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A village festival brings the social cohesion, tranquility and liberal attitudes in the Society (A Study on Panchadevata Mela-festival in Rajamayong Village in the District of Morigaon, Assam)

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Abstract- Religious life of Raja-Mayong is related to certain rights, 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. The festival is marked by full public participation and is continuing till date in Raja Mayong. This "Pancha Devata" fair has inculcated social cohesion, consensus, fraternity and religious tolerance in the present society.

Key Words- Rights, Festivals, Traditional institution, magic, tantrism, temples, shrines, monasteries, namghars and Sattras.

Significance: The ancient history of Raja-Mayong shows that there were well-organized socio-cultural institutions in Rajamayong, which continued for generations. The significance of the study lies on its attempt to discuss the "Pancha Devata" festival and behavior of the people of Mayong towards the nation building. It is also a traditional education that upholds the social unity and integrity of the nation.

Background: Raja-Mayong, a village in the district of Morigaon lies at a distance of 40 km., to the east from the district headquarter and 30 km, to the west from the city of Guwahati via Chandrapur on the South bank of the Brahmaputra. It is situated between 26° 1' 5" North latitude and 92° 6' 4" East longitudes. The area of the Village is 2.35 sq. km. The literacy of the Village is 89% percentage. The village is connected to Guwahati via Chandrapur and to different towns of the eastern part of Morigaon and Nagaon district such as Morigaon and Jagiroad by Motorable roads. Raja-Mayong is an important bus stoppage for almost all the passenger-carrying buses from Morigaon and Guwahati and from Chamata National Highway Stoppage Via Kamapur road. In the months of July and August, the buses cannot ply due to flood. During this period Raja-Mayong village is connected by at least one trip of (Bhoot-bhooti) motored boat to Jhargaon every day. Raja-Mayong is situated in a picturesque surrounding beautified by several

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numbers of small hills and hillocks towards the north, the east and the southwest of the village. Each hill or hillock towards the northern boundary of village has a name of its own with a rich heritage of shrine and sculptures. The rivers, Sonai and Pakaria flow from the east to northwest of the village. On the extreme south, the Kalong River flows from the northeast towards the west up to the confluence of Brahmaputra. Pabitora, a Wild life Sanctuary, declared in 1987, with the world's highest density of single-horned Rhinoceros along with varieties of other animals and various native and migratory birds is situated on the south.¹ Almost all the sides of the village is surrounded by paddy fields and water bodies and swamps. These swamps are believed to be abandoned course of the Brahmaputra.

"Raja-Mayong" is traditionally known as "Mayang". Mayang is a Sanskrit term which implies the "Yoni" or "Prakriti" or "Mahamayang". This term "Mayang" is also found in the *Dasham* i.e. the tenth canto of the *Bhagawata* and the twelfth canto of the *Srimad Bhagabata* and the "Gita" and the last part of the "*Brahma Samhita*". This proves that "Mayang" is the Prime "deity" over the nature, Demigods and Goddesses.

Magic and 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.

Rajaghariya Goid :

The Raja-Mayong village has a place in the history of Assam from quite early days. The history of Mayong is almost synonymous to the history of the Eastern Kamrupa. Eastern Kamrupa extended upto Raha-Barapujia and the present district of Morigaon in medieval period.⁴

According to the genealogy of the Kings maintained in the family of the king, which is known as the Raja Ghariya Goid, the kings of present dynasty of the kings of Raja-Mayong have been ruling the little kingdom of Mayong since 1538 AD. Prior to that, the rulers of the Pal dynasty ruled the Mayong area.⁵

Svarachcha Chandra Singha, the third son of former king of Muhit Singha, ruled the kingdom of Mayong from 1590 AD to 1615 AD. His period of governance was a golden time of the Mayong kingdom. He extended the boundary of the kingdom. He was the maker of the fortune of the Mayong kingdom. A large number of Shrines and Monasteries had been established during his reign. It is said that the worshipping of the "Pancha Devata" the five sole deities of the universe and the fair, popularly known as *Mela Utsav* coinciding it, began during his reign.⁶

He went on a Pilgrimage to Koch Behar (Nabadvipa) to bring the images of "Pancha Devata". Initially he brought the image of Basudeva (Krishna) of "Salagrama", for the royal adoration and other two idols for the respective royal "Medhis". He started the yearly Royal worship of the "Pancha Devata" during his reign. He proclaimed that every subjects of the kingdom of Mayong would follow the rites of the "Five deities (Pancha Devata)"; otherwise, their family would be cursed by the five deities.

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. **The process of Royal festival:** 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 avatars 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.

In the first week of Bohag (On 4th, 5th and 6th day), four deities (Gossains) are brought with the four royal Medhis to the gate of the royal Temple of "Basudeva" of the Mayong kingdom. On the fourth day of the month of Bohag, the office bearers of the royal family, the Dekaraja, Bishayas, Medhis, Pators, Senapatis, the royal Priest and messengers also remain present there. They are felicitated with the sacred "Sarai" consisting of earthen lamp, incense, Ghat, i.e. an earthen jar with neck (sacred waster) & big musical drums (Bardhol). Thereafter, the king proclaims that they have to go to two other places, namely, Hatimuria and Burha-Mayong on the next two days.⁷ At one time the king of Mayong had his "pam" i.e. agricultural farms, at

these places for which the procession was led to these places.

On the next day i.e. the fifth day of the month of Bohag, the important portfolio holders like the Deka Raja, the Brahmin, the Pators, the Bishaya, the Bayan, the Bangthai (Commander in chief) the Tamuli, the Maloibaria, the Thakuria remain present in front of the king's Mansion. As soon as they arrive there, the Medhi brings the garland and Brahmins distribute it according to the directions of the king. Thereafter, the king ascends on "Dola" and starts the procession of the festival to the "Hatimuriya" village. The other Bishoyas of the *than* of Bamun Gossain ritually welcome the king and Gossains. After these, the king takes the Royal seat on a particular rock known as the Dhaphkhoti rock, and the others take their respective seats. As the king takes his seat, the traditional artists and dancers of the Bangthai family start their dance to the tune of a musical instrument called the "Kali". The Brahmins distribute garlands once again. After the end of traditional dance, all respectable people chant "Harikirtan" i.e. the glories of the God. After this, the day long programme ends and they return home.

'On the sixth day of Bohag' - the important Bishayas mentioned above, come again, to front of the kings palace and take out the procession to "Burhamayong" which lies about at the distance of about 3 k.ms. from Raja-Mayong. The itinerary of the procession is same as that of the previous day. They sit on their respective seats when they arrive at Burhamayong village which used to be the residence of the king in the past.

People thronged the road to witness the procession from Raja-Mayong to Burhamayong. Remaining members of the family offer the sacred 'sarai', 'lamp', betel nut, leaf, garland, gamocha, cheleng. A gamocha or cheleng is laid along the street in front of the Royal procession. It is believed that, laying a gamocha to be stepped by the procession wards off diseases and misfortune. Besides these, the people of Mayong bow down in front of the gossain and the king. The people of the royal procession pay obeisance to the Kachaikhaiti than of Raja-Mayong and Ma Kamakhya than situated in the Mayong hill.

On the way of return, they come to the place "Kathpara" located in the north side of the village of Burhamayong, the king offers the awards to the members of the Bangthai clan. At every prescribed place of festival, the people of the Royal Procession chant the name of "Pancha-Devata" as - *Jay, Mayongor Pancho Devota, Chintakoriye; Jayo, Mayongor Bhagavatee, Kachaikhaiti, Burhiai, Kamakhya-Devi, Chintakorie, Om Hari, Om Rama.*⁸ "The Karbi Bishayas and dancers people give a full scream in a graceful manner on the last day in front of the king :-

oi somalo, somalo oi, Damahi Bikang. (dance)

(we have entered, entered by dancing)

Damahi Dam (sing)

(we have arrived, arrived by singing)

Gar Bhangar Utsav: (breaking of embankment).

After the returning of the Royal procession, all the people assemble in the precincts of the Royal Temple. Before entering the Temple, a traditional rite is performed by the people on this auspicious occasion. It is said that this ceremony in commemoration of Krishna's return from Ghunucha. The story runs that once, Lord Krishna went out on a procession to the city of "Ghunucha" where the divine consort of Krishna resided and he stayed there for at least seven days. This is the ceremonial day of returning. So the supporters of Goddess Lakshmi make a strong Bamboo-Fencing to impede the army accompanying the Lord Krishna as he lied to his legitimate wife, Lakshmi. Finally, the King's side, that is, the members of the procession representing the side of Lord Krishna pays an amount of three hundred rupees to appease the barricade holders. After that, Basudeva enters into the Royal Temple and take Prasada that is, the sacramental food is offered to a deity and the royal festival comes to an end.⁹

There were four families of Royal Priests viz. that of 1. Hara Chandra Sharma 2. Goja Kanta Sharma 3. Santadhan Sharma and Gopal Chandra Sharma. They had been settled in Mayong at the village of Hatimuria to worship the five deities. There were at least 21 families of Brahmins at Hatimuria in the past for which, the place is still known as Bamun-Chuburi. There is an image of Bongshi Gopal of pure copper in the temple at Hatimuria which was worshipped by the Priests.

Changes:

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.

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 salagramas 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.

Active participation of people of Mayong:

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.¹⁰

Now a day, this ceremony has emerged as a major social institution in Raja-Mayong. The important personalities are invited to join in the festival. Among others it is attended by the Deputy Commissioner of the district of Morigaon, Ministers of the state Government many other dignitaries. Besides these, modern Bihu dance is also performed on this auspicious occasion at the village of Raja-Mayong, Hatimuria and Burhamayong village respectively.

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. It is a unique social institution through which the people of Rajamayong have formulated a little India into a greater Indian society.

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