

MOIDAMS AT Charaideo



From 13th to the early 19th century CE, the Ahoms ruled over Assam. Their long reign established political and cultural unity and gave economic stability to this region. This helped in the process of evolution of a new nationality and culture by bringing together various ethnic groups under one administration. Their policy of matrimonial alliances and socio-cultural assimilation paved the way for the growth of a composite nationality, which was later on recognized as the Assamese.

Traditionally and culturally the Ahoms are member of the Great Tai (Tai-Yai) group of peoples. In the year 1215 CE, the Ahoms migrated from *Mong-Mao* or Mong-Mao-Lung (present Dehong Dai Jingpho autonomous prefecture of South-Western Yunan province of Peoples Republic of China). They entered into the Upper Assam region of the Brahmaputra valley through Patkai Hills under the leadership of Mao-Shang prince, named Chau-lung Siu-ka-pha. He became the first king or Chao-pha or Swargadeo (Lord of the heaven) of the Ahom Dynasty, who established the first Ahom capital at Cherai-doi or Charaideo. By the end of the 17th century, the Ahoms had expanded their kingdom over the length and breadth of the Brahmaputra valley in their long 600 years of power, Chau-lung Siu-ka-pha's able and intelligent successors like Suhungmung (CE 1497-1539), Suklengmung (CE 1539-1552), Pratap Singha (1603-1641), Gadadhar Singha (CE 1681-1696), Rudra Singha (CE 1696-1714), Shiva Singha (CE 1714-1744), Pramatta Singha (CE 1744- 1751), Rajeswar Singha (CE 1751-1769), built a strong state in the Brahmaputra valley by defending it from the Islamic rulers including the mighty Mughals and the provincial rulers, which provided this valley an era of peace and prosperity and helped the multi-ethnic Assamese culture to flourish.



The Ahoms took up a number of secular and religious architectural activities in their reign. One of them which has drawn the attention of the world community is the Moidam (the burial mounds) architecture. No other funerary structures found in other parts of the country can be compared with them. They are quite distinct in their style and architecture and are a reminiscent of their foreign origin.

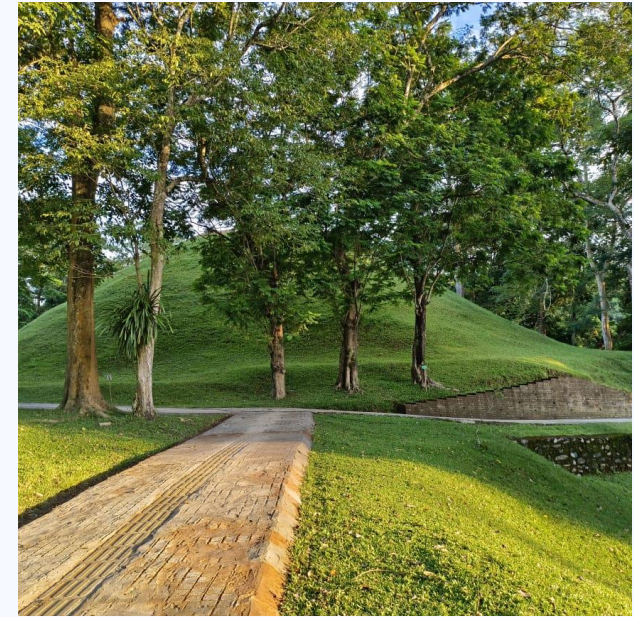
Traditionally the Ahoms buried their dead. The Moidams are the burial mounds of the Ahom kings, Queens and Nobles. The word Moidam is derived from the Tai word Phrang-Mai-Dam or Mai-Tam. Phrang-Mai means to put into the grave or to bury and Dam means the spirit of the Dead.

Though Moidams are found in all the districts of upper Assam, Charaideo, the first capital of the Ahoms was the necropolis of almost all the Ahom Royals. Charaideo is situated 28 km east of Sivasagar. The first king of the Ahoms Chau-lung Siu-ka-pha was buried at Charaideo after his death observing all the Tai-Ahom religious rites and rituals. Since then, it turned into a norm to bury the Tai-Ahom Kings, Queens and Princes and Princesses at Charaideo. During their six hundred years of rule, this place became a venerated and sacred place.

The exterior of the Moidam is hemispherical in shape and their sizes vary from a modest mound to a hillock of twenty meters or so in height, depending upon the power, status and recourses of the person buried. A Moidam consist of three major features, a vault of Chamber, a hemispherical earthen mound covering the chamber with a brick structure (*Chaw-chali*) for annual offering over it and an octagonal boundary wall around the base of the mound having an arched gateway on its west. However the smaller Moidams did not have all the above features.

Earlier the vaults were made of solid wooded poles and beams. Probably from the time of king Rudra Singha (CE 1696-1714) and his successors, wooded vaults were replaced with stone and brick vaults. According to the Chronicles of *Charng-rung* Phukan (Chang-rung Phukanar Buranjee), the bricks and stones of the Moidams were joined with a mortar mix consisting of lime (lime stone and Snail-shell), pulses, resin, hemp, molasses, fish etc.

Inside the vault, the mortal remains of the dead were kept, after observing the rituals which extended from 6 months to 2 years. The Ahom kings used to be buried along with their treasures including articles of their day to day use, i.e. cloths, ornaments, weapons etc. the Ahom chronicles refer that a huge quantity of valuables and attendants living or dead were buried with the royalty and the dignitaries. The practice of burying alive was banned by King Rudra Singha (CE 1696-1714).



As a custom (as mentioned in the Ahom chronicles), only the people from the *ghraphalia* and *likhurakhan khel* (khel is the group of people whom were assigned to do specific jobs and every khel consisted of one to five thousand people) were permitted to bury the bodies of Kings and Queens. In the Ahom *Buranjees* (Chronicles) it is mentioned that a coffin was made of a soecific type of timber called Uriam (*Bescoffia javanica*). the coffin was known as *Rung-dang*. *Rang-dang* was carried to the burial ground in *Kekora dola* (a kind of Assamese litter) only by the people from *ghraphalia* and *likhurakhan khel*. The massive vault under hemispherical earten mound is known as *kareng-rung-dang* (coffin), where coffin was placed in east west direction. Only the *Lukhukhans* were allowed to enter *kareng-rung-dang* and after placing the body they sealed the door of the vault with boulders in clay mortar. At Charaideo, there was a specific road to carry the dead bodies known as *Sa-nia-ali* (*Sa* means dead body, *nia* means carry and *ali* means Path or road) and a specific tank for the ritualistic baths of the death bodies, which is known as *Sa-Dhua-Pukhuri* (*Sa* means dead body, *dhua* means bath and *pukhuri* means tanks).

The Ahom kings appointed special officer, *Changrung Phukan* for the construction and maintenance of all the civil works including Royal Moidams. *Changrung Phukan* was one of the nine *Phukans* of the highest rank. Special officers, called as the Moidam Phukans and the guard group, known as the Moidamiya were appointed to protect and maintain the Moidams.

Being famous treasure troves, the Moidams attracted many plunderers from Mughal to the British and even the locals who plundered the Moidams many a times. The earliest sketch of the ground plan of a Moidam was published in the journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, June 1848 drawn by Sergeant C. Clayton, who superintendent and excavation of Moidam during 1840, at the request of captain T. Brody, the then principal Assistant Commissioner of Assam. Clayton and his team found rings, silver toothpick case, ear ornaments, goblets, platters and a small gold lime container which were later purchased by some Mr. Bedford. The archival report show that in 1905, under the surveillance of many Ahom Princess, one Moidam was excavated but nothing is known thereafter.



During excavated the Moidam No.2 in 2000-02 by ASI, Guwahati Circle several artifacts were found. Among them, the most noteworthy are the ivory decorative pieces and pieces of wooded objects. One of the wooded object is probably the shaft of a dish-on-stand (*sarai*), designed in the shape of *Stambha* (pillar). One ivory apnel depicts a mythical dragon –the Ahom royal insignia, along with the intricate carvings of elephant, peacock and floral motifs. Other objects found were pieces of copper objects fitted to wood, iron hook, iron pin, small ivory decorative art objects, round shaped ivory buttons, cowries, gold pendants and a few lead cannon balls.

The exact date of this Moidam or to whom it was dedicates is difficult to ascertain in the absence of written records. But on the basis of the artefacts and the nature of the brick structures are taking the literary references from the Buranjees on the cremation practices of the Ahom after embracing Hinduism, the construction of that Moidam could be assigned to the first half of the 18th century CE.

With the influence of Hinduism, the Ahoms also started to cremate their dead. Never the less, this burial system is still practiced by the priestly sections of the Ahoms i.e. *Mo-chai*, *Mo-hung* and *Mo-plang* and the *Chao-dang* (Royal bodyguards) clan.

SIU-KA-PHA ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM, CHARAIDEO



HOW TO REACH



BY AIR

Nearest Airport is Mohanbari, Dibrugarh is at a distance of 86 kms.

BY RAIL

Nearest Railway station is Simaluguri is at a distance of 13 KMs

BY ROAD

Charaideo Moidam site is well connected by road from Sivasagar (28 KMs), Nazira (18 KMs) and Sonari (20 KMs)

WHERE TO STAY

Tourism Bhawan, Charaideo – 9365176355

Hotel Brahmaputra, Nazira – 7002540494

Hotel Villa, Nazira - 9435105204

Greenview Hotel, Sonari – 7896453604

Star Hotel, Sonari – 9401723951

Mist View, Sonari – 7086910120

Hotel Majestic, Sonari - 8638036618

River Breeze Resort, Nazira - 9678423003

Shiva Palace, Sivasagar - 9954729782

Tourist Bungalow, Sivasagar – 9954476062

Holiday Palace, Sivasagar – 8638168088

Hotel Piccolo, Sivasagar – 9101622264

Hotel Raj Palace, Sivasagar – 03772 232951

Hotel Deo Vollente, Sivasagar – 8486329347

Hotel Brahmaputra, Sivasagar – 9395404565

Zoonskaya Resort, Sivasagar - 6900606445

Hotel Siddharth, Sivasagar – 8876642767

BG Palace, Sivasagar – 9957354619



Text source:

Archaeological Survey of India, Guwahati Circle

Photo:

Madhab, Kangkon, Bhargav & Gunangshu

For assistance, please contact

Tourist Information Office
Tourist Bungalow
Sivasagar
+91 81330 89993
tio-sivasagar@assam.gov.in

