

Moidams At Charaideo

Mound Burial System Of Ahom Dynasty

Why In News

- 46th session of the World Heritage Committee in 2024 will examine nominations from **around the world, including** 19 Cultural, 4 Natural, 2 Mixed sites and 2 Significant modifications to the boundaries. Out of which, **India's Moidams – The Mound – Burial System** of the Ahom Dynasty is set to be examined under the category of Cultural Property.



Historical Context

- **Tai-Ahom clan**, migrating from China, established their capital in various parts of the Brahmaputra River Valley from the **12th to the 18th century CE**.
- One of the most revered **sites among them was Choraideo**, where the Tai-Ahoms established their **first capital under Chau-lung Siu-ka-pha** at the foothills of the Patkai hills.



- This sacred site, known as **Che-rai-doi or Che-tam-doi**, was consecrated with rituals that reflected the deep spiritual beliefs of the Tai-Ahoms. Over centuries, Choraideo retained its **significance as a burial ground** where the departed souls of the Tai-Ahom royals transcended into the afterlife.
- **Tai-Ahom people** believed their kings were divine, leading to the establishment of a unique funerary tradition: the construction of Moidams, or vaulted mounds, for royal burials.



- This **tradition spanned 600 years**, marked by the use of various materials and architectural techniques evolving over time. **Initially using wood, and later stone and burnt bricks**, the construction of Moidams was a meticulous process detailed in the **Changrung Phukan**, a canonical text of the Ahoms.
- Rituals accompanying royal cremations were conducted with great grandeur, reflecting the **hierarchical structure of Tai-Ahom society**.

- Excavation shows that **each vaulted chamber** has a centrally **raised platform** where the body was laid.
- **Several objects used by the deceased** during his life, like royal insignia, objects made in wood or ivory or iron, gold pendants, ceramic ware, weapons, clothes to the extent of human beings (only from the Luk-kha-khun clan) were buried with their king.

Architectural Features

- **Moidams are characterized** by vaulted chambers, often **double-storied, accessed** through arched passages. The **chambers housed centrally raised** platforms where the deceased were laid to rest along with their royal insignia, weapons, and personal belongings. **The construction of these mounds** involved layers of bricks, earth, and vegetation, transforming the landscape into undulating hillocks reminiscent of celestial mountains.



Cultural Significance

- **Continuity of the Moidam tradition** at Choraideo underscores its Outstanding Universal Value under **UNESCO criteria**.
- This funerary landscape not only reflects **Tai-Ahom beliefs about life, death, and the afterlife** but also served as a testament to their cultural identity amidst shifts towards **Buddhism and Hinduism** among the population.
- **The concentration of Moidams at Choraideo** distinguishes it as the largest and most significant cluster, preserving the grand royal burial practices unique to the Tai-Ahoms.

Conservation Efforts

- **Despite challenges** such as vandalism by treasure seekers in the early 20th century, concerted efforts by the **Archaeological Survey of India** and the Assam State Department of Archaeology have restored and preserved the integrity of Choraideo. Protected under **national and state laws**, the site continues to be managed to safeguard its structural and cultural authenticity.



Comparisons with Similar Properties

- **Moidams of Choraideo** can be compared to royal tombs in ancient China and the **pyramids of Egyptian pharaohs**, illustrating universal themes of honoring and preserving royal lineage through monumental architecture.
- Within the broader **Tai-Ahom cultural region** spanning parts of Southeast Asia and Northeast India, Choraideo stands out for its scale, concentration, and spiritual significance.



- **Choraideo at the foothills of the Patkai range** remains a profound symbol of Tai-Ahom heritage, encapsulating their beliefs, rituals, and architectural prowess.



- As a landscape shaped by centuries of royal burials, it continues to **inspire awe and reverence, offering insights** into the cultural evolution and spiritual worldview of the Tai-Ahoms.
- **Preserved through careful conservation efforts**, Choraideo stands as a testament to the enduring legacy of the Tai-Ahom civilization in the Brahmaputra River Valley.
- **In conclusion, the Moidams of Choraideo** not only embody architectural and cultural significance but also serve as a poignant reminder of the Tai-Ahom people's deep spiritual connection to their land and their departed kings.