

CHAPTER III

CHANGING TRADITIONAL AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

Religious life of Raja-Mayong is related to certain rites, festivals, and practices of traditional institution like – magic, tantrism, temples, shrines, monasteries, namghars and Sattras. It controls the behaviour of the groups of the religious sect of Raja-Mayong village. Every caste and community of Raja-Mayong has certain taboos and religious sanctions which are to be obeyed by the villagers. This chapter of our study would discuss it in details from traditional practices to present development of the village.

Magic or Witchcraft.

Magic or sorcery or witchcraft has been existent from primitive ages to the present.¹ Specially, Kamrupa is known for its magic and Tantricism. Raja-Mayong in Assam is specially known for the practice of magic. The people have a strong belief that magic and its practice is prevalent in raja-Mayong. 100% of the respondents in the village comprising of 413 households responded positively in reply to the

questionnaire asking whether magic was prevalent in Raja-Mayong. In a recent survey on manuscripts it has been recorded that there are more than four hundred manuscripts on magic in the Raja-Mayong village itself. Apart from the existence of manuscripts there are many active practitioners of magic in the village. The names of some of them are Akan Nath, Sadananda Nath, Puspendra Nath, Kamal Chowdhuri, Ramendra Nath, etc.

From the time of 16th century A.D., the people of Assam had an impression that the Magical form of Mayong is efficacious against the enemies. The king of Mayong Late Minaram Sinha was himself a Magician. We have found some manuscripts in the name of Minaram Sinha. There is a popular saying in Assamese,

Dimaria mantra gune jat pat

Mayangar mantra gune aaste

Surpanakhar gune dhari dhari kate

(meaning: The mantras of Dimaria is quick but less efficacious but the mantras of Mayong are slow in their action but very efficacious causing even death.)²

One of the Magical practitioner of Raja-Mayong, Mr. Akan Nath says that he learnt magic from the Sanyasi, Late Narasingha. Narasingha resided at the ashram of Hiloikhunda before 1960. Prior to him, Chura bej of Raja-Mayong was famous for tiger catching and killing by magic. Late Kamala Nath and Ramcharan Nath were also distinguished snake charmers and cured patients of snake bite. At present also there are two practitioners of magic in Mayong.³

Taking advantage the association of the name of Raja-Mayong to magic, five persons from Raja-Mayong have chosen the profession of showing magic on the stage which is a modern art of playing tricks based

on science. People have begun to mistake it to be the magical practices of the bej.

Tantrism:

Tantric beliefs and practices also prevailed in Mayong at one time. The form of Tantric Buddhism or Vajrayana came into existence in the seventh century A.D. But the most essential of Kula Path Viz-Vama, Dakshina and Kaula were developed between the fourth and ninth centuries.⁴ Tantrism possibly was at its peak around 1000 A.D. and from that time on it's richly documented in written and non-written sources. The example of a great literary creation of Tantrism in Assam was the Kalika Purana and Yogini Tantra. Tantric Hinduism flourished in full-bloom from the 11th century A.D. Both Hindu and Buddhist Tantrism were practised in Assam in the medieval period.

Tantric religious literature refers to Vishnu and Shiva and Kali.⁵ The essential parts of Tantrism are the rites of Panchamakara viz Madya (alcohol), Matsya (fish), Mangsa(meat), Mudra(postures) and Maithuna(sexual intercourse). It refers essentially to the left-hand practices. The sacrifice of animal is also essential in Tantric practices. Sankardeva, the Vaisnava Guru and reformer referred to Tantric practices as the Vamachara in derogatory words in his book the Kirtan Ghosha in the second Kirtan "*budha-avatara veda pantha kari channa. vamanaya shastre muhi achcha sarvajana. nichinte charana nama nalaya tomara, sadaya pramatta loka pashanda achara.*"⁶ (meaning: He destroyed the path of Veda in the Buddha avatara and all were engrossed materialistic thoughts they did not chant the name of the Lord and their souls were epitomes of evil.)

From this it is evident that it was widely prevalent in time. Tantrism offered solution to philosophical problems for a long time and some people still resort to tantric practices for their spiritual solace. It's prevalent among some of the vaisnavite gurus also.

“One of the reasons perhaps why the Tantric tradition thus still survives in Assam is that it came under British hegemony rather late. Another reason why Assamese society is more open, and hence more habitable to Tantrism, is that it is also less Sanskritised. Caste is not too much puritanical as much as in the rest of India. Male - Female interaction is much freer than in other parts of India. According to most Tantric texts, the rites are open to all castes and creeds, all men are Shiva and all women are “Shakti” during the actual rites.”⁷

Assam is one of the very few places in India where the Tantric Tradition has been operational. This is not surprising because the Assam and Bengal regions have often been called the original home of Tantrism, these practices dating here from the early centuries of A.D.⁸

The traditional strength of Bhaktism in Assam is due to the large Tribal Sub-Stratum of the society; These Tribal groups are still today even more Matrilocal and liberal as compared to the greater Assamese society in which itself the position of women in every sphere is definitely much better than in the rest of India.

The robustness of the Tantric tradition in Assam is, therefore, due to the fact that the society and culture have always held comparatively very positive attitudes towards women.⁹

Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee has noted that Indo-Mongoloids have been quite liberal in terms of male-female interaction. This is perhaps one reason why Kamakhya is the foremost Tantric centre in India.

Further, Andrey Cantlie has recently pointed out that Assamese society is more socially mobile and has less rigid caste structure than other Indian societies.¹⁰

In terms of liberalism towards the womenfolk, the situation is not so bad in upper Assam, possible also because Shaktism is still a very strong cultural under current there.¹¹

Magic and Tantrism played an important role in the Assamese Society. Tantrism flourished in the Raja-Mayong village in medieval period and its tantric activities were patronised by the king of Raja-Mayong. The survey report says that the people of Raja-Mayong like the tantric traditions and it is still survived in few families. One of the reasons perhaps why the tantric tradition thus still survived in Raja-Mayong is that it came under British hegemony rather late and the village is much remote from the Headquarters of the district of Nagaon, Darrang and Kamrup. This is why the villagers of Raja-Mayong are closely related to the rites of tantric and magical practices.¹²

Dr. Nirmal Prabha Bordoloi also said in her book “Devi”, that Mayong was famous for magic or sorcery in medieval period in Assam. Raja-Mayong was the land of origin of tantrism in Assam.

The popularity of Magic and Tantric operation in Rajamayong had also extended to upper Assam. One Mr. Mujaffar Islam Bora, the Second son of Dr. Moidul Islam Bora had come to Raja-Mayong to learn magic¹³

Now, the tantric practices have undergone a number of changes. For a number of reasons social changes have taken place in Mayong over the last few decades. Increasing flow of population, modern education, enhancement of modern technology improvement in productivity, etc. are some of the reasons for the change.

There were a number of magical and Tantric practices for kings to be used as situation demanded. These were viz. Maran (Killing an enemy) Uchatan (creating unknown excitation), Kampan (tremor), Bashikaran (domination), Uran (speeding), Lukikaran (disappearance), Rajmohini (enchantment), Kandal (to create dispute among enemies), Malshram (acquiring power), Indrajala (Creating illusory situation), Maya (divined telepathic energy even to subdue animals like tiger, elephant, Snake etc.) With the help of these aids the Mayang king lived in such a dangerous place near the dense forests in which tiger, elephant, rhinoceros and snakes lived naturally. There are legends that the practitioners of magic in Mayong were able to convert men into tigers, goats, etc. They were able to convert leaves of trees into fish and they could attach the chair to the back of the one who sat on it. Even they were able to walk on water and ride on a boat of banana leaf and oar of reeds. It was believed that many people were killed by the tantric practice of Maron at the behest of the king.¹⁴

People believed that misfortune befell the evil doers through magic. They cite the example of the lack of children and mental derailment of the children of some of the practitioners of magic. The new generation in this region does not like the practice of Magic. Of course they feel proud for their traditional rich heritage of magic.¹⁵

Another notable change among the local residents of Raja-Mayong is transformation from the Nath cult and Shaktism to Vaishnavism. In the pre-vaisnavite era the people of Mayong were believers in Nath cult and Shaktism. The whole of the followers of the Nath Cult gave up their their erstwhile beliefs and practices and embraced Vaisnavism as preached by the Vaisnava gurus Chaitanyadeva and Shankaradeva. As a result of this conversion a lot of change took place in their beliefs and practices. Animal sacrifice was almost totally wiped out. Some people believed that even human sacrifice took place in the past. As result of this magical beliefs also dwindled to a great extent though it could not be totally wiped out.¹⁶

The magical practice continued to exist as a part of folk medicine. Earlier the people of Raja-Mayong used to take help of a traditional practice of medicine for seeking remedy from a disease. In the event of a person suffering from pox, they would resort to “Ainam or Devinam” of any kind, jorani (divine water), bhogsora or prashada etc. A medicine man also uses different mantras along with the use of traditional medicines. He accepts a sum of Rs. 1.25 along with a pair of betel leaf and a betel nut. But presently, people do not like to use this system of medicine. They choose to go to the doctor for his advice and treatment. Of course, in preliminary stage of disease, they still use the magical practices in Raja-Mayong village for treatment of diseases.¹⁷

In the traditional period, marital relationship were highly localised because people from outside were hesitant to establish marital relationship with people of Raja-Mayong, for their alleged practice of magic and sorcery. But with the development of communication, education etc., this hesitation has disappeared and now-a-days marriages are solemnised with

the outsiders. This also is one of the reasons for the giving up of the traditional magical practices in Raja-Mayong.¹⁸

Bhaktism :-

“Bhaktism emerged in the Indian Society when the vedic-learning and Brahminical orthodoxy created a division between Sanskritised elite and the common people. Thus, Bhaktism was a voice which was reared by the culturally deprived peasants, traders and members of guilds.”¹⁹ Lord Krishna became the prime deity of Bhaktism. Because, from his childhood, Krishna fought against the dictatorship of elitist politics and economy. General people enjoyed equality, liberty and security from the Lord Krishna. With a view to that, Lord Krishna became the best friend, philosopher guide during his time (*Dvaparayuga*).

Bhaktism in Assam is called - Vaishnavism. Ninety percent of the Hindus who specified their sect in 1901 census declared their adherence to Vaishnavism which relates to the worship of Vishnu.²⁰ On the basis of above background of Bhaktism, the population of Raja Mayong can be divided into three religious sects viz. - Damodariya or Bamuniya, Mahapurushiya or Vaishnava and Chaitania . The impact of Bhakti movement embraced Raja Mayong village also since the sixteen century. The settlement of the (Sattras) viz. - Damodariya Sattras at Sildubi, Mahapurushiya Sattras at Kalsila and Chaityania Sattras at Doipara and Misamari proved that all these sects were prevalent in Mayong area.²¹

The members of the Royal family of Raja-Mayong are of the Damodariya sect. They got initiated into the religious fold through Gossain of the Patbausee Sattras though a process called the *Sharan* in 1590. The king, Svaracha Chandra Sinha (14th Members Chadhya Bhagi) took sharan

at the Patbausee Sattra; Maniram Sinha (Nine Members Nay Bhagi) at the Sildubi Sattra and Muhit Sinha (Four Members Chari Bhagi) got *Sharan* from the Gossain of Kaliabar. The Gossain of the Damodariya Sattra has spread the worship of the “Panchdevata Puja” or Basudeva Gossain Mela or festival in Raja Mayong village. This festival became the royal festival from that period to at present.²²

In the matter of purity and pollution, Bhajaniya Bhakats (highly qualified devotees) are more Puritanical than the Sharaniya Bhakats (initial qualified). Damodariya Bhakats are liberal and normative in rites. They belong collectively to the Koch caste located in Raja Mayong and Hatimuriya villages.²³

Another king, Muhit Sinha adopted “Sharan” from the Kaliabar Sattra Gossain. A Sattra named Kalsila Sattra was established by Ananta Thakura in 1652 A.D.²⁴ But, this Sattra was not able to form a Satriya tradition of its own as the Sattra was shifted from Mayong to Doloichuba. The followers of the Kaliabar Sattra belong to the Koch caste and they are related to Royal family of Raja-Mayong.

Another important religious sect of Raja-Mayong village is the Chaitanyia sect. The group of the Chaitonyia unit is governed by their religious Guru or Master. It is their religious sanction that the Nath people can select the master of their own from the qualified persons. These gurus have their personal prayer houses at their residences which are called “Manikut”s. The males and the females sit together in religious rites among the Naths which is not so in case of the other sects. Astaprahar Nam-Yajna and Radhastami are the essential ceremonies of the Nath community. The orthodox section among the vaishnavas, known as the

Bhajan Margi vaishnavas, take food only from initiates of their category. Like the *Sharan* in Satriya Society, the Naths take “*Diksha*”. After adopting the *Diksha*, he becomes the *Guru-Bhai*.²⁵

Paramartha Society:-

This is a new religious sect of the Assamese Society because they do not read the *Kirtan* or *Bhagavata* composed by Sankar Deva. They have their own religious scriptures and rites. They do not have any dress or food code. They do not cremate the dead. It is significant that, they light earthen lamps as a part of religious ritual. This new society has no Gossain or Brahmin. They are free from the bindings of all Hindu sects and belong to the Keot caste. They have a temple of their own, which is dedicated to Hari in the Mayong area. They are from Ouguri and Satibheti villages and not Raja-Mayong.²⁶

Religious Settlement of Temples, Shrines and Namghars

There are five important temples, which taken together have come to be called the “Panchatirtha”. The five temples are viz Mayong–Baha Ganesha Temple, Mayong-Burha Burhi Shiva temple, Mayong-Hatimuria Ganesh Temple, Chanaka Ganesha Temple and Burha-Mayong Ganesha and Shiva temples. There are also five Devi Temples which taken together have come to be called the “Pancha-Devi-Tirtha” the five Tantric-Devi-Tirthas namely the Kechaikhaiti at Raja Mayong, Bhagavati at Mayong Hatimuriya, Burhiai shrine at the hill of Choraihagi, Aimath or Kali-Shrine at Hiloi Khunda and the Kamakhya Devi Shrine at Mayong hill.²⁷

A tentative study on the various temples and shrines in the radius of tree/four kilometres is considered most urgent to understand the social status of the traditional society of the village. The followings are the detailed of the traditional institutions which were established by the king of Mayong:-

Ganesha Temple at Hatimuriya:-

The important Ganesh Temple is situated in the south bank of the Brahmaputra lies about 1 k.m. from Raja Mayong village. A fine image of sitting Ganesha with four hands on the natural rock has been depicted by the artists as the king of Mayong brought them from the Koch-Bihar. In addition to that, there are two traditional forms under the name of Bor-Pukhuri and Saru-Pukhuri where the former is used for drinking water and latter is used for bathing. The people of Mayong have an ardent faith that this is and alive Ganesha looking for the goodness and prosperity. The pilgrims from outside places of Assam, particularly from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and Bengal have visited the alive Ganesha for his blessings.²⁸

This Royal Temple is handed over to the public of the Hatimuriya village to look after the annual rites on Ganesh Puja and Ganesh Nam at night.

There is a permanent Ganesh temple committee to look after the Temple's property and the management in the Temple.

Nara Simha Temple at Hiloi-Khunda:-

It's a centre for pilgrimage of the Hindus, located in a Hillock on the south bank of the Brahmaputra. It contains a statue of the Nara Sinha incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The Temple is rebuilt in a modern style, yet the

Nara Sinha Temple is attracting a lot of devotees for its natural beauty and the river. It is said that once a Sanyashi resided the ashrama. So, the name of Nara Sinha temple is derived from the name of the sanyasi i.e. Nara Sinha Babaji.

Traditionally this hilly area is known as Hiloi-Khunda, the weaponry house of Mayong kingdom. It is also famous for shrines of Lord Shiva and Burhi Ai.²⁹

Ganesha Temple at Chanaka:-

The temple at Chanaka is one of the most popular Shaiva temples. Chanaka was formerly the capital of Mayong kingdom. Chanaka Ganesh temple contains idols of all the family members of the Lord Shiva. The image of sitting Lord Ganesha with an iron plough and lotus shaped carving of stone are situated at the first part of the shrine in the south side; Erotic images of Lord Shiva Parvati of stone is situated at the middle of the shrine, an image of head of the Goddess Kali on the north side and numerous ruined images of *nartakis* are in the north side. The shrine touches the water of the Brahmaputra and another image of Lord Ganesha is sitting on the huge rock on the north east side of the shrine.³⁰

Ganesha Temple at Gobhali :-

The image of Lord Ganesha has been nicely depicted on the stone on the south side of the Mayong hill and the road side is known as Gobhali village. The king of Mayong, Bhagadatta excavated the pond for the worship of the “Mal-Devata” or “Malshram” and a temple was built for the adoration of the Lord Ganesh. The pond was very deep. The Assamese term

for deep is *gabhir*; so, the name of the village Gobhali is said to be derived from the word *gabhir*.³¹

Sil-Gossain Shrine at Raja-Mayong :-

Sil-Gossain is an open shrine without temple, having an image of the rain God is situated at the back of the house of one Mr. Rajen Nath in the Bhajar-Chuba of the village.

Hari-Temple at Raja-Mayong :-

Another Hari-Temple is situated in front of the king's house near the main road via Raja-Mayong to Kamarpur. Formerly, the priests worshiped the Salagrams in the temple. But, at present the former king, Ghanakanta Sinha, of the Damodariya sect, worships the Salagrams. The people of Koch Caste are associated with the rites of the Royal Temple and with the activities of the development of the Temple. During interview, they say that the functions of the Royal Temple are the sacred duties of the villagers. At the very beginning, the Temple was made of wood and bamboo. Now the Namghar and the Manikuta have been made of concrete. The members of the Royal khel have individually contributed for the improvement of the Temple. The local M.L.A. contributed Rs. 50,000/- to the Royal Temple in 2005 and the local Panchayat issued Rs.30,000/- in 2006 and Raja-Mayong Unnayan Committee contributed Rs.5000/- for the development of the Temple.³²

There are five seats for the images of Pancha-Gossains with an altar for the *doul* in the vicinity of the Royal Temple.

The important rites of the Royal Temples are viz. Pachoti, bathing of the Salagrama, Ekadashi, Purnima, celebration of the Pancha Devata,

Uresha Kirtan etc. These rites are followed by the entire Koch Caste. It appears that the Temple has been acting as a binding force for all Castes and Communities of the locality.

Till 1990, the bathing of the Salagrama was performed by a priest at the invitation of the king of Mayong. The names of the Salagramas are Jugal, Sudarshan, Dadhimukhi, Male Gandaki and female Gandaki. But now-a-day, the king himself accompanied with the Royal priests performs the bathing of the Salagrama. In addition to this there are four families of Royal Medhis who were formerly appointed by the king of Mayong to look after the four deities of the Salagrama.³³

The Royal Medhis of the respective four idols of salagramas were appointed by the king of Raja-Mayong in the 16th century. Since then the portfolios of the Medhis or Bishaya are still continuing in Rajamayong village. Two generations of the officials are mentioned below:-

Present representing	Former	Salagrama
1. Sri Baidya Ram Nath	Lt. Prem Ram Nath (Noa-jak)	Vasudeva
2. Sri Prabin Ch. Nath	Lt. Phukan Nath (Kana Jak)	Jugal
3. Sri Jogeswar Nath	Lt. Bhalman Nath (Panikara Jak)	Vasudeva
4. Sri Nabin Ch. Nath	Lt. Takara Nath (Goda Jak)	Jugal

The Hari Temple of the Naths:-

There is a huge Hari temple dedicated to the Lord Vishnu. The ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu are carved on its walls. It is situated in the middle of the village, which belongs to the sect called the Maj-Khel of the Nath community.

The entire community of Naths is associated with the rites of the Vishnu Temple. This is the biggest Temple in the area of Raja-Mayong. Since time immemorial, the Naths have been associated with this Temple. The original Temple was made of Thatch, Bamboo and wood. But rebuilding of the temple in modern form began since 1960. The temple was renovated during the years 1982 to 1995 but it reached its present shape only after 1995.

The members of the Nath Caste decided in a general meeting held on 25.8.95 to lay the foundation stone of the Vishnu Temple. Accordingly, on the Vijaya Dashami, in the month of October in 1995, they laid the foundation stone. After five years, the construction of the biggest Temple in the locality with two Namghars and a Manikuta with 3 rooms was completed. The Temple was inaugurated in a two day opening ceremony on 11.12.2000 and 12.12.2000 attended by guests of seven districts of Assam. In an interview, the founder President of the Temple committee says that they have spent the total amount to Rs. 7,20,598.40 in building the temple. The different heads in which expenditures are incurred are as under-

(1) Purchasing of the images	Rs. 1,05,000.00
(2) Payment to carpenters masons and artists (in four years of period of construction)	„ 2,62,800.95
(3) Painting	„ 22,800.00
(4) Building material	„ 2,62,045.45
(5) Expenditure on opening ceremony	„ <u>68,735.00</u>
Total Rs.	„ 7,20,598.40

The total figure of expenditure includes the contributions of the M.L.A., Raja-Mayong Unnayan Samity and Mayang Unnayan Samity, amounting to Rs. 50,000, 90,000 and 5,000 respectively making a total of Rs. 1,45,000. The rest Rs. 5,75,598.40 is the collective and individual contribution of the Maj-khel of the Nath Caste.

The Temple contains a dual icon of Radha-Krishna, an icon of Vishnu in his *ananta shayana* posture, a chariot named Pancha Rath and three *guru asanas* with “Bhagavatas” in the sanctum sanctorum of the Temple. The images of Joy-Bijoy are carved on the exterior wall and the statues of two lions are in front of the gate of the Temple. The statues of four Peacocks perch on the roof Manikuta or the garbha griha and the images of ten Avataras are nicely carved around the walls of the Manikuta.³⁴

The important rites performed in the Temple are Oresha Kirtan or Mahanam, Bhadamahiya Nam of women, Pachoti, Ekadashi, Bhagavat path on Thursdays, Shibaratri, Janmastami, Guru Tithi etc. It has been said that the rites are essential and compulsory for the people of the Nath Caste. None dares to violate the rites of the Temple. About 150 households are related to the Vishnu Temple.

During interview it has come to light that drinking and rearing chicken is strictly prohibited in the village vide two general meetings of the five khels of Raja-Mayong held on 3.5.07 and on 14.10.07. These meetings were held in the Vishnu Temple of Majkhel in Raja-Mayong. A Sub-Committee for prohibition with the help of Police was formed in a meeting on 16.10.07. The people of Majkhel are actively involved in social reform.

They feel that drinking alcohol and rearing chicken vitiates the sanctity of the village. Of course, some of them are engaged in the trade of poultry outside the village.³⁵

The Barua Chuburi Namghar :-

The Namghar of Barua Chuburi is the second oldest religious structure in Raja-Mayong next to the Royal Temple. The term Barua implies the portfolio of the Royal administration. It was established in 1952. This is situated in the northern part of the village. The 15 households are related to the Namghar of Barua Chuburi. This Namghar is very simple and it is also modernised with the concrete wall around the Namghar and Manikuta.

The Shivaratri, Ekadashi, Purnima, Gurutithi, Radhastami, Mahanam are the important rites performed in the Namghar. The entire society of the Nath Caste is associated with the Namghar and they built this full wall Assam type structure with the contributions of the members of the Khel.]

The committee of the Barua Khel also has spent more than Rs. 2,50,000.00 to complete this structure including Rs. 50,000 contributed by the local M.L.A. and Rs. 25,000 contributed by the Raja-Mayong Unnayan Samity.³⁶

The Gadaghariya Namghar:-

The Gadaghariya Namghar is an important Namghar of Raja-Mayong. This Namghar belongs to 52 households of the Nath Caste. The Namghar committee has spent above Rs. 4 Lakh in making of the Namghar in a modern form. The original villagers of Gadaghariya Khel had a portfolio namely Malaghariya. They had to supply the Garlands of the

Royal festival. The process of renovation of the Namghar began in 1962. Since then, construction has been done with public donations.

The Bhagavata is placed on the *guru asana* of the Monikuta as is done in the Namghars of the Mahapurushiya sect of Vaisnavism. But the devotees under this Namghar practice the Chaitanya sect of Vaisnavism.³⁷

Athghariya Namghar:-

The Athghariya Namghar belongs to 12 households of the Athghariya Khel. The Athghariya Khel is the spitted Khel from the Barua Khel since 1985. They are related to this Namghar. After splitting from the Barua Khel, they have built a new Namghar in the middle of the village. This is also a namghar of the Chaitanya sect of Vaisnavism.³⁸

They have also spent above Rs. 2 Lakh including the contributions of the M.L.A. and local Unnayan committee amount to Rs. 25,000 and Rs. 30,000 respectively. The Athghariya Namghar has the same rites like the rites of other Namghars

Another important Namghar of Raja-Mayong is the Murarbari Namghar situated in the south east of the village. The 50 households belonging to the Nath Caste settled in Murarbari since 1975 and they began the construction of the Namghar in 1980. They have also spent about Rs. 3 Lacs solely contributed by the villagers, in constructing the Namghar.³⁹

Beside the above Namghars, there are five Shiva-Temple and one yogashram within the Raja-Mayong village. The Shiva-Temple of Murarbari is situated on the east side of Mayong Anchalik College. This Shiva-Temple is very simple and it is made of thatch with bamboo and

wood. Regular worship of Shiva is done in this temple by the devotees in the evening. Shiva Ratri is the main rite of the Temple. Some of the devotees regularly smoke *hemp* in the Temple.⁴⁰

Another important Shiva-Temple is Shiva-Yogashram. It is situated in the middle of the village. A retired government servant, Sri Kamal Nath is the founder of the Ashrama. Nath people regard it as a centre for the practice of Yoga. It has been established in 1990.

Sankar Mandir is established in the western part of the village after 2000. This Temple also belong to the Nath Caste. The entire Society is associated with this Shiva Temple. Shiva Ratri is the main rite of the Sankar Mandir. The people have proposed to renovate but they haven't been able to do it for paucity of fund.

There are two more shrines sacred to Shiva at Hadugpar and Bhajor Shivasthan in the southern part of Raja-Mayong. But no structures of any kind are built in these two places.

There are two shrines named of "Bamun-Gossain" and "Garakhiyathan" to the west of the village. These places for worshipping have no permanent structures in the form of Temples. Only annual and occasional sacrifices are offered in these places.⁴¹

As regards ideological changes, it can be stated the people in the village were believers in Shaktism as is evident from the shrines and temples of the locality initially. But after the onslaught of the Bhakti movement in Assam they gradually switched over to Vaisnavism. Now Vaisnavism that flourished in Assam was the one propagated by Mahapurush Sankaradeva. But there were some corners in Assam where

the Chaitanya sect Vashnavism also was in vogue. Mayong was one such centre where this sect of Vaisnavism gathered roots.

Rangadariya than:-

Rangadariya shrine is situated in the middle of the vilage. It is regarded to be the most ancient shrine of Raja-Mayong village. The shrine consists of a huge peepul tree which is popularly known as the Bamuni Anhat. The trunk of the tree has a diameter of about sixteen feet and the branches of the tree occupy a huge area. This is the biggest tree in the area and people particularly of the Nath Community regard it as very sacred. The trunk of the tree is clad in a piece of red cloth from which the name rangadhariya is derived.⁴²

Kechaikhaiti than :-

The shrine of Kechaikhaiti is also a primitive shrine which was worshiped since 16th century A.D. by the royal preists and Medhis. This is one of the five Goddesses of Mayong and is located on the northern side of the village behind the office of Mayong Gaon panchayat.

An annual festival is held in this shrine and the offerings consist of raw bhog of powdered rice, ghee, honey, sugar, bananas, etc. This shrine has been renovated and is now housed in a beautiful modern structure. It was a shrine of the royal family which was later handed over to the people of the Nath community.⁴³

Bhagabati Than :-

The shrine of Bhagabati is the most popular shrines of mother goddess in Mayong area. It is situated just by the side of Mayong bazar. It has been worshiped regularly on Tuesday and Saturday by the people of Raja-Mayong and its neighbouring area. The Goddess Bhagabati is the secret incarnation of the Durga or Mahamaya. This shrine is believed to be established by the king of Mayong in the 16th century A.D. Presently, it has been handed over to the public of Raja-Mayong especially to the Hatimuria Khel. Though the people of Mayong are vaishnavites at present they still take part in the annual worship of the mother goddess in the form of Bhagavati.

There is a joint committee for both the shrine of Bhagavatee and the Laskhi temple which looks after the rites of the temple and developments of the shrine. Accordingly the committee has constructed the modernized the temple and the shrine. It is a general fact that the offering of the Prashada to the Devi - Bhagabati would fulfill the desires of the devotee.⁴⁴

Mayong Kamakhya Devi than :-

There is a primitive shrine of Mother goddess Kamakhya in the hill of Mayong. It was worshiped by the members of the royal family. It is said that human sacrifices were also offered in the name of the Devi. It is said that two priests namely Teporu and Mehang had hardly escaped from the temple than the doors of the temple were naturally closed. The temple doors are closed from then onwards and it is still worshiped from outside the temple.⁴⁵

Shiva Temple at Burha-Burhi :-

A Shaiva religious centre for the Hindus, Burha-Burhi-Shiva temple is also famous for many sculptures. According to a legend about Burha-Burhi, Lord Shiva, the Burha, i.e. an old man, the Goddess Parvatee, the Burhi, i.e. the old woman resided in a cave in the Kachasila hill. As they felt disturbed in their meditation they left for the Burha-Burhi hill and settled there permanently with a female child namely Putuly. It is believed that the three hillocks stand for the trio, Burha, Burhi and Putuly in the Burha-Burhi village.

Another legend says that the Pandavas, the five brothers of Hastinapura visited the hills and footsteps of the Pandavas are inscribed on a rock by roadside in the Burha-burhi hillocks⁴⁶.

Aithan at Hiloikhunda :-

Aithan i.e. the shrine of the mother goddess or the Kali-thana - located at the bank of the Gossain Beel is also a primitive shrine in Mayong kingdom. There is a huge rock which is believed to attract the women towards it. The story runs that, a woman wanted to enter the rock through its crevices. However the people were able to save her from the devine rock. An annual festival is held every year on the eighth of the month of Bohag corresponding to months of April and May in this shrine.

Pagladia Shrine at Kamarpur :-

There are two shrines of Bhagawati and Pagladia (Lord Shiva) another name of Shiva as because he takes Bhang; the former is situated near of the Kamarpur Tiniali and the latter is situated in the Kamarpur hill. The shrine contains swords, tridents and dambarus.

Kali Shrine at Dhamkhunda :-

An ancient Kali Shrine with the three images of kali in one stone is situated in a hillock near the village of Dhamkhunda.⁴⁷

Shiva Temple at Kachasila :-

The Shiva temple at Kachasila is Shaiva centre for pilgrimage of the Hindus, located in the outskirts of Mayong on a solitary hill by the bank of the Brahmaputra. A gigantic stone tortoise lies on the northern part of the hill. Tortoise means “Kacha” in Assamese. So the place is named Kachasila after the tortoise shaped stone. It is also famous for Hara-Gauri Shrine, Shivalingam, Yonipeeth and various ancient sculptures in terracota.

There is a temple committee to look after the shrine. This committee arranges the main yearly festival of Shiva-ratri.

The committee is able to contact the local M.L.A. and has made the concrete steps from ground level to apex of the temple. The committee is still trying to provide the electricity and drinking water for the pilgrims on the top of hill on which the shrine is situated. But, it has not been materialized till now.⁴⁸

Vishnu Temple at Kajali :-

A historical famous place about 35 km. away from Guwahati is situated in the meeting point of the rivers Kolong-Kopili and the Brahmaputra. It is also famous for a Vishnu temple and various sculptures. It looks like a mini “eden” for pilgrims.

The area of Kajali is very attractive for the sannyasis. A sannyasi named Sabharam babaji resided at the Vishnu temple in the beginning. He

often arranged a divine feast for the public. The unique feature of the feast is that thousands of people or pilgrims were able to take prasads from the little amount of rice, potato, vegetable etc. Nobody dares to insult him as soon as the devotee touches him, he feel peace and is releaved from any disease or tension. The people of the area believed him to be having supernatural powers.

After him, Amrit Deka from Mitanee resided at Vishnu temple. He also had supernatural powers and his after Mahesh Bhagat resided at the temple of the village. The local people say that the famous manuscript on “Mayongar Mantra-Tantra” was saved in Kajoli but in latter it was sold for prices. Some manuscripts have been thrown into the river Brahmaputra for the fear of bad affects.⁴⁹

Burhi-Ai at Hatimuria :

This shrine was established by the king of Mayong in 1590 A. D. This shrine is located in the hilly terrain of the Charaihagi hills. The king sacrificed animal and birds in this shrine. There is a copper pot and a traditional dao - which are used for the sacrificial rites. This shrine is now handed over the public of the Hatimuria village. Presently it has been modernised and worshiped by the sharania people that is, the people who have been initiated into the fold of Vaisnavism. It has a committee of the Hatimuria Koch Khel - which looks after the overall developments of the shrine.⁵⁰

Sildubi Sattra :-

The Sattras are more or less religious colleges of the Hindus in Assam resembling in some respect the medieval monasteries of Northern

India. Asana (seat) Simhasana (seat with lion motif), guru-asana (The seat of the guru, that is, Sankara or Madhaba), or Mahapurush asana (The seat of the guru identified with the Supreme Being), are a constant feature of the Sattras and Kirtan ghars. Another feature of a sattra institution is the preservation of relics such as pada-sila, pira, paduka, pada dhula, tree or herb.

The Stradhikara is the head of the Sattra who is considered as guru at the time of initiation of the adult before marriage. The Sattradhikara is assisted in the management of the Sattra and Sattra property including Devottor and Brahmotttar lands (Lakheraj and Nis-Kheraj lands) by the Deka Sattriya or Adhikara besides a number of office bearers such as Bhagavattar Bhagavati, Bar Medhi, Nam lagowa, Deuri or Bilonia, Bharali, etc. The office bearers are generally paid in cash or in kind.

On the contribution of the number to Assamese social evolution, Ramesh Chandra Kalita writes, "Besides being the place of theatrical performances called 'Bhaona' and other allied cultural activities of the villagers, the nam-ghar which was erected almost in every village in Assam also became subsequently the meeting place of village elders to hold discussions on matters of general, and thus it came to be treated as 'a venue of village panchayats'. As a matter of fact, Sattra became an integral part of Assamese social life and discipline, a seat of law and justice, education and art and culture." ⁵¹

The Sildubi Sattra is an important - neo-vaishnavite religious institution founded by the grandson of Sri Sri Damodardeva, Acharyya Siromani Goswami in 1590 A.D. He established this Sattra under instructions from the great vaishnava saint Mahapurush Sri Sri

Damodardeva during the reign of the great king of Mayong, Svarachah-Chandra Sinha in 1590 A.D. The king, Saniram Sinha (1584-1589 A.D.) adopted "Sharan" at Sildubi Sattrra. Since then, the linkage between master and disciple has been continuing in the king's dynasty of Raja-Mayong.

Mahapurush Sri Sri Damodar Deva established the original Sattrra, The "Patbaushi Sattrra at Vyaspara on the east side of the Dhankhunda swamp in 1540 A.D. From him, his nephew, Mukunda son of Ratnakar, and Shiromani, son of Mukunda eastablished the Mayong Sildubi Sattrra in 1585 A.D.

Acharyya Shiromoni went on a pilgrimage towards the Mayong kingdom after having got instruction from the Mahapurush Sri Sri Damodardeva. When he entered into the Mayong kingdom, he was highly impressed by the natural beauty of the riverside. He, therefore, established the Sattrra under the name of Sildubi Sattrra in 1585 A.D. Apparantly the location of the Sattrra is very low lying. The place of the Sattrra is therefore named as the Sildubi Sattrra.

The sole deity of the Sattrra is the Basudeva or Bongshigopal of Salagrama. Salagrama is traditionally worshiped by Brahmins only in the Damodariya sect of Vaisnavism.

The Sattrra has the Chakra Sila, Padma Sila and twining lotus engraved in stone. There are also Bar Sarai, Saru Sarai and the image of Basudevan Bongshigopal. Manuscripts of the Katha Gita and Katha Bhagabat written on Sanchipat are also preserved in the temple. Thousands of dicsiples of this Sattrra are scattered in the Mayong area. The Sattrra began the worship of the Panchadevata in Mayong.

The Gossain of this Sattrā were very courageous as they were able to reside amidst wild animals like the tigers, elephants, yak, buffalo, snakes etc. Amongst the gossains, late Nabin Chandra Gossain was the most popular in modern Mayong. He inaugurated the Ganesh Nam, an annual rite of female devotees at night at the Ganesh temple of Hatimuria in 1960 A.D.

This Sattrā is bounded by the posts of stone carved with the lotus, Trident and chakra on all the four corners of the boundary. The Pakariya River on the east side and the main road is on the south-west and both the north and south sides are covered by agricultural field. The daily rituals of the "Sattrā" viz, Puwa prasanga, Madhya prasanga, Sandhya prasanga, and festivals like Dol yatra, Ekadashi, Purnima, etc were performed in it.

Unfortunately, during the "Burmese aggression" the shrines images were slightly destroyed in 1824 A.D. It is said that about 300, Burmese soldiers were killed for revenge at Chanaka-ghat of traditional boats by drowning them in the river Brahmaputra; The place where the Burmese soldiers were killed was known as - Mantari. Most probably, this is the only place in Assam where the Burmese soldiers - were killed by the local people in a well planned manner. The name of the killer was Lt - Talau Koch. Yet, the gossain of this Sattrā-resided at Sildubi Sattrā till 1917 A.D. Due to the ravage of floods, the Gossain shifted the Sattrā to Chatabari located on the north bank of the river Kapilee, near the main road within the boundaries of the traditional Mayong kingdom. So, they named the Sattrā as Tuli-Sildubi Sattrā. The gossains were not able to bring the traditional-stone images to the new place. The Sattrā is therefore split into two. At

present, the Sattrha has a committee to look after the annual rites of the Sattrha.

Dharmadeva Goswami, Bhavadeva Goswami, Chakradeva, Ratul Deva, Shiva Deva, Sri Ram Deva, Betha Deva, Nabin Chandra Deva a freedom fighter; Madhab-Deva, were sattradhikars of this sattrha. Iswar Chandra Goswami, is the present Sattradhikar while Gopal Goswami is acting as the Deka Sattradhikar. The people of the Koch Community under the king of Mayong pay a visit to the Gossain and also pay a tax called *Guru Kar* to the gossain.⁵²

Misamari Sattrha :-

The Khula Gaon Misamari Sattrha (Gauriya or Chaityanyia) is the greatest and most popular Gauriya Sattrha in Assam located at Khula Gaon in the district of Morigaon. At the very beginning, Krishna Chandra Bairagi, the son of Madhavacharyya established the Sattrha at Panbari in 1610 A.D. He hosted a feast for the disciples with Misa fishes (prawn) for earth filling for the foundation of the Sattrha. So, the Sattrha is named as Misamari Sattrha.

After founding many Sattrhas in various parts of Assam, he married Sulochana Devi, the daughter of a Brahmin, Achyut of Vyaskuchi and resided at Mathurapur Sattrha. He had two sons namely Purnananda and Premananda. He died at the Mathurapur Sattrha of Sonapur.

Bairagi Sattradhikar's son Premananda had two sons - Bhriguram and Keshabchandra. Sattradhikara Keshabchandra had a son, Abhimanyu; Abhimanyu had two sons - Khargeswar and Nityananda; Khargeswar became the Sattradhikara and founded another Sattrha named Na-Khola. Nityananda later became the Sattradhikara of this Sattrha. His two sons -

Sabhananda and Shubhananda became the Sattradhikars of Devapara and Kholagaon Misamari towards the end of the 18th century. The present Sattradhikar of Devapara is Rajani Goswami and the Sattradhikar of Kholagaon Misamari Sattras is Dulal Goswami.

This is the origin of Misamari gauriya Sattras at Kholagaon, Devapara and Komoraguri which spread the the Gauriya vaisnava cult in Assam. The Kholagaon Misamari Sattras has been able to convert the tribal people of the area into vaisnavas under Chaitaniya sect. Hira people are also the disciples of Misamari Sattras. The Misamari Sattras has increased the disciples in the District of Morigaon.⁵³

Kalsila Sattras:-

Kalsila Sattras of the Mahapurushiya sect is another significant Sattras in Mayong Kingdom. It was founded by Ananta Ata alias Hridayananda Kayastha, under instruction from Ai Kanaklata, the youngest daughter-in-law of Sankardeva, in 1642 A.D.⁵⁴ at Kalsila about 1 km. from Raja Mayong village.

About the origin of Mayong Kingdom, the text of *Kalsileeya Gossain Charit* says-

Tehuye Asiya Mayong Rajyata

Kalsila grame Roila /

Premlata aru Ram je Kirtana

dui shasttra Karilanta //

(Meaning: he came to the kingdom of Mayong and rested at Kalsila village, he composed two scriptures namely Premlata and Rama Kirtana.)

He composed the two medieval verse narratives named “*Sri Ram Kirtan*” and “*Premalata*”. After him, his son, Bhubaneswar lifted the Sattrā to Doloichuba in the traditional Dandua Kingdom. The King Rajeswar Sinha settled the Kalsila with a grant of 700 *purās* of revenue free land.

Festivals:

In addition to the yearly functions and rituals of the above temples, notable festivals in Raja-Mayong village and the area of Mayong are performed throughout the Assamese calendar year beginning from the middle of April (first Bohag) under the auspices of the royal committee authority and some others are performed under the auspices of the local authority.

1. Bohag Bihu (Basudeva puja or Panchadevatagossain Mela utsav)
2. Pachoti
3. Bamungossain Puja
4. Lakhi puja
5. Radhastami
6. Janmastami
7. Holi Utsav
8. Shivaratri
9. Ganesh Nam
10. Astaprahar Nam
11. Phakuwa

Panchadevata Puja :-

The worship of Basudeva implies the Panchadevata or the respective Devatas, which is the essential part of the adoration of the Basudeva. The

idols of Panchadevata (five deities) of Raja-Mayong were brought from Kochbehar in 1590A.D. by the great king, Sarachcha Chandra Sinha. Firstly, it was started with only three idols of Basudeva; Sambhu or Shiva and Maya or Gauri. After that Ranjit Sinha, added the other two deities of Brahma and Ram and coined the name of "Panchadevata".

This "Pancha-Devata" worship has been prevailing in Assam since time immemorial. Though it mentions the five deities, in practice many deities of the Hindu pantheon are included. At the top Lord Vishnu; Gauri, Brahma, Surya, Shiva, Lakshmi, Saraswati, the earth, Indra, Ananta, Agni, Dikpal, Astabasu, eleven Rudras and the ten avataras are worshiped with the rites and after these, adoration of Basudeva begins and then Hari Kirtan, i.e. the glories of Krishna are chanted. According to the rites, Pancha Devata are viz. Shiva or Sambhu, Gauri or Yogamaya, Brahma or Surjya, Rama and Basudeva.

The worship of the five deities therefore is an example of religious toleration and liberalisation. Firstly, embraces all the deities of diverse sects of believers from Shaiva Shakta and Vaisnava as well as the worshippers of demigods and goddesses. Secondly, it has led to a kind of peace and tranquility in the society. It creates the religious tolerances in the minds of people among the varieties of religious faith and practices in Hinduism.

The "Pancha Devata" festival is celebrated under the auspices of the royal family. It is celebrated for three days viz-4, 5 and 6th day of Bohag in the month of April. First day, the 4th Bohag, is used for the divine bathing of the Salagramas, representing the five deities and a "Raj-Darbar" is held for general discussion on the festival as well as the appointment of new Medhi in case of demise of any Medhi. Traditionally,

the deities are bathed by the royal priests. But when the Brahmin families became extinct as they did not have any issue, Brahmins were invited from outside the kingdom for this purpose. Now-a-days, the king, himself serve the ritual bathing of the deities on the 4th day of Bohag and the service of the Brahmin priest is no longer utilized.

Two Royal processions are led on the occasion of the Pancha-Devata puja festival for the next two days. The first procession with the five deities is followed by the public of Raja-Mayong and Hatimuriya. The Gossai, the King, Bishayas Medhis; Banghthai and general people take part in the royal procession on the second day of the festival. They start from Raja-Mayong to Hatimuriya village about 1k.m. from Raja-Mayong. The second procession is led from Raja-Mayong to Burha-Mayong on the third day of the festival.

This shift of the tradition of bathing the icons by the king himself instead of Brahmin priests is a noteworthy change. It is mandatory according to Brahminical rites to bathe the salagrama by a Brahmin priest. But in Raja-Mayong a total of eight salagrams are bathed by the non Brahmin king and it has been an accepted practice. The King of Mayong, Ghanakanta Sinha is a Bhajaniya Vaishnava of the Damodariya sect i.e. a person who has attained a high position in the Bhakti cult, and has crossed the age of 90. He has been continuing this practice for quite a considerable time. The role of the Brahmins in performing the worship of "Panchadevata" has totally done away with. Even the *nirmalya* i.e. the sacred ablation is also given by the Medhies as appointed by the king.

Though the worship of "pancha-Devata" is a traditional one, it has changed along with time and now it is modern festival fully participated by

the people of Mayong. The Royal system of Koch dynasty ensures the participation of all sections of the people of the society of the area in the administration. Even, the representatives of lower caste get a Royal administrative portfolio in administration. This is totally different from the administrative system of the Ahom kings.

The Royal procession includes people of all castes and communities such as the Koch, Nath, Karbi, Tribal, Keot, Hira, Dom, etc. They bow down their heads in front of the five deities and the king of Raja-Mayong. Traditionally the Royal procession is started as soon as the king ascended on *Dola* i.e. a palanquin. After independence, the king gave up the practice of riding a palanquin and began walking in the procession. Of course, now a day the king rides on a car or auto-rickshaw because of his old age.

The village musicians take active part in the worship of “pancha-Devata”. The drummers who play the big drums called the Bar-Dhol, the player of Kali, a traditional reed trumpet and the player of the Mridanga, a percussion instrument, the singers of the devotional songs known as the kirtan, all accompany the procession and perform through the streets.⁵⁵

Pachati :-

“Pachati” is a notable ceremony of Assamese Hindu-Society. Five days after the Janmastami, that is the thirteenth day in the dark half of the moon, in the Assamese months of Bhadra or Shrawan during August-September Pachati or Nandotsav is celebrated by men and women of the locality either separately or together.

Pachati is an attractive (Socio-Religious) festival of Raja-Mayong village. It is said that Nanda, the king of Gukul invited the subjects to his

house after the birth of Krishna. He was very happy at the birth of a son to him, as he did not have any child for him for a longtime. Nanda therefore celebrated the naming ceremony known as the *pachati* of his child. On the other hand, Basudeva, the real father of the child sent the Kula-Guru or priest, Gargya for the naming of the child. Gargya came and named the child as 'Krishna'.

This rite is done in a graceful manner in the midst of religious songs, dance and acting. Someone takes the role of Gargya while others take the role of Nanda, Yashoda, etc. The festival generates a lot of humour and funfair. The womenfolk mix milk, turmeric powder or paste, mustard paste or oil, ghee and honey and sprinkle it on the devotees. They also smear it on each other's face. Moreover, they pour water on each other as a result of which the ground becomes muddy and finally they fall and roll in the slimy muddy floor.⁵⁶

Mal Devata Puja (Malshram) :-

During the reign of the king of Mayong, Bhagadatta Sinha, the "Malshram" or "Mal puja" (worship of physical energy) was performed by Sattram Mikir, the chieftain of the Mikir community, to make the Mayong kingdom powerful. The rite of 'Malshram' is called Mal-Kobowa (Mal beating). This was done between Raja-Mayong and Burha-Mayong village. In this worship the priest carried a few plants of reed and went on beating on whatever he found on his way. Finally, the sacrificial things are immersed in the pond of Gobhali. This pond was dug by the king for the purpose of this rite. An image of Lord Ganesha of 16th century has been discovered on a rock near of that pond. From that time, the local people worship this image of Ganesha. The practice this rite continued till 1950. But now a day it is no longer in vogue.⁵⁷

Vishahari Maroi Puja :-

The worship of the snake goddess Vishahari is widely prevalent in the kingdom of Mayong. The area of Raja-Mayong was full of wild animals such as the Rhinoceros, Buffalo, Yak, Tigers, Serpents, Birds, Wild-Pig, Bears, Turtles, Elephants, etc. The people of this area resorted to magical practices to ward off the wild animals. People of the locality say that this is one of the reasons for the widespread belief in Magic & Tantrism in Raja-Mayong village. The king, Svarachcha Chandra Sinha ordered the bishaya i.e. the office bearer of the court Leh Ram to arrange the Vishahari-Maroi puja in Mayong on 15th Phagun (in February last) in 1589. Accordingly, Leh Ram celebrated the rite of Vishahari Maroi puja at his village for three days. Leh Ram successfully performed this rite; so, the village is named after him as the Lehpati village. Now, Lehpati is a Gaon Panchayat under Mayong Development Block. The practice of Vishahari or Maroi worship is still prevalent in the region.⁵⁸

Ai nam:-

Ai nam is associated with the worship of the Ai, also known as Durga or Bhagabati, Kali, Burhi Ai, Kechaikhaiti, Shitala Ai, Sisu Ai, etc., the goddess of small pox. Women are associated with the prayer of Ai nam. Women of Raja-Mayong are experts in singing or chanting of the Ai nam and they offers Kutcha Bhog or prashad with the Ai nam.

Ai means mother and it is used as prefix before the name of Goddesses. Mahamaya or Maya is the prime deity who unleashed the diseases like small pox, pox, madness, fever, exorcism etc. in the world. Sometimes the goddess Mahamaya is equated with the goddesses Durga, Kali, Bhagabati, Kechaikhaiti, Shitala, etc. Women therefore invoke the

name of these Devis or Goddesses to get relief from the specific diseases. Ainam Ai-jorani or sacred water is essential for curing pox. The Ainam is widely prevalent in the Raja-Mayong village as well as in district of Morigaon. The Bhagabati Than of Mayong at Hatimuriya very close to the Lakhi Temple is the centre of Ainam in which every Tuesday and Saturday, the women while singing the Ainam offer “Bhoga”.⁵⁹

Barshik Kriya :-

“Oresha Varnan” is a chapter of the Kirtan Ghosha composed by Sankar Deva. The people of Raja-Mayong sing this chapter for two days after the new year of Hindus begins. They start the chanting in the evening of the first day and in the evening of the second day. All the people contribute the expenses and join in the singing of the Kirtan on this occasion.

The Traditional ruler of Mayong Dimoriya, Arimatta built a Jagannath Temple at Meetonee village, near of the Itila Beel. The performance of the Oresha Kirtan is done in this temple also.⁶⁰ This performance is called the Barshik Kriya

Astaprahar Naam:-

Astaprahar Naam is generally performed on the thirteenth day of the bright half of the lunar month in the month of Magha or Phalguna. This practice is prevalent among the Nath community and the Bengali people of the area. This is a practice of the Chaitanya sect of Vaisnavism. Five devotees of the Chaitanya sect start the singing, which is called the Mahakirtan and the singing continues for the whole day. They take only

light vegetarian food. The Acharya that is the principal singer of the Mahakirtan must be a life long vegetarian.

The devotees put on yellow coloured cloth on which the name of the lord is printed and white chheng (a long cloth which can cover the body in free size). People take vegetarian food, mostly cooked gruel of rice and pulses popularly known as *khichiri* after the kirtan. Curd and flat rice is taken in the morning as breakfast on the day.⁶¹

Radhastami :-

The eighth day of the bright half of the lunar month of Bhadra-Ashwin (September - October) is observed as the Radhastami, the birth day of Radha. This day is called "Radhastami" because it is said that one who celebrate it or take "Brata" becomes beloved of the Lord Krishna- as Radha loved Krishna. This day is considered to be sacred by the devotees of higher rank of the Chaitanya sect.

Radhastami Brata is the most coveted of the religious functions observed by the high ranking devotees of the Lord Chaitanya of Raja-Mayong. On this auspicious day, devotees of the Chaitanya sect and people of the Nath cult of Raja-Mayong village put on the Gauranga dress or pita – Bastra, i.e. yellow coloured clothes and take 'Jap Mala' (a kind of rosary of counting the name of Krishna and Rama) and put sandal wood paste on the forehead. The devotees offer raw as well as cooked vegetarian food to the deity and the devotees partake the same in the intervals of the singing of the kirtan.⁶²

Shivaratri :-

The fourteenth day of the dark half of the month of Phalguna (February - March) is considered as the most auspicious day for the worship of Lord Shiva and the night is known as Shivaratri . This night has special importance for the Shiva Temple of Kachasila on the North side of Raja-Mayong. Shiva is worshiped in the Temple by offerings of soaked gram and fruits. It is said that a mixture of hemp, milk and sugar, called “ghota” is indispensable part of the Shiva puja on this day. The devotees also indulge in heavy dose of hemp - smoking and ghota drinking during the night. The people of Mayong enjoy this day in a graceful manner.⁶³

Phakuwa :-

The Deul or Phakuwa is a three-day function observed in the Basudeva temple from the fourteenth day of the bright half of the lunar month of Phalguna (February - March). The term “Deul” denotes here “Dolyatra” or Holi or Phakuwa festival that is celebrated throughout India on the full-moon night either in the month of Phalguna (February - March) or sometime in Caitra (March - April). The Dol-Yatra is a festival in which the image of Krishna, called Govinda also, is placed in a swing. The term “Phakuwa” denotes the festival of colours, as the villagers enjoy the smearing of varieties of coloured powder in the Holi festival.

On the first day of the festival the idol of Basudeva is taken out of the Temple and worshiped outside by making offerings of flowers and edibles and singing Kirtan. The idol is then taken round the Deul for seven times and then installed in the swing fitted in it. “A thatched hut is erected near the Deul on a specified place and a male goat is kept tied to one of the posts. A symbolic ritual of burning of the goat is observed by putting the hut on the fire in the evening after holding other rites. After a few hours of

the animal are burnt it is taken away and later eaten in a community feast. The part of the celebration is called the Meshdaha and the first days functions come to an end there.”⁶⁴

The Rojaghoria khel of Raja-Mayong bears the expenses for the performance of “Yatra”, a form of dramatic performance or Bhaona, the traditional drama performed in the Vaisnava sect for all the three days of the Holi festival.

Ekadashi :-

The Ekadashi is the eleventh day either of the bright or dark half of a lunar month. According to Vishnu Purana, the Ekadashi is a special day set apart for the worship of Lord Vishnu. It is generally believed that the day of Ekadashi increases the power of the nature; so, it is not good to take heavy food and in some extent it is better not to take any food at all. The people observe the Ekadashi respectively in the Namgharas of the village with chanting the Kirtan-Ghosha from 11-12 a.m. to 1-2 p.m.⁶⁵

Ashokastami:-

The eight day of the bright half of the lunar month of Caitra (March-April) is observed as the “Ashokastami”. This day is called “Ashoka” because it is said that one who celebrates, it becomes free from ‘Shoka’ i.e. grief. A ceremonial bath is taken by the devotees in the South bank of the Brahmaputra. This ceremony is most popular amongst the Namashudras in Mayong area. Some of the Nath people also observe it.⁶⁶

Ganesh Nam :-

“Ganesh Nam” is an annual performance of the women. It is said that this performance began at the initiatives of Gossain, Nabin Chandra Goswami, a freedom fighter and the former Sattradhikar of the Sildubi Sattra.⁶⁷ Traditionally, a hom, the rites of sacred fire, was done up to 1995 by the priest as per invitation of the committee of the Ganesh Temple. This rite is celebrated on the definite day of Ganesh Puja and “Ganesh Nama” is newly added in the rites of Ganesh Puja at night long programme of the women of area concerned. This is a significant rite of the womenfolk of Mayong.

The committee of the Ganesh Temple looks after the property of the Temple and appoints the Babaji or Sanyasi. To Worship the Lord Ganesh the committee collects the contributions for the annual rites. The local people offer rice, coconut, Betel nut or Betel leaves, mustard oil etc. The people of Mayong believe that Ganesha is their Traditional deity of goodness and prosperity.

Lakshmi Puja:-

Lakshmi puja (festival) is celebrated on the day of full Moon in the month of Ashwin (October-November) at the Lakshmi Temple near of the Mayong market adjacent to the Traditional Bhagavatee shrine of Hatimuriya. The priest for the Lashmi puja is invited by the puja committee. This Lakshmi puja is the popular socio religious festival in Mayong.

The puja committee of this festival which invites the Bhaona party, the theatre party or others for three days. The people of the whole Mayong participate in the puja and the festival becomes the centre of the joy and recreation. This festival unites the people of the area at least once in a year.⁶⁸

Pollution :-

In the earliest time of the traditional kingdom, the katanees that is the people of the weaver caste were regarded as untouchable by the upper castes like the Brahmins and the Koches. In a later period they embraced the Nath Cult. The high caste people did not dine with the Nath people. It is said that one who marries a girl of Yogi i.e. Nath caste could not be cleaned. But now caste discrimination and untouchability have been eradicated to a great extent as a result of the expansion of education, communication and secular organizations. Presently secular people do not discriminate on grounds of caste. Of course religiously orthodox people have a propensity to discriminate on grounds of caste and avoid dining together with them. By interview it has been gathered that people of those castes, who have not been initiated to the Vaisnava religion or other sects of Hinduism through a process called Sharan and the ones who do not cremate the dead, are regarded as outcast to some extent. For those reasons most probably Nath people got initiated to vaishnavism and satriya culture to be at par with other castes of Assam. They have succeeded also.⁶⁹

Beside these, religious taboos like drinking wine and rearing poultry in the village and the temple are strictly adhered to. Marriage between members of the same lineage is prohibited. "If a person violates the two norms and then does not admit it, he is put to certain tests."⁷⁰ After being proved guilty they have to undergo prayachitta (penance) or

Mundon(shaving the head). Many people of the Nath and Koch castes have undergone the rites of prayachitta or Mundon for drinking wine and marriage within same lineages. Marriages between members of Nath caste and koch caste is also strictly prohibited. Yet three or four cases of breaking this taboo have been recorded in the village.

Split:-

At one time, the Royal festival, the Panchadevata Mela was split into two. Once, the in-charge of the Saraswati Puja of Mayong Higher Secondary school had invited the priest of the Nath caste at that time. Suddenly the other people of the area of Raja-Mayong raised objection to inviting the priest of the Nath caste and had boycotted the Saraswati puja at Higher Secondary School.⁷¹

As a retaliation of this the Nath people boycotted the Panchadevata Puja and began the celebration of the Puja separately. This continued for three or four years after which three leading people of the Nath community died prematurely and some of the people fell ill. The people believed that this happened as a result of this separation. Finally they gave up celebrating the Puja separately and joined the Puja performed by the other communities.

The above background of the early shrines and temple prove that there were a large number of traditional religious institutions in the area of Raja-Mayong. These institutions have undergone a lot of change in the course of time. These changes are Physical as well as ideological. The physical changes is that the traditional shrines and temples were temporary structures of thatch, bamboo, wood but now these are turned into permanent structures of concrete. The Keshhaikhaiti Shrine and the Royal

Bhagabati Shrine of Raja-Mayong are such examples. Of course some of the shrines such as Sil-Gossain and Rangadariya have not changed physically.. it is believed that these two Shrines were established by the king of Raja-Mayong in 16th century A.D.

Though religion was revered in the past the people have lost faith in religious activities. In the past they were very superstitious also but at present they have become more rational and less superstitious. The expansion of education, change in the occupational pattern and exposure to the scientific developments through the electronic and other media are some of the reasons for this change.

In dress pattern, the medhis and pujaries have given up the traditional dress and weapons such as the sword and the chopper(*dao*) at the time of worshipping. They simply put on the *dhoti*, *kurta* and *gamocha* etc. Of course, though most of the people have been converted into Vaisnavas they have not totally forsaken their earlier belief which is evident in the existence of the shrines and temples sacred to the gods like Ganesha, Shiva, Kali, Durga etc. These shrines still survive and some committees look after the properties of the Shrines.⁷⁰

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