



AHOM ARCHITECTURE: INDIGENOUS AND EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

Mr. Sanjay Das

Associate Professor

Department of History, Margherita College

Abstract:

The **Ahom Kingdom**, which ruled over **Assam** in northeastern India from the early 13th century until the British annexation in 1826, developed a unique and rich cultural heritage. This heritage is most evident in the **art** and **architecture** created during the Ahom period. Ahom art and architecture were influenced by a combination of indigenous traditions and external influences, including Tibetan, Burmese, and Southeast Asian styles, as well as later, colonial European elements. The **Ahom architecture** of Assam was shaped by a variety of influences, both indigenous and external, reflecting the kingdom's strategic location and cultural interactions with neighboring regions. The Ahoms ruled Assam from the early 13th century until the British annexation in 1826, and during this long period, their architecture evolved by integrating local traditions with those from Southeast Asia, Tibet, Burma (Myanmar), and India. The aim of this paper is to highlight the diversity of influences on Ahom architecture. The study is based on secondary sources and descriptive in nature.

Keywords: **art, architecture**, indigenous, cultural interactions, etc.

I. INTRODUCTION:

Ahom architecture refers to the distinctive style of architecture developed by the Ahom dynasty, which ruled the region of Assam (in northeastern India) from the 13th to the 19th century. The Ahoms, originally from the Shan state of Myanmar, established their kingdom in Assam in the 1220s and thrived for nearly 600 years. This architectural style evolved over time, incorporating elements of indigenous Assamese traditions, as well as influences from Southeast Asian, Hindu, and Tibetan architectural styles.

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II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

- To highlight the art and architecture of the Ahom.
- To highlight the diversity of influences on Ahom architecture.

III. METHODOLOGY

- The study is based on secondary sources and descriptive in nature. Secondary sources include books, journals, newspapers, e-journals, e-sources, etc.

IV. DISCUSSION

The Ahoms, originally from Southeast Asia, incorporated various elements from that region's architecture, such as high-pitched roofs, multi-tiered structures, and intricate wooden carvings. The influence of **Burmese**, **Thai**, and **Khmer** architectural styles is evident in the Ahom buildings, especially in the use of stupa-like designs in some of the temples. Ahom rulers were deeply influenced by both Hinduism and indigenous Assamese religious practices. As a result, many temples built during their reign reflected a blend of local and broader Southeast Asian and Indic architectural styles.

The main **influences on Ahom architecture are as follows:**

1. Indigenous Assamese Architecture

Before the Ahoms arrived in Assam in the early 13th century, indigenous Assamese communities had already developed distinct forms of construction, influenced by local materials, climate, and cultural practices. These traditions provided the foundation upon which Ahom architecture was built.

Traditional Wood and Bamboo Construction: Assamese architecture traditionally made use of wood, bamboo, and thatch, which were readily available in the region. This influence is evident in the **Ahom royal palaces and temples**, which incorporated timber framing and bamboo work for roofing and structural elements.

Steep Roofs: The indigenous Assamese style featured steep, sloping roofs, a design that was particularly suited to the **monsoon climate**, facilitating rainwater runoff. This influence can be seen in the **Ahom temple roofs and palaces**, which often had tall, gabled roofs, somewhat similar to the local house designs.

Vernacular Elements: The Ahoms adopted local craftsmanship in the **carvings, masonry, and woodwork** of their structures. Local **stone carving traditions** were employed in the creation of temples and monuments, using indigenous stones like **laterite**.

2. Burmese Influence

The Ahoms had strong cultural and military interactions with the **Burmese** (Myanmar) over several centuries. As a result, **Burmese architecture** became one of the most significant external influences on Ahom building styles.



Pagoda Roof Style: One of the most recognizable features of Burmese architecture is the **multi-tiered, upturned roof** (often referred to as the **pagoda-style roof**). The Ahoms adopted this style in many of their **temples** and **palaces**. The roofs were typically made of **wooden beams** and **thatch**, though later **brick** and **stone** construction came into use.

Open Courtyards: Like Burmese temples, many **Ahom structures** were designed around central **courtyards**. This design allowed for ventilation, social interaction, and the integration of religious and secular functions. The Ahom **Rang Ghar** and **Talatal Ghar** are good examples of this influence.

Carvings and Decorative Elements: Burmese-style **wooden carvings**, including **floral motifs**, **animal figures**, and **mythological creatures**, were incorporated into the Ahom temples and palaces. This was most apparent in the **wooden panels** and **doorways** of the royal residences and religious sites.

3. Tibetan Influence

The Ahoms, who originated from the **Mongolian** and **Tibetan** regions, carried elements of **Tibetan architecture** and culture with them when they migrated to Assam. This influence is most notable in the following architectural aspects:

Roof Designs: Some of the roof shapes in Ahom architecture, especially the **curved eaves** and **tiered roofs**, echo Tibetan Buddhist temples. This is evident in the **shikhara-style towers** of Ahom temples, which were influenced by **Tibetan stupa architecture**.

Temple Layouts: The **Ahom temples** often mirrored **Tibetan Buddhist monasteries**, with open courtyards, prayer halls, and sanctuaries. The **multi-storied structures** and the **wooden construction** found in temples like **Madambihu** are akin to Tibetan designs.

Symbolism: Some of the **religious symbols** and motifs in Ahom architecture reflect Tibetan influence, such as the **lotus flower** motif, often found in **carvings and sculptures**.

4. Indian (Hindu) Influence

While the Ahoms originally followed a form of **Tibeto-Burmese animism** and later **Shaivism**, their architectural style was heavily influenced by broader **Indian** architectural traditions, particularly **Hindu** temple architecture.

Shikhara and Mandapa: The **Ahom temples**, particularly those dedicated to **Shiva** and **Vishnu**, incorporated elements of **North Indian** temple architecture, including the **shikhara** (the tower above the sanctum) and the **mandapa** (the pillared hall). The **steep, pyramidal towers** of the Ahom temples resemble **North Indian temple styles** found in **Bengal** and **Odisha**.

Columns and Pillars: Hindu temple architecture from other parts of India, particularly **Eastern India**, influenced the use of **pillars** and **columns** in Ahom royal buildings and temples. The **Talatal Ghar** and **Rang Ghar** feature rows of **pillars** in their construction.



Religious Iconography: The Ahoms followed **Hinduism**, particularly the worship of **Shiva**, and this religious influence is visible in the **sculptures** and **carvings** found in Ahom temples, such as depictions of **mythological deities** and **events from Hindu epics** like the **Ramayana** and **Mahabharata**.

5. Mughal and Indian Islamic Influence

While the Ahoms and Mughals were often at odds, especially in military conflicts, there were some **cultural exchanges** that influenced Ahom architecture, especially during the later periods of Ahom rule. Elements of **Mughal** and **Islamic** architectural styles became apparent in the following areas:

Arched Doorways and Windows: Some of the **arches** and **curved windows** in later Ahom constructions show influences from **Islamic architecture**, particularly from **North India**. The **arched doorways** seen in buildings like the **Talatal Ghar** might be partially inspired by Mughal styles.

Use of Brick and Stone: The Mughals were known for their impressive **brickwork** and **stone construction**. The Ahoms adopted some of these practices, particularly in their later fortifications, temples, and palaces, using **brick** and **stone** in place of wood and bamboo for greater durability.

6. Southeast Asian Influence

Because of the geographical proximity of Assam to Southeast Asia, particularly **Thailand** and **Cambodia**, there are elements of **Southeast Asian** influence visible in Ahom architecture.

Tiered Roofs: The **tiered roof style** found in many **Ahom temples** resembles the **pagoda roofs** seen in **Thailand** and **Cambodia**. These roofs, often seen in religious buildings, were designed to shed rainwater effectively and add to the grandeur of the structure.

Monumental Structures: Like Southeast Asian cultures, the Ahoms built **grand structures**, such as the **Rang Ghar** and **Talatal Ghar**, which had monumental proportions, reflecting the influence of Southeast Asian temple complexes.

V. Conclusion:

Ahom architecture represents a unique blend of indigenous Assamese traditions, Southeast Asian influences, Tibetan and Burmese styles, as well as elements of Indian Hindu and Mughal architecture. The Ahoms' ability to incorporate these diverse influences while maintaining a distinctly local character helped to create a rich and lasting architectural legacy that continues to be celebrated in Assam today.



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