine.<sup>14</sup>

### 3. The importance of Xaj-paani (rice-beer) in Ahom community in religious traditions

Ahoms are a part Tai community. There is a belief that Tai were the followers of the Tao religions founded by Laoutxei and from here itself it's clear that Ahoms were also the Tao followers at the early stage. At this point Dr. Leela gogoi has given his view as Ahoms are mainly Tao religion followers. The main thing of Tao religion are heat and these – limitless (akhim), endless (ananta) and pure god (purnya brahma). George skot said, during the rule of king Ashoka in south-east Asia Buddhism was popular. But still then it took hundreds of years for Tais of south China to accuire the Buddhism even though they accured Buddhism. They mainly followed the rules regulations of ancient Tao religion rather than Buddhism. When Ahoms came to Assam also followed the same path.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore we can say that when Ahoms came to Assam by crossing Patkai they brought a mixed religion of Buddhism and Tao religion. But after coming to Assam they become generous in terms of religion. In the ancient period of pre-Sankardeva the religion which was popular Ahoms also started to following it. In Sadiya they started to worship "KECHAIKHATI", in Saraideo they worshipped "SARAIDEO" in DEBARGAON they worshipped "DEOKHAAL", and started sacrificing in 'Raam kha Deokhaal', even to make Saraideo town they sacrificed white horse under the Neem tree.<sup>16</sup> Lately Ahoms became close with the neighbouring communities and started exchanging of traditions and Ahoms were also influenced by the Hinduism. Ahoms first followed Hinduism under the rule of Sudangfa or Bamunikonwar.

It is notable though Ahoms were generous in case of religion and has accured the popular rules, behavior, and the events of the society but still then they have not left their own cultural activities. They followed some traditional and cultural events by following their own traditional rules and regulations. The Mohan, Deodhai and Bailungs under the Ahom categories have continued their own religion secretly and now also they are keeping it alive. The festivals which Ahoms celebrates according to their old traditions and rules are Umfa, Ma-daam-ma-fi, Daam puja, Rickhyan-Mungkhon, Jasingapha, Furalang etc.<sup>17</sup>

In these every festival of Ahoms rice beer or Xaj-paani plays an important role because rice beer is used as main thing of offering. Dr.Punyalata Gohain has said that Tai-Ahom community used to worship 8 lac gods. In every type of these pujas they offer Lukalau as main offering.<sup>18</sup>The main starting from Lengdongh to rest of the lords in heaven socially and annually they worship them through Umpha puja. This puja is organized in three different khaals (place of worshipping or sacrificing) and these khaals are- (a) BORDEO KHAAL (b) HINDU KHAAL (c)HABIDEO KHAAL or BOROSAMAANOR KHAAL.<sup>19</sup> among these in bordeo khaal they offer puja mainly to KHAMKHAO, AAI LENGDING, SIT-LUM-SUM, FA-NU-RU LENGDONG and seven more other gods and use Xaj-paani for every one with various rules.

To satisfy the male ancestors and gods of heaven Ahom people celebrates Ma-dam-ma-fi according to their way and thinking. In this puja Xaj-paani is compulsory. The lords worship in these puja can be divided into three parts (a) DAM SAU FI (b) DUM SUNG FI and (c) GRIHO DUM.<sup>20</sup>Dum sau fi is the lord of natural source power, Dum sau fi stands for ancestor of the family upto 14<sup>th</sup> generations, Griho dum stands for deadmen of a family upto 4<sup>th</sup> generations.

Ahoms celebrates another puja known as DAAM puja. This puja is celebrated with respect and to maintain the relation with the natural powers. Dum means to show gratitude towards the death people ...to achieve success in any blessed task reffering the dum lord they offer lukalau or Xaj-paani. The thing to be noticed is that for they have rule of offering Ghai dum two containers of lukalau, three containers for dakrua dum, two containers for chiren dum and one container for new dum (no dum) in dum puja.<sup>21</sup>

JASSINGPHA is the goddess of knowledge and enlightened in the Ahom community. The goddess of knowledge is also offered lukalau while worshipping her. In upper Assam the famous religious event known as RAATISEWA, where Xaj or Rice beer is main thing. Mentionable point is excluding the religious festivals or events Ahoms also use rice beer to treat their guest in various seasonable events and festivals.

#### 4.-Folk songs centering around locally produced Rice-beer (Xaj-paani) by Ahoms of Dhakuakhana

Huge numbers of Ahoms live in Dhakuakhana of Lakhimpur district. These Ahom people are still stuck to their own cultural traditions. Xaj-paani is still their main liquor and Ahoms still gives important to be served as main item in any traditional event or programs. Centering the death people they still organize death anniversary. In this religious event the main item of the pure Ahom is rice beer or lukolau or Xaj-paani.

If we elaborate the different festivals of Ahom we can see that they try to satisfy the expired people in most of their religious traditions. At present the death anniversary organized by the Ahom people can be said as ideas and thinking of those expired peoples. It is to be mentioned that every Ahom people does not use Xaj or rice-beer in death anniversary it is due to the different religious aspects. After coming to Assam Ahoms are influenced by the Hinduism. This results in accuring the religious aspects of Shivo, Shaakto and Vaisnav community of Hinduism willingly. In case of royal families of Ahoms if we discuss about new vaisnav religions influence we can see that Sudang pha or Bamuni Konwar worshipped portrait of Vishnu along with Sumdeo in his palace. After this Pratap singha reconstructed Naagshankar devalaya at the northern bank of Brahmaputra and started the process of construction of Hindu temples.<sup>22</sup> Surya kumar Bhuyan edited book named 'Horokanta Boruah Hodoraminor Asom Buranji' and Edward gate's 'A history of Assam' has published that eventually king Sutamala or Jai dhawaj singh has come under the shelther of Hinduism. He did all the pujas by the Brahmins and donated them a lot of land and then came under the shelter of Vaisnav priest. Jai dhawaj singh crowned Niranjana Babu as chief priest of Auniati satra under whom he has taken shelter.<sup>23</sup> He constructed Auniati, Dakshinpart and Garmur satra and made Vaisnav religion stable. Although royal families have done all this but still the general did not accepted completely because they did not left their Shivo or Shakto tradition. Therefore Vaisnav followers have to exclude some rule along with them in any religious programme, so Vaisnav religion was influenced by the Shaibo and Shakto. This can be seen in all four types of New-Vaisnav religion.

If we look into religious acts done for the dead in the Ahom society of Dhakuakhana, we see they are almost included in the 'Ratisewa' tradition. They are exactly same in 'Xaj-paani'(rice- beer) and the songs used in Ratisewa tradition at the yearly event done for deaths. Those who worship God by 'Ratisewa' are known as 'Poka Bhokot' and they are included in the 'Kaal songhoti' Vaisnavas. They used rice, meat and the traditional 'Xaj-paani' in the religious occasion held for their former death generations. In this occasion, they think the priest as their God, which is as same as the 'Ratisewa' tradition. We also see a nice similarity between the two in the case of the stages and the songs that are used in this occasion. Bellow we are briefly discussing the songs and religious works done for the deaths by the 'Poka Ahoms' in Dhakuakhana, which are mainly concentrated in the local rice- beer named 'Xaj-paani.

The pure Ahoms who stays in various parts of Dhakuakhana, personally all of them fixed a particular date of a year to remember their expired ones and in their memories they organize death anniversary and in this event rice beer or Xaj-pani is mainly used. The traditional events done by using Xaj-panni goes through three layers towards results. Every layer is known as 'BULON'. From beginning to end the event is continued by the holy peoples (bhokot) by singing traditional folk songs related with Xaj-pani or Lukolau.

In this event every holy person of the society cannot take part. To be a part of this society one must be a 'dukhoniya'( a particular stage of Holy persons). A priest will take the main role. We can define him as a director of that society. The event continues as per his instructions. The priest sits in the center of the society. When he sits on his sit and then according to age all other dukhoniya people sit along his both side and makes a long line. These holy peoples are known as "Parikhat", parikhat may vary from men to women. Once the peoples settle down in arranged way then proceed for preparation of lighting of "lamp" (saaki) and "koroni". Ladies comes for lighting the lamp and to do the koroni. Among them one comes with mustard oil lamp and one brings koroni on her head. In modern meaning koroni is four edges utensils made of bamboo or wood. At old periods they use bamboo or wooden koroni but at present they use metal utensils. Inside the koroni they put odd no of betel nut with money (Dakshina). Koroni is placed on a big piece of banana leaf and establishes with traditional establishment song. Establishment song are-

Hobe haj kori                      aahise hundori

Hadhoni naari hohite

Guware koroni    dhoriye jononi

Jonailonto ekochittye

Agobahi goiya                      protoko pariya

Monote niyome kori

Matha Guwadaalinomai hewa koru

Purnoko agote thoi

Mentioned in second part we became clear that 'koroni' which is called 'Guwadaali' here is brought on head and put on banana leaf and it established and memorizes the expired one and bows head in front of them. Here again the central priest has been pointed as 'Purno'. The central priest will be facilitated with various names by singing songs. He is also called as 'swami'-

Swamiye ovoiyee sorono tole

Diya ekobaro thai

Ramdeu sorone hridoiye dhoriya

Dakh hukhodewye gai

In these way after establishment of 'lamp and koroni' 'ROKH' (rice beer or Xaj-paani is known as Rokh in these types of events) is arranged in bowls in between the peoples. The arranged bowls also has particular numbers. Two of the ladies (they are known as ROKHINI) will bring three bowl of Rokh and two bowl of curry. Among them two bowls of Rokh are offered to the expired ones and third one is offered to the mother. After this the owner takes blessings and main function start. The bowl which was offered to mother is handed to the owner and rest two bowls are distributed among the priests and other parikhaats. At first both Rokhini approaches the central priest by singing-

Goruro suramoni hridoiyor onjoli

Bhokoto botsolo hori

Swami soronoloi aami sinti aahu

Aadoror manoni kori

While singing like this both Rokhini and priest holds the bowl of Rokh, they sit in traditional manner and everyone follows them and cooperates with them in this way. After serving the priest the Rokhini again sings to pray change the things on the plate-

Namore namore patilonto thale

Aasonte amritye bhori

Thalore aaboron gusua monai oi

Rokhe dew onjoli bhori

After this step by step Rokh is feeded and after the inauguration by the priest Rokhinites takes Rokh bowls and approaches to the parikhaats sitting on the both side of priest and they accept by singing. Among various songs these can be mentioned-

Aadite aacile etu deborokho

Purbote aahise naami

Debore rokhoke aapuni loibaha

Guru jogotore swami

Korne paan kori swadhai pete vori

Nirmol hongote pai

Rokhe nodi boiyahadhu jole hoiya

Hongote dubiya roi

Cold devorokh along with song three layers are passes by beautiful songs. After the finishing of Bulon they eat hot offerings and then according to rules they start to deallocate the lamp and koroni. Ladies has established lamp and koroni so they will dellocate it is their rule. Similar songs exist for dellocating the lamp also-

aami saari hokhi koroni patilu

koroni premore jori

chitra bichitro rohedoi rokhini

homajor koroni tulu

While singing the song Rokhini dellocates the lamp and koroni and brings out the betel nut one by one and offers the priest to have it and while coming back they take blessings from all the paarikhaats. After handover all the utensils and things present in the event to the owner the event ends.

## 5.-Conclusion

These songs are invaluable part of Assamese literature. The curiosity, creativity, beauty, expressions are clearly reflected in these songs. The preservations and publicity of these songs will make Assamese folk literature more powerful. From this research we may come to some decisions-

1. Rice beer plays an important role to maintain the beauty of Ahoms culture.
2. Since the time of coming though Ahoms are influenced by the other cultural but they have kept their culture alive.
3. Due to natural reasons or geographic reasons some traditional differences centering Xaj-paani has been seen among the Ahoms of Assam.
4. Though they have clear aim but difference can be seen between naming of events and traditions.
5. In the death anniversary of Ahoms of Dhakuakhana similarities is seen with the Raatisewa event of the pure Ahom community. This similar songs are born from the rule regulations related with that event.
6. A regional view of the songs related with rice beer can be seen among the people of Dhakuakhana because of the oral popularity of the songs. Difference is seen in case of lyrics and tune.

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2. Das, Dr Angshuman(Edi.) preface, Asomor Jonogusthiyo lukokhadya, aank-bank, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, September, 2012
3. Gohain, Dr. Punyalata, Asomor Jonogusthiyo Laupani, Beena library, page-25
4. Above mentioned book, page-76
5. Boruah, Dr. Hukho, Ahomhokolor utsav anusthan, Banlata, September, 2018, page-39
6. Above mentioned book, page-43
7. Das, Dr Angshuman(Edi.), Asomor Jonogusthiyo lukokhadya, aank-bank, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, September, page-121
8. Gohain, Dr. Punyalata, Asomor Jonogusthiyo Laupani, Beena library, page-36
9. Above mentioned book, page-32
10. One type of dense tree ,it is suitable to store the rice beer, name varies by place to place, in Dhakuakhana area it is known as xaj tree.
11. Gohain, Dr. Punyalata, Asomor Jonogusthiyo Laupani, Beena library, page-49
12. Above mentioned book, page-53
13. Sewasoru is a type of utensil used to boil the rice to store xaj. Olden days it was made of mud. At present big cookers of rice are used. Some small pores are made under it so that water vapour may enter through that hole and boil the rice.

14. Gohain, Dr. Punyalata, Asomor Jonogusthiyo Laupani, Beena library, page-50
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21. Gohain, Dr. Punyalata, Asomor Jonogusthiyo Laupani, Beena library, page-103
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23. Above mentioned book, page-64

