

Assam's Charaideo moidams burial sites

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In news— Assam Chief Minister has recently announced that the central government has decided to put forth the name of Assam's Charaideo moidams burial sites for addition to UNESCO's World Heritage Sites list.

About Charaideo moidams burial sites-

- **The Charaideo moidams are royal burial sites of the Ahom dynasty**, which ruled over much of Assam and the North East from 1228 to 1826 AD.
- Located around 30 km from Sivasagar town in eastern Assam, even today, the tumuli in Charaideo are **considered sacrosanct by many locals**.
- **A moidam is a tumulus – a mound of earth raised over a grave** – of Ahom royalty and aristocracy.
- **While Charaideo exclusively contains moidams of Ahom royals, other moidams of aristocrats and chiefs can be found scattered across Eastern Assam**, in the region between the towns of Jorhat and Dibrugarh.
- **A typical moidam at Charaideo contains one or more chambers in a vault**. On top of these is a hemispherical earthen mound, rising high above the ground, covered in grass.
- On top of this mound, there is a **pavilion, known as the chow chali**. A low octagonal wall surrounds the mound with one entrance.
- Ahom kings and queens were buried inside these moidams. **Unlike Hindus who cremate their dead, the predominant funerary method of the Ahoms, originating from the Tai people, was the burial**.
- The height of a moidam is typically indicative of the power and stature of the person buried inside.
- However, except for those of Gadhadhar Singha and Rudra

Singha, most moidams remain unidentified.

- **Inside the chambers of the moidam, the dead king would be buried along with items he needed for the “afterlife”,** as well as servants, horses, livestock and even their wives.
- It is the **similarity of the Ahom burial rites with that of the ancient Egyptians** that give Charaideo moidams the moniker of **“Pyramids of Assam.”**

Significance of Charaideo-

- **The word Charaideo has been derived from three Tai Ahom words, Che-Rai-Doi.**
- **“Che” means city or town, “Rai” means “to shine” and “Doi” means hill.**
- **In short, Charaideo means, “a shining town situated on a hilltop.”**
- While the **Ahoms** shifted capitals multiple times over their 600-year history, **Charaideo is considered to be their first capital city established in 1253 AD by king Sukaphaa.**
- Throughout the Ahom rule, it remained a symbolic and ritual centre of power, due to its salience in the dynasty’s founding.
- **After Sukaphaa was laid to rest in Charaideo in 1856, subsequent royals also chose it as their own resting place.**
- Today, these moidams are major tourist attractions. While there are over 150 moidams in the region, only 30 are protected by the Archaeological Survey of India with many in a state of disrepair.
- According to the dossier on the Charaideo Moidams, such burial sites have been seen in across East and Southeast Asia but the “cluster of moidams in Charaideo distinguishes itself in scale, concentration and being

located in the most sacred land of the Tai-Ahoms”.

About Ahom dynasty-

- The Ahoms were one of India's longest-reigning ruling dynasties.
- At their peak, their kingdom stretched from modern-day Bangladesh to deep inside Burma.
- Known to be able administrators and valiant warriors, the Ahom dynasty has enduring cultural appeal in Assam.
- **In 2022, Ahom general and folk hero Lachit Borphukan's 400th birth anniversary was celebrated** with pomp in New Delhi, from November 23 to 25.
- He epitomised unparalleled courage. He placed the well-being of people above everything else and was a just as well as visionary leader.
- Today, despite originating from South Chinese ruling dynasties, Ahoms are invoked as local Indian rulers who left behind a strong legacy.

Further reading: <https://journalsofindia.com/lachit-borphukan/>