

# CHARAIDEO IN EARLY AHOM POLITY: ESTABLISHMENT, HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

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**Abstract :** Charaideo occupies an important position in the political, cultural, and religious history of the Ahom kingdom in Assam. Established by Sukapha in 1253 AD, Charaideo emerged as the first permanent capital of the Ahoms after a period of exploratory settlement across the Brahmaputra valley. This study examines the historical foundations, etymology, spatial significance and enduring sacred character of Charaideo. It also analyses competing interpretations regarding the origin of the name “Charaideo”, its strategic location, architectural remains and its transformation from a political capital to a ceremonial and funerary centre following the shift of the Ahom capital to different sites. The Maidams—royal burial vaults of Ahom kings, queens, and nobles—reflect advanced indigenous engineering, ritual practices and syncretic cultural influences. Comparable in scale and symbolism to the pyramids of Egypt, these structures underscore Charaideo’s designation as the “Jerusalem of the East”. The article also highlights issues of heritage conservation, noting the limited number of protected maidams challenging its cultural and historical legacy.

## **IndexTerms – Ahom, Capital, Charaideo**

Charaideo was the first permanent capital of the Ahom kingdom established by Sukapha in 1253 AD. *Naobaisha Phukanar Asom Buranji* mentions that after spending two-three years in each of the sites of Namrup, Tipam, Salaguri, Habung and Simalugi, Sukapha was able to know the region better and established a city in Charaideo hills. In lakni Mungkeu, he constructed a town at Charaideo adjacent to a small hill (Barua:1930:47). The *Deodhai Asom Buranji* also stated that Sukapha founded a city at the hill adjacent to Lankuri hill in lakni Mungkeu. Sukapha worshipped the gods by sacrificed two horses and offering vessal full of silver at the foot of a tree. The word Charaideo has been derived from three Tai Ahom words, *Che-Rai-Doi*. *Che* means City or Town, *Rai* means Shine or Dazzle and *Doi* means Hill or Mountain. In short, Charaideo means, “a shining town situated on a hill top.” Charaideo (also Ahom: Che-Rai-Doi; Charai-khorong), was the permanent settlement of the first Ahom king Chaolung Sukaphaa. It was earlier referred to as Che-Tam-Doi-Phi (literally City-Hill-God) meaning "city of the sacred hill". The word Che-Rai-Doi became Charaideo or Charai-khorong in Assamese.

It was located in the modern day Charaideo district. The Charaideo district, curved out of Sivasagar district, is located on the eastern part of Sivasagar district. In the North-East, It is bounded by Dibrugarh district; Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh in the South; Sivasagar Sadar Sub-Division and Nazira Sub-Division of Sivasagar district in the West. It shares a boundary of 35 km with Nagaland and 27 km with Arunachal Pradesh.

There is much debate about the name Charaideo and its meaning. It is not known what the name of Charaideo was before the Ahoms established their capital. Dr. Leela Gogoi in her book 'Outline of Tai Culture' suggests that the name Charaideo may have originated from the word 'Che-rai-doi'. The Assamese translations of this word in Tai are as follows: Che- city, Rai- shining, Doi- mountain, meaning shining mountain city. In addition to the possibility mentioned in Dr. Maheshwar Neog's book '*Pavitra Asom*', it is also suggested that Charaideo may have originated from another Tai word '*Che-ra-Deu*'. The Assamese translations of this word are: *Che-nagar*, *Ra - Chutia*, *Deu - god*; It is the city of the Chutia gods. It is also possible that the Ahoms called it '*Che-ra-Deu*' as they had a temple in this area which was once ruled by the Chutia. Contrary to this view, some historians do not believe that the name 'Charaideo' derived from these words. They believe that the words mentioned are not found in the Ahom histories. The Ahom histories use only the word '*Doije*' or '*D'Yche*' to refer to the capital of Sukapha. The Assamese translation of this word in Tai is: *doi - mountain*, *che/je- city*; A city in the mountains. The book '*Charaideo*' published by the Directorate of Archeology of Assam mentions that the capital established by Chukapha was called 'Jetam - Doi - Jelung - Jekham'. The Assamese translation of this Tai word is as follows: *J - city*, *Tam-on places*, *Doi-the mountain*, *Jelung- the great city or nagar*, *Je Kham- the holy city*.

Charaideo was of unique importance during the Ahom period. After being the capital of the Ahom kings for about 150 years, the capital was shifted to Charagua during the reign of Sudangpha or Bamuni Konwar but it remained important for various cultural and religious activities of the Ahom people. The coronation ceremony of the Ahom kings was usually performed at Charaideo. Several dols or temples were also established in Charaideo. However, Charaideo was mostly important as the funeral place of royalty and *da-dangiyas* or nobles. After the death of such persons, the bodies were usually buried in Charaideo by traditionally building a tomb following certain rituals. *Deodhai Asom Buranji* provides a detailed account of the structure of Maidams.

Only the ruins of two temples are visible here. One of these is known as the Deoshal. It was probably the place where the Ahom god Lengdon was worshipped. Umpha was worshipped here. The temple was called the Deoshal because animals were sacrificed in a shed to appease the gods. The pillars of the temple were built of stone and the walls of brick. There were eight pillars in total, but only five pillars and some broken brick fragments are found today. It is believed that the site of the temple of Deoshal was the temple of the gods worshiped by the former Chutiya or Barahi. On the way up to this temple, the Ahom kings buried the beheaded Chutiya king Nitipal, the Muslim general Turbak, who had been defeated by them. The Ahom kings walked over the heads of these people buried

there, was probably a symbol of victory over the enemy. Another temple ruin in Charaideo is of the temple of Lankuri. It was built during Gadadhar Singha. This was actually a temple of Lord Siva. Apart from these two temples there was a temple named 'Bantung deualoi' in the west of Charaideo hill.

The early name of *Cheraidoi* was *Bihagadripahar* of Borahi rulers. Austric king Sungsaumara was the first ruler of this region. Virochan, Chandrashah, Vikramadityapha, Bicharpatipha, Pokhra were Borahi rulers of this region. The Borahi rulers founded two capitals close to Charaideo (*Cheraidoi*, *Bihagadripahar*) called "Sonapur" and "Banpur". The Tai-Ahom first king Chaolung Siukapha C.E. 1228-1256 ruled this area and founded his capital at this place also carved out the country of Mung-dun-chun-kham, a country full of garden of gold (Assam) stationing at this place whose descendants ruled this country up to C.E. 1838, till termination of their government by the British Government. *Cheraidoi* was a part of old Pagarjotic, Uparipattan, Pragjyotisha, Kamrupa, Saumarpatha, Dimalang etc. Charaideo or "*Cheraidoi*" is known as "Jerusalem of the East" for its location of Moidams i.e., Vaults of the Tai-Ahom kings, the Queens and the nobles. Charaideo remained the Capital of Ahoms till the reign of the Tyokhamti. ([www.assaminfo.com](http://www.assaminfo.com). Accessed on 25 April, 2025.)

Charaideo had the advantage of being situated at the centre of the territory, won by Sukapha. Sukapha established his Capital at Charaideo due to its high land and safe from flood. (Choudhury:1991:10) As per government revenue record the Charaideo Capital complex covers an area of 35 bighas and 19 lossas. During the reign of Sukapha, the royal palace and the residence were built at Charaideo by wood and bamboo. The type of houses was *duchola* (double roofed). With the connection of the indigenous people Moran and Borahis, Sukapha borrowed their style of construction their house as *duchala* (Assam type) and *tupdiya* (gabled). During this period the materials which were used for constructions of buildings were indigenous materials like wood, bamboo, reeds, thatch, cane etc (Buragohain:2020:2). Charaideo is also known as a sacred burial ground of the Kings, Queens and nobles of the Ahom dynasty. The Tombs of Kings and Queens at Charaideo hillocks are comparable to the pyramids of Egypt (Saikia:2009:57). The maidams are great example of fine architectural and sculptural design. The maidams were divided into three types- (i) The maidams built by soil (ii) The maidams built by wood and (iii) The maidam built by bricks. (Sharma:1993:163) bricks were used in maidams from the period of Siva Singha. The materials such as pulses, shells lime, mortar-molasses, stone lime, sun hemp, lime water, fish, mustard oil, duck's egg resin, bora rice etc were used for construction of the maidams. The actual number of maidams at Charaideo has exceeded 150 but only 30 maidams are protected by the Archeological Survey of India and Assam State Archeology Department and the remaining maidams are unprotected (Buragohain:2020:2). Charaideo was abandoned in 1397 C.E. as Charagua became the new capital. However, Charaideo continued to be a sacred place for the Ahom (Guha:1983:13).

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