

**THE KINSHIP TERMS USED BY  
THE AHOMS OF NORTH EAST INDIA**

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The Ahoms of the North East India have contributed a lot in the field of language and culture of the land. The Tai people who migrated to Assam about seven hundred years back are known as Ahom/ahom/ after whose name perhaps their kingdom was named as Assam/𑜀𑜢𑜤𑜰𑜫/. Recently a few scholars termed them as Tai-Ahom. But in this paper the original term Ahom is used. The language of this part is also named after them as Asamiya/𑜀𑜢𑜤𑜰𑜫𑜁𑜪𑜤/ i.e. Assamese, an englisged word of Assam /𑜀𑜢𑜤𑜰𑜫/. This language is the lingua-franca of this area of the country. Of course, Asamiya is an Indo-Aryan language.

The modern word Ahom by which the Tai-people, living in this eastern most corner of India, are known, evidently goes back to early Assamese Āsām : Āsām > Āsam > Āham, Āhom as elaborated by Dr. Banikanta Kakati, the pioneer linguist of Assam, in his scholarly work entitled, "Assamese, its Formation and Development". It is evident here that starting from the very name of the State of Assam, Tai-Ahom contribution, in the formation of Assamese language is conspicuous by its age-old affiliations.

Although Tai-Ahom language is not a major source which enriched the Assamese language with sufficient linguistic elements, it has distinctive features not commonly observed among the other communities of Assam. Such prominent terms exclusively

used among the Ahoms living in Assam are mostly the kinship terms, now recognised as important vocables of the modern Assamese.

The following is a list of the constituent kinship terms of the Assamese vocabulary exclusively used by the Ahoms of Assam.

Kinship terms used by the Ahoms	Equivalent kinship terms used by the non-Ahoms
Enaideu/*Enaïdeû/	Aita/aïta/
Puthadeu/puthadeû/	Kakadeuta/kṛkadeûta/
Burhadeuta/buradeûta/	Kakadeuta/kṛkadeûta/
Burhiaita/buriāita/	Aita/aïta/
Apadeu/apadeû/	Jethaideu /zethaideû/
	Barma/bṛma/
Nisadeu/nisadeû/	Mama/mama/
	Bardeuta/bṛdeûta/
Gohaindeu/gohaïdeû/	--
Aideu/aïdeû/	--
Momaideu/momaïdeû/	Mama/mama/
Maideu/maïdeû/	Mami/mami/
Dadaideu/dḍaïdeû/	Khuradeu/khuradeû/
Bongahardeu/bṅḍaḥṛdeû/	--
Kakaideu/kṛkaïdeû/	Dada/dada/
Pulinputhao/pulinputhāo/	Ajukaka/ adzukṛka/
Aitee/aïti/	--
Gogoideu/gṛgḍideû/	--
Halpati/Xalṇṇti/	--
Drumati/dṛmṇṇti/	--

Note : \*E =  $\xi$  ; \*N =  $\eta$

From the above list of vocabulary, it is observed that only the Ahoms use a number of independent kinship terms to distinguish their family relationship.

The children of the Ahom families of Assam use the term /Enaïdeu/ to address their Grandmother (maternal kinship) and /puthadeu/ to address their Grandfather of the same kinship. In this manner they use /buradeuta/ and /buriaita/ to address their grand fathers and grand mothers respectively of the paternal kinship. But the children of most of all other communities of Assam use the same kinship terms to address both the grand parents.

The daughter-in-laws of the Ahom families use the terms /gohaideu/ and /aideu/ to address the younger brothers and sisters respectively of their husbands. But there is no such specific kinship term used in other communities to address the same.

The Ahom children of Assam use the terms /momaideu/ to address the younger brothers of their mothers and /maideu/ to address the wives of such brothers of their mothers. But when it comes to addressing elder brothers and their wives of the same line of kinship, the Ahom children address them as /nisadeu/ and /apadeu/ respectively instead of /momaideu/ and maideu/. But the non-Ahom children use the same terms of /mama/ and /mami/ in both the cases.

Father's younger brother is addressed as /dɔdaideu/ while non-Ahom equivalent term for this is /khuradeu/ which is mostly used by the Brahmins of Assam.

/bɔ̃nɔ̃hɔ̃rdeu/, another kinship term exclusively used by the wife for her husband with very high-regard, love and affection. There is no such equivalent term among the non-Ahoms.

In Ahom families, the term /kɔ̃kaideu/ is used by the younger brothers and sisters to address their elder/older brothers irrespective of either their parentage or blood - relationship; but the non-Ahom children use the term /dada/ in all such cases.

The Ahom children address the fathers of their grandfathers (maternal kinship) as /pulinpuθao/, whereas the equivalent term for the non-Ahom children is /ad̃zukɔ̃ka/ for both paternal and maternal kinship.

Pet daughters of the Ahom families are addressed as /ãiti/ by their parents and elders; /gɔ̃gɔ̃ideu/ is an equivalent of /goh̃ãideu/ as explained above. The term /halpɔ̃ti/ is used to indicate the relationship between the husbands of as many sisters of the same parentage; on the other hand, the term /drumɔ̃ti/ is used to indicate the relationship between the elder brothers of the Ahom couples. There are no such equivalent kinship terms among the non-Ahoms as shown above.

It is, therefore, quite apparent that Ahom family relationships can be clearly identified by simply studying their kinship terms used.

But at the same time, it is worth-mentioning that the aforesaid conclusion cannot be drawn from all such terms. As for example, the kinship terms /apadeu/ and /nisadeu/ are used to address at least eight different relationship terms. The Ahom children address the elder-brothers and brother-in laws of their fathers and mothers as /nisadeu/ and elder sisters and sister-in-laws of their fathers and mothers as /apadeu/. In this particular instance, communities other than Ahoms use independent kinship terms to distinguish between paternal and maternal relationship, which proves to be an exception among the other communities too.

But inspite of the above exception, the fact remains that the kinship terms of the Ahoms of Assam have characteristics of their own to show that,

- (a) These are insular in their use and existence.
- (b) Most of these terms are used as specific terms to represent particular relationship, not commonly found among other communities of Assam.
- (c) The hierarchy of kinship is well-defined according to paternal or maternal connections.

Another peculiarity which is observed in Ahom kinship terms is that the children of the categories of /nisadeu/ and /apadeu/ are treated as elders, whereas the children of the categories of /ɖɔdaideu/. /momaideu-maideu/ and /gohaideu-aideu/

are treated as younger irrespective of the age difference. The hierarchy of elder/younger is intrinsic in the sense that it is the most alluring feature of the Ahom kinship.

Further it is interesting to note that some of the kinship terms used by the non-Ahoms, particularly the Assamese speaking community, are also now-a-days used by a section of the elite class of the Ahoms.

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