

Abstract

Ancient Manuscript Literature of Tai Ahom

The ancient manuscripts of the Ahom period written in the Tai Ahom language are considered as the most valuable literary property of Assamese literature, of Assam, north-east of India. Although Tai Ahom is now an endangered language and is on the verge of extinction, its literary practice is an inseparable part of the Assamese language and literature. The fact that the Ahoms ruled for 600 glorious years in the valley of Assam, is the prized evidence to the view that the most invaluable documents of the history of Assam are depicted in these Tai Ahom manuscripts. Besides, the manuscripts are also testimonials to the huge contribution of the Tai Ahom language to the development of Assamese language.

This paper addresses a brief outline of the age-old tradition of manuscript writing in Tai Ahom while keeping a close glance at the chronological history of the Ahom kingdom established in Assam. The Ahoms came from the Yunnan province of South China under the leadership of Su-ka-Pha, landed in the valley of Assam (Kamarupa) in 1228 AD, and established a powerful kingdom that ruled the valley for 600 long years. One of their primary and most significant contributions to the people of Assam is the practice of writing history including all important events and relevant chronology. The manuscript literature not only bears the responsibility of recording the chronology of 600 year-old Ahom rule, it also provides a concise outline of the Tai Ahom language once considered as the royal language of the Ahom court. Most of the Ahom words are now very much part of the Assamese vocabulary. The paper also looks into the linguistic aspect of the manuscript tradition as well as describes the literary genres it includes. As a whole, the paper addresses the a) history of the Ahoms, b) the linguistic description of the Tai Ahom language, and c) the contribution the Ahom lexicon has made into the Assamese vocabulary, with regard to the practice of these Ahom manuscript literature.