

STUDY ON SHREE SHREE BASUDEV DEVALAYA, A TANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF DARRANG DISTRICT, ASSAM

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Abstract- The term 'Devalaya' is a Sanskrit term which means temple. The old temples or Devalayas are treated as cultural heritages of our society. Cultural heritage describes the bequest of the palpable artifacts and impalpable attributes of a particular community or society that are handed down from ancestral generations, maintained in the present, and preserved as a means of their own style of sustenance. Palpable or tangible heritage includes buildings, historic places, monuments, artifacts, etc which are considered worthy of preservation for the future. Darrang District of Assam has rich cultural heritages such as temples, folklore, artwork, food, languages, artifacts, festivals, etc. The present study emphasizes the study of one tangible cultural heritage, i.e., Shree Shree Basudev Devalaya.

INTRODUCTION

The term Devalaya has been derived from the two Sanskrit words 'Deva' which means God and 'Alaya' means residence. Thus the term Devalaya refers to the residence of God or heaven or temple. Temple is a common word that is widely used all over India. But in Assam, different terms are used to denote temples such as Dol, Devalaya, Gokhaighar, Mondir, Than, Math, etc. In this paper, the word Devalaya is widely used. The word Devalaya is generally used to refer to various types of temples. It might be a Shakti peeth, a temple of Lord Vishnu or Shiva. The present study put emphasis on the study of one tangible cultural heritage or historic temple of Darrang District named Shree Shree Basudev Devalaya which is located at Jhakuapara and Samala village of the District. The people of the District have immense belief in the temple as it helps them to fulfill their wishes. This temple is treated as a cultural heritage where the socio-cultural and religious activities have been performed together since ancient times and can be called a sacred complex. The historic value of this temple has enhanced after the discovery of six copper plates which are dated back to 1092 AD.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

To investigate and record the history of the Devalaya..

To study the socio-cultural customs and traditions relating to the Devalaya.

To highlight the problems facing the Devalaya.

METHODS AND TECHNOLOGY:

Descriptive survey method, observation method, and interview method have been followed for data collection.

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT:

The history reveals that the Devalaya which is popularly known as ‘Shree Shree Basudev Devalaya’ dated back to the 11th century. This Devalaya is situated at Jhakuapara & Somola village of Darrang District, which is 16 km from NH 15 of Assam. It is believed that there was a jungle where the people of the village discovered the Vishnu Vighrah. They observed that every day one cow came to offer her milk to the Vishnu Vighrah. Then the villagers decided to clean the jungle and rescued the Vishnu Vighrah and built a temple named ‘Shree Shree Basudev Devalaya’. Since then the villagers have been worshipping the Vighrah. The villagers selected a person named Krishna Goswami as the first priest of the temple from a nearby village i.e. Patidarrang. But after a few years, the priest betrayed the villagers and stole the Vighrah from the temple and established that at his home. It is said which is very astonishing that every day the Vighrah came out automatically from the temple of the priest and fell down in the garden. According to the interviewers, one of the villagers got a dream of the bad condition of the Vighrah and the villagers were requested to recover it from the priest’s home. Then the villagers decided to recover the Vighrah and return it to the original temple. They went to the priest’s house and fought with the priest and finally returned the Vighrah on 22 Bohag (The Assamese first Month) of 1988. Till then they have been celebrating the day as the foundation day of the Devalaya and organizing ‘Gondh Souparia Sobha’. The people of the village selected a man as priest namely Tankeswar Deka and still he has been serving for the Devalaya. On 18th December 2017, 6 copper plates were discovered by the people of the village whiles they were digging the ground to build a ‘Bhog ghor’ for the temple. Many archaeologists from different parts of the country went to the village to study the

plates and they revealed that the plates dated back to 1092 A.D i.e. 926 years old. There were 9 pages in the 6 plates and out of them, 7 pages were studied by respected Bhaskar Bordoloi. According to him, the language in the plates is Sanskrit and the Lipi is a mixed form of Bangla, Chinese, and Kirat Lipi. Historians reveal that plates were prepared by Maharajadhiraj Dharmapala to hand over valuables to the most respected 'Boidya Maluya' of 'Samol Grama' (the present village Somola). In 2018, the plates were taken by the honorable D.C of Darrang District to preserve them in good condition although the villagers did not want to hand them over. The temple is reconstructed recently.

FESTIVALS CELEBRATED IN SHREE SHREE BASUDEV DEVALAYA INCLUDING RITUALS AND CUSTOMS:

DEUL: The Deul festival is celebrated in the Devalaya on the Goru Bihu which is a famous festival of Darrang District and celebrated throughout the Bohag month in different places of the District. This festival may be celebrated for welcoming the Assamese new year and praying for the well-being of the society and the people. A big mela is organized on this day where the small vendors from different places of the District come and install their shops. The shops' items are stationery items, utensils, and food items like Jalebi, Bhujia, Nimki, Icecreams, etc. People from nearer villages come to enjoy the mela and buy different items from the shops according to their choices. This mela helps the locals to earn some money and some attractive programs like Nagara Nam, Thionaam, and functions are also organized accordingly. A Vishnu Yajna is performed for the welfare of the village people and a 'Bheti' or earth mound is made for performing Puja or worshipping.

GONDH SOUPORIA SABHA: The main festival of the temple is 'Gondh Souparia Sobha' which is celebrated on the 22nd and 23rd of Bohag every year. Many people from different districts of Assam come to this festival. It is a grand festival celebrated in the Devalaya. There are two very attractive programs performed on both days of the festival. These are discussed below-

BHOTA JOLUA: The most important and attractive program of the first day of the festival is Bhota Jolua which is performed in the evening. Generally, the festival on the first day starts at 6 AM in the morning. Different kinds of Programs like cleaning the surroundings of the Devalaya, Planting, Bhagawat Paath, Ayotir Naam, etc are performed in the daytime and in the evening of the first day people light 'Bhota'. It is believed that if someone offers 'Bhota' in this festival, God

fulfils their wishes. In the last 'Gondh Souporia Sobha' the honorable D.C of Darrang District offered 101 'Bhota'. The preparation of Bhota is described below-

BHOTA: Bhota is prepared with ripened white gourd, mustard seed, mustard oil and cotton. The fleshes of the white gourd are removed and put mustard seed, mustard oil, and a big piece of cotton into it, then it is ready to light up after the Suddhi (purify) of the Bhotas by the priest. The priest sprinkles holy water on the Bhotas and the people who sit on the ground in front of the Devalaya and chants Mantras. Ojhapali is performed before the Bhota lightning program and continues the whole night. After lightning the Bhotas, people bring the Bhota inside the Devalaya and take it on the trunk of a Banana plant which is prepared beforehand. The People who offer Bhota have to look after their Bhotas for the whole night as the Bhotas should be lit the whole night. And they take the Bhota to their home the next morning and keep it safely in the temple of their own home and when the Bhota is put off then it is thrown in the current water or pond.

PANITULA (WATER BRINGING OCASSION): On the second day of the festival, all the villagers and outsiders participate in a procession to the 'Burhinagar Pukhuri' (a tank) which is 1.5 km away from the Devalaya to bring holy water to bath the 'Vishnu Vighrah' of the Devalaya. It is a tradition followed by the villagers that they bathe the Vishnu Vighrah only with the holy water of the Burhinagar Pond. For this ritual, the people used to travel by elephant, play band party, dhol, taal, khol and sing Diha naam and Biya Naam. In this procession, they take the epic Bhagawat also. The participation of the young generation in the occasion is very significant. The Kumari girls (girls before puberty) only are allowed to bring water from the pond and the priest follows some rituals on the bank of the pond before bringing water. The priest worships the God first and then allows the girls to bring water with the help of Ghats or pots from the pond. The other women sing Biyanaam while performing the rituals.

OTHER CULTURAL ACTIVITIES:

Other significant cultural activities which are performed in the 'Gondh Souparia Sobha' are – Byasor Ojhapali, Nagara Naam, Dihaa Naam, Bhagawat Paath, etc. After bathing the Vishnu Vighrah with the holy water of the Burhinagar tank, Vishnu yajna is performed. In this yajna, 1008 Bel pattas (wood apple leaves) are specially offered with other holy things like ghee, honey, etc. Five priests together perform this yajna.

OKHONDO BHAGAWAT PATH: In the month of Kaati, ‘Okhondo Bhagawat Paath’ is observed every day and night for the whole month. Different pathaks are invited for performing this Bagawat paath. The village people and the organizing committee play an important role in performing this program.

KRISHNA JANMASTAMI: The Krishna Janmastami is also celebrated in the devalaya in the Astami tithi of the Assamese month Bhada (September). The festival starts on the morning of the day. People of the village participate there. In the prayer hall, the men perform Bhagawat Paath in the morning time and the women of the village perform dihanaam in the evening. At night, Gunamala kirtan is performed by all people and prasad is distributed among them.

ANIMAL OFFERING:

Animal sacrifice is a ritual of killing and offering of animals in the name of a deity or God or Goddess. Some of the earliest Archaeological evidence suggests that animal sacrifice originated in Egypt as ancient Egypt was at the forefront of domestication. The oldest Egyptian burial sites which contain burials of sheep and goats originate from the Badari culture of Upper Egypt dated back to 4400 and 4000 BCE. By the end of the Copper age in 3000 BCE, many cultures adopted animal sacrifice as a common practice and more generally restricted to domestic livestock. Animal sacrifices are not practiced in Shree Shree Basudev Devalaya. But people can leave cow, goat and pigeon in the devalaya without harming their life through the priest.

ORGANIZING COMMITTEE:

There is an organizing committee which constitutes President, Secretary and various members. We interviewed the President named Samak Deka and the Secretary named Kantaram Deka. The organizing committee looks after the various purpose of the Devalaya. Because of the organizing committee, the recovery of the writings of discovered 6 copper plates were possible. They have done a very constructive work to the society for which they should be always appreciated and remembered.

PROBLEMS FACING BY THE DEVALAYA:

1. There is no 'Bhog Ghor' in the Devalaya for which they are facing a problem during 'Gondh Souporia Sobha'. The villagers are trying to construct a 'Bhog Ghor' by contributing their money.
2. The Devalaya is not getting much importance by the Government although it is a historic one.

CONCLUSION:

The Devalaya is being popular among the people of Assam after the discovery of 6 copper plates which is dated back to 1092 A.D. The people of the village are united by the customs and traditions which are observed in the Devalaya. It has been given the opportunity to cluster the society and diminish the generation gap of the people of the society. It is helping in preserving the various cultural activities of society. There is a great chance of tourism development relating to the Devalaya. The Government must initiate some policies for the development of the Devalaya. The Garvagriha of the Devalaya is re-constructed recently.

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