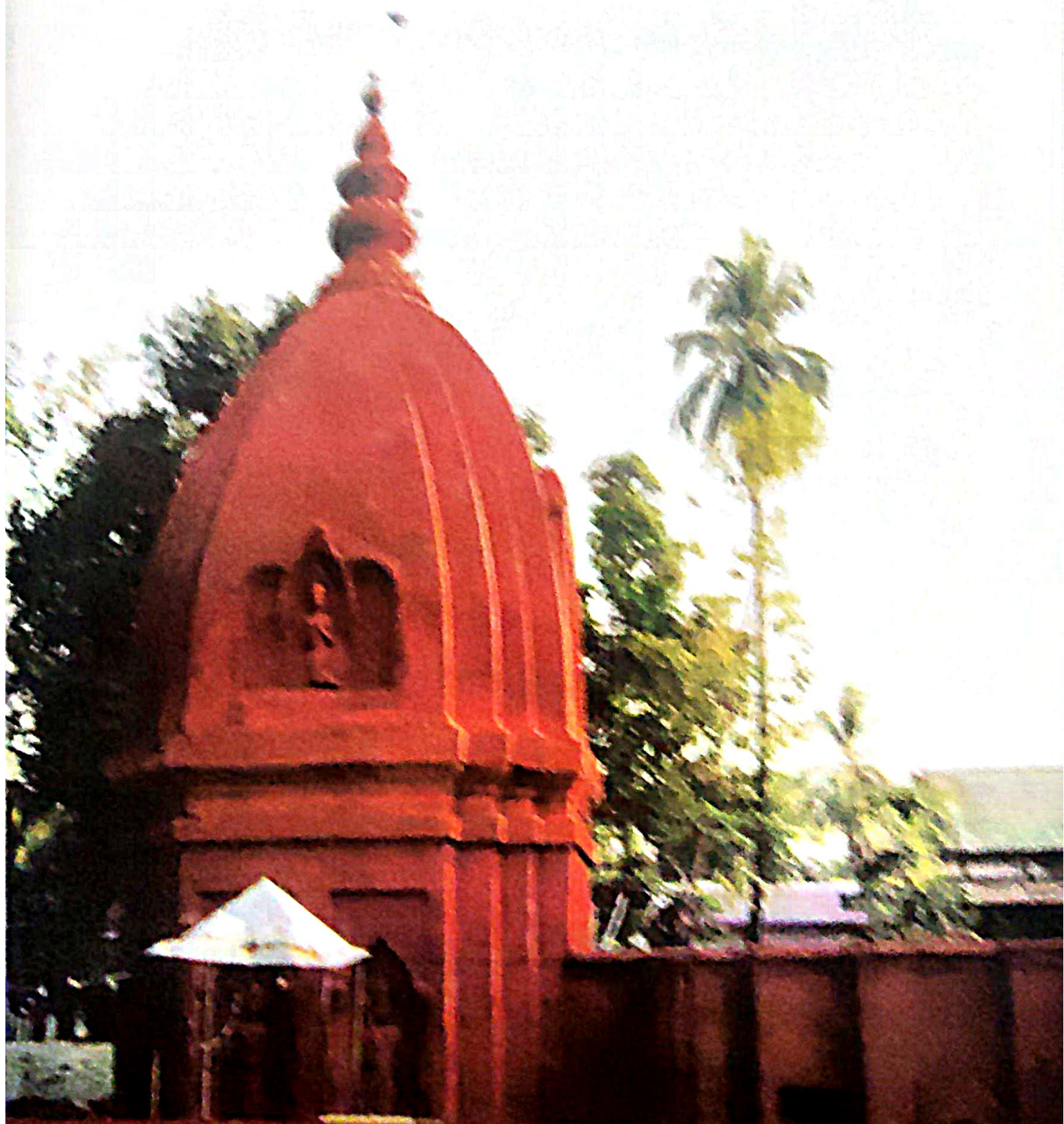


RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES OF WEST NALBARI



DIPIKA BARMAN

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জাগরণ সাহিত্য প্রকাশন

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PREFACE

From the primitive stage of human civilization, religion and religious practices have been playing a vital role in man's life in every where in the world. There are many religions in the world and every religion has certain religious practices or ceremonies. In all religions of the world, religious practices play an important role as cohesive force amongst the communities. It teaches human to live unitedly in the society. The practices or ceremonies bind the people of any specific area with one thread. Though the method of prayer and worship, religious practices are different to different religions, all religions teach humanity and universal brotherhood. The bond of unity among the people of different religions is established by religious practices performed by them. It will help our society to know about the role of religion in bringing unity among different people in a society.

But in the present day situation, religious communalisms which owe its origin as a result of misinterpretation of religion become a burning question of the day. So, the importance of studying different religions and its practices in the west Nalbari area of Nalbari district is conformity with the national scenario is very significant. As such, in this study an attempt has been made to investigate the influence of religious practices in uniting the people and has made an attempt to identify the superstitions which hampers for living a better religious life in this locality.

So, it is hoped that the conclusions derived from the study will be useful for the national integration, brotherhood and humanity among the people of our country.

In this regards, I offer my deep aspiration and respect to my well wisher, friends and colleagues for their inspiration and encouragement in the completion of this work.

I am also grateful to the people of different villages for their cooperation in their interviews and collecting data for the present study.

And last, I greatly appreciate the help of my husband whose constant support sustained me in the preparation of this book.

Dipika Barman

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Chapter-1

Introduction

A Pen Picture of Nalbari District

Nalbari is one of the district of Assam. Few years ago, Nalbari was a sub division of undivided Kamrup District. Nalbari is situated on North bank of river Brahmaputra.

Boundary of Nalbari district: In the north of this district, the Baksa district is situated. In the East and South of Nalbari, Kamrup (Rural) district is situated. And in the West side, Barpeta is situated.

The area of the Nalbari district is 2257 Square k.m. It is a vast populated district. According to census report, 2001, the total population of Nalbari is 11, 38,148. People are living in this district bearing different religions, different languages, castes or creed from. But they are living like one family for a long time ago. According to the census report, 2001, on religion, the Hindu population of Nalbari district is 873749 and Muslim population is 253842.

West Nalbari is the western part of Nalbari district. According to census report, 2001, the total population of west Nalbari is 1, 34,587. The west Nalbari area is a vast area comprising of 63 villages. The most important villages of west Nalbari are Chamata, Bihampur, Kaithalkuchi, Belsor, Bori, Barnaddi, Barhelacha, Gandhia, Dahudi, Kaihati, Panigoan, Solmara, Nalisha, Thutikata, Jagara, etc.

Here we find two main religions, namely Hinduism and Islam. They differ in regard to the method of prayer, worship and religious ceremonies. Though their castes, occupations, life style, mode of beliefs are different, they lived together as a member of one family. They observe different religious practices in which all the followers participate in those occasions forgetting the differences of socio-economic status among them.

Chapter-2

A Brief Description of Religion

George Thomson observed:

“A religion may be defined as a system of practices and beliefs resting on the assumption that the world is subject to the control of a supernatural force or agency, which can be influenced by prayer and sacrifice and is apprehended by faith as opposed to knowledge.”

An acceptable definition of “Religion” itself is difficult to attain. Religion, being complex, have different aspects and dimensions. Religion is a tie that binds. Religion, according to Dictionary of Religion, is a set of recognizable systems of belief and practice having a family resemblance. According to Oxford Dictionary, “Religion is human recognition of a superhuman controlling power and especially of a personal God or Gods entitled to obedience and worship.”

S. Radhakrishnan defines, “Religion as a way of life is the seeking of the eternal. It is more behaviour than belief”. If we believe in God we must act in the light of that faith. Religion begins for us with awareness that our life is not ourselves alone. There is another, greater life unfolding and sustaining us. Religion as man’s search for this greater self will not accept any creeds as final or any laws as perfect.

For Gandhi, “religion is not just a theoretical concept that seeks to satisfy intellectual curiosity and urges, it is, for him the way of life, a practical necessity.”

Religion is essentially a principle of life, the feeling of a living relation between the human individual and the power of which the world is a manifestation. Religion is the expression of the eternal and indestructible metaphysical craving of human nature. So religion has a dominant concern of mankind. Religion is the art of living, through right action, how to live our daily life of peace and happiness. Thus religion is a system of specific ideas, feelings and religious ceremonies or practices.

Religion is the balm of afflicted minds. It is as Bacon's observes, "the chief bond of human society". It is the most powerful factor in the regulation of human affairs. It is religion which taught to mankind discipline, duty and service. Religion leads man to see life through a ethical perspective and refrain from the material pursuits which give birth to jealousy, mutual distress, and violence and so on. Religion is one thing which creates equality for rich and poor, young and old, and transcends and sex.

Religion includes the whole of one's life. Religion as a practice based either on a belief in God as a supreme being, or as a power, both beyond and within cosmos flux, which includes the principles and practices of certain ethical behaviour.

'Dharma' is vital for human life. It is the man's very nature that he can't live without religion. Religion which becomes a way of life remains alive as it flows through time absorbing contemporary influences within itself but keeping its essential core inviolate. Religion has provided man with the kind of spiritual peace without which he can't even achieve material prosperity.

Religion or religious practices influence two ways: -- a positive, cohesive and integrating influence and a negative, destructive and disintegrating influence. From the psychological standpoint religion wields twofold influences in human mind; it makes human mind ritual-centered, loyal to a narrow religious group. But it also broadens human mind, develops a feeling of universal brotherhood and evokes a desire for service to man.

Religion is a medium of satisfying the hunger of one's soul which arises due to the deficiencies of mundane life. Religion is an individual as well as social phenomenon. From the individual standpoint, religion develops the inner spiritual nature of human being. From the social standpoint it develops the social consciousness of human being. The main function of religion consists in strengthening social solidarity. Religious ideas objectified in society. Religion is one of the major social agencies which exercise dominant influences in the mind of man. Every institution is being judged in terms of its contribution to the restructuring of human society for the common good.

Religion is not a way of propaganda imposing believe to others. Eventually, it is a mode of purification, a mode of tolerance, a mode of refinement and a mode of unification. Religion is one of earliest institution and culture of human society. It is a growing and dynamic subject. Religion can play an effective role for restoration of peace in the society. Religion brings integration in society through the establishment of certain norms. Religious institutions are the centre of social integration. Religious institutions are only the place for worship but many social activities are performed in this place. A man of religion will do nothing harms to others, rather than he will fight against all injustice, fatalities and dogmas. Indeed the conflict between man-to-man and society-to-society was, now it is and it will, so long human society exists.

The majority of societies and people of the world follow some religion or the other. Our religions and paths are different but the goal is the same. People, Societies and countries who believe in God spend their lives walking on the virtuous path. Religion is needed to make man's life happy. It guides man on his journey through life and shows him the way to live. It draws our man's humanistic virtues and creates respect in man for human values. Religion takes away man's baser instincts like – lust, anger, greed, ego, hatred, etc. and generates the loving emotion of universal brotherhood in man.

So, dharma is the first teaching for a good life. It is vital for human life. Rites and rituals change from time to time but common rules of good conduct haven't undergone a change. Traditional rituals and customs have had their significance since the beginning of human history. It is an interesting fact that some attractive rituals of one religion are adopted by the followers of other religions. Religion or religious practices include the whole of one's life. Religions as a practice based either on a belief in God as a supreme being, or as a power, both beyond and within cosmos flux, which includes the principles and practices of certain ethical behaviour.

Chapter-3

THE DIFFERENT SECTS OF HINDUISM AND ISLAM

In west Nalbari area, there are two main religious communities, ----Hinduism and Islam. According to census report 2001, on religion, the Hindu population of Nalbari district is 873749 and Muslim population is 253842

Every religion has generally three important features—the philosophy, the mythology and the rituals. These three features never be common in all religions.

Hinduism has its own philosophy, own mythology and own rituals, but it accepts others with a feeling of brotherhood, as it believes in one God, from whatever angle and whatever land. The ideas of Hindu religion are very liberal and acceptable to anyone. According to the beliefs of Hindu religion, any pure-hearted person who does not even worship or mediate or perform any other rites and rituals, is able to achieve salvation, because of the fact that he possesses in a sacred heart and that he believes in honest and harmless living in this world, with compassion and love towards everything.

Hinduism is perhaps the oldest religion of all living religions. Varying beliefs and practices can be found amongst those who call themselves Hindus. The variety and complexity of Hindu beliefs and practices can be implied into the basic philosophy that Hinduism entertains and professes. Hindu religion is an amalgam of various kinds of beliefs and practices. The overall culture or religion which is now known as Hinduism is a gradual growth out of the amalgam and synthesis of beliefs and practices of various strands. Hinduism has very appreciably retained within itself all

these kinds of beliefs and practices ranging from most profound religious thoughts and ideas to gross superstitions. Hinduism is a complex religion admitting of vast differences of beliefs and practices amongst its followers.

Hinduism is divided into certain sects. The Hindu sects have never been set completely apart from each other and there is a perfect understanding between them. A sense of mutual penetration and brotherhood exists between them. There have been two sects in Hinduism---- Saivism and Vaisnavism. One more sect—Saktism has also been recognized in it.

Apparently, at least, Saiva cult of religion is older than the vaisnava variety, since it had its origin in India during the Indus valley civilization. Siva Ling was being venerated in India from the time of the period of the puranas. Devotion to the sivaling continued during the Mahabharata and Ramayana periods. Siva worship took on the form of a religious sect in the first few centuries after Christ. In terms of history, it was Megasthenes who made first mention of Saiva religion, and it appears that the Greek name Dyonisius is only a modified form of Saiva. Saivism takes "Siva-worship" as its principal religious duty. Siva worship is mostly prevalent in Hinduism in the form of this linga- worship. The history of Saiva cult in Assam goes back to very early times.

The other sect is that of the Vaisnavism. This sect is very little associated with ascetism or other such Hindus otherworthy practices. Vaisnavism cult passed through numerous ups and downs in the course of its development. Krishna is among the more important such products, which accounts for the importance attached to Vaisnava sect the worship of Krishna. Krishna is the popular incarnations of Vishnu, who are very widely revered in various forms. The religious observance of Vaisnavism is marked by prayer service held in the prayer hall or in the courtyard of a household. No Image is installed on the altar of a Namghar, instead a sacred book like Dasama, Kirtanaghosa of Sankardeva. The Vaisnava saints and their followers introduced different festivals

through Satras and Nanghars to popularize Vaisnavism in land. The birth anniversaries of Mahapurush Sankardeva and Madhavadeva are observed with due solemnity in all Satras and Nanghars. The religious observance of vaisnavas is marked by prayer services held in the prayer hall or the courtyard of a household.

Vaisnavism has another sect known as Damadorian Vaisnavism. It is the Brahmin guru of a large section of Vaisnavism. Damadorian sect was propounded by Damodardeva. He refused to accept the authority of Madhavadeva. The Damodoria form of Vaisnavism came to be a representative of Brahmanical Vaisnavism. It took to lead in organizing full-fledged Satras (Manikut). They are not opposed to karma marga of the Vedas. The practice of Agama and Nigama are maintained and Vishnu and Siva are treated as non-distinguishable.

The third Hindu sect is the Saktas who worship the Sakti (the female part) of the gods. Sakti, the goddess is worshiped under various names, viz., Devi, Mahamaya, Durga, Kali, etc. The consorts of these gods are taken, as the personified forms of Durga or Kali is particularly the object of adoration for the saktas. Saktism seems based on the idea that the passions of the flesh may be best regulated and sublimated by making a complete exhaustion of them in religious rites. Sakti puja is in a sense the adoration of Siva himself in a specific form. His sakti takes different forms—sometimes Parvati, sometimes Durga, sometimes Kali and sometimes Uma. Saktism is an important religious sect in the district of Nalbari. The way in which the saktas perform their acts of adoration or worship is very mysterious, full of rites and rituals. One manifestation of sakti is the ten-armed Durga.

The Sects of Islam:

'Islam' means surrender of the soul to God. Mohammad preached the unity and majesty of one God. Islam is something more than a religion. It provides some moral principles and socio-cultural philosophy. The ethical teachings or principles of Islam are very much connected with the behaviour, conduct and the religious activities of a Muslim. A Muslim must treat every other as a brother with friendliness and generosity. It is a religion of peace, tranquility, and resignation to the will of God. What is required from a Muslim is a kind heart, sincere repentance and sincere effort to practice truth, charity, renunciation and service and to avoid evil and sin.

Although there is unity of faith, religion and God in Islam, still there is some multiplicity of sects among Muslims. Mohammad himself is said to have predicted that his followers would divide into 72 different sects, but time showed that the actual number far exceeded his prophecy. However, the most important division of Muslim has been between the Shiah and the Sunnis. According to Shiah, it is Ali who should have been elected caliph as the immediate successor of Mohammad. The Sunnis, on the other hand, take this successor as legitimate. The Sunnis are opposed to Shiah on the point of the rightful lineage of caliphate and believe that the order in which the caliphs actually held on to their positions were rightful. Moreover, there is a doctrinal difference too. The Sunnis are the followers of what is called the Sunna (custom or community). 'Sunna' is the Islamic term for the traditional sayings and doings of Mohammad. The Sunnis take these traditional records of the sayings and doings of Mohammad to be as authentic as Quran itself, which the Shiah deny. The Shiah believe in the Supreme authority of Quran only. The Sunnis are therefore regarded as traditionalists and are in majority in the Islamic world. The Shiah are soon divided into different sects of which one called the Ismailiya sect is well known.

The Religious practices of Hinduism and Islam

The majority of societies and people follow some religion and its relevance practices. Our religions and paths are different, but the goal is the same. People, societies and countries who believe in God spend their lives walking on the virtuous path. Religion is needed to make man's life happy. It guides man on his journey through life and shows him the way to live. It draws our man's humanistic virtues and creates respect in man for human values. Religion takes away man's baser instincts like- lust, anger greed, ego, hatred etc. and generates the loving emotion of universal brotherhood in man.

Dharma is the first teaching for a good life. All religions speak of human welfare. All religions teach man to walk on the path of humanity and all religions teach mankind to fellow human values like truth, love compassion, non-violence and benevolence.

Religious practices, traditional rituals and customs have had their significance since the beginning of human history. Their roots are deeply embedded in the human mind and sometimes the scientific and logical reasoning of man gets diminished in front of them. Not only this, he also moulds his religious beliefs according to the traditional rites and rituals. There are sixteen rites and rituals in Hinduism.

Rite or rituals change from time to time. But common rules of good conduct have not undergone a change. Old leaves keep falling. The ritual and religious ceremonies have also their regulating influence on the social life. These rituals and ceremonies are not always, directly religious, though their origin is religious.

Everyone of the community participated in these ceremonies. These rituals and ceremonies go a great way in establishing a fraternal bond among the members of that community. In the west Nalbari area, modern man also performs the religious rites in birth, in marriage, etc. in the form of communion or wearing the sacred thread. Religious practices are also performed in fishing and hunting. These facts go to prove that religion as an external form of social control is still in our society.

In all religions, the rituals of the naming ceremony, Upanayan, Satya Narayan puja, beginning of education, marriage, worship and funeral of the dead bear a fundamental similarity. Though these are individual ceremonies the people of one area cooperate each other in performing these ceremonies. Though marriage is, of course, a family celebration but at the same time, it gives social recognition to the union of two individuals. In these rituals also the basic spirit among the different religions remains the same. It is an interesting fact that some attractive rituals of one religion are adopted by the followers of other religions due to mutual interaction.

The funeral rites of the dead also show similarities. The Hindus perform their funeral rites in four different ways—(1) cremation of the body, (2) immersion of the body in the river, (3) buried of the body and (4) leaving the body in the open to be devoured by crows and vultures.

There are some practices which are performed individually and others are performed commonly. The religious practices which are performed in general, are called festival. These are different puja like Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Lakshmi Puja, Go-puja.

Chapter-6

The Religious Festivals of Hinduism

A festival has always been considered the best way to attract attention of the people from all walks of life. In West Nalbari Area, there are so many religious festivals observed by Hinduism and Islam. The Saktas, a sect of Hinduism, observed Durga puja, Kali puja or Dipawali, Sivaratri, Holi etc.

1. Durga Puja : Durga puja is celebrated during September and October. Though it is primarily a festival of the Saktas, people of other sects also take equal share in its accompanying merriment. The rites and rituals of the worship of Durga have been prescribed in different puranas. The bright fortnight within which the Durga puja is performed is called Devi-paksa.

Durga puja is one of the most popular festival in Nalbari district. The puja pandals remain crowded by people of all ages and sects from morning till late evening and are stirred up by beating of drums and the blowing of catch- shells, full throated chorus of the ojalali. This invariably presents a spectacle of a gay congregation and mass merriment.

2. Kalipuja : The goddess Kali or Syama is regarded as one of the manifestations of Sakti. There are two types of worship of Kali—viz—nitya and kamyā. The nitya type of worship is performed annually by the people in a community basis in the new moon night of the month of kartika. The kamyā type of worship is performed in an individual household on some suitable day of the year. By performing the first type of worship one can obtain happiness in this world and salvation after one's death. Kali is called the goddess of protection.

3. Sivaratri : Sivaratri is considered the most auspicious night for worshipping Siva. On this night Siva is worshiped not only in the Siva temples but also in the private houses of the devotees. The purpose of worshipping Siva is to get one's desires fulfilled. The "Matsya -purana" states that one who observes the Sivaratri vow gets the blessings of a thousand asvamedha sacrifices. One special offering to Siva is ghotra, an intoxicating and delicious drink prepared by hemp (ganja), milk and sugar. Among all the festivals, Shivaratri seems to be the only one that symbolizes the reincarnation of the incorporeal, God Shiva. We celebrate birthdays of others, but Shivaratri is commemorative of God's descent on earth to remove darkness of ignorance, vices and violence; this is why His descent is linked with 'night'. Shiva-worship was a major point in early Indian history and was prevalent in major civilization of the world. Now is the time to empower ourselves, to know our real identity, through communion with Him and inculcate His Supreme Commands of universal values to establish a Value-Based society.

4. Dola-yatra : Dola means swimming. The word yatra has got different meanings--- movement, motion, travel, religious procession, etc. Hence, Dola Yatra is a swimming festival in which an image of Lord Krishna is swung in a swing. It is celebrated throughout India on the full moon day usually in the month of phalguna (Feb- March), but sometimes in Caitra (March-April). It is also known as Holi or Phalgutsova.

5. Janmastami : To most Hindus the astamitithi, i.e. the eight lunar days, both bright and dark, are important and sacred and many religious functions are celebrated on these days. The eighth day of the dark half of Bhadra (Aug- September) called Janmastami or Krishnastami, is regarded as the birth of Lord Krishna. The day is observed throughout India by the Hindus with certain rituals. The Assamese people observe the Janmastami vow on the eighth day of the dark fortnight falling within the solar month of Bhadra. The birth anniversary of Lord Krishna is celebrated in the sartras

and village namgharas. There is a common belief that by observing the Janmastami-brata one can earn piety for all his people and be happy and prosperous. In the satras as well as village namgharas. There is a common belief that by observing the Janmastami-brata one can earn piety for all his people and can be happy and prosperous throughout whole life. In the satras as well as village namgharas the function starts with illumination at evening. The devotees, male and female assemble in the namgharas with necessary preparation for observing the Janmastami day.

6. Laksmi Puja : Laksmi puja is celebrated after Durga puja. On the purnima tithi of Assamese month Ashin-Kati (Sept-Oct.) Laksmi puja is performed. This puja is performed individually and in a community together. Laksmi is adored as the Goddess of wealth.

7. Go-puja : The most important festival of west Nalbari is Go-puja or devotion to cow. Gandhiji said that the protection of cow is an important religious belief. So, there is given a high status of cow in Hinduism. The Go-puja is celebrated with colourful decoration at the village Chamata. There are two places where Go-puja is celebrated. People of this area and other places also come to enjoy this festival. Besides Hindu people other religious people like Muslim also enjoy this festival and cooperate in many functions organized for Go-puja. There is another place, Badesila, where Go-puja is celebrated.

Besides these festivals there are many festival which are performed in own locality. The 'Bhatheli' festival is one of them. This festival is observed mainly in west Nalbari area. In this festival, the bamboo tree is worshiped with veneration. It is observed in many places, namely, Chamata, belsor, kaihati, and different temples of this area.

Chapter-7

The Religious Festivals of Islam

The Muslim community of west Nalbari area observed their religious festivals.

1. Eid-ul-Fitre :

Eid-ul-Fitre is one of the two Eid celebrations for the Muslims. Eid are considered to be the days of great joy and happiness and both the days are endowed by Allah with great blessings. Eid-ul-Fitre is the joyous festivals of the Muslims. This day is very blessed and there is much goodness and blessings in this festival. The word 'Eid' means 'greatest joy and happiness' and the word 'Fitre' means 'breaking fast'. So, the words Eid-ul-Fitre mean "the greatest joy and happiness of breaking fast". It is celebrated in the first lunar month Shawal which is the tenth month of the Islamic calendar.

The festival of Eid-ul-Fitre is held just after the completion of fasting in the month of Ramjan. It is the month long fast and it has been being observed as the month of fasting. The month of Ramjan begins with the appearance of the new moon and ends with the appearance of another new moon. As soon as the new moon of Ramjan is sighted a joyous surge of anticipation inspires the hearts of all, male and female, young and old. Mosques begin to fill with eager worshippers for the prayers. Eid-ul-Fitre is celebrated as the festival of the termination of the fast. Early in the morning of this day, the Muslims take bath, wear new and clean dresses and use perfume. The Younger ones seek blessings from their parents, grandparents and elder ones. The elders bless the youngers and youngers pay homage to the elders. The male and female Muslims greet "Eid Mubarak" each other and wish each

other's bright and glorious future. Then the male Muslims assemble for Eid-ul-Fitre prayer. In conformity with the spirit of Islam, the only celebration prescribed for the festival is a head of the congregation of the prayer. The prayer is somewhere held in some bigger mosques, but in view of the large numbers involved the prayer is generally held in the open field which is called Eidgah. On this day, the Muslims prepared various kinds of sweets and Sewai. The people who visit a Muslim house are served with various kinds of sweets, apples and grapes, dates and bananas.

Eid-ul-Fitre is a festival of great joy and happiness because on this day the pure repentant person's bad deeds are wiped clean and past sins are forgiven by Allah. After the Eid-ul-Fitre prayer, the Muslims exchange greetings by embracing with one another and they greet everyone they come across irrespective of colour, caste, religion and community. They invite their friends, relatives, Muslims and non-Muslims, to feast together. Exchange of greetings helps to strengthen the bond of unity, friendship and brotherhood among all sections of people in the society. So, Eid-ul-Fitre is one of the occasions of Islamic world which heralds joy and jubilation for one and all, male and female, young and old.

2. Id-UI- Zuha :

Eid-UI-Zuha is another religious festival of Islam. Eid-UI-Zuha is the symbol of sacrifice, ideal and faith. Not for enjoy, but for sacrifice is life—it is ideal of Eid-Uj-Joha. It is also known as 'bakrid', which means sacrifice. The 10th day of the Arabic month 'Jilhaj', Eid-Uj-Joha is celebrated. On that day the Muslim people wear new dresses and forget any kind of differences among them. Forgetting their baser instincts like-lust, anger, greed, ego, hatred, etc. they enjoy the festival themselves and generates the loving emotion of universal brotherhood in man. They invite their friends, relatives, Muslims and non-Muslims, to feast together. Exchange of greetings helps to strengthen the bond of unity, friendship and brotherhood among all sections of people in the society.

Eid-Ul-Joha is a sacred festival. In the present situation of our society, for social bond among different religious groups, this type of festival is very necessary.

3. Muharram :

According to the Islamic year, Muharram is celebrated on the 10th day of the month of Mahram. The meaning of the term 'Muharram' is prohibited. This festival is celebrated for peace and truth in the world. Muharram is the one of the important religious festival after the Eid. It is celebrated mainly in the Shia community. In memory of the grand son of Mohammad, Muharram is celebrated as the day of peace and truth.

Akheri Chahar Chumba :

In the last Wednesday of the Islamic month Safar, the festival, Akheri chahar chumba is celebrated.

Fatcha-E-doaz_Doham :

The meaning of Fatcha is open, birth etc. E means is, Doaz doham means day of twelve. The inherent meaning of this festival is that the 12th day of the month Rabiul Afawal is the sacred day as in this day Mohammad was born.

Shabe-Meraj :

The 27th day of the Arabic month Rajab, the Muslim observe this day as Shabe meraj. Mohammad Rasul went to achieve heaven for meeting Allah or to investigate mystery on that night.

Shabe-borat :

On the 15th day of the Arabic month Shaban, Shabe-borat is celebrated. The meaning of the word is 'the night of Luck'. On this day the table of man's birth and death are prepared for the whole year.

Lailat-AI-Qudar :

On the 27th day of the sacred month Ramjan, Lailat-AI-Qudar is celebrated. The Muslim observed their religious festivals regularly. In the villages, Belsor, Chamata, Mularkuchi, Madhupur, Pahlangpara are mainly Muslim area. They celebrated their most important festival Eid colourfully. The Hindu people of this area cooperate with the Muslim and greet each other forgetting any differences among them.

Chapter-8

Superstitions in West Nalbari

The true origin of superstition is to be found in early man's effort to explain Nature and his own existence; in the desire to propitiate Fate and invite Fortune; in the wish to avoid evils he could not understand; and in the unavoidable attempt to pry into the future. From these sources alone must have sprung that system of crude notions and practices still obtaining among savage nations; and although in more advanced nations the crude system gave place to attractive mythology, the moving power was still the same; man's interpretation of the world was equal to his ability to understand its mysteries---no more, no less. For this reason the superstitions which, to use a Darwinian word, persist, are of special interest, as showing a psychological habit of some importance.

The first note of all superstitions is that of ignorance. But ignorance exists in several varieties, and one of them has to do, not with the future, but with the well-established present; in other words, an accepted doctrine may be based on a misinterpretation of the facts. Thus early man attributed a living spirit to every thing—to his fellows, to the lower animals, to the trees, etc. ignorance is the atmosphere in which alone such superstitions can live.

Allied with ignorance is fear, which is the second element calling notice. The third element is the mind. Its effort to propitiate intelligent and semi-intelligent forces by suitable beliefs, rites, ceremonies and penance.

Now we come to the most difficult question of all: why is it that some of the superstitions in the past persist in the present? Why do we, in an age of increasing knowledge, still retain some of our fears—the offspring of ignorance? We can understand the perpetuation of a custom, even when its inner significance has gone, but a living superstition is a different thing.

One reason must be sought in the fact that superstition has always been contagious. But—and this is a further reason for the persistence which is the object of our enquiry—there is a superstitious mind, quite independent of education and training. But the great reason why superstition persists is because they are, in part, doctrines about matters concerning which we as yet know little. Mental and occult influences are the staple commodities of most of those practices which modern science condemns as meaningless. Of these influences we are in partial ignorance, and until that ignorance is dissolved we shall always have the crystal gazer and the clairvoyant in our midst, despite the activity of the police.

But in regard to occult powers, especially what is known as black magic, we are still in darkness, mainly because those who are competent to investigate laugh the problems out of court as not worthy of attention. This is a pity, because, if there are any superstitions at all which have an origin that can be tested here and now, it is the group belonging to the occult section, dealing with the things in heaven and earth “not dreamed of our philosophy”. In view of such discoveries as have been made by Lambroso and others, not so much in magic as in mental forces, it would appear very desirable to initiate enquiries into the so-called evil side of man’s powers, the persistent tradition of which has come down from remote antiquity, and surrounding which are strange superstitions and nightmare stories. It is because men of all classes have some modified belief in these vicious powers that a kind of half probability is accorded to beliefs of a more innocent hue.

Reviewing the whole subject, without prejudice, it seems to the present writer that the right attitude of mind towards the superstitions that are still operative is not one of mere condemnation, or lofty indifference; it should be one of sympathetic inquiry, for the psychological and scientific data available are of the highest interest; and just as astronomy arose out of astrology

and chemistry out of alchemy, so from the occult world we may some day attain developments in mental in the service of the race.

In west Nalbari, there are many types of superstitions among the Hindu people like dreams, palmistry, astrology, colour superstition, amulets, gems, the owl, comets, number thirteen, black cats etc.

Dreams are still believed in by a vast number of people as conveying warnings, or news about the events of the future.

Palmistry is one of superstition which is prevailing in west Nalbari area where men's fortunes are told by looking on the palms of the hands.

Astrology is probably the oldest pseudo-science in the world. It is one of the first guesses at the riddle of existence that took on mathematical and scientific shape. The time of the birth of children has been taken and the state of the heavens noted; any serious illness was observed, and the position of the planets at the time was written down, marriage, financial disaster, loss of parents etc.

There has always been a superstitious use of colour in connection with astrology, the planets not only having a number, but a favourite hue, which those people whose date of birth falls within the sphere of the planet should be careful to cultivate.

Like colour, number also contains fortune or fatality. In every age and clime numbers have formed a part of magical and non-magical ceremonial.

Amulets, gems wearing are also another superstition. An amulet is anything hung round the neck, placed like a bracelet on the wrist, or otherwise attached to the person, as an imagined preservative against sickness or other evils; a charm is exactly the same thing, the only difference being that the word itself contains the notion of some human action imparting to the article a certain

power for good. Since the practice of wearing such protective devices is a very ancient one, and one that still obtains, with perhaps a tendency to increase.

The owl is supposed to be a sign fortune and bad luck. If an owl, which is reckoned a most abominable and unlucky bird, send forth its hoarse and dismal voice, it is an omen of the approach of some terrible thing; that some dire calamity and some great misfortune is near at hand.

Black cats for luck: that is an old and an equally modern superstition prevails in west Nalbari as well as every place.

Appearing comet unusually in the sky is a sign of coming disasters.

These are the superstitions usually believed to be sign of good luck and bad luck. It is not true that every person believed in these types of superstitions, but most literate as well as illiterate persons believed it. There are no scientific causes behind these superstitions, they are prevailing from time immemorial. Lacks of education, lack of proper health care facilities are some of the root causes of social evils like superstition. Social reforms needed to eradicate superstition.

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