

Revitalizing Tai Ahom Culture in Assam: The Role of Digital Technology

Chintamoni Molia

Research Scholar, Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya, Assam, India

Abstract- The Tai Ahom community of Assam possesses a rich cultural heritage encompassing language, rituals, manuscripts, music, dance, and traditional crafts. However, changing times, cultural assimilation, rapid socio-economic change, and globalization have led to the erosion of many of these traditions. This paper examines the implications of technological integration, particularly digital archiving, language documentation, and educational initiatives, which are playing a vital role in preserving and revitalizing Tai Ahom culture in the region.

Index Terms- Tai Ahom community, language, cultural heritage, technology.

I. INTRODUCTION

Assam is home to several tribal, non-tribal, and ethnic groups or communities whose cultural practices and languages are integral to the region's diversity. Historically, many of these communities have faced challenges in preserving their cultural identity amidst external influences. The Tai Ahom community, originating from the Mongoloid ethnic group of the Tai race in Southeast Asia, established a powerful kingdom in Assam and ruled the region for nearly 600 years. Historically, they have a vibrant cultural heritage, such as language, literature, rituals, manuscripts, music, dance, and traditional crafts. etc., this diverse cultural expression reflects the historical depth of the community and underscores its contributions to the broader socio-cultural landscape of Northeast India. However, with the advent of globalization, rapid socio-economic transitions, and ongoing cultural assimilation, many aspects of this heritage face the threat of erosion and neglect. In recent years, technology has emerged as a powerful tool in safeguarding and promoting Tai heritage.

II. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Digital Archiving and Manuscript Preservation

The Tai Ahoms had a number of manuscripts that were most valuable. But due to a lack of adequate preservation, these are destroyed. In recent days, the Institute of Tai Studies and Research (ITSAR) in Moranhat, Assam, has undertaken significant efforts to preserve Tai Ahom manuscripts. Professor Girin Phukan, Director of ITSAR, notifies that, through a Manuscript Resource Centre funded by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi, ITSAR has digitized over 500 manuscripts, encompassing historical, astrological, and spiritual texts. These digital archives ensure that valuable knowledge is accessible to future generations and researchers worldwide. (Bhattacharyya, 2011)

B. Language Documentation and Education

Formerly, the Tai Ahom language, once a vibrant and widely spoken tongue of the Tai Ahom community in Assam, but today, only a small number of speakers and scholars are actively engaged in its use and preservation. The decline in its oral transmission over generations has led to significant concerns about the loss of linguistic heritage and the erasure of cultural identity closely tied to the language. In response to this, several efforts have been initiated to revive and revitalize the Tai Ahom language, especially among the younger generations.

One such noteworthy initiative is undertaken by an institution like ITSAR offers a one-year diploma course in Tai-Ahom language as well as a three-month certificate course in spoken Tai-Ahom, both under the academic framework of Dibrugarh University, aiming to revitalize the language among the youth. Additionally, online platforms have developed digital dictionaries and grammar resources, facilitating broader access to language learning tools. Together, these efforts, both academic and technological, represent a holistic approach to linguistic and cultural

preservation, empowering communities to reclaim their linguistic roots and cultural identity.

C. Cultural Heritage and Community Engagement

Technological platforms have enabled Tai communities to showcase their cultural practices to a global audience. Virtual exhibitions, online classes, tutorials, and social media campaigns have highlighted traditional dress, music, dances, and festivals, fostering a sense of pride and unity among community members.

Moreover, social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook are very much part of modern technology, and they play a crucial role in cultural preservation and revival efforts, including for Tai Ahom culture in Northeast India. Social media attracts younger generations, encouraging them to learn and take pride in their identity using the tools they're already familiar with. These platforms help connect other Tai communities across regions and rooted countries such as Thailand, China, Myanmar, Vietnam, etc., creating virtual spaces to celebrate and discuss their heritage. They organize online national-international conferences, seminars, and meetings by using Zoom Workplace, Google Meet, etc., apps. Additionally, through the use of social media, Tai language tutorials, traditional dance, and music performances can be shared globally.

D. Challenges and Future Directions

Even though there has been good progress in the preservation and revitalization of the Tai Ahom language, both through institutional frameworks and digital initiatives, there are still many challenges that make it hard to keep these efforts going in the long run. Especially older generations and those living in villages do not have enough knowledge of how to use digital devices. While online platforms and language learning apps can help a lot, they are not useful if people don't know how to use smartphones, computers, or the internet properly.

Another big challenge is poor internet access. In many parts of Assam, especially in remote or rural areas, there is still limited access to the internet and digital devices. This creates a gap, as many people are unable

to use online dictionaries, learning videos, or virtual classes that are meant to teach the Tai Ahom language.

Furthermore, the development, maintenance, and expansion of language preservation programs both offline and online require sustained funding and institutional support. However, many such initiatives are reliant on short-term grants, voluntary contributions, or limited state funding, which may not be sufficient for long-term planning and implementation. The lack of dedicated funding also restricts the ability to train teachers, develop updated curricula, and expand outreach activities across different regions.

Addressing these challenges calls for a multi-stakeholder approach that brings together governmental agencies, academic institutions, technology developers, cultural organizations, and local community leaders. Government intervention can play a pivotal role by providing policy-level support, infrastructural development, and funding for language preservation as part of broader cultural heritage initiatives.

III. CONCLUSION

The preservation of Tai Ahom culture in the face of modernization, cultural assimilation, and this challenging era requires a balanced blend of tradition and innovation. In this context, technology has emerged as a powerful tool for safeguarding linguistic and cultural heritage and re-engaging younger generations with their ancestral roots. Through digital archiving, language documentation, virtual learning platforms, and community-based educational programs, the Tai Ahom community is beginning to reclaim and revitalize aspects of its identity that were at risk of being lost. Integrating digital technologies into cultural preservation is not just a response to loss, but a forward-looking strategy to reimagine heritage in contemporary contexts. If nurtured with care and inclusivity, these initiatives can ensure that the Tai Ahom culture does not merely survive but continues to evolve, inspire, and enrich the broader cultural landscape of Northeast India and beyond.

REFERENCE

- [1] G.C. Barua Ahom Buranji: From the earliest time to the end of Ahom rule: With parallel English translation. Spectrum Publications, Guwahati. 1985 <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.450867>
- [2] S.Bhattacharyya Researchers hit upon manuscript treasure trove-Institute of Tai studies takes up project to preserve and digitise documents. The Telegraph. July, 2011 <https://www.telegraphindia.com/north-east/researchers-hit-upon-manuscript-treasure-trove-institute-of-tai-studies-takes-up-project-to-preserve-and-digitise-documents/cid/371979>
- [3] S.Morey Preservation and Study of Tai Manuscript, Indian Journal of Tai Studies, Moranhat, Assam 2007 58-72.
- [4] S.Morey Documenting, conserving and archiving the Tai Ahom manuscripts of Assam. Indian Journal of Tai Studies, Moranhat, Assam 2012, pp. 102-112.
- [5] G.Phukan. Dynamics of Tai Manuscript Literature in Northeast India. Indian Journal of Tai Studies, Moranhat, Assam, 2016, pp.33-51.
- [6] N.Sharma Documentation of Tai Ahom Manuscripts. DESIDOC Journal of Library & Information Technology, 2020, pp.286-291 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346266192_Documentation_of_Tai_Ahom_Manuscripts_Digital_Archiving_of_Dead_Language
- [7] <https://taistudiesmoranhat.org/>