

Other extra and bordering gods include

Lang Ku Ri

Lai Lung Kham

Khun Thao Cha Man

Pu Phi Chu

Chao Nuk Dam

Nang Thao Klao

Po' Lik Kha

Mae Lik Kha

Phi Gatial

Suo Phuok Suo Dam

Hu Palika

Khai Palika

Phi Leba

Phi Ka Nok

Phi Tao Niu



**Pig Sacrifice**



**Cow Sacrifice at Om Pha Puja**



**Photo of Om Pha Puja**

**Tradition of Chak long : Customary Ahom Marriage**

The Ahom marriage by *chak-lang*, the original system is another instrumentality by which the Ahom maintain their social coherence. 'The real Ahom rite is the saklang', writes P. R. Gurdon in *Encyclopaedia of Religion & Ethics*, Vol I, p. 235). In the *chak-long* marriage, the Ahom priest normally recounts the family trees and great deeds of forefathers of both the families to the new couple thus reminding them of their past history. In a judgement of the Hon'ble High Court of Gauhati gave recognition to the *chak-long* as the customary Ahom marriage system.

The Ahom still observe their customary marriage procedure. It is different from Hindu marriage by *homa* and has no parallel with other procedures of marriage observed by other non-Hindu population of the region. Thus the Chak long marriage has been inherited by the Ahom from their forefathers and is thus a cultural heritage. It is not known since when this system was introduced among the Ahom and for that matter among the Tai of the old days. But tradition connects Ahom Chak long marriage to a very ancient date when Nang Hum Pha, the daughter of Ak Kai Mo'hung was married to Lengdon. This was very long ago. It became a part of Tai marriage custom that was brought by the Ahom when they first came to the Brahmaputra valley early in the thirteenth century. While other Tai who had adopted Hinayana Buddhism like those in the Shan States, Thailand and Laos lost it as there were no separate official priests to perform marriage. But it appears that due to the tremendous growth of the Ahom power and prestige in the Brahmaputra valley and beyond, certain peripheral functions and preliminaries of the Chak long have been added to the original Chak long brought by the first Ahom to Assam. Thus the Chak long that is performed by the Ahom of today is the enlarged version of the original Chak long without the loss of its basic features.

After completing certain preliminaries by both the bride and the bridegroom separately in their own house a day or two previous to the marriage day, on the fixed day the bridegroom proceeds to the house of the bride in procession with his friends, both boys and girls, and others. In olden time, the bridegroom either walked with others or rode on horse or elephants. It was party of gaiety and amusement. The drummers accompanying the party beat drums, gongs were sounded, pipes were played. At the present time, the bridegroom party goes on car and buses, and so it has lost much of the colourful joviality of the earlier days.

On arrival of the party at the bride's house the bridegroom is accorded a traditional reception from the gate and is taken to the assigned seat by the

side of the *moral* / *mandala* which has already been ready under a pandal (temporary coverage usually in front of the bride's house). The term *moral* is derived from the term *mandala* and is applied to a halo with seven circles. The circles are coloured with seven colours.

As described by Padmeswar Gogoi, a reputed Ahom scholar, The bridegroom sits facing the altar made at the centre of the pandal bearing the majestic figure of a lotus drawn with seven coloured lines. It is popularly called *mandala* (*marala* in Assamese). Seven different kinds of colour powder – white, black, blue, green, purple, red and yellow are used to give colour to the lines. The lotus has sixteen petals of large size. At the centre there are two concentric circles, one smaller with a larger one. The space between the two circles is divided into four equal parts by four straight lines, the length of which is limited by the circumferences of the two circles. One large lighted earthen lamp is placed at the centre, that is within the innermost circle with the wick pointed to the east, and four such lamps of smaller size are placed in the position within the four parts into which the space between the inner and outer circles are divided. Then at the sixteen petal ends sixteen lamps are placed in the same manner. The remaining points for the lamps to be placed are the eighty crossing points of the petal lines. One such lamp is placed at each of these points. This lotus figure is the accepted figure illuminated with one hundred and one lamps, each containing mustard oil poured into it and a wick to burn. All the lamps, pointed to the east, are lighted just before the bridegroom takes his seat. (Gogoi Padmeswar, 1976)

The bridegroom sits saluting the *moral* at his assigned place. Soon the bride is brought out dressed in her best apparel and finery and is seated next to the bride-groom when actual performance of Chak long starts. Both the bride and the bridegroom do as instructed by the officiating priests. To the left of the

bride sits the father or guardian and to his left is the officiating priest and behind him are his assistants. In the meantime are lighted the earthen lamps.



**photo showing Chaklong Marriage with 101 lamps**

When all are seated in an orderly manner, the Mo'lung is requested by the father or guardian of the bride to start the function. The priest then prays thus

*Phra lai bet phra tu ching phrang hum  
Chao nu ru chao kao oi  
Krup tang boy mu khru  
Chao nu ru chao kao oi  
khun thao nyeu lang ku ri po phi  
khru me phi nyeu  
tang my ba mung khreu  
teng pha ba mung nyeu  
chao oi  
na teu pha ba mung nyeu  
chao oi*

(The chant is long and it is continued for several minutes)

The meaning may be put as below :

*O Great God over our heads (in the sky), I pray  
to you. You are the Lord of all. You have created  
all beings and the world, and you are the  
protector of all as well as destroyer of all. The  
sun and the moon manifest your glorious*

*creation. The fire and air are propagating the peace and harmony in this universe proclaiming your divine power. O Great God, today on this auspicious occasion, the bride and the groom pray and beseech your blessings. Be kind to them. Let their married life be fruitful and glittering like gold and coral beads.*

The main rites begin with this prayer of Mo'lung (priest). The lamps burning with dazzling light create an atmosphere of serene gracious religious occasion. The bride and the bridegroom then make prayer to God by offering rice and flowers to the lighted *marala*. The father/guardian of the bride prays

*Chao nu ru chao kao oi*  
*Kao a phu ming phrao jan hew tai*  
*Lang bak lang ka phi ka mai*  
*Chao kao oi*

(O the Great God I pray you. I am offering this bride to the bridegroom for procreation according to the natural law.)

There after by keeping the right hand thumb of the bride on the right hand thumb of the bridegroom, the father or guardian of the bride would pray thus – (O the Lord above us, today I am offering my daughter/ sister to you. Please keep her with love, care and affection.

The bridegroom would say :

*khreng lu mo chao kao di di chi hapao jao*  
*Kao hang lu chao mang chao nong sao mour chao di di chi ti bai jao.*

(I respectfully accept your offer. I shall keep your daughter/ sister with all care, love and affection.)

The father or guardian of the bride would show the articles presented with the bride saying “Son-in-law / brother-in-law, I am offering these articles according to my capacity. Please run your wedded life smoothly.” The final part of the Chak long is offering of garlands. The bride, at the instruction of the Mo'lung stands up by taking a garland of flowers; at the same time the bridegroom too stand up By uttering *Phu chao pak pak blok kham khup tang jan heu* (I adore you with this garland and choose you as my husband) the bride respectfully places the garland round the neck of the bridegroom. The bridegroom also takes up his garland and saying *nang sao blok kham ru heu di* puts it round the neck of the bride. Both the bride and the bridegroom then take their seats.

After this both of them pray to the Almighty God. The prayer runs thus:

*O phra chao, O leng-don mau chao  
Hang tang luk met khan kao jau  
Mau chao ni lung hang mau kao ka cam  
Tang lung ni lai  
Mau chao chao khan kao chao a lu  
Mau chao cang lang nu chi khan ka khan  
Mau chao cum loi khwan cam ci cim khem sa  
O' Po' kao chao hang rao  
Tang lung luk si tang khring tang mai hao pun wai  
Am rap tamg ;ing am ,e uamg jei kamg ta  
Rao lhit a m cang ko' khen  
Tang lung heu d icing ta  
Khwang cam hang rao an pe heu heng  
Nang nai rao kan lang di nai hang rao ao mamau chao heng pe ju  
A nai su tang jao  
O' ci cim khem chao O' po' chaos en pha an  
Rao cang ko' nau lao cik pi heu phit kan ta  
O' chao khun lung a khu can do rank  
Kan heu ta pin tang di nai oi wak ta*

The Meaning of the chant would be like this :

*O Lord, O Leng-don, you are the mightiest and the greatest of all. You are the holy one among all and all become sacred if you are recalled. You are the Lord of all and giver of everything. You are the soul of all. You are delightful and kind. Keep us away from the sorrows and anxieties of the world. Please fulfill our desires and wants. Whatever we prefer, must go in favour of attaining our own welfare and prosperity. Bestow us such power so that we may follow a noble path and noble mind in life. It is our prayer to you O' Lord of the Earth, the Benevolent One, to guide us so that no conflicts arise between us. O' our most revere Lord, bless us for our conjugal and prosperous and happy life.*

At the end of the joint prayer, the bride offers a hengdan (a Tai sword) to the bridegroom saying –

*ao khrang na cheng nap cak nai  
Cham mong mau chao luk ao Re wait a*

(O my beloved, please hold this hengdan, subdue your enemy, look after the country and be a brave man)

The bridegroom then accepts the hengdan and utters :

*kun juk kun khin tak tyuk ao pe*

*Phu ke kun ni tak jang ba si*

*Khun cham khyung bao a kiu rao tak*

*Heu khen kha si kao nap cak nai rap*

*Ao jao di kin lao jao.*

Holding the hengdan, I promise to subdue the enemies, to protect the country from enemies, to protect my wife, children and family. The bride then holding a cloth girdle called kavac-kapor (all protecting garment) addresses the bridegroom thus :

*O paw chao khung pha nai cham*

*Ao nung si heu pe heu ang ta.*

(O my dear husband, by wearing this cloth you will not fail anywhere). The bridegroom then says (in translation) 'By wearing this cloth on my body, I promise to subdue the enemies and the wicked persons'. The Mo' lung then narrates the past history and achievements of the families of the bridegroom and the bride. At the end he tenders advice to the newly married couple to lead a happy conjugal life. (J. N. Phukon & Girin Phukon, 2010:17)

### **Literary Skill and Knowledge**

**Language :** Literary treasure is another inherited cultural heritage of the Ahom. It includes language and literature, and also script or the writing system. Ahom is a Tai language and the Ahom had been Tai-speaking people like other Tai speakers in southern China, Vietnam, and South-East Asian countries of Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand. The form of the Tai language used by them was the Tai Mao, the language spoken by the Mao section that lived in Mong Mao. According to James R. Chamberlain this language belongs to the same category as the Shan, Lue, Black Tai, White Tai. ("A New Look at the History and Classifications of the Tai Languages", *Studies in Tai Linguistics*, ed. Jimmy G. Harris & James R. Chamberlain, Bangkok, 1975). In a recent classification made after Li Fang-Kuei, Edmondson and Solnit, the Ahom language has been classed with Thai, Lao, Shan, Black Tai, White Tai, and Red Tai as the Southwestern Branch of the Tai-Kadai language-family. (*Introduction to Tai-Kadai People*, Institute of Language and Culture for Rural Development, Mahidol University, 1998) Much earlier George Abraham Grierson placed Ahom language in the Northern Branch. All these classifications are based on scholars' study of the various features of the Tai languages. To