CHAPTER III

FOLK DEITIES PECULIAR TO THE KAMRUP AND DARRANG REGION

In the previous chapter we have discussed some of the deities common to the area of our study. In this chapter we shall discuss some deities who are localised either in a particular village or within the region. The region was under one political unit for a considerable period. Some common factors may be found from social, cultural and dialectical points of view in the region of Kamrup and Darrang. However, in names and method of worship, local variation is evident. Therefore, deities have been discussed under two sub-sections i.e. A. Deities peculiar to Kamrup and B. Deities peculiar to Darrang.

A. Deities peculiar to Kamrup

1. Ukni Budhi

Ukni Budhi or Barat Pujä is confined only in Nalbari and Rangia sub-divisions. The votaries are women of the upper caste Hindus, particularly, the Brahmans. The Pujä is held in the months of Jeth and Ahir. The functions of the Pujä starts three days ahead of the Sankranti day of the month of Jeth.
and continues to the third day of the month of \textit{Ahir}. On the first day of the function, the woman who vows to offer Puja goes to the nearby river or pond wearing an\textit{ka\textsuperscript{2}\textsuperscript{a} kat\textsuperscript{2} k\textsuperscript{a}gar}. She takes in her hand a \textit{pira}, a \textit{tomi}, and a knife. Then she sinks in the water thrice and brings mud from underneath the water. The other votaries make \textit{ulu-ulu} sound at that time. The mud is then placed over the \textit{pira}. Keeping the \textit{pira} on her head, the votary along with other participants, comes back home and places the \textit{pira} at a particular place of the courtyard. Then earthen lamps are lit, incense burnt and a \textit{paivdvi\textsuperscript{a}} is placed before the \textit{pira}. Then five varieties of corns viz., paddy, black gram, \textit{pun}, mustard-seed and \textit{Khicari} are scattered over the \textit{pira} containing mud. Seasonal fruits numbering two of each variety are kept on the \textit{pira}. The \textit{tomi} and the knife are also kept there. The votaries, sprinkle water over the \textit{pira} everyday by making \textit{ulu-ulu} sound. On the \textit{Sankranti} day of the month of \textit{Jath} the fruits are replaced by new ones. The \textit{pira} is supposed to be the deity itself.

On the third day of the first week of the month of \textit{Ahir}, the last function of the Puja is performed. The deity is then put over another \textit{pira} and a banana leaf is kept in front of the \textit{pira}. Three idols two of which are made of \textit{Pitha\textsuperscript{a}guri} and the remaining one of turmeric powder. The idols
are placed on the banana leaf. The idol made of turmeric powder symbolises Sāvitrī and the other two Satyabāna and his son. The idol of Sāvitrī is placed in between Satyabāna and his son.

One expert woman known as nāmati uta begins to tell Vṛata kathā and the votaries offers flowers and Vermillion to the deity. Ulu-ulu sound is repeated by the other invitees. After the Vṛata kathā is over, the nāmati sing devotional songs with elapse. The Pūja ends in the evening. Then the Pīta and the idols are immersed in the water. Prasad is distributed among the participants.

The purpose of the Pūja is to avert all calamities of the family which may occur during the year.

There are three Vṛata kathā such as Sāvitrī and Satyabāna, Dāyu and Bāyu and Bāmunani and Bāsicari.

The Vṛata kathā of Sāvitrī and Satyabāna (not the Pauranie) is interesting one. Sāvitrī was the daughter of a Brahmin. She was very beautiful and pioues. She possesses some supernatural powers. Every day a golden flower was oozing out of her mouth. Hearing the beauty and miracles, Satyabāna, son of another Brahmin married Sāvitrī. Curiously enough, after her marriage she failed to produce golden flower as she lost her virginity. After sometime, a male baby was born. The
father-in-law of Savitri wanted to test her and she had to undergo five tests. The tests are (a) her son was kept hiding and she had to find him out, (b) The baby was offered to a tiger and Savitri had to save him from the jaws of the animal, (c) the baby was throwing into water and Savitri had to save him from drowning; (d) Savitri had to kill her son by washing and (e) had to cook the flesh of her dead son. Savitri was successful in all the tests by propitiating ukni Budhī. The tale of Dāyu and Bāyu is connected with wealth and that of Bānumani and Bāiḍeri with health.

Dr. N.P. Bardalai has identified ukni Budhī with Banadurga.¹ The Banaduraga Puja is performed after the Durga Puja in Koo Bihar district of West Bengal. The method of worship is also not the same. Ukni Budhī Puja is held during the bhumidaha period which is called Sath in Assamese. So it would be premature to identify ukni Budhī with Banadurga.

From the functions and Vrata Kāthas discussed above, the following points may be noted.

(a) Bringing of mud from the underneath (b) the five varieties of corn and its seedlings (c) the test and knife and vermilion, (d) the golden flowers oozing out of Savitri

(a) the three idols etc. The bringing of mud from the underneath of water may indicate the mother goddess Lakṣmi who came out of water in time of churning the sea by the gods and the demons. Or it may indicate the mother earth which was brought over from the netherland by Viṣṇu in his incarnation as the boar. Lakṣmi is also identified as earth. The number five is significant to Lakṣmi and five varieties of corns are germinated in ukṣi Puja. Corns are the symbol of goddess Lakṣmi. Eminent scholar A. Tagore has observed that some seeds of different varieties of corns are kept in front of the altar of goddess Lakṣmi on the day of her worship. Further he observes that three idols of Lakṣmi, Narayana and Kuvera are made. The three idols of ukṣi Būdhī Puja which are of white and yellow are notable. The white may signify seedlings of corns which are initially white in colour and the yellow (turmeric) ripened paddy or other corns. The ākāl, the knife, the bangle and vermillion are inferred to be the symbol of fertility. Some local marriages (marriage performed without priest) of the Hindus are performed by exchanging ākāl and knife. The golden flowers oozing out of the mouth of Savitri may signify the golden crops. Thus from the above discussion

2. See infra, Chapter II.
3. A. Tagore, Bandal Vrata, p. 22.
we may infer that ukni Budhi may be identified with the corn goddess Lakṣmi.

According to Dr. H.K. Sarma the meaning of the word ukni is "an old woman with lice". We do not find any relation with lice in ukni Puja performance. The Assamese word for lice is okani or okni, not ukni. On the other hand, we may infer two probable sources for the word ukni. The Assamese verb root uk, the meaning of which is to vomit; "uk-di" to relapse. As the seedlings are coming out of the mud, so uk + ani 7 ukni means something produced. The other source may be um + ani 7 umani 7 umni, ukni. Heat is definitely essential for production. Another name used for ukni Budhi Puja is Barat Puja. The devotees observe some vrata for seven days.

In conclusion we may think that ukni Budhi is an indigenous deity of the said places and her identification with corn goddess Lakṣmi may be inferred.

2. Aśan or Āhan Patā Nām

Aśan Patā nām or Āhan Patā nām is a religious function observed by the women of the Malbari area. The function is performed at day time in the courtyard of a family. For the

purpose a Píra is required. A Phulén ommeg is spread over the Píra and a manuscript of the Bhagavata Purana is kept on it. The chief votary after taking the píra on her head whirls thrice or five times. Other women at that time dance. Some light songs are sung. At the end of the function, the woman who first took the píra on her head again whirls three or five times. In the songs small symbols are played. Chanting the name of 'Hari' and making ulu-lu sound the function is closed. Mah-Praya is distributed among the participants. It is a yearly function and welfare of the villagers as well as individuals is desired.

In upper Assam the function is known as Āsan Pata Sabāh. When small pox breaks out in a family the Āsan Pata Sabah is performed. The Cutiyas perform the function by offering curry prepared with flesh of duck and rice powder. Páyana and naivedya containing fruits, flowers etc. are also offered. The women devotees sing the songs of Āj in her praise.5

We do not find any similarity between the functions performed in our area and upper Assam except the name. In upper Assam it is purely the worship of Sitala while in Malbari it is the worship of Vianu. Because in the Vaisnava system of prayer a copy of religious scripture such as the Bhagavata or the Gita is kept on a bata in front of the

5. N. Berdealal, On Cit., p. 84.
devotees. The sacred scripture is regarded as the image of Lord Vianu. In Assan Pata nam the deity whom the devotees worship, is perhaps Lord Vianu.

3. Apacara Nam (Sabah)

Apacara Nam or Sabah is purely a woman function. When a child is suffering from epilepsy, senselessness, anaemia, deformities in hands or legs, the ordinary people think that the cause of the disease is the evil sight of the Apacara. In local language it is called worali lathā. In upper Assam, the Apacara Sabah is performed when somebody suffers from mums, non-attainment of puberty in time or epidemic disease. It is believed that the Apacaras are gossiping on the sky at noon and when any child walk over their shadows which fall on the ground, then Apacaras do harm to the child. Then the mother or any relative of the victim vows to offer Puja or nam to the Apacaras. The appropriate time for the Apacara nam is at noon.

The function is held in the courtyard of the diseased. At first, the courtyard is cleaned by sprinkling water mixed with cow-dung. On the east of the courtyard a particular place is selected for the nam. Three circles are drawn from the same
The boundary line of the first circle is marked by Vermillion, the second by flowers and the third one by pithaauri. On the left side of the circles nine naivedyas are placed for the Apecaras. An asana is prepared on a pira. A piece of white cloth is suspended over the asana. Comb, mirror, scented oil, bungle, vermilion and phunupa are put in the asana. On the right side of the circles two artificial ponds are dug so that the Apecaras can fetch water. Two artificial paths of vermilion are made to enable the Apecaras to go to the ponds. Three chatera full of water are installed and mango leaves are kept inside the chatera. Vermillion marks are given on the chatera. Then three or five virgins sit on special seats after wearing new clothes. A big lapi is suspended over the virgins to protect them from the sight of the Apecaras. Then the virgins are worshipped by offering naivedyas and burning incense and resins.

The votaries sing traditional song known as apecara Sabāhar nā with devotion. After the nā–Kirtana is over, the patient pays pranama to the virgins and they in return bless the patient wishing immediate removal of the disease. The nāmati go on fasting till the end of the function. The girls known as Kumāra are well fed and dakeina is paid to them.

The word Apecara or Apacari is the corrupt form of the Sanskrit word Apasvari (Apa + īsvari) i.e. evil goddess. As the
is doing harm to the children, so she is Apecari. The identity of the deity is doubtful. Whether she is a single deity or the juxtaposition of different deities is a question to be discussed. The worship of the virgins remind us the Kumari Puja of Kamakhya dhana. The folk songs of Apecari justifies the power of mother goddess Durga. Mentions of Suvaacani and Sitala have been made in some songs. 6 Jagat ironi sita (mother of the universe) Narayani are some of the epithets of Apecara. The Apecaras are of nine sisters. They comedown to the earth by the Ākasi Yān which is narrated in the folk song in this way:

āi apecari tennār na bhani ākāse śhile căl
bimāne śhite nāri śhila nara manicēr thēl

"Mother Apecari with her nine sisters was looking from the heaven. She comes down to the place of human beings by the vehicle of air".

The nine sisters of Apecara may be the nine sisters of Sitala. Thus Apecara is a deity in whom Sitala, Suvaacani Durga have been juxtaposed. Moreover, she is a malevolent deity.

6. H.K. Sarma, Assamiya Lokasiti Senchavana, p. 82.
4. **Kumārī Pūjā**

Kumārī Pūjā or the worship of the virgin is a peculiar function observed at Kāmakhya ritually and other places of the Dist. of Kamrup without any Sastric rites. The Pūjā may be performed at any time of the year; though it is noticed that it is performed on the closing day of the Amubager which is supposed to be the menstruation period of the mother earth. In some places the Pūjā is performed along with the Durga Pūjā festival.

The method of worship at Kāmakhya is that a minor daughter of a Pānde (Pilgrim's guide) is idolised as the virgin goddess. She is neatly dressed and be seated on a Pītra. The offerings such as pulse, fruits, husked rice, sweets scented oil, comb, mirror, vermilion mehndies leaves etc. are placed in front of the virgin. Cloths, ornaments, flowers, garlands, are also kept. A little water is poured on the feet of the girl by an Aroha (Copper spoon). The musical instruments such as drums, cymbal, are played. After the end of the worship the votaries bow down at the feet of the virgin. The virgin in turn blesses the votaries. Then the virgin is fed well and paid Dakshina. The votaries believe that they will be blessed with sons, wealth, land and other desired objects if the virgin is worshipped.
In some places when some one is suffering from pox or eye trouble or fever it is vowed to offer Pūjā to the virgin and accordingly odd number of virgins such as three, five or seven are engaged and worshipped with due reverence. The patient offers Pāyasa and areca nuts and leaves to the girls and at the end they are well fed. This Puja is perhaps the local form of the virgin Pūjā of Kamakhya dham.

In the Kalika Purana the virgin goddess is called Tripura. "The goddess was called a virgin (Kumari), because she was her own mistress and by virtue of her own independent status (Sva-Svatantryavasena) created the universe according to her desire. In this context, a virgin does not convey the modern meaning of chaste, unspotted; it means unwed, unmarried, and thus free from anybody's control. But it is noticed that those girls who have not attained their puberty are preferred as Kumari. Dr. Kakati has given some instances of the practice of the virgin worship among different tribes of the world. Particularly he had cited some example of the virgin worship in vogue in the Southern India. It may be inferred that the virgin worship is an old practice and it has entered into the Sastras in later period.

It is difficult to ascertain the probable time of introduction of worship of the virgin goddess in Assam. Dr. H.N. Sarmadali is of opinion that the Puja of the virgin may have originated in between eleventh and fourteenth century A.D. 8

5. Āila or Aula Puja

Āila or Aula Puja is performed on Navami or Daśamī day of the Durga Puja in Nalbari and Barpeta areas of the Dist. of Kamrup. In Barpeta area the Puja is known as Devi Puja. In Nalbari area the Puja is performed on the Navami tithi of Devi Pekaa. The votaries are mainly the unmarried grown up girls. On this occasion a good number of bamboo torches are lighted and the goddess Durga is worshipped by the girls at night. The chief object of the worship is to get good husbands and to be a good weaver.

The votaries make a square-size altar in a courtyard of a particular family or in congregational prayer house. The altar is decorated with a diagram (mandala) varieties of flowers and coloured papers. Four banana plants are erected on the four sides of the altar. Jasmine flowers and cotton threads are hung over the banana plants. A māiju made of plantain barks is placed on the altar. The māiju is of

palanquin size and well decorated. An image of goddess durga is placed on the Maju. A naivedya of rice, banana, grams etc. is offered in the name of the goddess. Incense, resins are burnt.

Weaving tools like Yatex (spinning wheel), Neethani (Cotton gin) etc. are also collected. The votaries abstain from taking anything on that day. The Puja starts in the evening and continues till morning. The votaries sing song in praise of the goddess and perform some works of weaving. A piece of cloth is woven during the night and the same is offered to the goddess in the morning. At the end of the function the image is immersed in the nearby river or pond.

The method of worship is a bit different at Barpeta area. There the devotees plant a banana tree and vermillion mark is put on it. An image of the goddess made of banana is installed under the banana tree. A black arum bush is planted under the loom where an earthen lamp is lighted. Here the votaries are unmarried girls. It is their belief that on the day of immersion the goddess spends the night under the black arum bush. The goddess comes to her mother's house along with two sister-in-laws. One of them loves the goddess and the other one dislikes her. The disliking one complains that the goddess has taken fish, meat etc. and the liking one refutes
her by saying that the goddess has taken only the rice made of lily flour fruit and alkaline mixed jute leaves. During the worship a piece of cloth is erected as screen as if the disliking one does not see the goddess. Then the votaries sing devotional songs. They also believe that if somebody worship the goddess on that particular night, the goddess will be pleased and will bless them with whatever they desire. No Brahmin priest is engaged to perform the ceremony.

Dr. H.K. Sarm is of opinion that the word Āila is a corrupt form of ārīvā derived from skt. "andika" (meaning fix pit). As a good number of bamboo torches are lit on the occasion, so it may be possible. The Navami Pūjā of Durga is called Āila-suita Pūjā in some places as sacrifices are made haphazardly on that day.

6. Mal Gosain

Mal Gosain is a peculiar deity of Sonapur-Khetri portions of the District of Kamrup. The deity is symbolised by a stick of wood. There is a than dedicated in the name of the deity near Khetri. There are two deities known as Budhā Māl and Gorakhiyā Māl. Gorakhiyā Māl is propitiated

9. H.K. Sarm, Dr. cit., p. 4.
every year by the cowherd boys and the Budha Mal generally at an interval of every fifth year. There is a custom that the Tiwa go to the nearby hill to catch crickets in the month of April-May. After catching, the heads of the insects are removed and brought home in a Koral. The year in which the number of the insects increases, that particular year is selected to propitiate the deity. The Puja is held in the month of April-May. The devotees do not take rice three days ahead of the specific day for the Puja. They live on fruits only. Then they go in a batch to the nearby hill or jungle to construct a cot of bamboos. It is interesting to note that they tie the knots of the cot by tanaal using their left hands. The cot is decorated by four garlands of red jabe flower. Curiously enough, the garlands are made without using any thread. Four naivedyas containing gram, rice, fruits etc. are kept in the cot. A kadiil is also put on the cot. Five or seven pairs of white pigeons are kept hanging putting their heads downwards. After the decoration, a peculiar Puja known as Khara (Perhaps drought) is performed by offering twelve naivedyas. The devotees then utter 'Hari bol' sound and it is their belief that the cot raises without any support. Then four or eight strong young men carry the cot to every house and collect articles from the householders. In the evening the cot is brought to the Than of Mal Gosain.
The Puja is performed to get rid of constant drought and diseases of human beings and domestic animals.

It is believed that the Puja was introduced by the kings of the Dimoriya State. They consider the deity to be the god of power, war, justice, rain, and a protector of the village.

The literal meaning of the word Mal is wrestler. It may be an indication of the worship of a wrestler who protected the villagers from any outside attack and as a reminder the stick is still propitiated. The descendants of the Darrangi king even now worship the weapons used by their forefathers on the Vijaya dashami day. They call it Dar Puja. It can be learnt from history that the kings of Dimaria were under the subjugation of the Koca kings of Darrang for a considerable period. We have reason to think that under the influence of the said kings Mal Puja might have been introduced in that kingdom. But the purpose, methods, time of worship differ from that of Darrang. Moreover the descendants of Dimariya king do not participate in the function.

It has already been mentioned that the Puja of Mal Gosain is generally performed when the number of cricket increases. In Bengali language mal ghurea is the word for cricket and by killing it people want to make an end of the drought.
Frazer has given a description of the worship of 'Pittari Penu', the god of increase and of gain by the khonds of India. They as he observes "expel the devils at seed time instead of at harvest".... on the first day of the festival a rude car is made of a basket set upon a few sticks, tied upon bamboo rollers for wheels. The priest takes this car first to the house of the lineal head of the tribe, to whom precedence is given in all ceremonies connected with agriculture. Here he receives a little of each kind of seed and some feathers. He then takes the car to all other houses of in the village, each of which contributes the same things".  

We find some resemblance between the functions of pitteri penu and Mal Gosain; but it is difficult to connect each other.  

Now-a-days some people want to identify Mal Gosain with Pakhla Baba i.e. Shiva. But we do not find any resemblance between the two deities.

7. Pakhlá Gosain

About six miles east of the Barpeta town there is a village known as Barbila. In the neachar of the said village there is a stone with a big whole. That stone is known as Pakhla Gosain. On eleventh day of the month of Kati a

congregational prayer with **Maw Kirtan** is performed in the name of the deity. Thousands of people assemble there and offer milk, cloths, coins, deer, peacock etc. as they vowed before hand. People believe that a barren woman blessed with a child, a poor will be rich, all diseases will be cured if the deity is contended at the prayer of the devotees. Besides the ceremonial day, the devotees can offer articles at any time. Particularly the milk of first milked cow is poured on the deity.

People are ignorant about the origin of the gossa. The legend is that the **Pakhalli** was used for husking purpose by a rich man of the village **Bagadi** (now inhabited by the Muslim immigrants). The members of the family of the said man were suffering from different diseases after using the stone as **Pakhalli**. One day the rich man dreamt that a Brahmin with godly dressed appeared before him and advised him to worship the **Pakhalli** to get rid of all calamities. But the rich man did not believe in the dream. His wife died. He thought that the said **Pakhalli** was the cause of all troubles and then he dug out the **Pakhalli** and threw it into water. Then the great earthquake of 1897 occurred. After some years, it was observed that a cow allowed her calf to suck her in a particular place of the grazing reserve. Then the villagers
cleaned the place and found the stone there. People used to offer their prayer on the stone. The stone was brought to the village Barbila about twelve years ago from the place. An image of Lord Vishnu was carved there. It is undoubtedly a Vaishnava deity. But as the image is carved on the Pakhili so it is called Pakhla gossain. If it was an indigenous deity, it is difficult to ascertain now.

8. Buna Gossain

The literal meaning of the word Buna Gossain is the god of jungle. No image, no shrine is found dedicated in the name of the deity except a Kadam tree. The devotees offer their prayer and other articles under the said tree. When a cow or a calf is lost, people vow to offer a Thani or milk to the deity and it is believed that they will get the lost animal within a short time. Even the unmarried girls pray the deity to get good husbands. In short, villagers pray the deity for the fulfilment of their desires and removal of all calamities. The than of the deity is situated at Rakhibaha village about three Kms. south of the Tihu Railway Station.

Nobody knows the probable time of the introduction of Buna Gossain Puja at the village. It is heard from the old men of the village that once a cultivator dreamt that the deity
was residing on the Kadana tree and he should be propitiated by the villagers. The villagers after hearing the episode from the cultivator, cleaned the jungles and erected a thatched house. But to their surprise, they found on the following morning that the house was damaged by the elephant. Somebody dreamt that the deity did not require any house. Then the people name the deity as Buna Gosain and used to propitiate by offering milk under the tree. From that time people were not attacked by wild elephants too.

From the above legend, it may be inferred that the deity was first propitiated to get rid of the attack of wild animals when the place was surrounded by thick jungles. Afterwards for getting back of lost household animals the deity was propitiated. Now-a-days, it is observed, that the deity has the power of fulfilling all desires which is a common factor in respect of all village gods and goddesses. Some people want to connect the deity with the legend of Sri Krishna, the cowherd god.

9. Bhogi Gosain

Bhogeswar or Bhogi Gohain is a peculiar deity of the uluwa village of Bajali area. Devotees from different parts of Assam and Jalpaiguri, Koch Bihar of West Bengal come
every year in the month of Raoh to pay regards to the deity. The month of Raoh is an auspicious month to the Hindus and a big maha is held on the 2nd day of the month at the shrine of Bhogi Gohain. The Devotees are mainly womenfolk. They bow down before the deity by offering Thak, cloth, gold, Silver, Laru, Sera, etc. for the fulfilment of desires. The deity is so powerful that he has graced many people by curing fatal diseases, barren woman with a child, unmarried girls with good husbands, nonweaver with weaving excellency and so on and so forth.

The deity is a recent origin. One book by the name of Sri Sri Bhogeswar Mahatmya composed in verse by Late Kalidas Khataniyar and published by the Bhogeswar Seva Samiti in 1969, is the only available source for the deity. The source of the book is based on the popular beliefs of the people of the area. The composer has tried to identify the god Bhogeswar with Lord Krsna. According to the scripture, a daibajna Brahmin, Gayapani by name, had a Kanli cow. The cow did not allow the Brahmin to milk her. Rather she went to a nearby river in which bank she poured her milk on a bunch of birina grass. Then the Brahmin went to the place and found the head and face of an image. The other portion of the image was not visible. On the same night he dreamt that a beautiful
parson indentified himself as Bhogeswar Gohain and he told the Brahmin that he would stay there for ever. The place would be surrounded by back arum plants. No Sastric rituals required to propitiate him. Irrespective of caste and creed could offer articles in the name of the deity. On the following morning, the dream was revealed before the public and going to the place people found the reality of the dream. Thus Gayapani is responsible for naming the deity Bhogi or Bhogeswar Gohain. 11

Bhogi or Bhogeswar is an indigenous deity of the area. The word Bhogi means a voracious eater or one who has enjoyed a resourceful life. The deity is contended when some one offers Bhao.

10. Simâ Gossain

Simâ Gossain is a peculiar godling of the village Topatli of Sanapur area. The godling is represented by a big rock. According to the legend once there arose a quarrel between the king of Dimariya and Gobha for boundary. A big rock was floated in flood and it stood unmoved in the present place. The rock has been regarded as a demarcating sign of the two states. People of Dimariya and Gobha States revered

the rock as a boundary god.

11. Jabardiyā Gosain

   A straw (Jabar) is offered to the Jabar Diya Gosain by the passersby. The than is situated at the village Mitani of Tsetlia area. The godling is signified by a small rock. People believe that if a straw is offered to the deity, they will be free from all sins known and unknown. Moreover, it is believed that no calamities will appear. The deity is mostly a local one and perhaps it is worshipped to ward off any evil.

12. Kharidiya Gosain

   Like Jabardiya Gosain there is a Kharidiya Gosain near Chaygaon of the District of Kamrup. Khar means wood fuel. Only offering required is a piece of wood fuel to propitiate the deity. Particularly wood-cutters and hunters must offer the fuel to the deity, otherwise they will have to face many troubles in the jungle.

13. Šal Puja or Vishkarm Puja

   In Malbari area Šal Puja is held on the Viṁśatī day of the Durga Puja. On this occasion the weavers raise
four mount of earth around the four posts of their loom. The posts are decorated with vermillion marks and flowers namely Devi-takan plant is essential. In the middle of the loom a naivedya is offered to the goddess Durga.

In some places of Kamrup this function is called Bāhkarmi Puja (Viśvakarma). Perhaps the local name of the goddess is Bāhkarmi or Bākarmi. It is no way connected with Viśvakarma, the god of construction. In Assam, the weavers is under the competence of the women. They believe Viśkarmi is the presiding deity of the weaving. She is none but the manifestation of the goddess Durga. If she is made pleased by propitiation they will be able to become good weavers.

B. Deities Peculiar to Darrang Region

1. Asīsta Puja

The meaning of the word asīsta is the evil. Asīsta Puja means the worship of the evil. There are many evil spirits which may do harm to different persons. The Puja is performed generally in the month of Jeth (April and May) at a probable distance of the village or at the field. For the purpose a garland of snails, rice, curry Jākal and Kheleś (fishing tools) are kept on a bamboo tray having holes.
Sometimes for easy delivery a piece of cloth or a Makhela besmeared with the blood of menstruation period of a woman is also required, besides the above mentioned articles. In some places country liquor and spirit are also offered.

There the Devi who performs the Puja is a Kachari. He is called bailung. He performs the puja facing towards west. It appears that the puja might have borrowed from the Kacharías.

2. Thalgiri or Dängerī Sevā

Thalgiri or Dängerī is a household deity of some families of Mangaldai. He protects the family from any danger. There are some thana of the deity. He is worshipped individually and collectively in the month of Pagon and Chat (February-March). Pigeons are let loose in his name. Payasa (rice boiled in milk with sugar) is offered. People believe that when the god is angry with anybody a black dog of the family dies. There is no image of the deity.

3. Gorakhiyā Puja

When a child can not walk or speak in proper age, Gorakhiyā Puja is performed at the paddy field. A bunch of Athiya banana, Payasa, rice cakes are required for the Puja.
Cowherd boys are given sticks. When they beat the child by the sticks, it is hoped that the child will be cured. The cowherd boys may signify the boys who tended cows with Sri Krishna.

4. Jalpujé

Jalpujé means worship of water as a deity. When somebody suffers from eye trouble or anaemia (Jeth) a garland of white flowers and a duck are floated in the name of water god. The duck is besmeared with virmillion.

5. Bhāt diyā Gehāin

These are some evil spirits who may cause different epidemic diseases in the village. The masses do not know the appropriate names of the spirits. They are regarded as Gehāin (gods). When malaria, cholera, small pox etc. break out in a particular village, the villagers put boiled rice, curry etc. in twelve banana leaves and kept the leaves in an isolated place. The unknown Gehain is supposed to take the offerings and in return will leave the village soon. As the gehain is pleased after taking boiled rice, so he is called Bhāt diyā Gehāin. Bhāt diyā means offering of boiled rice. This is performed in the month of Jeth (April-May) offering of boiled
rice in twelve leaves may be inferred to be the sisters of Sitala who are twelve in numbers.

6. Phal Ruwa Devata

Phal Ruwa Devata is a peculiar deity of some villages of Pathurighat area. The deity is offered curd, molasses, bana rice or flattened rice in a dona and is kept in the gateway in the evening. Earthen lamp is also lit. The deity is propitiated when somebody suffers from mumps.

7. Kehuri Ai Pujia

Kehuri is one of the sisters of Sitala or Ai. Except Mangaldai no other places the deity is worshipped specially. Generally all the sisters of Sitala are worshipped together. The literal meaning of the word Kehuri is one who is coughing. Cough is another symptom of small pox. When a child is suffering from cough along with pox or from heaping cough the mother thinks that due to the wrath of the Kehuri Ai the child is suffering. So she vows the propitiate the deity after the complete cure of the disease. The articles required for the goddess are uncommon to other deities. Athia banana, Patti urah (black pulses), Ahu rice are required for the propitiation of the goddess. These articles are harmful for the patient.
The Puja of Kahuri Ai is performed in the afternoon at the courtyard. The place is cleaned by water mixed with cow dung. In the middle a bamboo post is erected over which a Japi is kept. A small altar is made under the Japi. A Sarai is placed on the altar in which four handfuls of black pulse, Ahu rice and Athia bananas are put. White flowers are scattered at the altar. Three or four garlands of white flowers are placed on the Sarai. A thapi containing soaked black pulses, salt, ginger and Ahu rice is prepared and kept beside the altar. Ripe Athia bananas are also kept in a basket. Sometimes bhog is prepared with the powder rice of Ahu variety, milk, Athia bananas and molasses. Then the women sing songs in praise of the goddess Sitala by clapping in a harmonious way. At the end of the function the Prasad or Bhog is distributed. An earthen lamp is kept lighting throughout the night. On the following morning, the mother of the patient after taking her bath, floats the articles which were placed in the Sarai. The function reminds us of Apagari now in Kamrup.

8. Dar Puja

Dar Puja is confined to the Royal family of Dorangel kings. It is performed on Bhiva Dharsa day of the Durga Puja.
The descendants of the Darrangi Kings exhibit the weapons used by their forefathers for the purpose of winning the battle against their enemies and for self-protection. The kings used flag with special emblem in time of war. In Dar Puja also such a flag is exhibited. The members of the Royal family stand in a line with weapons and flags used in time of war as if they are setting out for battle. A Javeline with a peculiar symbol made of gold and silver on the top, is erected. This erected Javeline is called Dar. Then drums are beaten, Kali (A kind of flute) is played. With the rhythm of the musical instruments the persons who take the weapons exhibit some mock fighting as if they are starting for winning a battle. The Dar Puja is held in front of the mother goddess Durga where the Durga Puja is performed. Afterwards the image of the goddess is immersed. Dr. N. Sarma is of opinion that Ranachandi is worshipped on the occasion of Dar Puja by sacrificing goats. 12

From the above discussion we have come to learn that
(i) Dar Puja is a parochial one (ii) it is connected with the war (iii) at present it is synchronised with the Durga Puja (iv) it is a reminiscence of the war preparation of the Kooa Kings of Darrang.

Dr. N. Sarma thinks that the meaning of the word *Dar* is fear. The Koca kings exhibited their strength by mock fighting on the eve of the war to intimidate their enemies. 13

The word Dar may have originated from the Sanskrit word Danda, the meaning of which is punishment or a stick. If we take the word punishment for *Dar* then the function should be a post war. In this connection mention may be made of the Ind Puja of Midnapore, Birbhum and Bankura districts of West Bengal. The Puja is held on the month of Bhadra (August-September). A big sal tree is erected over which a bamboo made umbrella is suspended. The members of the royal family and some zaminder family participate in the function. The priests interpret it to be the Indradvaja Puja of the Puranas. 14

In support of the above interpretation, the priests explain that once the gods were in an act of joy. The demons being jealous of their joy came to destroy it and Indra, the king of the gods drove the demons out by a danda (Stick). Then the danda was installed in the court of Indra as a symbol of victory. The other story goes like this:

Once Indra was defeated by the demons. Visnu offered him a dhvaja by which Indra was able to defeat the demons. That dhvaja was regarded as a symbol of victory. The kings of the earth too used to install the danda which was called Indra dhvaja. Thus the Indradhvaja Puja was in vogue in India since remote past and was confined to the royal family only. From this point of view the present Dar Puja of the Mangaldai may be the reminiscence of the Indradhvaja Puja of the past. The time of observance may be changed according to the facility of the observers. Moreover, it is now observed that the Dar Puja has taken the garb of Saktism as the Royal family belong to the Sakte faith of Hinduisam.

9. Bātuwa Gahain

The literal meaning of the word Bātuwa Gahain is the god of the path. People believe that if the deity is pleased he will remain as gate keeper of the village. He will not allow any epidemic to breakout, any evil spirit to enter the village. The Puja is held in the month of Jeth. At the end of the village, preferably, under an au tree. Besides

15. C.K. Basu, ibid., p. 111.
the fruits of the season a white she-goat is required. Moreover, two hundred fifty grams of rice must be deposited by the villagers and one person from each family must be present at the place of worship. The she-goat is to be besmeared with vermillion. A Daurni from among the devotees performs the Puja. The she-goat is strangled to death and offered to the deity. When the Puja is over, the participants take rice and curry prepared from the meat of the she-goat. It is forbidden to take home any article. The tree itself is supposed to be the abode of the deity. It is an annual function of the village Kamarpara, Rangaldai sub-division.