

OM-PHA PUJA OF TAI- AHOM COMMUNITY UNDER THE INFUENCE OF GLOBALIZATION : NATURE, PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

Globalization is an effort to economically integrate people from all over the world as a whole. On the other hand it is a global market system where there is no compulsion to imagine borders. In Character globalization is a successful neo-liberal capitalist pervasiveness, which is simultaneously identified as a hegemonic process culturally as well. The hegemonic process of globalization began to threaten the traditional religious beliefs and practices of the world's smaller community. The religious and cultural pluralistic structure of small communities was broken down to create a world of single social, materialistic consumers through the certain of an open communication process. The Tai-Ahom community living in Assam are one of the smallest community in the world. The *Om-Pha Puja* that the community celebrates collectively is currently in crisis. The question faced by a small community within the global cultural hegemonic realm about the need for a religious ceremony held by investing longer associations, labour and money has emerged as difficult challenge.

Key words : *Om-Pha-Puja, globalization, Tai-Ahom community, religious belief, tradition, culture.*

1. INTRODUCTION

There are three main religious ceremonies in the religious tradition of the Tai Ahom community in Assam. These ceremonies are *Om-Pha Puja*, *Me-Dam-Phi*, and *Rik-Khan-Mung-Khun*. Among them, the *Om-Pha Puja* is the largest one. In 1228 AD, Sukaphaⁱ did not immediately establish a permanent capital after coming to Assam. In 1253 AD, the capital was established at Charaidew and it was here that Sukapha established the *Ti-Phi-Chang* or *Deoshal* – the traditional place of worship for the community – atop the Charaidew hills and held the *Om-Pha Puja* royally for the first time. The term *Om-Pha* consists of two words, where *Om* means to offer and *Pha* means gods. It is worship dedicated to the deities. In the religious tradition of the Tai Ahom community, the relationship of the gods with the theory of creation is inseparable. The Tai Ahom people believe that the worship of deities is essential to maintain the overall wellbeing of the country and mutual peace and harmony between the people. Following this belief, the subsequent kings of the Ahom dynasty also held *Om-Pha* as royal affair. In recent times, the Tai Ahom community have maintained the ritual in the communitarian level. But under the influence of globalization process, traditional festival, community belief systems are constantly changing. In general, globalization poses challenges to the traditional foundations of tradition and cultures.

The observance of *Om-Pha* of the Tai Ahom is also seen to be hindered by the aspects of the process of globalization.

Objectives of the study

The main objectives of this study are the following:

- To discuss the nature, significance and method of *Om-Pha*, which has been held in Assam since 1253 AD by the Tai-Ahom community.
- To discuss the barriers, problems and possibilities that the ritual faces under the influence of globalization.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study is mainly based on primary and secondary data. Primary data are drawn from field studies conducted in the eighteen villages, which come under Bakata Mazgaon Ti-Phi-Chang in Sivasagar District. The secondary data are drawn from the articles from published books and magazines. The methodology followed in this study is descriptive and analytical.

3. DISCUSSION

Leng-Don is the main deity of the Tai-Ahom community. During the reign of the Ahom dynasty in Assam (1228-1838), it is mentioned in the *buranji*ⁱⁱⁱ that the rulers used to organise worships of Leng-Don and the other deities. Thus there were two parts to this type of worship organized to seek the blessings of the deity for the well-being of the nation. The two parts are *Om-Pha* and *Sai-Pha*. In *Ahomor Din*, Hiteswar Barbaruah claims that *Om-Pha* was a lavish ceremony organized by the kings, whereas *Sai-Pha* was a ceremony organized by the people.ⁱⁱⁱ Towards the end of the reign of Ahom dynasty, *Poy-Om-Pha* was held every twelve years.^{iv}

3.1 Mode of *Om-Pha* Puja

In the religious methods of the Ahom community, one can notice two customs of worship. One is *Ban-Phi* and other is *Phra-Lung*. Animals are sacrificed in the *Ban-Phi* system and fruits are offered in the *Phra-Lung* system. The *Ban-Phi* custom was traditionally practiced under royal patronage. *Om-Pha* was and still is performed in the *Ban-Phi* custom.

3.2 Nature of worship

On the day before the scheduled day of holding the *Om-Pha*, the Deoris (Priests) make *Matghars* for the three Deoshals. This *Matghar* is decorated by *Kalpatua* and *Madhuna*. Before performing the magical tasks, the priests prepare a meal. A rooster cock is fried with roasted rice powder and banana stem and the food are taken along with *Nam-Lao*. The priests then pray to the *Phura*^v for all kinds of wellbeing on the day of the worship. On the day of the *Om-Pha*, *Malang* takes a bath in the morning and formally starts the ritual by lighting incense. The *Madalial* signals the start of the worship by playing the *Madoli* in the morning. As he calls upon the gods by chanting mantras in the Tai-Ahom language in *Bor Deoshal*, simultaneously he also prays to the gods and urges them to accept their worship in the *Hindu Deoshal* and the *Habi Deoshal*. In parallel, the

designated sacrifices are offered in all the three *Deoshals*. Dancing along with the beats of the *madolis*, the priests (*deori*) – possessed by the deities - drinks the blood of the sacrificed animals, puts the burning lamps in their mouth, and takes things from the their plates and eats, throws. In between dancing, they sits, stands, laughs and cries. In such a situation, the people gathered wish to ask personal questions as well as to know about the good and well-being of the society and the country. The *Deoris* answer these questions.

3.1.1 Worship in the *Leng-Don Shal* or *Bor Deoshal*

Bor Deoshal is usually located in the eastern side of the *Deoshal* campus. The *Pang* – a sort of pedestal- of the following deities are gradually arranged from the left side on the ground.

- a. *Khao-kham* (The god of water)
- b. *Aai-leng-din* (the god of Earth)
- c. *Jan-sai-hung* (Master of god)
- d. *Leng-Don* (The god of heaven)
- e. *Muk kum tai kum* (The gods of Moon and Sun)
- f. The seven sons of *Leng-Don* are *Chit-lam-chao*, *Aai-pha-laan*, *Det-chai-lum*, *Bao-ho-khe*, *Bao-plong-mung*, *Bao-teng-cha*, and *Net-chai-lum*.
- g. *Jachingpha* (The god of education)

In *Bor Deoshal* or *Leng-Don-Shal* a heifer is sacrificed for the satisfaction of *Leng-Don*. The *Bor Deori* – possessed by the deities – kills the heifer by beating her on the head with an axe in accordance with the orders of the *malung*^{vi}. And then cutting the heifer's neck slightly with a dagger, he holds the flowing blood in an earthen pot and dedicates it to *Leng-Don*. He then chants mantra in the Tai language for *Leng-Don*'s satisfaction. Pigs and Chickens are dedicated to other *Pangs* at the *Leng-Don Shal*. After that the meat of the sacrificed cow is distributed among all present as a sacred product.

3.1.2 The worship in the *Pu-Phi-Chu Shal* or *Habi Deo Shal*

In the *Pu-Phi-Chu-shal*, the forest and border guards are worshipped. The deities worshipped in this shal are *Langkuri* (gross and agricultural god), *Nang-chi-chao* (nature power), *pu-phi-chu* (forest god), *Li-kha-chaman* (the youngest forest god), *gatial*, *chaan palik*, *su-palik*, *khetor*, *jokh*, *bhut* and *bagh-baghini*. Like *Leng-Don shals*, the mantras are chanted in the Tai language here as well. Many earlier indigenous deities are brought under Tai-Ahom belief system and worshiped in the *Pu-Phi-Chu shal*.

3.1.3 The worship in the *Hindu Deoshal*

The deities worshipped in the *Hindu Deoshal* are ---*Saraswati*, *Mahadev*, *Gosai*, *Borbauli*, *Sarubauli*, *Khetor*, *Aair Nabhoni*, *Saatghoria*, *Paasghoria*, *Shelkonwar*, *Maalkonwar*, *Dhoba-Dhubuni*, *Goria Roja*, *Moria Roja*, *Dong-Dongia*, *Apeswari*. They are worshiped by offering various animals. In this shal *Burha Mahadeo* and *Burha Subasani* are given the main place. In addition, goats, poultry, ducks, parrots, chickens, etc are sacrificed for the satisfaction of other

gods and goddesses. The blood of the sacrificed buffaloes and other animals is eaten by the *Deuris* (priests) possessed by the deities.

After offering prayers to the deities of the *Hindu Deoshal*, they are called upon to devour the gifts offered to them. In this *Shal*, mantras are sung using Assamese language instead of Tai language. This is what is said in the Assamese language after asking the gods of the *Hindu shal* to eat ---*Aaji baaror dinakhon din nai bar nai jotha shakti totha bhokti, saage bor bolike kay manabike soite dhupe dipe noibedyore bor sarupe sewa sonman dhora hoise. Ei sewate tusto hoi ghorkhonor bhitorot jikhini aase das-dasi, lora-damuri, kuhula-kopila, goru-moh, thal-bhoral, logote sakalokhini nirapode kushale rakhibo lage. Hori bolo hori...*

After finishing all this, the priests sing the mantra for bidding adieu to the gods in Assamese—‘O gods, take the offerings of worship and go back in the same path you used to arrive here with joy and happiness.’

Thus the Tai Ahoms continue the tradition of bidding farewell to the gods of the *Hindu shal*.

4. Globalization and *Om-Pha-Puja*

In general globalization is a communication process, through which the whole world can be turned into a village. Globalization is an economic, political, social, cultural process whose impact is also seen in the intimate aspects of community and life in the regional level. Under the influence of the globalization process there has been a change in the economics as well as social and cultural aspects of all parts of the world. There have also been many restrictions on the *Om-Pha* worship of the Tai Ahom community. Such barriers are mostly in social, economic, cultural and educational contexts. It involves the process of globalization, whether directly or indirectly.

4.1 Problems

The *Om-Pha Puja* of the Tai Ahoms is essentially an expensive event and long-term preparation is needed for it. At present, there is a lack of mental preparation and interest required to hold this puja among the new generation. Only the elderly in the society are keen on the taking the responsibility of the expenses and preparations required for this puja. Traditional belief in the *Om-Pha* worship has eroded among the new generation educated with modern education. The new generation has raised questions about the need for this traditional puja. The priests required for *Om-pha Puja* are currently disappearing. Due to the death of many priests, there is a huge problem in the celebration of worship today. No one in the new generation has come forward to become a priest. There is also a shortage of people who know how to recite mantras in Tai language. On the other hand, all the materials required for conducting this puja should be collected by going door to door. It requires a long standing collective preparedness and organized people. At present, this collective and organized force has been declining to a great extent.

4.5 Prospects

Despite many problems in conducting *Om-Pha Puja*, the Tai-Ahoms have been holding *Om-Pha puja* continuously. At present, various groups and organizations of the Ahom community have also been organizing *Om-Pha puja* from time to time. This can be considered as a possibility when it comes to holding *Om-Pha Puja*. Amidst all the hurdles, *Amlakhi Deoshal* has been performing *Om-Pha Puja* every twelve years and *Rangagara Deoshal* and *Bakata Mazgaon Bor Deoshal* every four years. In order to maintain peace and harmony among the different tribes of Assam, the kings of the Ahom people included the indigenous elements along with the indigenous traditional, supernatural beliefs, religious beliefs etc. And it was in such an environment that the Hindu religious tradition was merged with the Ahom religious tradition and added *Hindu Deoshal* to *Om-Pha Puja*.

5.CONCLUSION

Om-Pha Puja is a major religious ritual of the Tai-Ahom community. But in the currently changing global socio-economic context, questions have been raised about traditional religious practices and belief system. The new generation of every community, which has fallen into the grip of the market economy under the influence of globalisation, seems to have ignored its cultural fabrics as a result of seeing cultural elements from the point of view of commodities. As a result, a small community in a small region of the developing country like India is gradually beginning to face a crisis.

References

ⁱ *Sukapha* was the 1st king of Tai-Ahom community in Assam.

ⁱⁱ *Buranji* are a class of historical chronicles and manuscripts associated with the Ahom kingdom.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Baruah, Sukha, Ahomsakalar utsab-anusthan, Kalpataru Prakashan, Guwahati-28, 1st published, 2007.*

^{iv} Phukan, Sampriti and Dr Sharat Km Phukan, *Tai-Ahmer Poy-Om-Pha*, Krishna Saikia, *Che-Rai-Doy*, Charaidew, 1st published in 2015, p. 13.

^v *Phura* means ancestors of Tai-Ahom community.

^{vi} *Malung* is the priest of the community.