

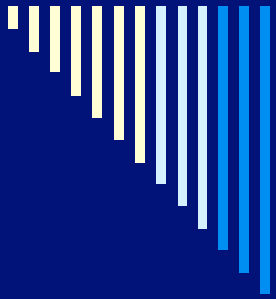
# Issues of Language Contact and Shift in Tai Ahom

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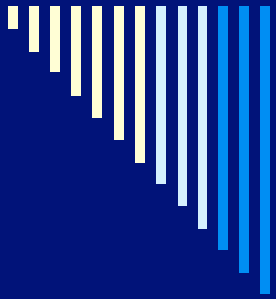
## Introduction

- Language family: Tai language family spoken largely in the Southeast Asian region.
  - Geographical and demographic distribution:
    - Tai language family: From Assam to Kwangsi and Kwangtung, to the island of Hainan, from Laos and Thailand to the border of Tibet, including the Yunnan Province of China.
    - Tai Ahom: In several districts of the Upper Assam area in India, including the districts of Sivasagar, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Golaghat and Dhemaji.
    - Speakers of Tai Ahom: Around 150-360 speakers left most of which belong to the various priestly classes of the Ahom community. Another few hundreds constitute the new learners' group of the language.
  - Importance of Tai Ahom:
    - Historical significance: History of Assam is written and preserved in the writing system of Tai Ahom language.
    - Cultural significance: Religious functions and cultural rituals still use hymns and prayer songs in Tai Ahom.
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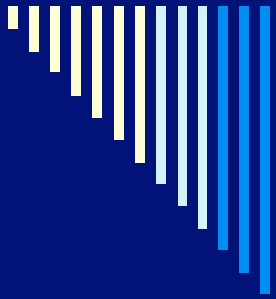
## Historical background

- Tai – Mongoloid population of Asia.
- Ahom – Origin traced from the Yunnan Province of Southern China.
- Migration of the Ahoms – From Yunnan Province through the Patkai Hills to the Brahmaputra Valley in Assam, India around 13<sup>th</sup> century.
- Interesting facts:
  - No striking similarity with Chinese culture.
  - Ruled Assam for a long period of about 600 years (1228AD-1826AD).
  - First Ahom king was *Su-ka-pha*.



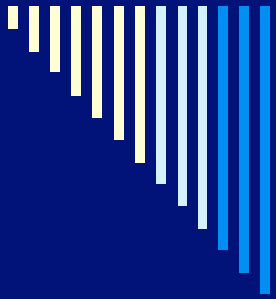
## Issues of language shift

- Tai Ahom was the primary language of the Ahom court as well as of common man till 15<sup>th</sup> century.
- The development of Assamese language started from mid-15<sup>th</sup> century onwards.
- Vaishnavite Movement initiated by reformer Srimanta Shankaradeva was the main reason behind the development and use of Assamese language in the royal Ahom court and among masses.
- Reasons of language shift from Ahom to Assamese:
  - Use of Assamese language both in the royal court and among common man.
  - Hinduization of the Ahoms.
  - Acculturation process among the Ahoms.



## Language contact and borrowings

- **Cultural assimilation:** The Ahoms assimilated with the local aborigines of the Brahmaputra Valley while acknowledging their respective languages and cultures.
- **Linguistic assimilation:** A huge amount of Ahom vocabulary got assimilated in the Assamese language. For instance, surnames of the Ahom community are derived from the Ahom language. Ahom names of places and rivers are still used in Assam.



## Language revival and language planning

- ❑ State government is taking special concern in introducing Tai Ahom in various university programs.
- ❑ Scholars are encouraged to write more about the Tai Ahom language and the Ahom culture.
- ❑ Private institutes are being set up in different areas of the region promoting Tai language learning among young learners.
- ❑ Translation studies of Tai Ahom manuscripts and textbooks are encouraged in order to investigate and research ancient Assam history.
- ❑ Journals, books and magazines are published encouraging scholars and history enthusiasts to document more on the Ahom language and culture.
- ❑ Preservation of old Ahom manuscripts is a serious concern of the state authority while encouraging scholars to document and translate these manuscripts and texts into Assamese, English and other languages.



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