

## **PALANQUIN : The symbol of Royalty and luxury of ancient Assam: Special reference to wedding rituals and bearers profession**

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### **Abstract**

Palanquin was a means of land transport which is especially used in eastern Asia as well as in Assam usually for one person that consists of an enclosed box-like litter borne on the shoulders of men by means of poles. It was a passenger conveyance vehicle, usually for one or two person. Owning one and keeping the staff to power it was a luxury affordable even to low-paid clerks. The time of Ahom emperors in Assam, *dula* served as military ambulances, used for carrying the wounded from the battlefield. In that period the most prevalent mode of long distance transport for the affluent was by palanquin. The royal messengers could arrange, with a few days' notice, relays of bearers to convey a traveller's palanquin between stations. The distance between two important places averaged about 10 miles (16 km), and could be covered within three to four hours. A relay's usual complement consisted of two torch-bearers, two luggage-porters, and eight palanquin-bearers who worked in a group of four, although all eight might pitch in at steep sections and also in dark also to make it easier. A passenger could travel straight through or break their journey at certain stations. Modern use of the palanquin is limited to ceremonial occasions. A *dula* carries the bride in a traditional wedding and they may be used to carry religious images in Hindu processions. During tour, the bearers practiced some specific folk songs to overcome their tiredness and pain. In wedding rituals there are thousands of songs in Assam related with palanquins. Now these practices are nearing extinction due to modernization and passage of time. These practices carry a rich cultural value and need a brief study to maintain the cultural heritage of Assam. Through this study people will be enlightened and the new generation will be aware of their heritage.

**Key Words:** *Palanquin, transport, wedding, folksongs, bearers*

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