CHAPTER II

DEITIES COMMON TO THE TWO REGIONS

In this chapter we shall make an attempt to discuss some of the deities who are common to the regions of our study for their wide popularity. Deities like Siva, Laksmi, Sitala have all India manifestations and variations in the local method of worship with beliefs and customs. Manasa, Satyanarayana and Dharma have been worshipped in the eastern zone of India. The worship of Swasani, Bha, Trinath etc. is prevalent in north Bengal and our regions. So we have arranged the gods and goddesses mentioned above for discussion on the basis of their popularity.

1. Siva of the local Pantheon

A. Siva - the all-India perspective

Scholars are of opinion that the history of Siva traces back to the pre-vedic era. The Pasupati form discovered in the Indus Valley reliefs is thought to be the first image of Siva. It is also opined that the vedic god Rudra has transformed to Siva in the later age. Let us now discuss the position of Rudra in the vedic and post vedic literature.
"In the Rg Veda Rudra is described as fierce, destructive like a terrible wild beast, the swift, the red bower of the sky, the Cow slayer, the man slayer, the lord of animal sacrifices, the father of the Rudras or Aruuta and one who bears swift arrows and strong bow". In the same Veda he was identified with Agni. Rudra appeared in Yajurveda in a much more developed form. Rudra in this Veda is "Clad in a skin, dweller in the mountains, aged, thousand-eyed etc.". Here the deity is described in his benevolent identity which was not in Rg Veda and "all the basic elements which related the complex Rudra-Siva cult of later ages are to be found here".

Satarudriya section of the Yajurveda has given a fresh starting point for new developments of Rudra. According to the script Rudra's range is so wide that he is every where - "In the stream and on the road, in the pool and the ditch, in the lake and the river, in the pond and the well, in the abyss and the bank, in the cloud and lightning in the rain and the drought, in the wind and the house, in the barren land and on the beaten track, in the cow- pen and the cattle-shed, in the heart and the whirl-pool, in what is dried up

and what is green, in the dust and the mist, in the corpse
and the gully. From a minor atmospheric god of the Rg Veda
he now becomes the lord of all quarters—of forests and
fields, of trees and plants, of food and moving creatures. 3

The Atharvaveda, the Brahmanas, the upanisadas also
describe the benevolent and malevolent nature of Rudra.
According to the Satapatha Brahmana the abode of Rudra is
on the north. Sri M. Chakravarty after furnishing detail
information as found in Vedic and post-Vedic literatures
about Rudra, has summed up in the following lines, "It is
not the gradual development of a Vedic deity along lines
chalked out in the Rg Veda, but the metamorphosis of an Aryan
god into a god who has both Aryan and pre-Aryan features.
The Rg Vedic atmospheric god became in course of time the
lord of various professions. In fact, the cosmopolitan
nature of Rudra enables to absorb him to local gods. The
conception of Siva from its opposite Rudra resulted partially
from an attempt at "appeasement by flattery" and partially
perhaps from his gradual amalgamation with the Pre-Aryan
father god. 4

Let us now discuss the place of Siva in the early texts

and his amalgamation with Rudra. In the Svetasvatara Upanishada, Siva was used as a proper name of Rudra. The traits of Rudra-Siva is supposed to arise from "the conception of a deity of mountain and forest". Parvati, the wife of Siva is the daughter of mountain. Regarding non-Aryan influence some scholars suggest that "Siva came from the Tamil word Sivam (Chivam) meaning red, the word Rudra also often seems to mean 'red' and metamorphosis from Rudra to Siva was facilitated by this resemblance". Patanjali in his Mahabhasya mentioned Siva twice as a god and once he is classified as one of the folk deities (Laukika-devata) distinct from the gods of the vedik order.

There was a tribe by the name of Sibei who was subdued by Alexander. "Curtius, Diodorus, Arrian and some of the classical writers describe the Sibei people as dressed in skins, carrying a cudgel and branding on backs of their oxen the representative of a club, where in the Macedonians recognize a memorial of Marsiles". Megasthenes describes the Indian Dionysius (Siva) as the god of hills and mountains. It is interesting to note that in this connection that

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Dionysios, in Greek mythology, is described just like Siva as a healing god, specially associated with vegetation rites, snakes and Phallic emblem.

After discussing pros and cons the background of Rudra-Siva from literary as well as popular points of view Sri Chakraborty has come to the following conclusion...

"that the cult of Siva had developed in parts of Northern India even long before the time of Patanjali and an early effort was made to cause and amalgam between the vedic Rudra and Siva as the Aryan invaders gradually imbibed blood and ideas of the Pre-Aryan population." James Hastings also opines "The Popularization of the cult of Siva involved a process of syncretism, the adoption of various local deities as his manifestations".

From the above discussion it would not be wrong to conclude that Siva was originally a non-Aryan deity and later on he was Aryanized. That the cult had developed in the northern India can be proved from its immense popularity in the regions.

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9. N. Chakraborty. op.cit. p. 30;
10. J. Hastings op.cit. Vol. 6, p. 701,
B. Siva’s place in the socio-cultural life of the Area

We have already discussed about prevalence of Saivism in Assam as well as in our regions.\(^{11}\) Now we shall make an attempt to describe Siva’s place in the socio-cultural life of the people of our regions. The inhabitants of the area are agrarian. The agriculturists are to depend on natural phenomenon for proper seedling and good harvests. The tilling instruments, the bullocks etc., are indispensable for agriculture. Siva in oral and written literature is depicted as an introducer of agriculture and an inventor of agricultural instruments.\(^{12}\) He made the plough from his trident. He created the bullock to till the field and at the same time he used the bullock as his Vahana. Siva is the protector from all natural calamities. So on the first day of the Rongali Bihu festival of Assam the following couplet is written on the leaves of nabar tree and kept on the roof of the main house:

\[
\text{deva deva mahidova nilagriva jatadhara} \\
\text{bata bratin bera deva mahidova nomanastute}
\]

We pray thee O great god; thou art nilagriva (blue neck) and jatadhara (matted hair); thou art the protector

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11. See Infra, Chapter I.
from storm and rain*. Hemp trees are planted in the paddy field on the Kangali Sihy festival for good harvests and to protect the field from insects. Hemp is the favourite intoxication of Siva.

Siva to the mind of the masses is more a human being than a heavenly god. He is a good householder and leads a peaceful family life. Blessings are offered by the elders to newly married couple by chanting *Hara Gauri Gauri Naat* i.e. let your conjugal life be happy as that of Hara and Gauri.

Siva is supposed to be the presiding deity of evil spirits. When somebody suffers from any disease, it is believed that the patient is attacked by some evil spirit. The village quacks warn the spirit by chanting the following mantra: *You evil spirit, if you do not leave the patient, I curse, you eat the head of the great god*. Siva is a compromising deity of the different sects of Hindu religion. Besides the Saktas and the Saivas, the vaisnavas also honour Siva without hampering their own ideology. Sankaradeva, the vaisnava saint and poet composed several lines in his *Kirtana* and *Rukmini Harana Kavya* in honour of Siva. Rama Saraswati, another poet of Vaisnava period composed a couplet *Shima garita*, by name depicting Siva as a cultivator.
If we come to the tribes of the region we find that Siva is the most popular god among them. The Kacharîs claim that Siva was their progenitor. They worshipped him in the name of Siva, Gîlā dambra, kharivā, sriburâk (śibrak) bâthâw etc. The Patî Rabhas identify him with Langa, the Principal deity of the tribe. The Karbis of the plains worship him in the name of Mahādai. The Tîjus call him Dhā Mahādai and the Sonowal Kacharîs Baithe. Sîva and Păravaî are worshipped in the name of Girā-Girācî by the Deuri-Chutiyas.

C. Birth of Siva according to Manasā legend

An oral tradition of the Patî Rabhas describes beautifully the creation of Siva by Anâdi Gehâi. Anâdi Gehâi after giving birth to Brahma Vînu and Mahâsî ordered them to go for meditation. Then to test his sons the Gehâi turned into a corpse and came floating near to them. Brahma and Vînu could not recognise him and it was Sîva who through meditation could identify him and was successful in the test. The Gehâi was pleased and entered in the body of Sîva through his mouth. Thus half of Sîva's body became Anâdi Gehâi or Dharmâ. Siva married Gangâ and Durgâ as per instruction of the Gehâi. 14

D. Siva of the Local Pantheon

(i) A popular god

Siva is the most popular god of all the gods and goddesses of Hindu Pantheon. The tribes and the non-tribes, the Vaishnavas and the Saktas, the rich and the poor, the barren, the diseased, the quacks venerate Siva with great esteem. While other gods and goddesses are living in heaven or some unknown places, mount Kailasa is Siva's abode. He is believed to live on the big tree like piple or in the cremation ground. He is a poverty-stricken family holder and lives on begging. He is contended if somebody offers a gilam of hemp. wearing tiger skin, trident in hand, with matted hair and long beard, besmearing the body with ashes, using snake as sacred thread, this Siva in his anthropomorphic form is very familiar among the masses.

(ii) A good family holder

There is a beautiful description of Siva's marriage with Durga in the Manasa kavya of Maneka. Maneka took active part as a negotiator. Maneka at first refused to give marriage her daughter to an old man with grey beard and matted hair. Moreover, he is very poor and lives on begging. He cannot give good cloth or bungle or other ornaments to his
wife. Even he cannot provide a good dish to his wife and children. This household condition of Siva attracts the poverty-stricken people of the land. In spite of his non-attachment to the worldly belongings, the maids prefer a bridegroom like him. Gangā and Durgā are his wives and Kārtike, Ganapati, Lakṣāṇi and Saraswati are his children.

(iii) A fertility god

It is described in the biographical works of Sankardeva that his father Kuśumbara worshipped Gopālā Siva to bless him with a son. Barren women pour milk on the Siva lingam for getting child. Unmarried girls worship Siva to have good husbands. Some people vow to offer hemp, pigeons, goats etc. in the thopa of Siva if they are blessed with child. Some practice is done by some people of Muslim community of Goalpara region.

(iv) A god of Agriculture

Dr. A. Bhattacharyya is of opinion that the people of north Bengal are responsible to qualify Siva as an agrarian god. The similar belief is in vogue in Assam too. That

17. A. Bhattacharyya. Dornāl Manag Kavya Itihās, p. 188.
the deity is connected with the agriculture has been discussed else where. Agrarian people worship him for good harvests. In some places harvested crops are offered to Siva first. Even the first flow of milk of a newly milking cow is offered to Siva. In time of processing sugar cane for molasses, grass prepared with rice powder, molasses and little quantity of hemp is offered to him first.

(v) Remover of diseases and other calamities

Siva is propitiated to remove diseases of human as well as of domestic animals. Whenever any epidemic breaks out Siva is then worshipped by offering hemp. It is believed that if the god is satisfied, the epidemic is sure to stop. He is also assumed to be the remover of any pain. When somebody utters the name of Siva, the pain removes at once.
In the mantra literature, Siva is conceived to be the remover of all the diseases. The quacks compel the evil spirit to abandon the ailed person by chanting the following mantras:

Śrī mahaideva humkār
Gaṇidhva bhubane rikhī nirantar
hum hum humkār sārīva lankār sār
nāhībī asukār ohar
kāli simā rāmār
śrī paṭe vadi tai ra

śrī mahaideva humkār
Gaṇidhva bhubane rikhī nirantar
hum hum humkār sārīva lankār sār
nāhībī asukār ohar
kāli simā rāmār
śrī paṭe vadi tai ra
The utterance (hukka) of Mahādeva is heard in the fourteen world. You disease, go to Lankā leaving the boundary of the household. If you remain somewhere near the house you will eat the head of Mahādeva. Keeping an head the words of Sankara, I kill you disease. 18

(vi) Bestower of boons

Sīva is a benevolent deity. He is contended with little. He is satisfied when somebody prays him with devotion. He bestows boons to his devotees though he himself is very poor. "Jagatok bar di āpuni nangathā" i.e. he bestows boons, but he has no cloth to wear.

E. Sīva in the Folk Literature

Many episodes of Sīva have been narrated in the folk songs, tales, legends etc. He has been depicted in accordance with the imagination of the masses. As a result he has become an agriculturist, a beggar, an old bridegroom, an intoxicated

person, an erotic a lunatic a naked etc. In Tokari gīt, it is mentioned that Śiva has made the tokāri (a musical instrument). A humorous picture of family quarrel between Śiva and Pārvatī is described beautifully in the Pāndū-Pārvatī gīt or Śadāsvīr nām. In Bhādracalī gīt we find the poverty stricken life of Śiva. In Bhāhourī Sevar gīt we find the local form of Śiva that he carries a bag of hemp on his shoulder, his body is besmeared with ashes, he rides on the bullock and is contended when somebody offer him a leaf of pal tree. In Padā purānā gīt, Kālīgūṭā gīt, Śīhāvūṭā gīt etc., we find that Śiva is connected with these deities directly or indirectly. In the Rābhā and Kachārī legends it is described that Śiva was the originator of the world.

F. Different forms and modes of worship

(1) Linga

The most popular form of worship of Śiva is the Phallus or linga. Phallus worship is no doubt a pre-Aryan one and up to the present day the form has not lost its popularity. M. Chakraborty goes back to the Harrappa civilization when he

20. N. Sarma, (ed) op. cit., p. 189.
... the worship of linga of Siva originated from the conception of the god as the Great-Father or procreator and this father-god and the mother-goddess were worshipped in both anthropomorphic and symbolic forms by the pre-Aryan peoples of the Harappan civilization. In the Assamese rendering of Siva Purana by king Rudra Sinha, the emergence of Linga and its philosophical aspects and the fruits received by the devotees after worshipping it, has been beautifully narrated. In the temples and thana the linga is installed as a symbol of Siva. It is observed that the Linga symbol of Siva who is believed to be united with his consorts Parvati and Ganga together is worshipped at the Kedara temple of Hajo with the offerings of fish and meat. People believe that there are less than one lakh of lingas carved on rocks at Sri Suryya hill.

(ii) Tree

Tree is associated with the worship of Siva. A pipal or Bel tree is believed to be the abode of Siva. Some devotees worship the tree to be the god himself. It is a taboo to touch...
such trees by feet or to pass water on it. Even Śiva lingas are installed under a pipal and bel tree. The place is popularly known as "Budhā Gehāin Thān". The Kocharīs worship him under a Śīv tree. 24

(iii) Stone

The Pāṭi Rabhaē, worship their chief deity Langa who is identical with Śiva in the form of a stone.

(iv) Trident

Sometimes the deity is propitiated by erecting a trident or triśula.

(v) Clay images

Now-a-days the statue of the deity is made from clay. The statue or image is installed in the congregational prayer house or in individual family house and is worshipped. Śiva is the household deity of some family.

(vi) Animals

It is noted that in some villages the elephant, is called Budhā cossain and propitiated the animal. Śiva wears tiger's skin and as such the devotees worship the tiger as

24. See Śrāvaka Ch. VII.
Siva’s attendant, Bullock is his Vahana. The animal is let loose and he becomes nobody's property. People call him Ganesār jār i.e. the bullock of the god. The animal is honoured and nobody does any harm to the animal.

Q. Some Popular Epithets of Siva

(1) Budhā Gehāin/Gehe/Dāngariyā or Ḍāngrā

The word budhā has come from the Sanskrit word vṛddha. The word has two meanings i.e. the old and the wise. Goseāin or Gehai or Gehe means a god or deity. Siva is the oldest and wisest of all the gods and goddesses and hence he is worshipped in that name. Dr. L. Gogoi thinks that Budhā Gosain was the presiding deity of the Bhuyans.²⁸ The Kashérios call him Bṛī Goseāin. There are many things dedicated in the name of Budhā Gosain. Even some hills and rivers are named after him.

(ii) Pāgla; Pāgālā or Baliyā

There is a shrine at a distance of ten K.M. west of Goalpara town known as Pāgler tek. Here Pāgla is identified with Siva. The nature of the god as described in the oral tradition of the Rabhās is that he often acts like a lunatic. He is the god of the universe, but he abducts the wives of

²⁸ L. Gogoi. Assam Sanskriti, p. 79.
the sages and the Kocos. He becomes naked when he takes hemp or other intoxication abundantly. He is contended with little, becomes angry all on a sudden and destructs. He bestows boons to the undesirable. All these opposite characters indicate that he is a mad god.

(iii) Bhāngrā or Bhāngurā

The deity is addicted to hemp and other intoxication. The Assamese word for hemp is bhāng or hānā. Those who are addicted to hemp are known as bhāngurā. These bhāngurās are stern devotees of Śiva. To get rid of any calamities, a social function called bhāngurā savā is performed by a householder. He invites the bhāngurās. They sing song in praise of Śiva. It is believed that Śiva is pleased after serving his devotees with hemp and sweets. The devotees in time of smoking utter the word "bom, bom, Śiva Sambhu".

(iv) Jatiyā Bābā

Another epithet of Śiva is Jatiyā Bābā as he is assumed to have a lock of long matted hairs. It is the practice of some people who have left home and become Sannyāsīs or Bābās to keep matted hair. Even if a person's or a child's hairs are matted the ordinary people think that he or she is blessed by Śiva. The hairs are thought to be sacred.

(v) Lengtā Bābā, Lankeswar, Dudhnāth are some of the popular epithets of Śiva.
2. Āi or Sītalā, the Pox Goddess

Āi or Sītalā or Sītli is the pox goddess. Small pox is a most dreaded disease which often took an epidemic form and a good number of people succumbed to the disease. Experiencing the fatality of the disease and finding no way to cure it, the ordinary people thought it to be the act of an unseen spirit. They imagined a presiding deity of the disease and used to propitiate her to get rid of the fear caused by the epidemic. Small pox is a general catastrophe of the world. Summer dominated areas experienced this catastrophe a bit more. The deity is popularly known as Āi, Sītalā, Sītli etc.

A. Identify of the Goddess

Let us now see whether the deity is a śāstria or local one. In Skanda purana there is a dhvana mantra of Sitala:

"namī śītalā śāstri devī rāsa bhāsthana digambarīn mārijani kalasapataṃ surpalakrītamastakam".

"(We) pray thee O'Sitala! Thy vehicle is an sea. Thou art naked. Thou hast a broom in one hand and a water jug (Kalasa) in the other hand an winnowing tray (Kuta) on thy head".

The name of Sītalā is mentioned in the Kalika Purana. The Piculla Tantra, a tantric work where the episode of Sītalā is found. Some scholars are of opinion that she is identical
with "Taksana" and "Apadevi" of the Atharva Veda. Dr. H. N. Bhattaoharyya has tried to associate her with Saraswati, Gangā Saṃthi etc. All these goddesses are connected with water and whiteness. Whiteness is a characteristic of Sītalā and her connection with water is also notable. Like Saṃthi Sītalā is the protector of children. Sītalā is one of the names of Saṃthi. Sītalā–Saṃthi is a vrata observed by the women of Bengal. Dhumāvati is another goddess of the deep mahavidya who takes a kūla on her head. Similarly Sītalā takes a kūla on her head.

Mariti is a pox goddess of a Tantra of the Buddhists. The deity is worshipped by offering flesh and blood of fish and other animals. Mahamehopadhyaya H. P. Sastri is also of opinion that Sītalā is indebted to Buddhist deity Mariti. It is difficult to ascertain whether Hindus have taken sītalā from the Buddhistic Mariti or the Buddhist from Sītalā. I am inclined to think that the Hindus are the borrowers.

There are temples of Mariti by the side of Lord Buddha or Dharma in Nepal. In Assam, Dharma and Sītalā are worshipped.

in Hanasa worship. H.N. Bhattacharyya does not support
Mahamohopadhyay's view and rules out the possibility of
Sitala being Hariti. Dr. A. Bhattacharyya holds the view
that there may be some relation with the South Indian
goddess 'Sitalamma' who is a goddess of water and pest. 30

5. Origin of the goddess

Different scholars have given their own views on
regards to the origin of the goddess. Dr. H.N. Bhattacharyya
has argued that Sitala is a vedic deity. 31 On the other hand
Dr. A. Bhattacharyya is of opinion that Sitala is a goddess
of non-Aryan origin. He explains that the disease occurs in
epidemic form in the summer dominated areas like India. The
non-Aryans who were the predecessors to the Aryan in India,
must acquainted with the disease. The Skanda Purana is one
of the latest purana where a good number of deities of non-
Aryan origin have been aryenised. Sitala may be such a
deity. 32 D.D. Kosambi thinks that the Putana of the Krana
legend may turn into Sitala. "As a child, he had killed one
of them Putana by name (letter a goddess of small pest
perhaps) who had tried to nurse him with her poisonous milk". 33

33. D.D. Kosambi., The culture and civilization of Ancient
India in Historical outline, p. 715.
There is a tale in the Bengali Sitala Marga that once Krishna and Salarāma suffered from smallpox and were cured after propitiating Sitalā. It is found that every child suffers from "Nuti or Luti (measles) after a few days of his or her birth. In an Assamese folk song it is mentioned that a child cannot be brought up without being touched by the foot of Āl i.e. pox: "Mandār Pevālī tulība novārī ēye pāva nuphurāy māne".

C. Sitalā, a water goddess

It has been mentioned elsewhere that the south-Indian deity Sitalā is a water goddess. If Sitalā is Sitalā, then her connection with the water cannot be ruled out. Similarly, Ganga and Saraswati are water goddesses with whom some scholars want to indentify Sitala. The principal medicine applied to a pox patient is charmed water. Moreover Sitalā ānil (water of Sitala), Sitalā chak (waterful pot of Sitala) Picalā ānil (river picula) are some of the significant words used in Assamese in connection with water and Sitalā. In spite of so many similarities it would be improper to conclude that Sitalā is a water goddess as she is not mentioned anywhere as a goddess of water.
(iv) The birth of the goddess - Some popular beliefs

In a version of a folk song current in the eastern part of Goalpara District, it is mentioned that the goddess is born of west wind. She attained her maturity on twelveth day from her birth. There is an interesting description in the said version as regards to her progeny. Once she was playing with her friends who insulted her that she was the daughter of an unknown father like that of a goose. Being insulted she enquired her mother Durga of her actual father. Durga replied that she was the daughter of Siva. She immediately went to Kailasa along with her seven associates belonging to the Koca community to meet her father. She begged permission from her father to come down to the earth, the land of human beings. Siva gladly granted her permission and advised her to visit each and every family irrespective of caste and creed. On her way to the earth she came across a river and asked a fisherman to help her in crossing the river by his boat. The fisherman at first did not accede to her request and as a result he had to face some calamities. Ultimately he yielded and began to propitiate Sitala.

According to Jayrama, a Sitalā poet in Assamese, the goddess was born of the navel of Manasā. 34

34. Jayrama, Sitalā, p. 6.
D. Different epithets of the goddess

Besides Áî or Áîli the goddess possesses other names. According to the symptoms of the disease the deity is named. The deity is believed to have seven or nine or twelve sisters. In a folk version, collected by the author, the number is about twenty six. These names are Dômcâr-Áî, Maju-Áî, Sâru-Áî, Tilnavari, Mupavari, Kuôthi, Sundari, Bihuti, pôncemari, Ivâlô, Dhosâbeti, Baravâ, Khangoavari, Rangavari, Kahuli, Kateri, Kanduri, Mâhuri, Jikôphuli, Bhatophuli, Bôhmuri, Akrohi, Gâbhârani, Tângamâri, Flenai, Câhuli etc.

Now-a-days the deity is identified with Râhmâyâ, Bhagabati, Isvari, Cândikâ Jôgamâyâ etc.

E. Method of Worship

In the Darrang-Kamrup and Goalpara regions the method of worship of the deity is almost the same. When some one suffers from pox the house including the bed room of the patient is made clean. Earthen lamps are lit, incense burnt and white flowers are kept on a banana leaf by the side of the patient. Sometimes a nauvedya with white flowers, banana, arecanuts and batal leaves is placed over a small wooden cot. No medicine is applied to the patient except charmed
water. *Nav-Kirtana* in the praise of the goddess is performed by the women folk. The patient is regarded as the goddess herself and nobody makes any ill treatment to the diseased. When the disease is fully exposed it is believed that the patient is completely under the grip of the goddess (*Ai bhor diyā*). In some places the disease is called *Phul* i.e. flower which has been offered by the goddess (*Ai Phul diše*). Then the elderly woman of the house vows to offer *pekā* or *Kapēhān* to the goddess after she leaves the patient. When the patient is completely cured the last function "*bidāv diyā nam*" (to bid adieu to the goddess) is performed by the women in the evening.

In Darrang region *Sītalā* is worshipped along with Manasā. An earthen pot (ghata) filled with water is installed in her name in the altar of Manasā. The deity is worshipped to get rid of small pox and ophthalmic disease. A pair of white pigeons is let loose in her name. The custom of letting loose of pigeons was in vogue in the medieval Assam. In the western part of Goalpara region the goddess is known as *Sīti*, *Sītilā* or *Śitā*. She occupies a special place in the "*Daśa tālīa dhūm*". Seven *āṭīla* containing flowers, areca-nut, betel leaves, banana etc. are kept on an altar made of clay. An earthen pot full of water is also kept on

36. See *Āśpara* Ch. I.
the altar. The women sing Śītīlā song. At the end of the function, the waterful pot is kept for a moment on the head of the patient by a woman and then floated it in the nearby river.

The cattle are also suffered from the disease. To cure the animal the deity is worshipped in the name of "Ma Thakurani". In Orissa the pox goddess is known as Thakurani. This Thakurani Puja is generally done in the cowshed. In this Puja two Barali fishes with virmilion applied on their heads are offered to the deity. In this connection we can refer that the goddess Hariti is also worshipped by offering blood and flesh of fish and animals. The main devotees are the Rajbanahis. Dr. B. Datta has remarked "Especially among the Rajbanahi Shitli andMa Thakurani are two different goddesses, the former associated with small pox and the latter with other disease like cholera and diseases of the Cattle".39

3. Mother goddess Laksmi — Local variations in the Form

Mother goddess has different manifestations. Laksmi as a mother goddess is worshipped for wealth and corn. In

every Hindu family the deity occupies a respectable position. She is inferred to be the consort of Lord Viṣṇu. She was born of sea during the time of churning by the gods and the demons. Fickleness is one of the characteristics of the deity and she does not stay permanently in a particular place. She is pleased when the women of a family observe certain rules and regulations in their day to day life. 40

As regards to the origin and identity of the deity many scholars have put forth their opinions. According to H.N. Bhattacharyya the name of Laksñī is found in the vedas and other puranas and she is a vedic deity. 41 Scholar like A. Tagore has opined that Laksñī was originally a non-Aryan deity. He has mentioned some articles required for the worship of the goddess which are significant. The tooth of a bear, the coconut, the owl and a stalk of paddy all are non-Aryan elements connected with the worship of the goddess. 42 He has also discussed about Alaksñī Pūja. This Alaksñī, according to the scholar, is the goddess of corn and from her appearance she may be inferred as non-Aryan. In the Alaksñī Pūja, Laksñī-Nārāyana and Kuvra are also worshipped along with the deity.

42. A. Tagore, Pindolā Vrata, p. 23.
The scholar has tried to connect these deities with some of the corn deities of Mexico. We will not enter into any controversy as to her origin, we shall simply discuss the place and form of the goddess in the mind of the people.

A. Forms

(1) Paddy

We have already mentioned that the deity is worshipped for wealth and good harvest. The popular form of the deity as a goddess of corn is the paddy. The agriculturists regard the paddy with devotion. They call it Takemi or Lakhini. The Ahu and the Sali are the chief crops in Assam. In the time of harvest the first sheaves are taken home ceremoniously. An auspicious day is selected to start harvesting. Any male person preferably, the son of the cultivator is engaged to start harvest. He does not take any food in the morning and after taking his bath, wearing new clothes, goes to the paddy field with sickle and a leaf of banana in his hand. He cuts with devotion three stalks and makes a sheaf. Then the sheaf is rapped by the banana leaf and the sickle is also placed there. He proceeds towards home taking the bundle on his head. The courtyard is made clean, water mixed with cow dung is

sprinked over it. The woman, standing on the gate way of the house with burning incense and oil lamps welcome the boy. The sheaf of paddy is then placed either in the barn or in the main house. Prasad is offered and distributed among the children. Afterwards the sheaf is kept tied on a post of the barn. This process of fetching the paddy is performed twice a year i.e. in time harvests of Alu and Sal paddy. The sheaf is inferred to be the deity herself.

Another ceremony is observed in time of seedling the paddy. This is known as nupi loh utapp in Mangaldai area. On the first day of seedling a banana leaf is placed on the field. An areca-nut and betel leaf are kept on the leaf. The five stalks of seedling are planted round the banana leaf first. Then the five stalks are joined together and mustard oil is poured on it. On the same day home stead is made clean and a plant of banana or arun is planted in the homestead.

Like the pre-harvest, a post harvest ceremony is also performed. The last stalks of paddy are brought home ceremoniously. In some places instead of taking the last stalks home are left in the field. A malbadya of rice, sugar, areca-nut etc. is offered and chanting the name of 'Hari' the stalks are tied together. The same practice is found among the Hajangs. They leave twelve stalks of paddy in the field. Twelve pieces
of cotton besmeared with vermillion and paddy numbering twelve are kept on the stalks. The sickle is then washed over it. An old Hajang has informed the author that they sacrifice a tortoise in front of the granary after the harvest is over. Then the tortoise is buried there. In this connection the following lines of Frazer are noteworthy: "The corn mother plays an important part in harvest customs. She is believed to be present in the handful of corn which is left standing last on the field; and with the cutting of the last handful she is caught, driven away or killed". 44

(i) Installation of Ghata

The local name of the deity is Lekhini. The appropriate time for her worship is the full moon night of month of Abib or Kati. That full moon night is called Laksh Purnima. The deity is worshipped on that particular day by installing a ghata either in the main house of the family or under the basil tree. It is mentioned in the Laksmi Carita that the ghata should be filled with water. A branch of mango tree with leaves is to be placed in it and Vermillon should be besmeared.

A handful of unboiled rice is also to be kept beside the ghata. Earthen lamps are to be lighted and incense to be burned. A naibedya containing of gram, rice coconut etc. is offered. The devotees visit every house by reciting name-Kirtana and take Prasad. In some house the women go on fasting and recite Vrata Katha or Caritra of Laksmi.

In the Barpeta sub-division a peculiar function is performed on the night of Laksmi Purnima. The youths stealthily throw fruits of the nevana tree on the walls of the individual house. It is their belief that if the house holders call bad names as a result of throwing, there will be no trouble in the coming days. This custom may indicate driving out of evil elements from the village or from the paddy field.

Another interesting practice is that the devotees take coconut with flattened rice on this particular night. They sprinkle water of the coconut on their eyes and believe that if it is done there is no possibility of ophthalmic disease.

In upper Assam the deity is worshipped in the month of Jetha or Ahir congregationally. This is known as Lakshmi nau or Lakshmi Sabah. It is believed that after the harvest the goddess leaves the field and resides on the remote mountain.

45. Rama Saraswati. Sri Sri Laksmi Carita, p. 11.
The goddess comes to the field with the rain. 46

There are some deities of the tribes who are identical with Lakemi. Raathansri or Rain 47 of the Kasqaris is identified with the Lakemi of the Hindu Pantheon. Similarly Kanche of the Rabhas bears the same identification. Char Gehani is the household deity of the Pati Rabhas. She is identified with Lakemi. The deity is worshipped by installing ghata in the eastern side of the main house in any auspicious occasion. Thursday is the appropriate day for worshipping the deity. The women of some families recite Vrata Katha or Lakemi garitra every Thursday.

(iii) Animal

Cows are regarded as Lakemi. The first day of the Rongali Bihu festival of Assam is called Gury Bihu. On that day cows one bathed, garlands of vegetables are put on their necks and new ropes are offered. It is a taboo to take the air of a fan before fanning the cows. Like the corns the cows or bullocks are also indispensable for an agrarian society. So, cows are associated with the deity as the people think them to be the deity herself.

46. N. Bardaloi, Assamese Lok Sanskriti, p. 89.
47. See Amra, Ch. VII,
Frazer has discussed that cats are regarded as a spirit of corn in many places of the world. There is a belief in Assam that the deity visit the house of a particular family in the guise of a cat. Killing of cat is a taboo. In some places of Goalpara region the cats are inferred to be associated with the wealth. In the Vrata katha of Mirkali, it is mentioned that the prosperity of a family is connected with the cat.

B. Some Popular Beliefs

(i) Vehicles

Owl is the vehicle of goddess Lakami. D.K. Sarkar has given an interesting interpretation of the owl who has become the vehicle of the goddess. He thinks Lakami Narayana of Puranic scripture were originally the male and the female owl. Some of the natures of the owl, as he observes, tally with the myth of Lakami-Narayana.

The Rabhas believe that the pigeon is the vehicle of the goddess. There is a belief in the Hindu Assamese family that when the pigeons make nest coming from other house, the

49. See op.sit., Ch. XI.
goddess has visited their house and the other wise signifies the leaving of the deity.

(ii) Place of abode

According to the Laksmi caritra the deity resides on the following places : (a) Lotus blooming in the lake (b) amalaki tree (c) flower garden (d) active and truthful person (e) white conch shell and white cloth (f) Cow dung and (g) the married women having chastity.

"āro ṣunā āmāra basati Nārāyana
Sarobarā bikasita kamala kānana
āmalaki bṛkaśa āro dibya gugga bana
āsaṃya rasita satva parāvāna jañe
śakha ratna svālā basṭre āro samavata
artva dīta bādya vathā howa abirata
mahāsati satīrvāta nārā vāto janī
īsakata thōko satva kahilo kāhini". 51

(iii) Some minor beliefs and practices

It has already been mentioned that the goddess is fickle in nature. To keep the deity permanently the house holders are to observe some rules particularly the womenfolk.

Some vegetables, fish, meat etc. are forbidden to take in some particular tithias. Cleaning of floor of the house at night and throwing the wastage outside the house are not allowed. Any person is not allowed to sit or stand on the door way of the house as the way is used by the deity for her entrance and exit. Keeping of broom erected and pira (flo) outside the house at night, is a taboo. Earthen lamps are lit in front of the granary in Kati Bihu and divali festivals.

4. Manasa

A. A Snake Deity

Manasa is a popular deity of Assam, West Bengal and Bihar. She is primarily associated with the snakes. She is the anthropomorphic form of the snake worship. Though the worship of snake is prevalent in many parts of India, the name Manasa is popular only in the above mentioned states. Some doubts arise among the scholars that whether Manasa is a snake deity or not. Because no where in the Manasa Kavyas she is mentioned as a snake deity. Moreover, she is propitiated for other purposes, such as apedemic, fertility or fecundity.

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wealth etc. It is the general tendency of the folk to impose several qualities on the same village deity although the deity was originally worshipped for a single purpose. But if we carefully study her nature, some common characteristics of the snake and the deity may be observed. According to Durgābara, a Manasā post of Assam, Manasā is the wife of a snake called Aijār. The snake lives in the holes and Manasā was born in the netherland. It is observed that the snakes haunt in the flower garden and Manasā was brought home by Śiva in the basket of flowers. When Durga, the wife of Śiva being suspicious damaged one of her eyes, she immediately bit her. Even her name became Manasā as she bit her mother, "māyak dankiya bhailā manasaśī nām". Frogs are favourite food for the snakes. Manasa is called names as "Bena khāitī" i.e. eater of frogs. Generally a stick is used to kill a snake. Chando used Ham-tala i.e. stick of gold to hurt Manasā. Almost all public and individuals festivals of Manasā are performed by the votaries to avert snake-bites. From the instances given above, it would be no wrong to conclude that Manasā is a snake deity of the regions.

B. Worship of Snake

Snake worship is a universal practice from the ancient

times. "The sudden disappearance of a snake in the undergrowth, the brilliance and fascination of its eye, its beauty and strength, its enveloping folds, its supportless body, its way of living in holes for a long time without food, and its property of casting its skin led people to worship the reptile, which seemed almost or completely immortal. Thus fear coupled with wonder brought about the worship of the snake all over the world, as a single snake, or as a species, or by creating a serpent god or goddesses or by worshipping the heroes of the particular race which used snakes either as its totem or tribal emblem. In India snake worship had been in vogue since the pre-vedic age. Now we shall make an attempt to give a description of the said worship in the perspective of India and Assam.

(i) Snake worship in pre-vedic age

Some European scholars are of opinion that the snake cult had come to India from Central Asia. Scholars like P.K. Maity, A. Bhattacharyya do not agree with those scholars. Dr. Bhattacharyya has strongly placed his argument in favour of India. He has said that the original homeland of the snakes must be in India. Summer dominated areas are appropriate

place of living for the snake. 56 Snake worship in the pre-
vedic age may be inferred from the seals and potteries
discovered at Mahenjodaro. One such seal is of Siva in
which a verteile figure of a cobra is found. Such picture
of Cobra with expanded hood are seen in some pots also.
Thus "from the archaeological evidence, the only source for
that period most scholars would support the existence of
some kind of snake cult in the proto-Indian period," 57

(ii) Snake worship in vedic and pauranic age

It is difficult to ascertain that snake worship was
in vogue during the Rgvedic days as the said veda is silent
about the cult. However, Swami Shankarananda is of opinion
that the snake was worshipped as the symbol of sun in rgyadic
days. 58 In Atharva veoda, Mahabharata, Brahma Vaivarta Purana
and Jataka-mala, there are instances of snake worship. There
was a clan known as the Naga in the pauranic age. The Nágas
were closely associated with the snakes. We are told in the
pauranic literature that a Naga king was a snake who assumed
human form occasionally. Furguson asserts that the Nágas

58. Suami Shakerananda, Rvedic culture of the Indus Valley
Civilization, p. 20.
were not originally snakes but snake worshippers. The Aryans were not the worshipper of snakes. The Kaliya Dasa episode of Srikrsna, the Barsa Satta of Jamnajaya indicate the subjugation of snake or a tribe having snake as their totem.

(iii) Snake worship in Assam and adjoining areas

The Khasia of the Meghalaya worship snake in the name of W-Khler. Human blood is essential for the worship. Some Khasi family pet snakes and they believe that the snakes are the custodian of wealth. Such beliefs are in vogue in Assamese society too. They believe that some valuable metals kept underneath by some spirit are protected by the snakes. The Manipurie believe that their forefather Pakhamba appears in the guise of a snake. The Hajangs worship snake for removal of disease and other omens. The Rabhas once propitiate snake living in the cave by sacrificing human child. There is still Alankar Puli in the western part of the Goalpara region.

C. Snake and tree worship

Close association of serpent worship with that of

tree has been discussed by western scholars like Ferguson and Vogel. In Southern India snake worship is performed under a piple tree by constructing a snake idol either of clay or of stone. It is their belief that a barren woman becomes mother after propitiating the snake. In West Bengal and Assam snake worship is associated with a tree called *Siju* (*Cactus Indica*). Stone carved *Siju* tree is discovered in Bodo dominated areas of Assam and West Bengal.61 There are similarities between the hoods of the snake and the branches of the *Siju* tree. It is noted that the branch of *Siju* tree is essential for *Manasā Puja* in Assam.

D. Some popular beliefs in regard to snake in Assam

The snake is a cruel, dreadful and venomous reptile. Some popular beliefs and superstitions centre round the snake. There is a folk tale that a girl was married to a snake. A snake was born of human womb in the family of the Mouzadar of Changa Mouza of the District of Barpeta. Matting with snake is still a talk of the villagers. There is still a belief that the snake sucks the breast of a woman. If a towel can be placed over copulated snakes, one can subdue

one's enemy as well as overcome any calamity. If a snake passes from left to the right in time of journey to any destination, it is believed that the journey will be peaceful. Thana of Kali, Siva Manasa are protected by the snakes. Killing of snake living in the barn is a taboo to the Rabhas. There was a snake disciple of Madhavadeva, a stern devotee of Sri Sankardeva. 62

E. Origin of the goddess

Opinion differs among the scholars about the origin of the goddess Manasa. She is not a vedic deity, nor her name is mentioned in the Puranas except in Brahma vaivarta Purana and Devi Bhagavata. 63 Dr. S. Sen is of opinion that some similarities can be found in Manasī with Lakṣmī and Sarasvati of the Puranas. Another name of Sarasvati is Brahmā and Manasī too bears the same epithet. The vehicle of both the deities is the same. The tithi of Panchami is the appropriate time for propitiation of both the deities. Laksāmī bears the name of Kamalā and Manasa Padmā. Laksmī was born in the Sea and Manasā in the lake. 64 Mention is made in the Atharva veda of a Kirata girl who dug earth for removal of

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64. S. Sen, Panola Sahityar Itihās, p. 182.
pain caused due to snake bite. In the said veda saraswati is a Savara girl who had capacity of removal of pain. She was known as Taudi and phritī. Dr. Neog thinks that Saraswati is none but the Kirata girl mentioned above. In the legend of Manasā, she has been described as Jaratkaru and she was the wife of sage Jaratkaru. She is the mother of Āstika.

Jānguli is a snake deity of the Mahāyāna Buddhists. She is a Savara girl expert in snake charm and she is propitiated when somebody bitten by snake. Another name of Manasā is tātāla. Dr. Neog thinks that the name may have some connection with Tattārī of the Mahayani-Tantra. The snake deity of the Jainas is known as Paumā (Padma). Paumā or Paddā or Paumā is a popular name of Manasā in Assam.

From the above discussion, it is clear that different religious sects of India have been worshipping deities associated with the snakes. But it is difficult to come to the conclusion that the goddess is of Ṛṣiṇī or Jaina or Buddhist origin. Dr. P.K. Maity's argument seems to base on correctness when he says, "Manasā was originally a local goddess worshipped by the non-Aryans as represented by the cowherds, the farmers and fishermen, but by and by she came

to gain popularity, first among the women folk of the upper classes and then among the upper class men including the Brahmins. 67

F. Homeland of the goddess

The Manasa worship is a popular festival of Assam, West Bengal and Bihar. The devotees of the three states claim that the Manasa worship was first introduced in their own state. The claim for Bihar was raised by A. Battacharyya, D.C. Sen, B.R. Roy and others. They are of the opinion that the story was first started in Bihar and then migrated to Bengal. Another view is put forward by some scholars that the birth place of the Manasa legend originated in South India. The story of the village deity Ammarau current in south India has some similarity with that of the Manasa. Another deity Ran-Kangi or Mancama is worshipped as a snake goddess in south India. 68 Some scholars argue that the Senas of Bengal who migrated from South India had introduced the Manasa worship in Bengal. Scholars like S. Sen, A. Battacharyya etc. reject the argument as they do not find any historical

proof of migration of Manasa cult from the south. Dr. P.K. Maity argues in favour of Radha country. He argues "Thus on balance it seems probable that the cult as well as the legend and their origin in West Bengal and travelled thence to rest of Bengal Assam and Bihar where they are still popular". 69

The Manasa legend has wide popularity in Darrang, Kamrup and Goalpara regions. Besides the upper class Hindus the tribes also worship the deity with immense reverence. Dr. B.K. Barua and S.N. Sarna think that the worship of Manasa migrated to Assam from North Bengal. 70 Dr. H.N. Sarna Dalai, on the contrary, claims that the Manasa worship was first introduced in old Kamrup kingdom and spread to east and west. 71 The following points may be added in support of our claim for Assam -

(i) Stone carved image of Manasa beginning from tenth century is discovered in Assam.

(ii) Dumdami and Dujapali are two traditional cultural organisations associated with the Manasa worship.

(iii) The Jools of other parts of India come every year to Kamakhya in Kamrup for purification of snake bite charms.

(iv) Manasa is still worshipped in original form i.e. installing earthen pot and Aju tree in Assam.

(v) There are many Thana dedicated to Manasa in the tribal and non-tribal areas.

(vi) There are many place names, hills, ponds in Assam connected with the Manasa legends.

G. Manasa worship in Assam (Probable time)

Manasa legend is not based on any historicity. Some images, literature, oral traditions are the only source for determination of the time of worship of the deity. Bengalee scholars are of opinion that the worship of the deity might introduce in the 9th - 10th century A.D. in Bengal. The legend of chanda as they think, is a later addition. As regards the introduction of Manasa worship in Assam Dr. B.K. Barua and Dr. S.N. Sarma are of opinion that the probable time of the composition of Manasa literature in Assam dates back to 15th - 16th century. If we go back hundred years from the time of the literary works, then probable time may be established at 14th - 15th century.\(^72\) There is a belief in Kamrup and

\(^{72}\) B.K. Barua and S.N. Sarma., On Sit., p. 19.
Mangaldai areas that the Morias, a Muslim sect, had introduced Manasā worship in Assam. R.M. Nath has said that the Morias are of Austrian origin and had migrated to Assam from united province. "The austrian Morias of united province who came to Assam in the fourteenth century A.D. as followers of Muhammadan invaders, was introduced to the country as Haroi Devi; her stronghold being further strengthened by her introduction to Bengal probably by the Senas of the ornatic as Monosea". The Morias of Assam are Muslim by religion and are skilled in Brass-metal works. There are traditional Manasa singers among the Muslim, but they are not Morias. It would not be proper to ascertain that the Morias had introduced Manasa worship in Assam. The words Mania and matriyani are used in the Manasa literature. Those Votaries who vow to worship Manase are called Mania and the female counterpart Matriyani. The Manasa Kavya composed by Sukavi Narayana Deva is the only complete works on Manasa. The Kavya seems to compose after the 16th century i.e. in the post vaishnava period, where the names of Rama, Krishna Radha etc. are uttered very often. At that time the cult may attain wide popularity in the western part of Assam. On the other hand,

Ptanasa is nowhere mentioned in the bulk of Vaishnava literature. As such, it would, perhaps, be no wrong to conclude that the Manasa cult may gain its firm footing towards the end of 15th century.

H. Manasa Images

There is a rock carved Manasa idol at Sri Suryya hill near Goalpara town. The image of Manasa goddess, also identified as Durga by some, is a twelve armed deity cut out of a single rock. She holds weapons of different kinds in each of her hands. She is standing on a lotus with seven snakes spreading their heads like a canopy over her head. This is perhaps the singular instance of 12 armed goddess hitherto discovered in Assam. One Manasa image has been discovered near Silghat, District of Nagaon. The goddess is riding on an elephant. Another image made of brass was discovered at Guwahati. The image is of two armed having 'Parvati Mudra' on the right hand and a child on the left. The snake hoods are found over the image. Dr. Neog is of opinion that these images date back to 10th–13th century.

I. Different epithets of the Deity

Besides Manasa, the popular names of the goddess are Padma, Gangesi, Kapi, Barmani, Mara, Marai, Ietale, Hila-khali, Ghassavati, Sahura Ietale etc.

J. Manasa Poes of Assam

Mankara, Durgakara and Sukavi Narayana Deva are the three Manasa poes of Assam. They all belong to the area of our study. The works of Mankara and Durgavara have been termed as Manasa Kavya and that of Narayana Deva Suknavi Padnavati. One more oral tradition of Manasa composed in the local dialect of the Pati Rabhas of Goalpara District, has been published recently. Mankara has ended his kavya after the birth of Manasa. Mankara's description of the creation of universe is interesting one. Dr. Sen has remarked that nowhere in the Bengalee works on Manasa such story is found. The folk elements have been used abundantly in his kavya. The different godly characters have been depicted as ordinary human beings. The legend of chande is absent in this version. Perhaps in his time the legend might not gain popularity much.

Durgavara has started his kavya from describing the campawali nagar, the capital of merchant chande and ended in Baula’s return to campawali along with her husband Lakhindar and his six brothers after resurrection. Thus the works of both the poets are the complete version of Manasa episode.

The most popular poet on Manasa episode is Sukavi Narayana Deva alia "Sukrani" or Suknani. His printed work contains seven hundred forty-nine pages. Dr. S. Sen thinks that the fore-fathers of Narayana deva migrated to Assam from Radha dea and brought the Panchali of Manasa to Assam and it was Narayana Deva who re-organised the story in Assamese. Some of the Bengali critics try to establish that Nārāyana Deva was a Bengalee poet. Dr. H.N. Sarma Dalai had opined that Narayana Deva was an Assamese poet. Rather his Kavya may spread to North and east Bengal. However, at present Narayanadeva’s Kavya has wide popularity particularly in Kamrup and Darrang regions. Mayavanti Bisohari is sung by the Patil Rābhās of Goalpara and Kamrup during Bārmanī Pūjā.

78. S. Sen, op.cit., p. 233.
K. Purpose of Worship of the Goddess

According to Durgavera the following boons may be obtained after propitiating the goddess with devotion:

"Padasik pujile pratvaka bar Puli
andhaler ekeu dan gharo dhan (Bharai)
niputir putra hava sukta hava bandi
gharo ghanta pati yedi pujaya prabandhi".

"A blindman regains his eyes sight, fortune smiles, a barren woman is blessed with children and a captive is freed if Padumai is worshipped with devotion by installing an earthen pot in the house".

The following qualities may be attributed to the goddess for which she has been worshipped.

(i) A fertility Goddess

It is supposed that the snake is associated with fertility and fecundity. Manasa, being the goddess of snake has the quality of production. A barren woman gets a child if she propitiates the goddess. Sanska, the wife of Chando was blessed with sons after worshipping Manasa. In Mangaldai area a marriage like ceremony is performed by the womenfolk on the eve of the Manasa worship. Some scholars argue that installation of Chata and planting of Siju tree for worshipping
the deity are indicative of her agrarian capacity and productivity. Further, they argue that the death of Lakhindara and his resurrection after six months indicate the gap period between sowing and harvesting. 80

(ii) Curer of disease

Manasé is worshipped to avert epidemic diseases both human and animal. She is called Harai as she is the goddess of 'Hari-Paraka' i.e. epidemic. 81 Any victims of snake-bite after recovery are to worship the deity. From our own experience it is found that every year a good number of villagers of the village Garai under Palasbari P.S. had to succumb snake-bite. The villagers then used to worship the deity every year and to their utter surprise, the casualties have been minimised to almost nil.

(iii) Wealth giver

It has been mentioned elsewhere where that one can get wealth by the grace of the deity. It is believed that the snakes guard the hidden treasure. Chanda regains his cargos and other properties when he vows to worship the goddess. Even now the votaries believe that Manasé can give back the lost property.

(iv) Auspicious occasions

Another purpose of worshipping the deity is to avoid any calamity which may occur in any auspicious occasion. So in marriage, *Anna prasad* (first rice taking ceremony) and *śraddha* ceremony the deity is worshipped individually by the house-holders.

L. Appropriate time for Pūjā performance

*Rāra* or Manasa Pūjā starts from the month of *Chat* (March-April) and continues to the month of *Bhāḍa* (July-August). The suitable time for the Pūjā is the *Sankranti* day of *Śīra* and *Bhāḍa* month as mentioned in the Manasa literature.

"śhariaka antara bārīsā samavata
caridina pułibeka Śravana maṭata,
dui sankrantiṅa dui pannamī pułibā,
Pādumāi uprasanna sukhat thākiba".

"In an annual interval in the month of Śravana, worship the goddess *Pādumā* for four days. Be happy by worshipping her in the *Pancami* tithi".

M. Methods of Manasa worship as prevalent in the Area of our study

The goddess Manasa is worshipped either individually or collectively. If any misfortunes occurs in a particular family
the head of the family vows to offer Pūjā to the deity if he or she can overcome the calamity. The family must perform her worship at least for three consecutive years. In some places Manasā Pūjā is an annual festival. In the western part of Goalpara as well as among the Rābhās she is a household deity. It is to be noted that the Manasā Pūjā is prevalent only in the Lower Assam. Some variations in the methods of worship are observed in different localities of our jurisdiction which are narrated below:

(i) Darrang Region

It is the general belief that the Kośa kings of Darrang introduced Manasā worship at Darrang area. D. Sarma does not agree to this hypothesis. He thinks that the Puja was in vogue in Darrang before the establishment of Koś kingdom at Darrang. Perhaps they made the festival more popular.82 There are reasons to believe that the Kasheris are responsible for the introduction of Manasā Pūjā in Darrang as even now a dance called Kasheridance is performed in the Manasa Puja there.

The Pūjā at Mangaldai area is of three types: (i) Maju Pūjā, (ii) Ghetā Pūjā and (iii) Pratimā Pūjā.

The maju is made of either Pith or stem of banana tree. Some majus are of pyramid size (triphala) and some are

82. D. Sarma, Mangaldai Buranji, p. 67.
round like the fruit of a *dimari* tree. Round size *maiv* are six to seven feet high. Pictures of snake Beula-Lakhindar and some gods and goddesses are drawn over the *maiv*. Sacrifice of buffaloes is a must in *maiv* Puja.

*Ghata* Puja is performed by installing an earthen pot filled with water over an altar. The ghata is presumed to be the symbol of the goddess. *Pratinā* Puja or idol worship may be an imported one.

According to the duration of time there are four kinds of Puja:

(a) *EK Pariya* Puja or *Rang* Puja.

(b) *Ediniya* or *Gotā* *rang*.

(c) *Tinidiniya* or *Rangiyal* *Mārai*.

(d) *Bijuriya Mārai* (odd number, i.e. five, seven, nine days).

An altar about more than four feet long, three feet broad and one foot high is constructed out of clay. The extreme left side is decorated with red, then yellow and white colours. The left one is meant for goddess Hanuma and the other two for Dharma and Sitala. Goats, pigeons, buffaloes

are sacrificed before the goddess Manasa and white pigeons are let loose in the name of Dharma and Sitala. Five gods (Panca devata), suvecani, Asa Naga and other village deities are also propitiated by offering flowers.

It is interesting to note that an atmosphere of mock marriage prevails during the Puja days. On the eve of the day fixed for the Puja, the women go to nearby river or pond to fetch holy water in a pot called dharanar chata. The water fetched in the pot is sprinkled over the deity as if a bride is taking bathes on the marriage day.

Another important function of the Puja is the ajanjali dance and song. The ajanjali sing from the Suksham Padmavati of Narayana Deva. Even if the priest is absent the ajanjali perform the Puja by singing and dancing. They remain in the Puja place from the beginning to the end.

Deodha or Daadhani dance is an external function of the Hare Puja. The Deodha is a male and the Daadhani a female one. It is believed that the participants are chosen persons of the goddess who compands them to dance on the occasion of her worship. The Shamans can foretell the future of individual.

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society or the country. "Similar beliefs are current in Bengal and have been attested in south Indian serpent worship". The Deodha or Deodhani dances in a rustic manner. Kachari and Kashari dances are also parts of the Rare Puja at Mangaldai. Even a peculiar Pujā is offered in accordance with the Kashari custom.

(ii) Kamrup Region

There is little difference in the method of worship in between Darrang and Kamrup regions. In Kamrup the eve of the Puja day is called "Jagani" or gondha, and the day of worship bhor puja and immersion "bhahori". Megha-Megani and Kashari dance are absent here. In some places of Kamrup the Deodha is called Pinda or phora or iaki. It is believed that if a deodha is not invited to a particular place where the Puja is going to be performed, he dreams in the previous night and comes to the place crossing all hazards which he may face in his journey. At Kāmakhya, Sealkuchi, Pacariya and at Garal the Puja is performed publicly.

(iii) Goalpara region

The goddess Manasā is a very popular deity in this region. The method of worship differs from Kamrup and Darrang.

When the Puja is performed within a day it is called Ek Hake and when it continues for four days Sex Hare.

Four types of Puja are found in Sakoca areas of the region:

1. One day Hare on the Nivrtti day of Ambubasi.
2. Two day Hare beginning from the last day of the month of Asadhha.
3. Three day Hare beginning from the Sankranti day of the month of Sravana.
4. Four day Hare beginning from the Sankranti day of ghadra.

In some places the Puja is performed only on the Nag Panchami day.

The idol of the goddess is made either of mud or of Pith. The Pith made idol is known as Mandira or Haiwa or Maiu. Some Haiwa are of Pyramid size. Pictures of the goddess and snakes are drawn on it. This kind of Maiu is known as Phulabari or Impari. The Maiu is placed on a dala (winnowing tray) and offerings for the Puja such as a bunch of bananas, flowers leaves of bamboo tree, twigs of Giliu tree, orange, cucumber are also kept on the dala. Pithapuri (rice powder) is sprinkled
over the offerings. In some places of western Goalpara Mara Puja is known as Kirtan, Lakhel or Derviva and Geta Mara. In Kirtan Mara, besides a Pith made Jemari, a Haraya shata is essential. The devotees sing Hanasi song beginning from the creation of the universe to the worship of the deity by Kalabati. In Lakhel or Derviva Mara a mala, shaped like a trident is installed by the side of the Tempari. A hooded snake made of pith is placed on it. An idol of goddess Bisohari is placed in front of the Tempari. Here the songs of Padma Purana are sung from the beginning to the worship of the deity by Hasan and Hussain. A Tempari is placed in between two mala in the Geta Mara. The veteris summon all the gods and goddesses. The whole verse of Padma Purana is sung except the attainment of heaven by Neula and Lakhibarda.

The Puja performed by the women folk is called Bisohari Puja. The main object of this Puja is the welfare of the family. If any child is intimidated by snake, then Koni Bisohari is to be worshipped. A dala (bamboo tray) is required to propitiate the deity. In some places it is called dala puja. The women sing in praise of the goddess and sometimes they dance.

Besides the Hindu there are some tribes of our area who are also stern devotees of the goddess.

(iv) The Kachāris

The Kachāris worship the goddess Mārai in between the month of Rohāṇ and Sīon on dark half-moon night. A buffalo, a pair of Pharīna (grass-hopper), a pair of sīva fish and a pair of hens are sacrificed. Betel leaves and areca nuts, fruits of the season, flattened rice and cakes are offered. Children are forbidden to attend the Puja. If any devotee offers Puja he or she is to continue for consecutive three years. It is their belief that the goddess will protect them from ferocious animals, make them win the battle and will give wealth. Deodhani dance is performed in the Puja. It is believed that once human beings were sacrificed before the deity. 87 There is no image of the goddess.

(v) The Rābhās

The goddess is very popular among the Patī Rabhās of the regions. The goddess is known as Mārai or Barmāni. Even she is the household deity of some families. There are many Thane dedicated in the name of Barmāni in Rabha dominated areas. There are traditional group of ojapalis who sing and dance like those of Kamrup and Mangaldai during the performance of Puja. Deodhani dance is performed by some particular families who have been practising generation to generation.

Baraani Puja among the Rabhas is held from the month of Phagun to Sapon. When the Puja is performed within a day, it is called Phul Haral and when continues for three days Gota Harai. An altar about six inches high is made of mud. The altar is divided by a line of vermillion. Two earthen pots, one for the goddess and the other for Dharma are installed. The pots are covered with white cloths. Sacred water, coins, betel-nuts are kept inside the pots. Akheis (Rice flower) are spread over the altar. Two meji made of pith or banana stem are placed in front of the altar. The meji meant for Manasa is a decorative one and for Dharma is of white colour. Images of different gods and goddesses with their vehicles are drawn on the meji meant for the goddess. It is interesting to note that the vehicle of Brahma is Tuh (vastage of rice), that of Sarasvati is Cela and Laksmi pigeons. Goats, pigeons, ducks, coocks are sacrificed in the name of the goddess and a pair of white pigeons are let loose for Dharma. There are innumerable deities of the Rabhas. They offer flowers to these deities along with Baranii. They are Airani, Banabi, Kusi Khel, Kali Kali, Kali Khetar, Kali Dand, Kali Khel, Khukel, Khetar, Gandhesvari, Bhateesvari, Ghar Gosani, Carikhel, Candi daw, Cimon, Cimon Khetar, cuti-nuti, Jaykali, Jaydeu, Tarini, Titadeu, Thanesvari, Duwar, Dokau, Naki, Nilani, Pirau, Puwati Khetar, Biral, Ghairadeu
Bhadra Kali, Ayyalman, Jakh-Jakhin, Rakhë Kali, Ran Paoli, 
Rudra Kali, Rwaangani, Rwaarë, Son rèy, Landoa Lëna etc. 88
The ojapalis utter these names and the Deuri offers flowers. 
In some places a Garo deity called Long jera is propitiated 
on the concluding day of the Puja. He is propitiated under 
the bamboo groves by offering wine and red cocks. The ojapalis 
dance Garo dance and sing in Garo dialect. This deity is a 
malignant one.

Near Dhupdhara there is a Then called Milëkhitii She 
is not identical with Mil Gorani of the Ahoms of Nila Saraswati 
of the Buddhist. She is worshipped on the Majës tithi of 
Durga Puja by the Rabhas and the Kasar. Buffalo, cocks, 
pigeons are sacrificed. The devotees call the function as 
Phul Nëra.

(vi) Bëraghariya Gëro

The Bëraghariya, a sub-clan of the Garos who are living 
at Sonapur, District of Kamrup, worship Bisahari every fifth 
year. The Puja lingering for five days. The goddess is symbolised 
by a dëkhar (Sword). On the beginning day of the Puja an 
eartren pot filled with water is installed. The Deuri fetches 
water for bathe from the near by river. A pair of black pigeons 
is sacrificed. Another pair of white pigeons are set free in 
the name of Dharma. The last day performance is called Ganakhiya

Puja. The paraphernalia required for the Puja are a grass hopper, earth collected from the hole of rats, leaves of *Areca catechu* (supposed to be betel leaves) earth collected from the heap of earthworms (arecanuts) blade of *Bibina* plants (used as sword) and five bananas (symbolise cows). The articles required for the Puja remind us about the cowherd boys who first worshipped Manasa.

5. Dharma

Dharma cult in Assam is not strong but in our area Dharma is worshipped either as an independent deity or in conjunction with Mara Puja. But since there is a strong Dharma cult in West Bengal and North Bengal and some contiguous areas, there is every possibility of having link with Assam through North Bengal. We shall make an attempt to specify the cult prevalent in Assam later on. Now we are going to explain the cult in general and the opinions made by different eminent scholars of Bengal and other parts regarding the identity and popularity of the deity. Mahamahopadhyaya H.P. Sastri was the first scholar to draw the attention of Bengali critics as regards to the identity of the deity and his cult. While

scholars like S.B. Dasgupta is dealing with the Philosophic aspects of the cult, Dr. A. Bhattacharyya on the other hand, is dealing with the indigeneousness of the deity. Dr. Bhattacharyya opines that the original devotees of Dharma were the lower class people and the cult might have flourished amongst them.\(^90\) Later on, the cult was accepted by the people of the upper strata.

Different scholars have studied Dharma cult thoroughly and putforth their opinions regarding possible affiliation of the deity with other gods of the Hindus and the Buddhists. Now we shall discuss Dharma's affiliation with the following deities.

A. Dharma and Buddha

H.P. Sastri is of opinion that Dharma is the hidden form of Lord Buddha. The tortoise-shape dharma stupa of Bengal have similarities with the stupa of the Buddhists. Dharma is an epithet of Buddha.\(^91\) The full moon day of the month and Baishaka is the appropriate time for Dharma Puja. That full moon day is called Buddha Purnima. The myth of creation described in the Sunya Purana has resemblance with

\(^{90}\) A. Bhattacharyya, Qua. cit., p. 574.
\(^{91}\) S. Dasgupta, Obscure Religious cult, p. 262.
the Buddhist literature. The theory propounded by Sastri that Dharma is Buddha is not accepted by Dasgupta and Bhattacharyya. They are of opinion that the design of the Dharma Sīla is not always tortoise-shape in every place. Sacrifice of animal is strictly forbidden in Buddhism, where as sacrifice of animals is one of the practices of worshipping Dharma Thakur. In the liturgical works of Dharma nowhere it is mentioned his identification with Buddha.

B. Dharma and Yama

Yama, the god of death is known as Dharma ṛajā. He is the son of the sun. Dharma sits on a white abode and wears white dress. So all whiteness is one of the qualities of both the deities. Basing on the above mentioned points it would not be proper to conclude that both the deities are same. Moreover Yudhīsthira of the Mahābhārata is also known as Dharma ṛajā.

C. Dharma and Baruna

Dr. S. Sen is of opinion that Dharma was originally Baruna. He has referred to the story of Hariscandra, Sunahsapha and Rohita of "Aitareya Brahmana" which has been incorporated in the legend of king Hariscandra of the Dharma
Mangala literature. Dhavala (whiteness) is the epithet of Baruna and Niranjana (stainless) of Dharma. Baruna is satisfied when the votaries sacrifice human beings in his name. It is supposed that human sacrifice was done in the name of Dharma. Both the gods can bless one with child.  

Baruna is conceived to be water god. In the Assamese version of Manasa episode Dharma was propitiated in the water. These outward similarities of both the deities are noteworthy.

D. Dharma and Siva

In the well-known religious ceremony of West Bengal known as the Gaajana of Dharma which is the most celebrated function of the Dharmitea current even to the present day, Dharma has been frankly made Siva and the Gaajana of Dharma really means the Gaajana of Siva. In some places of West Bengal, Dharma is worshipped in the form of Siva linga. In the Assamese version of Manasa Kavya by Mankara, it is mentioned that half portion of the body of Siva is Dharma. 

Jagajjibana, a Bengalee Manasa post of the seventeenth century A.D., has described the creation of the universe in

this way. At the very outset Dharma gave birth to Siva, Brahma and Vianu. They went for meditation after their birth. Dharma being unable to bear the pangs of separation from his sons, sighed and Manasa was born out of his sigh. Dharma accepted her as his spouse. After their union Manasa fell in deep sleep. Dharma repented for his unlawful action and wanted to commit suicide. Before that he tested his three sons in the guise of a corpse and Siva succeeded in his tests. Dharma then entered the body of Siva. All whiteness is the attribution given to Siva and to Dharma.

E. Dharma and Vianu

Tortoise is an incarnation of Vianu and the Dharmaśilas are of tortoise shape. In the Dharma Mangala Kavyas, Dharma has been described as Vianu. He appears before his devotees in the form of four armed Vianu. Dharma who is propitiated along with Manasa in Assam is conceived to be Vianu. S. Dasgupta has opined that the Dharma Mangala Kavyas are of later origin and in the composition of the Kavyas, Vaishnavism flourished in Bengal. To quote him "The Dharma Mangala literature, which is now available to us is of very late origin and flourished under the sway of vaishnavism both of the Rama cult and the Krana cult; it is for this reason
that Dharma of the Dharma mangalas is mostly identified with Vignu in general and Krishna and Rama in particular." 96

F. Dharma and the Sun

Dr. A. Bhattacharyya has strongly put his argument that the Dharma cult emerged from the sun cult. 97 Sunya is an epithet of both of Dharma and the sun. Here Sunya means not the void but the shape of a zero. Lawson was able to make the sun rise in the west after worshipping Dharma, when Dharma is dissatisfied with some one, he curses him or her to suffer from leprosy and if he is contended he has the capacity of curing the disease. In the Puranas the sun has been qualified as a remover of leprosy 98 sun can cure one from ophthalmic disease, so is the Dharma Thakur. The number twelve is significant as the number is connected with Dharma and the sun. In some places of West Bengal the clay-mode images of horse are offered to Dharma Thakur by the devotees. The chariot of the sun is drawn by horses. Dr. Bhattacharyya again cited a good number of tribal people who worship the sun in the name of Dharma. 99 Thus considering the keen

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affiliation of the deity with the sun, we may safely support
the view of Dr. A. Bhattacharyya.

G. A Non-Aryan God

Dr. S.K. Chatterjee and Dr. B.K. Kakati are of opinion
that the word Dharma is a Sanskritized form of Austric word.
"It seems highly, probable, however, that the word 'dharma'
is a Sanskritisation of some Austric formation like 'dasa'
'darśa'.100 The Orao, Munda, Santal, Birhor, Ho Khariya,
Bhuyan, Bonda, Kol, Dam are some of the tribes inhabited in
the north eastern part of Bengal, who worship Dharma in
different names.101 The chief performers of the Dharma Puja
in West Bengal are the Dams. So judging the popularity of
the deity amongst the tribes, it may be inferred that the
god may have emerged from any tribal faith.

H. A Heterogeneous God

Dr. S.B. Daegupta has used the word 'heterogeneous'
in case of Dharma. He is also of opinion that different
cults of many ages have been mingled in him and that is why
he is claimed to be Buddhist, Saivite, Sakta Vaishnavite and

100. B.K. Kakati, Viṣṇuism mythe et légende, p. 121.
101. A. Bhattacharyya, Brajīt, p. 704.
so on. "The followers of the Dharma cult have proceeded a step further than the tantric Buddhists and Dharma here represents the formless Brahman of the upanisads, the Lord Siva of the Shivas and the Tantrics, Vishnu of the general Vaishnavites, Krishna of the Krsnites vaishnavas and Rama of the Ramaite Vaishnavite and again sometimes the sun-god of the sun worshippers". Dharma is the god of corns and rain. Sometimes he is described as an ox in the Puranas. Some scholars opine that the ox is the symbol of sun-shine. Even Muslim influence can not be ruled out. The epithets of Niranjana (Stainless) Nirakara (shapeless) of Dharma may have taken from Islamic philosophy.

I. Dharma Cult in Assam

Dharma cult is not so much prominent in Assam as that of West Bengal. If we take into consideration that the Dharma cult is affiliated to the sun-cult then the prevalence of the sun cult in the past may be proved from the following materials

(a) Markandeya Purana (b) Copper plate of king Indrasala
(Eleventh century) (c) History of the Buddhist by Tara Natha.

(d) Kalika Purana (e) The stone image of the sun in Sri Suryya hill (f) Sun temple at Tezpur (about ninth century) (g) Mavaoraha temple at Guwahati (h) KathapuruCharita and (i) Bare Bhuyar Buranji. We will not go into details of the sun-cult which have been discussed by eminent scholars of Assam. However, some legends and biographical works will help us to infer the prevalence of the cult. Suryyasara, the grandfather of Sri Sankardeva was born after worshipping the sun-god. 104 It is described in the Bare Bhuyar Buranji that Lakshmi Puri, daughter of Nanobhobhuyan, invoked the sun-god as her husband on the bank of the Pichol river for thirteen days. Being pleased at her prayer, the god fulfilled her desire and two sons were born of him. Even now some barren women go on fasting on Sunday (Deobar) which is the auspicious day for sun worship, for getting child. Dr. Bhattasheryya has stated that from the eastern border of Assam to the east of Madhya Pradesh the sun worship was in practice among the aboriginal tribes. 105 The above instances will prove the existence of the sun-cult in Assam. Now if we take for consideration that the sun-cult has affinity with the Dharma cult, we may proceed to gather some materials of the said

105. A. Bhattasheryya, _Prasit_, p. 691.
cult and its influence on the life and lore of the people of Assam.

There are no Dharmas Mangala Kavyas in Assam like those of West Bengal. In the Manusas literature particularly of Manakara, some references of Dharmas are found. The myth of the creation of the universe described by Manakara has resemblance with that of Sunya Purana of Ramai Pandita. The said Purana has elaborated the episode of Dharmas. Moreover it is supposed that the Purana was composed in old Assamese dialect. There is an interesting story narrated in the Kathaguru Carita that Ananta Kendali alias Madhu Bharati, an erudite scholar of medieval Assam worshipped Dharmas. Dharmas took the offerings in the guise of an ox. From the above instance we can infer that cult of Dharmas was in vogue in Assam to the days of Sri Sankardava. Moreover, the name of Kamrupa has been mentioned in Bengali Dharmas Mangala Kavyas. Lausen invaded Kamrupa and the lovely princess Kalina was married to Lausen. There is also a description of establishment of Bhakur kingdom by Ichai Ghash. This Bhakur or Bhakkar is supposed to be situated in the western part of old Kamrupa and now the District of Goalpara (old).

107. A. Bhatasharyya. Os.fit., p. 710.
There are place names such as Dharampur, Dharmatul, Dharmatala etc. which indicate the spread of the cult.

J. Dharma Worship

It has already been mentioned that Dharma is worshipped along with Manasa. There is a distinct place for Dharma on the altar of Manasa. An earthen pot containing water and twig of mango tree is installed on the altar demarcated for Dharma. The pot symbolises as Dharma phata. In some place a deadha dances standing on the pot and he sets free a pair of white pigeons. No animal is sacrificed in his name. During the Manasa Puja the ejapali summons the deity by reciting following songs:

"O Dharam Puja laur neviye devasan,
Sijho nuji Puja lau manvar bhitar,

Dharam Puja laur . . . . .

Dhavala sauna Dhavala Basama
Sunya ratho nasi cil a anadi dharam."

"O' Dharma, coming down to the manca (altar) soon and accept (our) offerings. Thy sitting place and dress are all white. Anadi Dharam is coming down sitting on his Sunya chariot."

The Patl Rabhas of our region worship Dharma in Barani Puja. The method is almost the same. Dharma occupies a special place in the Desenenya dham, a house of congregation of different gods and goddesses of West Goalpara. There is no image of the deity.

Dharma is worshipped individually in some places of Lower Assam. People belonging to the Nath (Jogi) community worship Dharma as their household deity in the name of Baetu. When any member of the family suffers from any fatal disease a packet (Tonota) containing the articles required for Dharma Puja is kept inside the house. A pair of white pigeons is set free in the name of Dharma. 110

The Rangdania Rabhas of Goalpara worship Dharma when somebody suffers from eye trouble, headache and other pain. A small cot made of reeds is placed beside a stream. A piece of cotton is tied on a reed and the reed is kept erected by the side of the cot unboiled rice, leaves of Jutal plant, burning incense are kept on the cot. Generally the Puja is performed at noon. When somebody suffers from night blindness, the Puja is done at night. In case of headache or other pain it is performed in the morning. A white Cock is then fried and taken by the patient.

The Pati Rabhas of Boko area propitiate Dharma on the eve of the first rice taking ceremony. Besides, usual articles, a white cock is let loose in the name of Dharma. It is their belief that the deity can remove all diseases both human and animals. He can bring prosperity to the society. 111

On the first half of the full moon, in the month of Kati or Durnastami day, the women of Mankachar area worship Dharma. The Puja starts early in the morning. Bananas, areca nuts and betel leaves, flattened rice, akhai and molasses are offered. The Puja is done to get rid of eye troubles, leprosy etc. There is a custom that the married couples must worship Dharma in the courtyard on the post marriage day.

K. The Possible connection of Dharma with some popular functions and festivals.

(i) Chadak, Bas or Radankim, Sonaray, Mudum are some of the deities particularly of west Goalpara who are directly or indirectly connected with Dharma Thakur. These deities are discussed in the subsequent chapters. 112

112. See ANDRA Chapter II and IV.
(ii) Niranjana and Jagannatha

Niranjana supposed to be the stainless supreme god who is propitiated in the month of Magha at Bakaitaril village of Goalpara sub-division. Another epithet of Dharma Thakur is Niranjana. Jagannatha is a deity of the Nathas of Goalpara District who is worshipped on the full-moon day in the month of Magha. This Jagannatha is perhaps not the Jagannatha of the temple of Puri. There are thana dedicated to the deity at the villages of Baguwan, Samundanga, Tiplai etc. He is the god of the universe. The deity may have some link with Dharma Thakur.

(iii) Installation of Padasilà

Installation of Padasilà in Vaishnava sattras is thought to be a later addition of the said institution. Dharma silàs are also installed and sandal marks of Paduka on the Dharma silàs are found in many places of West Bengal. The Padasilàs are inferred to be the foot-prints of Vaishnava Guru. So an indirect influence of the Dharma silàs can not be ruled out.

6. Satya Narayana

Satya Narayana who is identified with Visnu is a popular god not to speak of our area but whole of Assam
and West Bengal. Controversy arises among the scholars as regards to his identity, whether he is a Hindu deity or a Muslim Pir. His inclusion in the Skanda Purana as the scholars think, is a later addition. The Sanskrit Dictionary meaning is a deity and in local language "Pir" (devata biseeh, Piro iti bhasa). Thus the name of the deity is significant and we shall make an attempt to analyse the actual position of the deity.

A. A Composite God

Dr. S. Sen is of opinion that Satya Narayana alias Satyapir is a composite god for both Hindus and Muslims. Almost the same view is putforth by A. Tagore and Dr. D.C. Sen. If we study the social aspects, we find that the Hindus and the Muslims lived together for a considerable time and a feeling of religious tolerance, not to speak of the past but at present time, is working in the mass level. Out of this sentiment Muslim Pir 'Satya' by name, may be identified with 'Narayana' of the Hindus. Similar view is forwarded by R.N. Nath when he says "This simple form of worship passed
on to Bengal and after about a century Husain Shah found it a very simple means of religious compromise between the Hindus and the Mohammedan by naming it Satya Narayan Sini as parallel to the Mohammedan "Tesha Sini". In Assam the Puja of Satya Narayan is performed by offering 'bhoja' a mixture of five articles of equal proportion. Number 'five' is a significant number for the Muslims. Feizullah, supposed to be a poet of western Assam, has described as such:

Satyapir bolo raija sunea bangna
Kalikéa evastra su Satynáryana
hindur devaté mut musalmaé pír
ghare ghare mar námo bharil jikir.

Satyapir says "you king listen to me. I am Satya Narayana an incarnate of Kaliyuga. I am the god of the Hindus and Pír of the Muslims. Jikir is sung in my honour in every house". There is Than known as Budhi-Budhi at Jaleesvar village under Laksipur Police Station, where Satyapir is worshipped by both the communities.

Kumudananda a panchali poet in Assamese has described that the deity appeared in the guise of aditi:

\[\text{aditi beata Shambha Nārāyana}
\text{dakhiye viprara mana bhaila Prasanna}
\text{gāra bhotā yavana kirāta yena rūpa,}
\text{Sīharila nān dvija bhailā suya.}

"The Brahmin (dvija) was pleased to see Narayana in the guise of aditi. His body trembled when he saw the god in the form of garo, bhotā, yavana and Kirata." 118 The word 'Yavana' indicates the foreigner i.e. the Muslim. Again we learn from the said penchali that the god appeared before the queen of Misor in the guise of a 'Fakir' to release his devotees from captivity.

The birth legend, current in Bengal, speaks of Satya Narayana's identity as a Muslim Pir. According to one legend Satya Narayana was born of a daughter of Sultan Alauddin Husseain Sah. Some are of opinion that he was "Haque Al Halla," a famous sufi saint who proclaimed "I am truth." The Arabic word 'Haque' is the synonym of Satya. 119 Once sufism was preached in Bengal and satya Narayana may emerge from that ideology.

118. Kumudananda Saty Narayana Pancali, p. 11.
B. Affiliation of Satya Narayana with other gods

(i) Satya Narayana and Dharmaraj

We have already discussed that Satya Narayana may be Satya Pir; but for practical purposes he is now identified as one of the gods of the Hinduism. Dr. Sen has tried to identify him with Dharma Thakur, a popular deity of West Bengal and adjoining areas. He opines that Dharma Thakur of Bengal may turn into Satya Narayana or Satya Pir during the Muslim rule in Bengal. Many temples and sacred places were destroyed by the Muslim invaders. Many deities of the Hindus had to compromise with the monothestic ideology of the Islam. So, the Dharma Thakur of Bengal might be worshipped as Satya Pir by the newly converted Muslim and Satya Narayana by the Hindus. 120

The following common characteristics of both the deities may be noted:

(a) The appropriate time for the worship of both the deities is full moon day.

(b) There are no images of both the deities.

(c) Dharma is assumed to be identical with Vianu

So is Satya Narayana.

(d) There are Hindu and Muslim votaries of both the deities.

(e) A barren woman blesses with a child, the blind can regain eyesight, the poor may turn into rich and all other calamities can be overcome after propitiating both the deities.

In spite of the common characteristics mentioned above, it is difficult to ascertain that Dharma is Satya Narayana. We do not find any historical proof in regard to their merge. Moreover, Dharma is both a malignant and benevolent deity. Satya Narayana on the other hand is a benevolent deity. The votaries of Dharma generally belong to the Low-caste people whereas High Caste people of the Hindu society are stern devotees of Satya Narayana. Synchronisation may be one of the factors which may allow some scholars to think about their identity.

(ii) Satya Narayana and Viśnu

In the dhvanya mantra of Satya Narayana, the deity is worshipped as Viśnu:

"Om Satya nārāyanam devam Suśila varnam
Caturbhujam Śaṅkha sakra gāḍa padam
bengāla bimbhitaḥ."
'I pray the Satya Narayana'. thou art of white colour having four arms and holding conch, wheel, mace and lotus in thy hands and wearing banamala'.

From the above cited dhyana mantra it is clear that the deity has been conceived having all the appellation of Lord Vianu of the Puranas. The popular belief is also the same. Even the name 'Satya' is found eliminated and the Puja, in some places, is called Narayana Puja. R.N. Nath also has said that it is a simple form of Vasudeva Puja introduced by the Brahmins.

C. Assamese Pancali Posts

Nuija Bivesvara, Kumudananda, Cakrapani and Faizullah are the four pancali posts of Satya Narayana. Besides the Muslim poet, the three other posts of Assam have adopted the theme from the Skanda purana with little addition or alteration. The legends incorporated in the said Pancalis are of a poor Brahmin, a wood cutter and a Merchant. Fortunes smile to the poor Brahmin and the wood cutter after propitiating Satya Narayana. The legend of the merchant bears some significance. Biles Mahanta, the merchant went to Misore

121. G. Sarma, Satya Narayanasi Pancali (Introduction).
(Egypt) for trade in textile goods along with his handsome son Gunadhvaja. The queen of Mysore was attracted to see Gunadhvaja and expressed her love to him. Gunadhvaja refused her and as a result he had to be captivated. In the meantime, the queen was bitten by snake and Satyanarayana in the guise of a Fakir cured her. He then asked her to release Gunadhvaja and his father with their belongings.

Mohammed Faizullah, a folk singer of western Goalpara composed some songs on Satya Pir. The songs are popular among the Hindus and the Muslims. Bengali scholars claim that Faizullah belongs to West Bengal. But dialectical affinity and popularity of the song indicate that the poet was in the western part of Goalpara. 123

D. Probable time of Introduction of Satya Narayana Puja in Assam

According to R.M. Nath, a Brahmin, Narayana by name, introduced Bauddeva Puja in the North Lakhimpur area. He got a grant of eight hundred acres of land on the bank of Dheli river in 1401 from king Satya Narayana. Dr. M. Neog supports the existence of king Satyanarayana. 124 Nath thinks that

Basudeva and Satya Narayana are the same personality and the worship of Satya Narayana is a simple form of Basudeva Puja. Further, he argues that after hundred years since its introduction in Assam, the Puja passed on to Bengal. At that time Hussain Shah was the ruler and he patronised Satya Narayana Puja in Bengal. Hussain Shah ruled in Bengal in the fifteenth century A.D. If we accept Nath's view, we can infer fourteenth century to be the probable time of the beginning of Satya Narayana Puja in Assam. But his view can not be considered for (a) he has mistaken Basudeva to be Satya Narayana (b) passing on to Bengal from Assam and Hussain Shah patronised the Puja is a mere hypothesis and is not based any historical facts. On the contrary, Hussain Shah invaded Kamata kingdom in the year 1498 A.D. and since then the song of Satya Narain gained popularity in the western part of Assam. This view is also hypothetical as the Pancalis of Satya Narayana are composed in the 18th-19th century. Moreover, no where in the medieval literature the name of Satya Narayana has been mentioned. Therefore, the probable time for introduction of Satya Narayana Puja may fixed at early part of 18th century A.D.

E. Occasion, purpose and time of worship

Satya Narayana is a benevolent deity. He is worshipped on the occasion of marriage, annaprasana, Sraddha and other auspicious ceremonies. In some families he is worshipped annually to avert any calamity.

The blind regains his/her eye sight, the childless will be blessed with child, a captive is freed, the poor gets enough riches if one worship the deity with devotion.

"sandhalena imana ca kay gava evahale
durgati khanda ve gata bandhana avale". 127

The appropriate time for his worship is the Sankranti day or full moon day or any time when occasion demands. There is no specific tithi fixed for his propitiation like some other deities.

F. Method of Worship

The method of worship of Satya Narayana is simple.
The Puja is performed preferably in the evening. An earthen or brass pot is installed in the household. A twig of mango tree with leaves numbering three or five is kept inside the waterful pot. The pot is tied with a piece of thread and vermillion is put over it. 'Shoo' or a mixture of sugar, atta

127. Quoted from Kunmadananda's Satyanarayanar Pandali, p.18.
or rice powder, milk, ghee, honey and bananas of equal proportion is prepared and offered to the deity. Sometimes a priest is engaged to perform the Puja in Sastric way. Recitation of pancali, after the Puja, is indispensable. Where there is no priest, the Puja is performed by reciting Pancali by the votaries. In some places nam-kirtana is also done. The votaries are mainly male members. Satya Pir is a popular deity among the Muslim community of West Goalpara. The women and the unmarried girls propitiate Satya Pir by offering Sinni. They sing from the folk version of Faizullah or from the poetical work of Kranahari Das, a Bengali poet. They worship for getting good husbands and children. In the Budha Budhi Than at Jaleswar, there is a stone identified to be Satya pir where pigeons and goats are setfree in the name of the Pir. If the devotee desires for a daughter he/she offers a pair of pigeons and a goat for male child.

7. Suwacani

A. Indentity

Suwacani is a benevolent deity. She is a village deity of Assam and West Bengal. The main devotees of her are the women folk. In some places of West Goalpara the deity is
worshipped as SubhaCandi who is a Sastric goddess. So doubts arise regarding her proper identity. Nowhere in the Puranas her name has been mentioned. Dr. S.N. Sarma has mentioned that according to the Puja vidhi of SuvaCani, the Puja should be performed as prescribed in the Kalika Purana. But he has not found any reference of SuvaCani in the printed edition of Kalika Purana.\textsuperscript{128} In the 'dhyanamatra' of SuvaCani, one of her epithets is \textit{Inata devi}. The meaning of the word \textit{Inata} is supposed to be that the deity who confers happiness in this world. "In the SuvaCani Puja vidhi prevalent in Bengal the deity is described as having four faces and three eyes. Clad in red garment and sitting on a swan she holds a Kamandalu in her right hand\textsuperscript{129}. This characteristic resembles her with Manasa. In the Puja vidhi current in Assam she is the consort of Trilochana and sits on a cock. Some scholars want to identify with the Tantric goddess Vagisvari. Both the terms Vagisvari and SuvaCani bear the same meaning. It is not unlikely that the Tantric goddess Vagisvari may turn into SuvaCani in course of time. Some people identify her with SubhaCandi of the Purana. It may be due to the influence of the Brahmin priests who worship the deity in Sastric rites.\textsuperscript{128, 129}

\textsuperscript{128} S.N. Sarma, \textit{The Journal of Assam Research Society}, p. 108.  
\textsuperscript{129} S.N. Sarma, \textit{ibid.}, p. 108.
The word Subhasucani is used as synonym of Subacani. In eastern Assam she has been described as Kamakhya of Nilacola and Kocai Khaiti of Sadiya. She is popularly known as Huvacani or Budhi-Huvacani. She is described as an eater of raw flesh. Pigeons, ducks are sacrificed before her. Dr. L. Gogoi inferred that once cow was sacrificed. Even now an image of cow made of sugar, is offered to the deity. This Huvacani, is seemed to be the manifestation of the great mother goddess and the votaries are male members. On the other hand Suacani of Lower Assam, is propitiated by the women and no animal is sacrificed in her worship except in some rare cases where Brahmin priest is engaged only for the Puja.

From the above discussion it would not be wrong to infer that Suacani is an indigenous deity and the following points may be added in support of her indigenousness.

(i) Suacani is not a Pauranic deity as her name is not mentioned in the Puranas.

(ii) The devotees are women.

(iii) The tribes, such as, the Kacharie, the outiyas, the Ahoms, the Rabhas worship her in their popular method.

(iv) Folk songs are composed in her praise.

131. L. Gogoi, Assamar Sanskriti, p. 58.
(v) The Puja may be performed without engaging any priest.

(vi) Another popular name of the Puja in western Goalpara is 'suwa-salia' or offering of areca nuts.

(vii) Like other deities of popular belief, there are Vrata Kathas of Suvaeani

(viii) Dr. S.N. Sarma has asserted that there is no doubt about the popular origin of the deity. He has summed up with the following lines: "Considering the popularity of the deity and the prevalence of her worship more frequently amongst the tribal and backward communities and considering the absence of any reference to her in early religious literature it can be surmised that the goddess either managed to occupy a place in the Hindu pantheon only a few centuries back by casting off its tribal or primitive garb or Vagiswari, the Tantric goddess assumed a new designation Subhasini or Suvaeani by incorporating certain tribal characteristics peculiar to Assam". 132

8. Purpose of Worship

The deity is worshipped on the occasion of any

suspicious ceremony such as marriage, annaprasana, Sraddha etc. or before the head of the family leaves for any suspicious mission. In Kriens area the local name of the goddess is Subhasini and the Puja is performed especially when there is a pregnancy in the house and in general to ward off evil. In some places of east Goalpara the goddess is worshipped when a member of a family has remained untraced for several days or a cow is lost.

C. Method of Worship

There is no specific date or tithi for the worship of the deity. She may be worshipped in any day of the month. In Western Goalpara, the Puja ceremony is held outside the house in the courtyard. The Puja begins in the morning and ends in the evening. Specially married women with their husbands living are invited. A young unmarried girl takes leading part. The articles required for the Puja are areca-nuts and betel leaves, banana, vermilion, mustard oil, an earthen pot of water (Ghata) and a basket full of paddy. At the outset the earthen pot is installed on an altar. Then in front of the altar pictures of ducks numbering twenty one are drawn by rice powder (Pithaouri). The basket full

of paddy, areca nuts, banana etc. are kept on the altar. The unmarried girl after taking her bath, places qupan and other articles one after another on the banana leaves. There are seven lines of such naivedya where five naivedya are placed in each line. On the basket of paddy five earthen lamps are lit. Incense is burnt. The women then make uhu-ulu sound. At that time girl goes inside the house and bolts in. When she comes out after a considerable time, water is sprinkled over her body. An elderly woman known as Kathati tells the Vrata Katha of Subhacani. Then women put vermillion on their forehead and take qupan.

In Kamrup and Salkoca area of the district of Goalpara (old) the method of worship is a bit different from that of western Goalpara. In Salkoca a miniature pond is dug in the courtyard and the pond is filled with milk and vermillion. In Kamrup five such ponds are dug and same contents are put. One cowrie in each pond is kept. Naivedya containing fruits areca-nuts etc. are placed in front of the ponds. Red flowers and eggs besmeared with vermillion are also put in the naivedya. One religious scripture preferably the Gita is placed on a pira (small wooden stool). The scripture is decorated with flowers and vermillion. Then one of the devotees tells the Vrata katha of Subhacani. The system is prevalent.
in West Bengal too. Along with Suwacani her two associates Nabir-Mahi or Karan-Kari or in Kamrup Akelal-Sukkal are propitiated. At the end of the Vrata katha any female member of the family where the Puja is performed takes the pira on her head and whirls. In Goalpara west a goat or a sheep is sacrificed occasionally. The Muslim women of Goalpara also worship Suwacani. The deity is worshipped as an auxiliary deity in course of Manasa worship in Mangaldai area.

d. A Goddess of Fertility

The Vrata kathas of Suwacani are significant. Birth, marriage, regain of lost properties, ward off poverty and calamity are some of the direct effect of the worship of Suwacani. The paraphernalias required for the Puja and the participation of married women and virgin girls are significant. The ponds of milk mixed with vermillion, eggs etc. and worship of the deity during pregnancy may have some connection with fertility. So, we may infer the deity to be a goddess of fertility or productivity.

134. S.N. Kendal, Suwacani Vrata Katha, p. 4.
136. See Vrata Chap. X.
8. Bāō or Madan-Kām Pūjā

Bāō Puja is a socio-religious festival in general of the regions of our study and in particular to the Goalpara region. The literal meaning of the word is "bamboo worship". This worship is intimately related with Madana, the erotic god of the puranas. In some places of Goalpara the Pūjā is known as Madan-Kam or Buddha Madan-Kām Pūjā. Before discussing the identity of the deity, we shall make an attempt to explain the Bāō or tree worship and its relation with Madan-Kam.

A. Madan-Kām and Tree Worship

Madan-Kām is generally worshipped in the form of a bamboo tree. The word Madana has other meaning which indicates tree namely, Khadira, Masketha, Bekula or Damanaka. According to the Sastriic procedure, it is suggested that Madana is to be worshipped either by Damanaka tree or Salaprema or in the water. 137 "Tree worship is an old practice of the world. .... that trees considered as animate beings are credited with the power of making the rain to fall, the sun to shine, flocks and herds to multiply and women to bring forth easily." 138

Some trees such as Tulasī, Bata, Ahata are recognised as sacred trees. Ordinary people pour water or milk on the roots of certain trees. They think it to be a pious act and believe that the spirits who haunt on the trees will fulfill their desires. The Kacharis worship Biju tree as a symbol of their god Bathau, passing of water on certain trees and using certain trees as fuel are strictly forbidden. Bamboos are grown abundantly not only in this region but whole of north-eastern region. Its production is multiplied year by year. It is very essential to the agrarian society. It is long and having no big branches. It is compared with one’s own brother in the Assamese folk song. At the order of Madana, Mālagirī went to Brahmā to learn the art of producing bamboo. Brahma instructed him to worship Vīnu. Mālagirī was successful in producing different varieties of bamboos. Thus bamboo is preferred to other trees as a symbol of Madan-Kam.

B. Madana, a pauranic god

Madana is not a vedic deity. Mention is made of him in few Puranas. His other epithets are Manmatha, Kama.

Kandarpa, Pradunanya etc. He is described as a god of erotic sentiment in Siva Purana, Skanda Purana, Kalika Purana, Padma and Bhagavata Purana. He has five arrows of flower which are used to rouse the sentiment of eros among the creatures. One popular episode is described in almost all the puranas mentioned above, that Madana breaks the meditation of Siva. Siva became angry at this action of Madana and burnt him into ashes by his divine power. At the sincere devotion of Rati, the wife of Madana, Siva was contended and Madana regained his new life. But he will have to live as amanna (formless). The episode has a wide popularity in Assam as the place of occurrence is supposed to be in old Kamrupa.

According to Bhagavata Purana Madana is the son of Srikrana and Rukmani. After ten days of his birth he was stolen by Sambasaraura and thrown him into the sea. Then he was swallowed by a big fish. A fisherman caught the fish and presented it to the king Sambara. The cook found a human baby in the stomach of the fish. The baby was then given to Mayavati alias Rati to bring him up. His wife Rati who was captivated by Sambara was happy to have her husband. Ultimately Madana killed the Asura and went to Dwarka along with his wife Rati.

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In this purana he is described as Pradunnya.\textsuperscript{141}

According to Pancaratra, a sect of Vaishnava School, Pradunnya is one of the presiding deities of the four 'bhutas'. He is the presiding deity of wealth and power. He is Brahma, the creator. He is the god of mind or intelligence.\textsuperscript{142}

Some scholars try to identify him with the sun. The vehicle of Madana is a fish (Makara). The fish is interpreted as the sun. Madana was born of a fish and fish is Prajapati or Brahma. Pradunnya is the mental issue by Brahma. Brahma is one of the epithets of the sun.\textsuperscript{143}

C. Radanotsava and Meli or Dauletswa

Radanotsava was a popular festival in India. Madana travodees or Caturdasi which falls in the month of Chaitra is the fixed date for the Puja of Madana. D.R. Sastry, W. Crooke etc. have given vivid description of the popularity of Radanotsava. All sections of people irrespective of caste and creed participated in this festival. In this connection the following lines may be quoted. "The Lokayatikas were a

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{141}] Bhagavata Purana, Canto X, pp. 1090-92.
\item[\textsuperscript{142}] S.N. Dasgupta, \textit{SriRadhar Kramabikas darasana D Sahitya}, pp. 32-33.
\end{itemize}
creed of joy, all sunny. Through their influence at that period of Indian history, the temple and the court, poetry and art, delighted in sensuousness. Eroticism prevailed all over the country. The Brahmin and the Chandala, the king and the beggar, took part with equal enthusiasm in Madanotsava, in which Madana or Kama was worshipped .... As a reaction against this practice of sexual romance, vaishnavism made its appearance and the Madanotsava festival was replaced by Dolotsava. From the above quotation of the eminent scholar, it is clear that Madanotsava was a popular festival and was full of eroticism. It is also to be noted that Daulotsava replaced Madanotsava for its sexual romance. Even now we cannot ignore the sexual romance as described in the folk song of Madan-Kam and the dance performed on the occasion of his Puja. But it is difficult to ascertain that Daulotsava replaces Madanotsava. Madana is regarded as a son of Srikrsna by the Vaishnavites. Madan-Kam puja is not totally forbidden by the masses. The Puja is performed in some parts of North Bengal and Lower Assam enthusiastically.

D. The cult of Madan-Kam prevalent in Assam

The subject has not been discussed much by the scholars up till now. There is a hill known as Madanacala or Madan-Kama

144. D.R. Sheatri quoted by D.P. Chottopadhyay, Lokavata Darshana, p. 447.
or Divangiri at about a distance of twenty three kilometers north of Guwahati. On that hill there are some relics of a temple which is supposed to be the temple of Madan-kama. In the *Jogini Tantra* mention is made of Madanacala and observance of *Madana Trayodashi* festival. It is the popular belief that the images found at the hillock are of Madana and Rati. Now-a-days the images are worshipped in Sataric rites by the Brahmin priest. There are one hundred and eighteen bighas of land in the name of the temple. Durgavara, a poet of medieval Assam, has given a description of *Madana Caturdasi* festival in his *Giti Ramayana*.

E. Methods of Bāś Pūjā Performance

Bāś pūjā is held generally on the trayodashi or Caturdasi day of the month of *Chaitra*. The day must be moon light. On the previous day of the Puja the devotees go on fasting. One of the votaries cut a straight bamboo uttering some song. Then the bamboo is made clean by cutting its twigs and thorns. The bamboo is sprinkled with water. It is decorated with cloths, Yauka, flowers etc. In some areas of Goalpara District

146. Durgavara. *Giti Ramayana*, p. 16.
the decorated bamboo is believed to be god Madan-Kam or Budha Madan-Kam when the deity is supposed to be Madan-Kam, fishing tools like jäkai and khālai are tied on the pole. In some places three poles are used. One for Madan-Kam, one for this his wife and the other for Budha Madan-Kam. The Puja functions very place to place. In some places of West Goalpara the Puja is associated with goddess Kāli and she is worshipped as Chief deity. Sometimes other deities such as Budha Madan, Bhagavati, Cenap Madar, Püla Thakur, Keka Khāitti, Kajalmati, Sitalā, Svāmā Kāli, Pūrakāli, Asta Kāli, Jagannātha, Naouri, Muturi, Khudi Khāl, Thakurani etc. are propitiated along with Madan-kam. Sri D. Baruah has described that a deadhali is essential in Bas Puja in some places when it is worshipped in Sakti method. The deadhali sings songs, made shamanastic dance and utters some mantras. The devotees imagine that the deadhali himself represents the deity itself. At that moment the bamboo meant for a particular deity is erected. This bamboo is called dhāndil. In this manner four or five bamboo are erected in three days. Perhaps this sort of performance is mainly connected with the goddess Kāli and the Bas Pūjā may be a synchronisation with the Kāli Pūjā. 147

147. D. Barua. Śaṅkī grantha, Bongaigaon Session, Assam Sahitya Sabha.
In the southern bank of Goalpara the deity is known as Gopāl. The songs are associated with Madan-Kām and his birth story is narrated. In the south east part of the District of Goalpara, the Krsna legend from his birth to killing of Kansa is narrated. Sometimes Kangabodha play is enacted. The deity is worshipped by offering balls of powder rise mixed with milk, hemp and sugar.

F. Purpose and Participants of the Puja

The main purpose of the Bas Puja is to get rid of epidemics, to have children, to have good production welfare of the village. Sometimes the householder of a particular house vow to offer Puja and Puja may be performed at any time of the year.

The main votaries are the male members of the village. People belonging to different castes and creed participate in the function. Yet, the Rajbansis are very enthusiastic. The devotees who are closely connected with the performance of the Puja are known as deogh, deuri, Paityal, bhandara, dhalua, Nemati etc. Those who dance by taking bamboo poles in their hands are known as baaluwa.

G. A Symbol of Phallus

It has already been mentioned that the tree has
connection with the fertility cult. There is a belief in some places of Assam that when two trees are got weded one with the other, a barren woman may get a child. Pouring of water or milk at the root of a tree may signify productivity. Bamboos may suppose to be the symbol of Phallus for its size and power of multiple productivity. Dr. B.K. Datta is of opinion that eroticism is directly connected with the Madan-Kam or Bas Puja. The using of fishing tools in the Madan-Kam Puja, may be inferred to be the symbol of sex organs. Moreover, some obscene songs are sang and dance is performed.

From the philosophic point of view, Krishna and Radha are Kama and Madana. The meaning of the word Kama is 'love' which attracts the lover i.e. 'Rasa'. Madana means the reason which cause the sentiment of 'Love' i.e. 'Rati'. Thus Rasa or 'Kama' is the hero and 'Rati' or 'Madana' is the heroine of the universe.

M. Some relevant functions connected with the Bamboo worship

Bhathali, Dehar, Parowa tale, Bahbiya Sorli or Sunari are some of the functions observed in the Kamrup region which are connected with the bamboo. The 'Deul' at Mangaldai

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150. See Supta Appendix - 'A'. 
region is also notable.

9. Trinātha

A. Identity of the deity

The literal meaning of the word Trinātha is three lords i.e. Brahma, Viṣṇu, Maheśvara. The word may also convey the meaning of the lord of three worlds. But in the Pancali of Trinātha, the word is used to recognise the trinity of the Hindu pantheon. The devotee prays:

"मो न श्रद्धार्य नामात्र प्रणाति सत्यिः

क्रोन कर्म क्रोः साव तुम देवी साव

ब्रह्म विष्णु माहेश्वर क्रियारूढः श्रीस्वरा

वेषभवे हृद एतां क्रो तन्म क्रियाह"

"I am a fool I do not know how to worship you. Bless me oh Lord, you are the combined god of Brahma, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara". 151

Dr. H.K. Sarma has observed that the conception of Hindu trinity was prevalent in Kamrupa at the time of composition of Kalika Purana (11th-12th century). He has also mentioned that as Siva was more prominent at that time, so he occupies an important place among the trinātha group of deities. He has not ruled out the possibility of evolution of Trinātha out of this concept. 152

Some scholars try to connect Trinatha with the three preceptors of the Nāthas, namely, Minanātha, Geroksanatha and Jalandharinatha, who in course of time merged into one deity i.e. Śiva. The Nāthas claim themselves to be the descendants of Śiva or Ādinātha. So, the worship of Trinātha might be introduced in Assam by the Nātha community who migrated to Assam probably in the second half of the twelfth century A.D. But the worship of Śiva or Trinatha is not confined only among the Nātha community. Other sections of people belonging to the Hindu community propitiate the deity.

Another view is forwarded by Dr. G.N. Das that Matsendra-nātha, Geroksanātha and Satya Nārayana have become Trinatha or Trailokyapīṭa in West Bengal. He has observed some similarities in the worship of Trinātha with that of Satya Nārayana. The full moon day is the appropriate day for the worship of both the deities. In Kamrupa Trinātha is also offered the same bhojan as it is offered to Satya Nārayana. Satya Nārayana appears to be the manifestation of Viṣṇu, so is of Trinatha. The Vaisnavas of the Śehāra sect, especially participate in the worship of Trinatha and they sing song and take pana. According to the pencai of Mahesh Das (Bengali version) Trinatha is a manifestation of Viṣṇu. Some Bhattacharyya

of Baranghali village under Nalbari sub-division, has composed one *pencali* of Trinātha. The *pencali* of Bhattacaryya has striking similarity with that of Mahes Das.

From the above discussion, it is observed that the different scholars have tried to identify the deity with Śiva, Viṣṇu and Satya Nārāyana. It is difficult to ascertain whether Trinātha is a single deity or a combined one. Some devotees interpret that *tīla* of hemp offered to the deity symbolises Śiva, the earthen lamp Brahma and areca-nuts and betel leaves Viṣṇu. Dr. G.N. Das opines that Trinātha is a local god though his *pencali* is composed on Brahmanical thought and ideology. Further, he thinks that the probable time for evolution of Trinatha worship in Bengal may be in the later part of fifteenth century or early part of sixteenth century. A.D. 151 In Assam, the same Pūjā may evolve sometime after sixteenth century.

8. Methods of Worship

Trinatha is worshipped in some places of Rangia and Nalbari sub-divisions and eastern part of Goalpara region. The method of worship is simple. An earthen or a brass made

The ghata is to be installed either in the courtyard or inside the house of an individual family who vow to offer Puja. The ghata should be filled with water. A twig of mango tree with leaves, coins numbering three, flowers etc. are to be put inside the ghata. Three pairs of areca-nuts and betel leaves are kept before the ghata. Three incenses are burnt. A cilia of hemp is also offered. The devotees then recite the Panchali of Trinatha. The Puja is performed at night and the votaries are mainly male members. No Brahmin priest is engaged. There is no specific time for the Puja but the full moon night is generally preferred. In some places bhoog is also offered and the number of articles must be three. The Puja is performed individually by inviting votaries from other families of the village.

The purpose of the Puja is to avoid all calamities which may occur in the family. It is mentioned in the Panchali that a patient ailing from any disease is cured, the blind regains eye sight, the lame is alright, the deaf can regain his hearing if Trinatha is worshipped with due regards.

C. Than of Trinatha

There is a Than known as Tripura or Trinatha at a village called Lela about forty kilometre east of Goalpara. 
town. The Than is situated on a hillock. There are three rocks representing Oudhkonar, Phul Konar and Tripura or Trinatha. The rock dedicated in the name of Trinatha is the biggest of the three. In the months of Jeth and Kati Trinatha is worshipped by offering Hanu-P拉萨ad, leaves of bel tree, flowers mahben, banana etc. Milk and water is poured on Oudh Konar and flowers, water etc. on Phul Konar. The votaries are Rajbansia. They worship the deity for the welfare of the villagers and for good harvests.