With the establishment of the Darrangi Phaid, the history of the Darrangi Rajya underwent a social transformation. This chapter intends to analyse the processes that impacted this change. Social stratification was based on occupation, wealth and power, rather than on caste alone, although the caste-system apparently appears to be rigid, stratified and endogamous. Economic status determined the social position in the raja, and a flexibility of social stratification in terms of economic activities is evident from the fact that although priesthood was the principal occupation of the Brahmans they could undertake other economic pursuits, such as agriculture, trade, etc. Broadly, the society can be classified on the basis of racial groups and religion. It therefore consisted largely of Hindus and Muslims and also ethnic groups such as the Kacharis and Rabhas who came from the Mongoloid stock. The Koches, whose descendants were the rajas of Darrang, too, can trace their lineage to the Mongoloid stock. Later, several additions were made to the original group both through conversion and the process of ‘sanskritization’ signifying upward social mobility in the society. The Darrangi Hindu society was jati-vittik or caste-based, hereditary and endogamous.

There were several other professional social groups, which W. W. Hunter, Director General of Statistics of the Government of India (1874 A.D.), mentions as “Hindu caste” or “semi-aboriginal peoples”. In fact Hunter mentions as many as ‘eighty-eight castes’ in the Darrangi society. He arranges castes on the basis of local estimation and occupation. Some of the social groups such as Halwai, Jaliya, Jogi, Katani, etc., are placed in separate caste category. In practice the former two were professional social groups and endogamous and belonged to one caste called Keot. So also the latter two belonged to Jogi caste. Moreover, the Sonari, Kamar, Kumar, Hira, Teli, Tanti, etc., that he mentions, are not castes but professional groups. Further his

1 ‘Sanskritization’ is the process by which a ‘low’ Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently, ‘twice-born’ caste. M. N. Srinivas, Social Change in Modern India, Orient Longman Limited, New Delhi, India, (First published in 1996) 2000, p. 6.
classification is based on Mr. C. F. Magrath's District Census Compilation of 1871 A. D., which included some of the people such as Marwari or Kaya (up-country traders and merchants), Agarwala (a caste of up-country traders and merchants), Srawak (Jain traders), etc., that came to the area during the time of the British rule. These cannot be counted as “Hindu caste” or “semi-aboriginal people”.

The colonial interpretation of “caste” by officials such as Hunter or Magrath appears to be totally erroneous. “Caste is,” according to M. N. Srinivas, “a hereditary endogamous, usually localised group having traditional associations with an occupation and a particular position in the local hierarchy of castes. Relations between castes are governed among other things by the concepts of pollution and purity and generally maximum commensuality [sic] occurs within the caste.” Thus, the Hindu people of the Darrangi Rajya can be broadly divided into castes and professional social groups.

The Brahmans better know as Bamun whose chief occupation was priesthood, being well-versed in the sastras, was the influential caste, although numerically small. The Daibajyans, popularly known as Ganak, were associated with astronomy and were a category of the Brahmans. They had a versatile position in the society. The distinction between the Brahmans and Daibajyan was based on profession. It is noteworthy that the Daibajyan too occupied a high position in the Darrangi society. The second in position of social status are the Kayasthas who were the professional writers of the rajya and it was from this caste that the ministers were chosen and therefore had access to power. They were perhaps in control of the treasury of the rajya and hence held an important position in the society. As mentioned earlier, the economic and professional status determined the social position in the society. The Jogi’s, a caste migrated from Bengal, social position improved with the change in their economic status, indicating upward mobility within the social structure. In fact, Jogi people wore the sacred thread called jugapatra, a symbol of twice born or dwija just as the Brahmans or Kayasthas.3


The Darrangi Rajas brought many Brahmans from Kashi, Kanauj, Mithila and Nabadvip at different times and established them in the rajya, to perform rituals in the rajya, as was the trend in the Gangetic valley and the eastern zone of India during the medieval period. It is evident that Raja Dharma Narayan brought two Brahmans, namely, Charuchandra and Charubhadra from Koch Behar and settled them in Darrang to offer puja to Durga (Bhabani). These two Brahmans knew the Vedas and Purans and became the court scholars. They advised the raja in different matters. Their predecessors were brought from Kanyakubija by Nar Narayan of Koch Behar. So also Pitambar Sidhanta Bagis was taken as royal guru (religious teacher) and pujari (priest). His status was higher than that of the other Brahmans. He did not perform his duty as jajamani for other people except the royal family. The Brahmans were not orthodox but liberal in customs and manners. Choudhury points out that one reason for this was the admixture of these Brahmans with the Alpine stock. Although priesthood was their principal occupation, there was no restriction on them to undertake some other economic pursuits. They even adopted agriculture, but did not plough the land themselves. Unlike the Brahmans in the rest of India, the Darrangi Brahmans ate fish and meat. However, the widows were barred from taking a non-vegetarian diet. This shows that gender discrimination and subordination of women was prevalent in the social system based on Brahmanical patriarchy. This was done to control sexuality of women and maintain caste purity. The purity of women has a centrality in Brahmanical patriarchy, because the purity of caste is dependent upon it.

The traditional occupation of the Daibajyans was astrological calculation or ganana. They were also known as grahabipra as they knew about the movements of planets.

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5 Abdul Mazid, Darrangar Alitihakisk Sambal, Baneswar Printing Works, Darrang, Assam, 1998, p. 43
7 Jagannath Bhattacharyya, Koch Rajar Buranji, preserved in the house of Durga Charan Bhattacharyya, Sarabari, Darrang, Assam, not dated.
9 N. C. Dutta, op. cit. p. 125.
They had the exclusive authority to worship grahadevata. The Darranga Rajvansaali refers to the functions and duties of the Daibajyans. A Daibajyan knew the movements of stars, planets and could read the past, present and the future. They performed all the sanskaras (sacraments) and wore sacred thread. Their customs and manners were similar to that of the Brahmans. They were sun-worshippers for which they were also known as Suryabipra. Susandai Mishra, the author of the Siyalavaishnav Charit gives his identity as Suryabipra. Some scholars are of the opinion that the Daibajyans was a category of the Brahman. In their opinion, there was no caste difference between the Brahmans and the Daibajyans except the professional division. Because of the adoption of astrology as their occupation, the Daibajyans became a separate functional division within the Brahman caste. Although the Daibajyans claimed the same status as the Brahmans, the latter did not enter into matrimonial alliance with the former. Marriage within the same caste was practiced to maintain caste purity. Even then the Daibajyan occupied a dignified position in the Darrangi society, and were regarded by the common people as ranking second only to the Bamuns (Brahmans).

The Darrangi Rajas patronized Daibajyans and conferred the title Khadi to those who were well-versed in astrology. For example, Sagarkhadi Daibajyan was awarded the title Khadi. The Darrangi Daibajyans performed different works under the Darrangi Rajas and accordingly they were divided into five groups such as Rajdoloi or Raj Ganak, Biah or Biyas Ganak, Deuri Ganak, Natoa Ganak and the Bilati Ganak. Their status was differentiated on the basis of their profession. The Rajdoloi or Raj Ganaks enjoyed the favour of the rajas. They worked out calculations or gananas in the royal houses. They also performed graha puja or planet worship during Durga

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14 Gunaviram Barua, Asom Buranjii, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 2003, p140.
16 Susandai Mishra, Siyalavaishnav Charit, in Bharat Chandra Nath’s Siyalavaishnav Mahanta Sambatsarar Kahini, Gautam Printers, Sipajhar, Assam, 1989, verse, 482, p.75.
17 Jatindra Kumar Bargohain, Assamar Sanskriti Itihas, Bhagawati Prakasan, Assam, 1992, p. 213.
18 B. C. Allen, op. cit., p. 84.
19 Satyendra Nath Sarma, A Socio-Economic And Cultural History of Medieval Assam (1200-1800), Pratima Devi, Guwahati, 1989, p. 63; and also H. K. Barpujari, ibid, p. 171.
20 B. C. Allen, op. cit., p. 84.
puja, Phalgu utsav, etc.\(^{21}\) They had a high status in the society. Deuri Ganaks were engaged in temples. Biah Ganaks, who were professional singers, sang jarag and malachi\(^{22}\) in the Siva and Durga puja by taking the taijartic or mudra-\(j\)antra.\(^{23}\) They also received favour from the rajas and had a high status in the society. This was common in the village of Biahpara or Biyaspara near Sipajhar. The Natoa Ganaks were the professional dancers. Besides, there was a section called Bilati Ganaks, who were cultivators.\(^{24}\) The social position of the latter was low due to their occupational status and the other Ganaks did not make any relation or take food cooked by them.

The Kayasthas commonly known as kaih were a distinct caste of Darrang.\(^{25}\) According to P.C. Choudhury, the Kayasthas entered Assam at an early period.\(^{26}\) They came from places like Mithila, Kanauj and also Bengal.\(^{27}\) During the reign of the Darrangi Rajas some Kayasthas were brought to the rajya from outside to perform some important duties of administration. It is evident that in 1638 A.D. Raja Mahendra Narayan brought a Kayasta of the Dutta family to Dighirpar and granted land and also appointed him as a minister. He was permitted to move on dhekora \(d\)ola\(^{28}\) to suit his dignity. So also during the reign of Raja Bijoy Narayan, Sabdal Duara, commonly known as Kaliaphukan of the Kayasthas caste under Dahi mauza worked as a minister.\(^{29}\) On getting royal favour the Kayasthas became an influential caste in the society.

Originally the Kayasthas were associated with the task of writing. The Laskars, a section of the Kayastha caste were engaged in copying the Bhagawat, Puran and other books in calligraphy and supplied it to the rajas. They also had to keep an account of the income and expenditure of the raja's Chiraster (accountant).\(^{30}\) Several Kayastha families inhabited the village Kuruagaon, situated in the extreme south-
west of the *Darrangi Rajya*, opposite Gauhati.\textsuperscript{31} The *Kayasthas* enjoyed high social status in the *Darrangi* society. Those people who earn by non-agricultural means and refrain from manual labour were regarded highly, in the social hierarchy. Like the Brahmans they did not plough land themselves and earned income by non-agricultural means.\textsuperscript{32} Most of the *Kayasthas* wore sacred thread called *uttari*.\textsuperscript{33} They followed orthodox rites in respect of marriage and other caste usages.\textsuperscript{34}

The *Kalitas* were another caste of the *Darrangi* society, whose social position was high and ranked next to the Brahmans, *Daibajyan* and *Kayasthas*.\textsuperscript{35} Most of the scholars think that the *Kalitas* were the descendents of the Alpine priests in Eastern India and Assam.\textsuperscript{36} The *Darrangi Kalitas* also recognized themselves as of Alpine origin.\textsuperscript{37} Though they were primarily agriculturists, they engaged in other works as well. The *Kalitas* were broadly divided into two divisions i.e. *Barkalita* (higher) and *Sarukalita* (lower).\textsuperscript{38} On the basis of their economic occupation, the *Kalita* caste was further sub-divided into *Mali* (gardener), *Kamar* (blacksmith), *Tanti* (weaver), *Sonari* (goldsmith), *Kumar* (potter), *Napit* (barbar) and *Nat* (dancer), etc.\textsuperscript{39} In practice these occupational sub-divisions were not very rigid. Their social relations, marriage rules, etc., conformed to orthodox Hindu rules.\textsuperscript{40}

The *Keots* were another Hindu caste, next to the *Kalitas* in the social hierarchy. This position is determined by the fact that a Brahman is allowed to take water served by them.\textsuperscript{41} They were also known as *sudir*.\textsuperscript{42} According to scholars, the term *Keot* originated from the Sanskrit word *Kaivarta*, which became *Kevatta* (boatman) and finally *Keot*.\textsuperscript{43} The *Keots* were primarily agriculturists. Some of them adopted fishing
as their occupation. On the basis of the occupation, the Keots were divided into two broad divisions such as Halwai or cultivating Keots and Jaliya or fishermen Keots.\(^{44}\) The former was treated as upper Hindus, while the latter was considered as a depressed class.\(^{45}\) Their social status was thus based on occupation.

It is said that the Koch (Koc) which was originally designated as an ethnic group (tribe) had in later years been recognized as a Hindu (Aryan) caste into which were absorbed converts from the Kachari and other aboriginal ethnic groups.\(^{46}\) The Koch of Darrang was an important and a dominant caste\(^{47}\) to which the rajas belonged. They were of the greater Mongolian stock\(^{48}\) which included the greater Boro or Bodo group closely allied to the Mechés and Kacharis.\(^{49}\) The process of conversion and sanskritization was a continuous process. It was natural that as the rajas belonged to this caste, the aboriginal people were anxious to enroll themselves as members of this caste.\(^{50}\) That is why they became numerically a large section in the Darrangi society.\(^{51}\) This marks a change as well as an upward mobility in the society. On the basis of the system of conversion, the Koches were broadly divided into two groups such as Barkoch, and Sarukoch.\(^{52}\) The former is regarded as high while the latter is treated as low. The Barkoch generally refrained from entering into marriage relations with the Sarukoch. Thus status differentiation was found within the Koch caste. The Koches were further divided into several groups such as Saraniakoch, Madahikoch, Harmiyakoch, etc.\(^{53}\) In practice these divisions were flexible. Agriculture was their

\(^{44}\) B. C. Allen, op. cit. p. 92.
\(^{46}\) Birinchi Kumar Barua, op. cit. p. 9.
\(^{47}\) As defined by Srinivas, "A caste may be said to be ‘dominant’ when it preponderates numerically over the other castes, and when it also wields preponderant economic and political power. A large and powerful caste group can be more easily dominant if its position in the local caste hierarchy is not too low." -M. N. Srinivas, The Dominant Caste in Rampura, in Dipankar Gupta’s (ed.), Social Stratification, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004, p. 308
\(^{48}\) B. C. Allen, op. cit. p. 95.
\(^{50}\) B. C. Allen, op. cit. p. 95.
\(^{52}\) The new converts from Kacharis and other aboriginal people to Hinsuism first became Sarukoch, while later on when they became fully acquainted with the customs they became General Koch or Barkoch.-Gunaviram Barua, Assam Buranjì, Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati, 2003, p. 141.
primary occupation. The marriage and sradha were done through the Brahman priest.\footnote{54}

The Jogis\footnote{55} also formed an important caste in the Darrangi Rajya. They were so called because of their practice of Joga.\footnote{56} The Jogis of Darrang migrated from Bengal in the middle of the twelfth century due to the oppression of Ballal Sen, the king of Bengal.\footnote{57} Formerly they functioned as gurus or teachers in the court of Ballal Sen. They settled in Goalpara, Kamrup and later on in Darrang and other parts of Assam. As they were oppressed in Bengal, the people of Assam looked down upon them as low caste.\footnote{58} However, they lay claim to high origin. According to one account, they were the offspring of Brahman widows and ascetics, while others assert that they are descendants of Gorakshanath, an incarnation of Lord Siva.\footnote{59} The original title of the Jogi was ‘Nath’, which means guru or provu. The Jogis of Darrang were worshippers of Siva. Like the Brahmans, the Jogis wore the sacred thread and had their own priest to perform religious rites like sradha. However, unlike the Brahmans, they engaged in cultivation ploughing the fields themselves.

The traditional occupation of the Jogis was the rearing of patpalu,\footnote{60} spinning and weaving. At the time of their arrival in Darrang, none could know the art of rearing of patpalu and spinning. However, when they realized the great prospect of this business, as it was the attire of the high classes, they brought patpalu from Bengal and started its business for their livelihood in the Darrangi Rajya.\footnote{61} As they carried on business of pat thread by rearing and spinning, they were called as Katani.\footnote{62} Patpalu was cultured in very clean environment and therefore, the other people were not permitted to enter the houses where the patpalu were kept.\footnote{63} This clearly shows the caste distinction in the Darrangi society. As a result, the rearing of patpalu became the monopoly of this new emerging business group that led to important social

\footnote{54} However, presently some of the Koches adopted their own priest, which is known as tantradhari.
\footnote{55} Jogi, generally spelt as Yogi in other works. B. C. Allen used the spelling Jugi.
\footnote{56} Prasanta Nath, Nath Dharma Darsan Aru Sanskriti, Anurag Offset, Guwahati, 2005, p. 64.
\footnote{58} B. C. Allen, op. cit. p. 85.
\footnote{59} Ibid. 85.
\footnote{60} Silkworm fed with the leaves of neskuri or mulberry tree.
\footnote{61} Haliram Nath Saharia, op. cit. 43.
\footnote{62} Sarbananda Rajkumar, Itihase Soaura Chachata Bachr, Banalata, Dibrugarh, 2000, p. 163.
\footnote{63} Hiteswar Barbarua, Ahomar Din, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 1997, p. 475.
changes. It is evident that the Jogi or Katani supplied clothes to the Darrangi Rajas. The village Hatimuria under Sipajhar circle was a famous centre of the pat or silk industry.\(^{64}\)

As the economic condition of the Jogi people improved due to their trade monopoly the rajas patronized them and under the patronage of Raja Madhu Narayan they made considerable advances in the social scale.\(^{65}\) As a result some of them worked as Rajkarmachari (royal servicemen) under the Darrangi Rajas. It is a known fact that Daneswar Hazarika and Japurai Saharia, natives of village Nagaon, under Rangamati mauza, worked as Rajkarmachari under the rule of Raja Bijoy Narayan.\(^{66}\) This shows how wealth determines access to power. Earlier they were looked down upon but with their improved economic status, they were allowed access into the raja's court. However, there was no restriction in adopting other occupations. Agriculture was their common occupation.

The professional social groups carried on their traditional and inherited occupations. Literature like Darranga Rajvansaali and Hatibarua Vansaali refer to some other social divisions of the Darrangi Rajya which were mainly professional groups such as Nat (dancer), Tanti (weaver), Mali (gardener), Kamar (blacksmith), Kahar (bell metal worker), Barhai (carpenter), Dhoba (washerman), Teli (oil presser), Sonari (goldsmith), Kumar (potter), Hira (potter), Kaibarta (fisherman), Chamar, Muchiar (cobbler), Hari (sweeper),\(^{67}\) Bonia (jeweller), Napit (barber),\(^{68}\) etc. It is noteworthy that the rajas had the authority to debar a particular group from their traditional profession if he so desired.\(^{69}\) This shows that the rajas had considerable control over economic activities. Thereby it can be said that the economic activities of the Darrangi Rajya were centralized. Some of the professional groups are discussed below.

The Kaibarta or Jaliya was one of the professional groups associated with water and boat. Fishing was their chief occupation. There was, however, no restriction to adopt

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\(^{64}\) Dimbeswar Saikia (ed.), Darrangar Itihas, Imprint Offset, Mangaldai, Assam, 2005, p. 11.
\(^{65}\) B. C. Allen, op. cit. p. 85.
\(^{66}\) Haliram Nath Saharia, op. cit. 46.
\(^{67}\) Suryakhadi Daibajyan, op. cit., verses, 550-551, p.104.
\(^{68}\) Hatibarua Vansaali, op. cit., verse, 49, p.29.
\(^{69}\) Ibid, verse, 52, p.29.
other occupation. Some of them had taken to agriculture and others engaged in trade as their subsidiary occupation. They followed many basic tenets of Hinduism. They had many things common with other Hindu castes in observance of marriage and other customs.\textsuperscript{70} The Kaibartas declined to use the ghokota net used by other fishermen group like Doms and they sold their fishes close to the river bank.\textsuperscript{71} Another such group associated with boats and fishing, was the Doms or Nadiyals. There were minor differences between the Doms and the Kaibartas. The Doms or Nadiyals regularly took their catch to the market. In Darrang (Mangaldai), the Doms or Nadiyals were divided into three sections i.e. the Muchi or shoemakers, the Kheoli or wholesalers and the Machua or retail fish sellers.\textsuperscript{72}

The Hiras were an important professional group of the Darrangi Rajya, they were engaged in pottery-making. In Assam, there were two groups of potters i.e. Kumars and Hiras. The Hiras were regarded as ‘degraded’ (antyaja).\textsuperscript{73} Francis Hamilton called them ‘an impure’ caste.\textsuperscript{74} The basic difference between the Hiras with the Kumars was that the former did not use the wheel,\textsuperscript{75} while the latter used the wheel called Kumar's chak in pottery-making. Thus distinction between the two potter groups was reckoned on the basis of the use and non-use of the wheel. Besides, the Hiras were not allowed to make pots used for devakarya or religious rituals and only the Kumars were allowed to do so. This is a clear evidence of the social stratification in the society.

The other professional groups like Barhai, Dhuba, Teli, Mali, etc., were engaged in performing particular works of the royal family. They were primarily agriculturists. There was no restriction for other people to pursue these works like extraction of mustard oil, washing clothes, carpentry, etc. In fact, every household performed these works at their own houses.

\textsuperscript{70} N. C. Dutta, op. cit. p.128.
\textsuperscript{71} B. C. Allen, op. cit. p. 92.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid, pp. 92-93.
\textsuperscript{73} Birinchi Kumar Barua, \textit{A Cultural History of Assam}, Bina Library, Assam, 2003, p.131.
\textsuperscript{74} Francis Hamilton, op. cit. p. 57.
\textsuperscript{75} B. C. Allen, op. cit. p. 157.
The Darrangi Rajas followed a policy of religious tolerance. The principal religion of the rajya was Hinduism. The three cults of the Hindu religion i.e. Saivism, Saktism, and Vaishnavism were prevalent, although the dominant cult was Saktism to which the rajas adhered. The ethnic groups of people retained their original beliefs and practices. Islam also gained ground and being a minority it was influenced by Hinduism and the Muslims followed many Hindu customs and manners. Hindu-Muslim integrity is one of the important and significant features of the Darrangi society. Though the Darrangis came in contact with the Buddhists, they did not convert to this religion although its influence is apparent in their culture. The worship of Siva was prevalent and the Rudreswar Dewaloi, situated in the village Maharipara under Dipila mauza, was one of the most famous places of Siva worship in the rajya. There was a Siva linga in the Dewaloi. On the orders of the Ahom king Gaurinath Singha, the Darrangi Raja Swarga Narayan (Chandra Narayan) granted 160 puras of land in saka 1708 for the maintenance of the deity and issued a copper plate to this effect, which is now preserved in the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam, Guwahati. On getting royal patronage this deity became popular among the people of the rajya and its worship is still prevalent. The Tamreswar Dewaloi, situated in Khairabari was an equally important seat of Siva worship where the remnants of an ancient Siva temple and idols were found. This Dewaloi was also patronized by the Darrangi Rajas and granted land for its maintenance through the same copper plate issued to the Rudreswar Dewaloi. Another important centre of Siva worship was the Umananda Than in the Cinakona mauza under Kalaigaon Thana. There was a temple, which was ruined in the earthquake of 1898 A.D. Here a trisul was found. Gopeswar temple of Singari was another Saiva temple of importance of the Darrangi Rajya. Moreover, a large number of Siva lingas and idols were found in the rajya proving that Siva was

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76 W. W. Hunter, op. cit. p. 118.
77 Legend has in it that Lord Mohadev appeared in the form of linga (phallus) in the jungle of this area. Since then a particular cow used to go to the Siva linga and poured milk on it regularly which came out automatically from her udder. The people of this area built a dewaloi and placed the particular Siva linga on it, when they came to know about this event through a saint, who became aware of this in dream.
81 Ibid. p. 211. According to a legend, once Lord Siva lived there with his consort Uma and that was why the name of the place came to be known as Umananda Than.
82 Sarbananda Rajkumar, op. cit., p. 282.
worshipped in both forms. Under the patronage of the Darrangi Rajas Saivaism became an important religion in the rajya. The Darrangi Rajas patronized and made extensive grants for the spread of Saivism.

The Darrangi Rajas were the followers of Sakti cult and did much for the spread of it. They organized and patronized different festivals and functions related to the Sakti worship. For example, they performed Durga puja at their capital. The followers of Sakti cult were encouraged to celebrate manasa or maroi puja. Some scholars even wrote manasa pachali for preaching Sakti worship, Sukabi Narayandev wrote Padma Puran. The institution of Suknani Ojhapali related to the Sakti worship became famous and popular in the rajya. The Mukteswari temple of village Odola under Ambagoan mauza, Padma Than under Bönmaja mauza, Madha Gohain temple located in Pub-Dalgaon mauza, Kamakhya Moth in the village Lakhimpur and Bishwa Satra were the important seats of Sakti worship. The priest of the temple Madha Gohain belonged to the Hindu Chutia caste. In the Bishwa Satra, located in Deomornoi which was established during the reign of the Darrangi Rajas, Lakhmi puja and Saraswati puja were held.

Though the Darrangi Rajas adhered to the Sakti cult, they did not coerce the subjects to adopt it; rather they respected other cults and provided extensive grants for their development. However, it can be noticed that the rajas wanted to establish a unity between the Sakti and Vaishnava worship through assimilation of some of their elements. Such intention is clearly revealed when the rajas introduced the Sakta malachis in the Biyasar Ojhapali. It marked a change in religious and cultural affairs. The Vaishnava cult also made some progress. The Darrangi Rajas patronized many Vaishnavite scholars and established them at their court. Among them Ram Saraswati, Ratikanta Dwija, Nandeswar Dwija and Gobinda Mishra were important. Their writings immensely helped in preaching the Vaishnava doctrine in the rajya.

As a result of the popularity of the Vaishnava cult many satras were founded in the rajya, such as the Debananda Satra, Outola Satra, the Maroi Satra, etc., and became very famous and popular after receiving royal patronage. The Darrangi Rajas granted

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83 Hatibarua Vansaali, op. cit.,verse 21, p. 22; and also M. Neog, Asamiya Sahityar Ruprakha, Chandra Prakasan, Guwahati, 1987, p. 198
84 In this thesis the spelling Padma Puran is used though generally it is spelt as Padma Purana.
85 N. C. Dutta, op. cit. p:145.
land to the Debananda Satra, where the famous *mathoni utsav* is held. The Outola Satra was established during the reign of the *Darrangi Raja* Chandra Narayan. Maroi Satra was another important Vaishnava *satra* patronized by the *Darrangi Rajas*. Some the lower groups of people like *Hira* were converted through this *satra*. The *Darrangi Rajas* granted land to this *satra* for its maintenance by issuing a *tamrapatra* (copper plate), which is now preserved by the Managing Committee of the *satra*. The *Darrangi Rajas* celebrated Vishnu *puja* at their capital. Some festivals viz, *Deul utsav*, *Phalgu utsav* and *Gondhchaupari sobha*, etc., related to Vishnu worship were widely celebrated in the *rajya* and received royal patronage.

The neo-Vaishnava movement propounded by Sri Sankardev did not make much impact in Darrang in spite of the fact that Sankardev himself resided for six months at Rowta (Rota). One reason for this may be attributed to the fact that both idol worship and *sakta cult* were prominent in the *rajya*. At a later stage, Gobinda Atai of Lechakonia founded a *satra* of Mahapurusiya sect at Khatara in the west part of Darrang. Even then the people were not attracted to the simple *akasaran nam-dharma* and, therefore, it is interesting to note that he had to install idols of Ram, Sita, Lakshman and Hanuman in the *satra* to motivate the people to the *akasaran nam-dharma*. These four idols still exist in the Khatara Satra. This marked a change and variation of the original form of the *akasaran nam-dharma* or neo-Vaishnavism, which was against idol worship. Royal patronage was also extended to this *satra*, which is attested to by the *Barkakat* preserved in the *satra*.

*Barkhelia or Purnadharia Bhakat* was a sect of the Vaishnavite cult prevalent in the *rajya*. It is said that Sukdev or Sukura Mahanta preached this cult in the *rajya*. The *Barkhelia Bhakats* consumed liquor, pigs, fowl, *sal, singi, kekora*, etc. These articles were essential for the *sewa* or the religious function. The *Bhakat sewa* (religious function) was held at night and completed before dawn. That was why this sect is also

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87 Ibid, p.69.
88 Dineswar Sarma, op. cit. p. 100.
90 The *Barkakat* is a document written on *sachi* bark which contained a list of articles donated to the Khatara Satra by the *Darrangi Rajas*.
known as Ratikhowa sewa or Guput sewa. The Mahanta would wear a japi on his head, a Rudrakhya mala round the neck, and would play the dambaru (a kind of drum), which is believed to be a special musical instrument of Lord Siva. This religious cult gradually expanded in the Darrangi Rajya. The Mahanta proved that he had great powers, which led Raja Prem Narayan, commonly known as Thotha Raja, son of Samudra Narayan to become a devotee of this cult. After this royal conversion many people of different castes such as Koch, Kalita, Jogi, Daibajyan, etc., were attracted to it and became devotees of this cult and its popularity increased. Their sadhasar or prayers called chiya git became a special part of the Darrangi culture.

Another sect of the Vaishnavite cult was known as Puthinessia, who placed great importance on the reading of the puthi or sastra (religious book). The other important ritual was associated with the offering of the prasad or sarai in an elaborately symbolic ceremony. It is said that Symrai Thakur, a Mahapurusia Mahanta of Barpeta district, came to the Darrangi Rajya and preached this new cult of Vaishnavism, which was also known as Thakur Khelia. This cult, which permitted only vegetarian food, was founded in the Darrangi Rajya in the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Among the ethnic groups of the Darrangi Rajya the Kacharis, often called the Boro-Kachari people, were prominent and were descended from the Kirata or the Indo-Mongoloid stock. Linguistically they belonged to the Tibeto-Burman group of Boro or Bodo languages. Judging from the wide range of extention of their language, Suniti Kumar Chatterji thinks that the Bodos or Kacharis were the first to have settled over the entire Brahmaputra valley. From this point of view probably most of the scholars think that they were the aboriginal inhabitants of Darrang. It is significant to note that the Report on the Judicial and Revenue Administration of Assam, 1835,

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92 An indigenous sunshade made of bamboo.
93 Jagannath Bhattarcharyya, Koch Raja Buranj, preserved in the house of Durga Charan Bhattarcharyya, Sarabari, Darrang, Assam, not dated.
95 Ibid. p. 49.
98 Ibid, p. 46.
File No. 298 Bengal, says that most of the Kacharis (Cacharees) who had deserted from Assam had settled in Darrang especially in Kariapara Duar.\(^{100}\) The majority of the Kachari population settled in the northern parts of the rajya particularly in the duar areas like Kariapara, Burhigoma, Khalling and Chatguri. That is why these were also known as Kachariduar,\(^{101}\) which indicated the domination of the Kachari population in these areas. Reference to the Kachari people in the north is also found in the Darranga Rajvansaali.\(^{102}\) Agriculture was their primary occupation and rice the staple crop grown. They had the knowledge of dong irrigation system in the cultivated field that will be discussed in the chapter III.

The Kacharis observed certain ceremonies and festivals on the occasions of birth, marriage and death. During Baisagu or spring time festival the people rejoiced with songs, dance, drinks and feasts. Drinking rice beer was an important aspect of maintaining social cohesion during festivals.\(^{103}\) Rice beer was prepared and served entirely by the women. Another significant feature of the Kachari society was that divorce was permitted in their society and was by mutual consent. When both husband and wife had mutually agreed to a divorce, their friends were informed and in their presence the husband and wife took hold of either end of a paan (leaf of the betel vine), and tore it into two pieces. This practice declared the marriage null and void and the invitees were regarded as witnesses of the divorce. Both husband and wife were free to marry again.\(^{104}\)

It is interesting to note that although the patriarchal form of inheritance was prevalent in their society, the Kachari women enjoyed the liberty to participate in song, dance and merry-making on the occasions of marriage and other festivals. It is a known fact that they were expert in weaving too.\(^{105}\) It is also notable that in the Kachari society adultery was looked upon as a very serious offence and the adulterer became socially ostracised, unless he paid a heavy fine, while no blame was attached to the

\(^{100}\) Assam Secretariat Proceedings, Report on the Judicial and Revenue Administration of Assam, 1835, File No. 298 Bengal. State Archives, Dispur, Guwahati.

\(^{101}\) B. C. Allen, op. cit. p. 88.

\(^{102}\) Suryakhadi Daibajyan, op. cit. verse, 336, p. 64.

\(^{103}\) N. C. Dutta, op. cit. p.132.

\(^{104}\) William Robinson, A Descriptive Account of Assam, Sanskaran Prakash, Delhi, India, 1975, p. 295; and also Nabin Chandra Sarma (ed.), Jana Krishir Ruprekha, Chandra Prakash, Guwahati, 2001, p. 138.

\(^{105}\) N. C. Dutta, op. cit. pp. 133-34.
adultress.\textsuperscript{106} This indicates exaction of fines was part of revenue as perhaps adultery may have been a common practice and at the same time it shows the liberal attitude of the society towards women.

The \textit{Kacharis} of the \textit{rajya} had their own religious believes and practices and worshipped various kinds of gods and goddess and natural phenomena. They worshipped \textit{Bathou},\textsuperscript{107} and it was their supreme God, a deity represented by a \textit{sizu} tree. It was their religious symbol and every household would plant a \textit{sizu} tree in the north-east corner of their courtyard (\textit{chotal}) by observing certain rituals. The musical instruments used in the prayers were of five kinds such as \textit{madal} (drum), \textit{basi} (flute), \textit{seraja}, \textit{tal} and \textit{gangana}.\textsuperscript{108} It is highly debatable as Jeuram Boro has mentioned that in the Boro language, \textit{Bathou} was also known as \textit{Siribrai}, identified as Mahadev or Siva.\textsuperscript{109} It must be noted that \textit{Bathou} in itself is a concept of religious belief and cannot be identified with Hindu religion. Although it is evident in the \textit{Darranga Rajvansaali} that the \textit{Kacharis} worshipped Mahadev or Siva,\textsuperscript{110} it does not imply that \textit{Bathou} can be identified with the Hindu god, Siva. In fact the worship of Siva among the \textit{Kacharis} may have been a later development. They believe in the existence of one Supreme Being; but they supposed that the affairs of nations and individuals were under the superintendence of two divine agents, a good and evil spirit; the favour of the one may be obtained, and the wrath of the other appeased by the sacrifice of a fowl.\textsuperscript{111} Besides their principal deity \textit{Bathou}, the \textit{Kacharis} worshipped certain other gods and goddess. They also believed in ghosts and spirits.\textsuperscript{112} In times of trouble they offered \textit{puja} to appease the evil spirits or ghosts. The strong evil spirit popular among them was \textit{kuber}, who was of different kinds such as \textit{jal kuber}, \textit{sthal kuber}, \textit{baga kuber} and \textit{kola kuber}, etc.\textsuperscript{113}

The \textit{Kacharis} had their own priests to conduct their religious rituals and they were divided into five divisions such as \textit{gisia}, \textit{gothari}, \textit{asari}, \textit{doiri} and \textit{daisi}. The first two,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item William Robinson, op. cit. p. 295.
\item N. C. Dutta, op. cit. p. 133.
\item Tarun Azad Deka and Sailen Kumar Rajbongshi (eds.), op. cit. p. 18.
\item Jeuram Boro, \textit{Boro Sanskritir Akhila Pat}, in Kiran Chandra Sarma (ed.), op. cit. pp. 48-49.
\item Suryakhadi Daibajyan, op. cit. verse, 325, p. 62.
\item William Robinson, op. cit. p. 295.
\item N. C. Dutta, op. cit. p. 132.
\item Tarun Azad Deka and Sailen Kumar Rajbongshi (eds.), op. cit p.20.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
gisia and gothari, were highly respected and occupied high status in Kachari society and they acted as guides in both social and religious spheres. While the third, asari carried out marriage ceremonies, the last two conducted puja or regular religious rites. Thus the status differentiation was prevalent within the priestly class of the Kachari society.

The Rabhas were a section of the Bodo race. They were an offshoot of the Garos and akin to the Kacharis. They originally lived on the northern slopes of the Garo Hills. Some of them left their homeland and settled in Goalpara, Kamrup and Darrang. The Rabhas had as many as seven subdivisions such as Rangdania, Pati, Maitariya, Koch, Bitlia, Dahuria and Sangha. But these subdivisions were not recognized in Darrang. The Rabhas of Darrang were known as Totola Rabha. According to S. N. Sarma, the Rabhas were more Hinduised than the Kacharis. The Rabhas were agriculturists and like the Kacharis, they were fond of beer, pork and chicken. During their festivals especially marriage ceremonies the duty of distributing beer or wine was entrusted to a special couple called Barua-Baruani who also entertained the guests with songs and dances.

Originally the Rabhas had their own religious believes and worshipped various kinds of natural phenomena attributed to different deities. However, the chief deity of the Rabhas was Baikhu. They worshipped deities like Bharali and Kubir gohain and made offerings to the spirits of the forests and marshes. Nevertheless, they also followed different cults of Hinduism such as Saivism, Saktism and worshipped other gods and goddess. This change was perhaps made due to the influence of the neighbouring Hindus.

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114 Ibid. p.18.
115 B. C. Allen, op.cit. p. 93.
116 Satyendra Nath Sarma, op.cit. p. 46.
117 B. C. Allen, op.cit. p. 93.
119 Satyendra Nath Sarma, op.cit. p. 46.
120 B. C. Allen, op. cit. p.95.
121 Tarun Azad Deka and Sailen Kumar Rajbongshi (eds.), op. cit. p.72.
123 B. C. Allen, op. cit. p. 95.
There were some Chutia subjects in the Darrangi Rajya. Linguistically they belonged to the great Tibeto-Burman race. They were originally a group of Bodo race.\textsuperscript{125} Formerly the Chutias had a kingdom at Sadiya, which was annexed to the Ahom kingdom during the reign of Suhummung, the Dihingia Raja (1497-1539 A.D.). After the annexation of the Chutia kingdom of Sadiya, Sadhak Narayan, the five-year old son of the deceased Chutia king Dhir Narayan was enthroned with twelve Chutia families in the territory west of Rowta, east of Dhansiri river, south of Kabir Ali and north of the Brahmaputra river by issuing a tamrapatra (copper plate).\textsuperscript{126} This kingdom came to be known as Desh Chutia,\textsuperscript{127} which was included in the Darrangi Rajya.

At the time of Chilarai’s invasion of the Ahom kingdom the descendants of the Chutia royal family, who had been dethroned and expelled from the kingdom by the Ahoms, took shelter under the Koch king, Nar Narayan and the latter established them at a place called Banbhari\textsuperscript{128} in Darrang district. Besides, three thousand Chutias were sent from Upper Assam at the time of coronation of Dharma Narayan as the raja of the Darrangi Rajya.\textsuperscript{129} The Chutias professed Hinduism and were Sakti worshippers.\textsuperscript{130} They worshipped various forms of Kali with the aid of their priest called Deori. The favourite deity was the Kesaikhati or the eater of raw flesh.\textsuperscript{131} They were mainly agriculturists.

The Mohammadens were also important subjects of the Darrangi Rajya. They came to Assam at different times in the tide of the Muslim invasions from the North-West India,\textsuperscript{132} especially from the Gauda country.\textsuperscript{133} The migration of the Muslim people started with the invasion of Assam by Md. Bin Bakhtiar Khiliji, a Muslim General of Kutubuddin in about 1205 A.D. Khiliji was defeated and some of his captive soldiers settled in Assam, especially in the area between Hajo and Sipajhar in the Brahmaputra

\textsuperscript{125} K. L. Barua, Early History of Kamrupa, (From earliest times to the end of the sixteenth century), Lawyer's Book Stall, Assam, 1988, p. 183.
\textsuperscript{127} N. C. Dutta, op. cit. p. 71.
\textsuperscript{128} Suryakhadi Daibajyan, op. cit. verse, 373, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{129} Edward Gait, op. cit. p. 63.
\textsuperscript{130} Satyendra Nath Sarma, op. cit. p.63.
\textsuperscript{131} Edward Gait, op. cit. p.39.
\textsuperscript{132} S. K. Bhuyan, Swargadeo Rajeswar Singha, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 1975, p. 166.
\textsuperscript{133} Sarbeswar Rajguru, op. cit. p. 145.
Like in other parts of Assam, the Muslim people of the Darrangi Rajya were also known as *gaudia* or *garia*, as they basically came from Gauda. The earliest settlements of the Muslim people in the *rajya* were found in a village called Ghopa near Sipajhar. After their settlement the village came to be known as Garia Ghopa.

The Muslim society of the Darrangi Rajya was a later formation as many invading Muslim soldiers and prisoners of war did not return and settled in Darrang instead. It is said that Raja Chandra Narayan sold some Mughal prisoners of war in a place called *Mughalbesa* under Kalaigaon mauza. Some of them were settled at village Chapara that came to be known as Gariapara near Jaljali. As these men did not bring women with them, they married local women. Sihabuddin Talish observed, “as for the Musalmans who had been taken prisoner in former times and had chosen to marry here, their descendants act exactly in the manner of the Assamese, and have nothing of Islam except the name; their hearts are inclined far more towards mingling with the Assamese than towards association with Muslims.” It is said that during the reign of Raja Surya Narayan three Islamic Allims (persons having special knowledge of Islam) were brought from Nagaon district and given land grants in Nagarbahi near the capital Houli Mohanpur, Garia Ghopa and Maroi, 3 k.m. south of Sipajhar. Attracted to this new faith, a number of Hindu people converted to Islam. The hierarchical Hindu social system was one of the main reasons of this mobility. Moreover, there was lack of Hindu *Gosai* or religious teacher to impart religious education. It is a known fact that a person named Patharu Hira converted to Islam, and became known as ‘Patharu Shiekh’. It is said that the area was named after him as ‘Patharughat’, 10 k.m. north-west of Sipajhar. Not only the low caste people, but high caste Hindus also converted. For instance, one Kanai Gosai, whose original

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136 During the British rule the then Land Settlement officer Md. Anwar Hussain changed the name of the village to Muslim Ghopa.
137 Dineswar Sarma, op. cit. p. 38.
139 Edward Gait, op. cit. p.141.
140 Ram Chandra Deka and Prasanna Kumar Nath (eds), *Saranga Saurav*, Printmatrics, Mangaldai, Assam, 2005, p. 156.
141 Abdul Mazid, op. cit. p. 40.
name was Sanjay Goswami, converted to this new faith.\textsuperscript{142} It may be that the caste rigidities in Hindu social system often took to social ostracism which paved the way for Islam. The prevailing stratified social condition in the Hindu society provided them opportunity for social mobility. This brought about important changes in the society.

Majority of the Muslim people under the Darrangi Rajya were Hindu converts and this is clearly proved in the Maroi area\textsuperscript{143} and as such their manners and customs were similar to that of the Hindus. They dressed, shaved and worshipped idols like the Hindus.\textsuperscript{144} Like the Hindus, a male member of the Muslim community wore dhutichuria while the women wore mekhela and riha-chadar.\textsuperscript{145} So also, mantra-tantra was prevalent among them and in times of sickness and trouble they endeavoured to obtain relief by reciting mantras and singing hymns.\textsuperscript{146} The Muslim women sang sitalanam and ainam prevalent in the Hindu society. So the converts represented a culture that was a synthesis of both Hinduism and Islam. Interestingly, it may be noted that there were no restrictions for the Muslim people to take part in Hindu social and even religious functions. Muslim people took active part in the Durga puja, a Sakti worship ritual conducted at Houli Mohanpur, the capital city.\textsuperscript{147} They also participated in the Deul utsav,\textsuperscript{148} another popular Hindu festival related to Vishnu worship of the rajya. One reason for this was that being it was organized and patronized by the rajas. They took part in the cultural affairs of the rajya. They even played the role of Ojha, the headsinger of the Ojhapali, which is not seen in other parts of Assam. It is evident that Parasu Ojha of village Maroi performed Suknani Sanggit at the Durga puja held at Houli Mohanpur.\textsuperscript{149} They also earned reputation in different art forms such as Dhulia and Kalia. The village Kaliapara near Aulachowaka testifies to this tradition.\textsuperscript{150} They were also invited by the Hindus to perform Kalia in the marriage ceremony.\textsuperscript{151} The performance of Kalia was one of the important parts,

\textsuperscript{142} M. Abid Ali and Abdur Rahaman, op. cit. p. 29.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{144} B. C. Allen, op. cit. p. 100.
\textsuperscript{145} M. Abid Ali and Abdur Rahaman, op. cit. p. 46.
\textsuperscript{146} B. C. Allen, op. cit. p. 100.
\textsuperscript{147} Dineswar Sarma, op.cit. p. 54.
\textsuperscript{149} Lohit Chandra Kalita (ed.), op. cit, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{150} Dimbeswar Saikia (ed.), op.cit. p.254.
\textsuperscript{151} M. Abid Ali and Abdur Rahaman, op.cit. p. 30.
if not essential, of the marriage ceremony in those days. The Muslim community that emerged was largely influenced by the dominant Hindu society.

Moria was a sub-group of the Muslim community. They were associated with the making of brass works, and prepared fermented liquor from rice. Their houses were the resorts of all kinds of debauchery.\textsuperscript{152} William Robinson observed that they did not maintain restrictions in their food habit. They ate beef as well as pork, and were in general very much addicted to the use of spirituous liquors.\textsuperscript{153} The Morias of Assam were of Shia sect\textsuperscript{154} so were the Morias of the Darrangi Rajya. Mohini Kumar Saikia is of the opinion that the Morias were the Muslim people settled in Assam long before seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{155} That means they were the earliest Muslim settlers. The Morias were regarded as a lowly group of people and their social position was very low perhaps due to their debauchery and they were not constrained in their food habits. Therefore, this community was segregated from the general Muslim community and they were debarred from entering into marriage alliances.\textsuperscript{156} Thus social stratification within the Muslim society was also prevalent. Moriapatty (Islampur) in Mangaldai, Houli Mohanpur and Banglagarh\textsuperscript{157} were seats of considerable Moria habitation. The Muslim people were primarily agriculturists. Some of them were appointed under the Darrangi Rajas. They mainly served in the military department. For instance, Nurhama acted in his capacity as commander of the forces of the Darrangi Raja Hangsa Narayan II against the Ahom king.\textsuperscript{158} There were some Muslim soldiers in the Darrangi army.\textsuperscript{159} This shows that the Darrangi Rajas did not make any discrimination on the basis of religion and merit was the only criteria.

The followers of the Islam were a minority in the rajya as shown in the Census Report of 1871 A.D. only 5.9 percent\textsuperscript{160} of the total population and most of them were Hindu

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textit{Assam Secretariat Proceedings, Report on the Judicial and Revenue Administration Assam}, 1835, \textit{File No. 298}, Bengal, State Archives, Dispur, Guwahati.}
\footnote{William Robinson, op. cit. p. 264.}
\footnote{Mohini Kumar Saikia, \textit{Assam-Mughal Relations and its Cultural Significance}, Luit Printers, Golaghat, Assam, 1978, p. 139.}
\footnote{Lohit Chandra Kalita (ed.), op. cit. p. 26.}
\footnote{W. W. Hunter, op. cit., P. 141.}
\footnote{Kiran Chandra Sarma (ed.), op. cit. p. 129.}
\footnote{W. W. Hunter, op. cit., p. 118.}
\end{footnotes}
converts. The new converts were not acquainted with even the basic tenets of Islam and also could not read the Koran. Prayers were held in the open field, as there was no set establishment for the purpose. They eschewed beef and declined to kill cows. However, they practiced circumcision and offered prayers according to Islamic practices. They followed the manners and customs of the neighbouring Hindus. In times of sickness or an epidemic of cholera or smallpox, it is said that they secretly recited mantras, in the hope of relief from the illness. Thus Islam showed the influence of Hinduism.

One of the significant institutions of the Darrangi society was the system of bandi-golam. The Darrangi nobles or the well-to-do people kept bandi-golam or bondsmen for their household duties. Maintenance of bandi-golam became a status symbol for the upper class. Robinson stated that ‘slavery’ or bandi-golam existed, and the domestic helpers, both male and female, were either ‘slaves’, or bonded labour, who continued in bondage for life. Bought and sold, and even mortgaged like any other article of property, their descendants or nearest relations, were kept in bondage, from generation to generation, in the event of the ‘slave’ or bonded labour’s death.

Many economically ruined men had sold their children and even their wives as bandi-golam. This is corroborated by the Padma Puran. Moreover, bandi-golams were procured from amongst the prisoners of war or bought from the hills. When Chandra Narayan, the Darrangi Raja with his forces joined in the Ahom side and fought against the Mughals, the Mughal invaders were defeated and many fell into the hands of the Ahoms. Those soldiers were captured by the Darrangi Raja, taken to Mangaldai and kept in bondage with iron chains at a place which came to be known as Mughalbesa (sale of Mughals) under Kalaigaon mauza and they were sold as bandi-golam. There were also some dolabhari-golam in the royal and noble families in the Darrangi Rajya. They generally carried dolas.

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161 N. C. Dutta, op. cit., p.123.
164 Sukabi Narayandev, op. cit. verses, 344-345, p. 72.
165 Major Adam White, op. cit., p. 218.
The price of the *bandi-golam* depended upon their caste status or high or low *kul*, and gender. The price of *bandi-golam* varied from Rs. 3 to 20. This also clearly revealed the exploitation practiced within the society. The *bandi-golams* were considered as the private property of the owners. The *rajas* did not have any authority over these *bandi-golams* and they had no obligation to go to war. That was why many low caste people preferred to enter as *bandi-golam* rather than enlisting as *paiks*.\(^{168}\) It is reported that the owners were uncommonly kind to their *bandi-golam* (slave), who were generally treated as part of the household, provided food and cloths.\(^{169}\) This shows that the condition of the *bandi-golam* was better than that of the slaves of Europe. That the institution of *bandi-golam* was widespread in the *Darrangi Rajya* is clearly indicated by the fact that when the British took over the administration of Darrang, David Scott, Governor General's Agent is said to have freed several *bandi-golams* from the custody of the noble families.\(^{170}\)

Family was the smallest unit of the society. Patriarchal form of inheritance was prevalent among Hindus, Muslims and ethnic groups. The elder male member of the family was the head and guardian of the family and all societies were patriarchal. Although some gender discrimination was prevalent such as women were not allowed any kind of formal education and the Brahman widows were not permitted to take non-vegetarian food the *purdha* or veil system was not prevalent either in the Hindu, the Muslim or in the societies of ethnic groups. Women could openly appear in the public festivals. Chastity or purity called *sati* of women was demanded and respected and deemed as providing extraordinary powers to the women as has been authenticated by the *Padma Puran*. Polygamy was in practice both among the Hindus, Muslims and ethnic groups such as *Kacharis* and *Rabhas*. Pre-puberty marriage was prevalent. Widow re-marriage was prevalent among some people especially among the *Jogi* caste people\(^{171}\) while it was restricted in the high caste people.

Literature like *Darranga Rajvansaali*, *Gobinda Charit* and *Padma Puran* gives us an idea of the cremation rituals of the Hindus in the *Darrangi Rajya*. Death rituals varied

\(^{168}\) Jagannath Bhattarcharya, op. cit.
\(^{170}\) Jagannath Bhattarcharya, op. cit.
\(^{171}\) N. C. Dutta, op. cit. p.127.
according to social position in the society. Both cremation and burial practice was prevalent. The kith and kin carried the dead on a *dola* (palanquin) or *singhasan* (a decorated wooden seat supported by wooden lion) in case of upper class to the crematorium called *smakhan*. The common people carried the dead on a *chang*, a temporary structure made of jait* bamboo. The dead were taken to the crematorium in a procession, *sa-yatra*, by the kith and kin and the neighbours of the same clan shouting "*haridhani*" and playing musical instruments such as *dhol*, *tal*, and the *sankha*. The cremation was generally held by the river side. In case there were no rivers, the cremation was carried out in places isolated from the villages or residential areas. The practice of cremation has been mentioned by both Narayandev and Mishra. However, the system of burial was prevalent among the *Jogi* community generally in the form of *jogasan*. That was why the other caste people called them as 'thiyai pota Jogi' . However, eventually a process of assimilation and sanskritization began and they abandoned the practice of burial and adopted the practice of cremation and other local customs like observing a period of mourning for ten days. Both cremation as well as burial system was prevalent among the *Kachari* people. In case of infants or a case of unnatural death like suicide, drowning, lightningstrike, etc, the dead was not cremated but buried. So also in case of snake-bite, the dead was neither cremated nor buried but placed on a raft called *bhur* made of plantain trees and floated down the river. This was a common practice irrespective of caste and creed. It was the belief that the raft would take rest in the ghats where *dhanantari* or *bez* lived and his *mantras* would remove the poison and the dead would be revived.

172 Suryakhadi Daibajyan, op. cit. verse, 702, p. 131.
174 A kind of bamboo.
175 Dwija Bhabananda Mishra, op. cit., verse, 161, p. 32.
177 Sukabi Narayandev, ibid, verse, 412, p. 84; and also, Dwija Bhabananda Mishra, op. cit., verse, 166, p. 33.
179 "Thiyai pota Jogi" means the dead of the *Jogi* people burying on standing.
180 B. C. Allen, op. cit. p. 89.
Under the rule of the *Darrangi Rajas* education made some progress. The progenitors of the *Darrangi Rajas* had a high regard for education. It is evident that Malladev and Sukladhaj better known as Nar Narayan and Chilarai respectively went to Baranasi for higher education. The *Darrangi Rajas* also encouraged and provided for education to some extent. There were Sanskrit *tols* or schools to impart education to the high caste people. Learned men were brought from outside the state to provide formal education in the *rajya*. Raja Bijoy Narayan brought a Brahman *pandit* (scholar) from Barnagar under Kamrup district and established a Sanskrit *tol* (school) in the capital city Houli Mohanpur. In this *tol* the education of Brahman and Ganak boys was mandatory.

Formal education i.e. imparting education through regular *tol* or school was not extended to the common people and not only the women of low castes but women of high castes also were not encouraged to read or write. This shows the gender discrimination and male domination under the patriarchal society. In fact it was an expression of social stratification in which women and the lower castes have been subjected to humiliating conditions in the society. However, it is said that at a later period *pathsalas* or schools for the royal families were established where common people would sometimes accompany the sons of the royal families for education. This marked a gradual change in the existing social system. The *Darrangi Rajas* also made provisions for military training. Dharma Narayan for instance, provided military training to the subjects. Therefore, the *Darrangi* subjects became competent soldiers and this was proved in different engagements with the Mughals and in the revolts of Krishna Narayan.

Although formal education was denied to women and the common people, they received non-formal education in different fields like arts and crafts. Generally this knowledge was handed down from father to son and mother to daughter. Such training covered weaving and spinning, bamboo works, carpentry, pottery making,

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1 Suryakhadi Daibajyan, op. cit. p. verse, 292, p. 56; and also, Edward Gait, op. cit. pp. 47-48.
2 Jagannath Bhattacharyya, op. cit.
3 *Assam Secretariat Proceeding, Judicial and Revenue Administration of Assam, 1835, File No. 298, Bengal. State Archives, Dispur, Guwahati.
5 Dineswar Sarma, op. cit. p. 46.
jewellery making, etc. Moreover, the Darrangi Rajas were aware of cultural education and provided facilities for cultural uplift. Cultural training was imparted under their patronage. There was a special place called Akharakhala (place of rehearsal) near Houli Mohanpur, under royal supervision. Different kinds of cultural activity including Biyasar Ojhapali, Suknani Ojhapali, Deodhani dance, Dhepadhulia, Kalta, etc., were practiced. People received education especially moral and religious through some cultural institutions. For instance, Ojhapali represented a great media of informal education to the masses.

On the other hand, the Gosais and the Medhis or Mahantas, generally engaged in satras, played a great role in educating the common people in religious and social affairs. Such satras of various kinds were found in the Darrangi Rajya, important among of them were Maroi Satra, Debananda Satra, Outola Satra, Khatara Satra, etc. The tradition of pathparha or reading of religious text was a common feature of the village dwellers. In every village there were satras, temple or community prayer halls where religious books like the Ramayana, Mohabharata and Gita were read. One reading the text was known as pathak and the others heard it devoutly. Through this process the people received moral and ethical education. Besides, folktales and fables told from generation to generation also served as a medium of imparting folk wisdom.

Literature made great progress and many outstanding literary works were written during this period eg. Padma Puran, Sri Madbhagawat Gita, Darranga Rajvansaali, etc. The Darrangi Rajas patronized scholars and encouraged literary activity, in fact some of the Buranjis and Vansaali were written under their patronage. The Darrangi Rajas brought scholars from Koch Behar and other places. Scholars like Ram Saraswati, Damodar Dwija, Gopinath Pathak, Gobinda Mishra, Sukabi Narayande, Dwija Bhabanada Mishra, Ratikanta Dwija, Suryakhadi Daibajyan, Sagarkhadi Daibajyan, Jayram Das and Pitambar Siddhanta Bagis, who were very influential.

186 Lalit Chandra Nath (Ojha), Sukanani Sangitar Rengani, Caligraphy Offset, Mangaldai, Assam, 2008, p. 16.
187 Jagannath Bhattacharyya, op. cit.
188 Dineswar Sarma, op. cit. p. 107.
Ram Saraswati was one of the outstanding scholars under the patronage of the Darrangi Rajas. He was originally the court poet of Nar Narayan of Koch Behar. During this period he translated some parbas of Mahabharata into Assamese. When Raghudev, the son of Chilarai established a separate kingdom at Barnagar, he translated Karna Parba into Assamese, and when Dharma Narayan founded the Darrangi Rajya, Ram Saraswati came to Darrang and translated Birat Parba into Assamese. Besides, he wrote Sindhu-Yatra, Jaydev Kabya, and Bana Parba on the orders of Raja Dharma Narayan. Another famous scholar of the time of Dharma Narayan was Damodar Dwija, who wrote Salla Parba. Gopinath Pathak, the son of Ram Saraswati translated Sabha Parba, Dorna Parba and Sargarohan Parba into Assamese from the Mahabharata.

Gobinda Mishra was another outstanding Vaishnava scholar of this period, who translated the famous sastra (religious book) Sri Modbhagawat Gita into Assamese from the Sanskrit Mahabharata. Scholars express different views regarding his identity and period of work. However, majority of the scholars have opined that he was a court poet of Raja Dharma Narayan. He was born at village Dala, 11 k.m. south-west of Kalaigaon. Mishra Pukhuri (pond) located in the village Bholabari near Dala still perpetuates the memory of Gobinda Mishra. In his memory 'Gobinda Mishra Sahitya Sabha', a branch of Assam Sahitya Sabha was founded. The Gita Sastra became the mouthpiece of the Vaishnavas. Sukabi Narayandev wrote the famous manasa pachali namely Padma Puran based on the popular legend Beula-Lakhindhar, which is recited by the Suknani Ojhapali during the Durga puja and manasa or maroi puja. Though the scholars express different views regarding his period and place of work, the general belief is that he was a court poet of Raja Dharma Narayan, who established Durga puja in the rajya and encouraged the officials and others to perform monasa or maroi puja. The Padma Puran reveals

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190 Dineswar Sarma, op. cit. p. 64.
193 Dineswar Sarma, op. cit. p. 68; and also Paramananda Rajbongshi, Rajpisthapokhatat Asomiya Sahitya, Bina Mandir, Guwahati, 2005, p. 131.
194 Dimbeswar Saikia, op. cit., p. 240.
195 M. Neog, op. cit. p. 198.
several local customs, traditions, and dialects. All these proved that Sukabi Narayandev was a Darrangi scholar.

During the reign of Raja Chandra Narayan, Dwija Bhabanada Mishra wrote *Gobinda Charit*, a biography of Gobinda Atoi, the founder of Khatara Satra. He also wrote *Haribansa*. Ratikanta Dwija translated the *Brahmabaibarta Puran* into Assamese under the orders of the Darrangi Raja Haya Narayan. The remaining part of this work was translated by Nandeswar Dwija, Bisheswar Dwija, Khargeswar Dwija and Narottom Dwija into Assamese. Ratikanta Dwija also wrote a *Rajvansaali*, which is known as *Kharga Narayan Vansaali*, which includes events from the reign of Koch king Bishwa Singha up to events related to the *Darrangi Phaid*. Suryakhadi Daibajyan was another outstanding scholar who wrote *Siba-Vansaali* or *Raj-Vansaali* under Darrangi Raja Samudra Narayan, published the same as *Darranga Rajvansaali*. It covered the entire period of the Koch kings of Koch Behar up to the establishment of the *Darrangi Phaid* in the *Darrangi Rajya* by Bali Narayan alias Dharma Narayan. This work however, is incomplete. He was also an astrologer who wrote *Jyotimartanda*.

Sagarkhadi Daibajyan was a court poet of the *Darrangi Rajas* and an astrologer. He wrote *Kurmakwailbadh*, *Khatasurbadh* and *Ashwakarana Yudha*. Besides, he wrote a book namely *‘Ashwa Nidan’* on horse treatment. Another poet Jayram Das wrote *Sitala Puthi* under the patronage of the *Darrangi Rajas*. Pitambar Sidhanta Bagis was an expert in *sastras* and he became the rajguru of the *Darrangi Rajas*. He wrote as many as 28 *kaumodis*. He was granted *Brahmottor* land by the *Darrangi Rajas*. The members of royal family also participated in literary activities. For example, Madhu Narayan Kownar, a *Darrangi* prince and son of *Raja* Jagat Narayan and a brother of Gandharba Narayan wrote *‘Agni Puran’* or *‘Jamar Gharat Jiyanta Manushya’*. So also Bhog Narayan Kownar, the eldest son of Dharma Narayan wrote *‘Rajnitir Lakhyan’* on different aspect of politics. This was written on *sashi* bark covering

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196 Kiran Chandra Sarma (ed.), op. cit. p. 80; and also Dineswar Sarma, op. cit. 67.
197 M. Neog, op. cit. p. 199.
198 Ibid., p. 200.
199 Dineswar Sarma, op. cit. p. 71.
200 Kiran Chandra Sarma, op. cit. p. 80.
201 Dineswar Sarma, op. cit. p. 73.
seventy-two pages.\textsuperscript{203} It is significant to note that literature also developed as a private venture without royal patronage. For example, during the reign of Raja Prem Narayan, Susandai Mishra wrote \textit{Siyalavaishnav Charit}.\textsuperscript{204} In fact he recited verses from his \textit{Siyalavaishnav Charit} as a mendicant seeking alms, an art he later transformed into his livelihood. Thus almost all branches of the Assamese literature developed during the rule of the \textit{Darrangi Rajas} both in royal patronage and private venture.

People used different kinds of dress. The male dresses were \textit{dhuti}, \textit{churia}, while the women wore \textit{mekhela}, \textit{chadar}, \textit{riha}, etc. The clothes were made of \textit{pat}, \textit{muga}, \textit{mejankari}, \textit{endi}, cotton, etc. The royal and upper class wore \textit{pat}, \textit{muga} and \textit{mejankari}, while the common people wore cotton and \textit{eri} or \textit{endi}. It is significant to note that all the clothes were locally made. Some people wore \textit{paguri} or turban as a status symbol.\textsuperscript{205} The people commonly used the mosquito net, \textit{athuwa}.\textsuperscript{206} Moustache and long beard were in vogue.\textsuperscript{207} The \textit{Darrangis}, both male and female, used different types of ornaments made of gold and silver. The Barkakat preserved in the Khata Satra refers to various types of ornaments used in those days such as \textit{gam kharu}, \textit{sonar galpata}, \textit{harmala}, etc.\textsuperscript{208} Besides, \textit{keru mani kharu}, \textit{jangphal keru}, \textit{dugdugi}, \textit{bena}, \textit{chair}, \textit{bala}, etc., were used. Both gold and silver ornaments were prevalent. The traditional and typical Assamese ornaments found in the \textit{Darrangi Rajya} were \textit{dholbiri}, \textit{jonbiri}, \textit{bena}, \textit{dugdugi}, \textit{galpata}, \textit{gamkharu}, \textit{thuriya} and \textit{lokaparo}.

A typical rural house consisted of a \textit{choraghar} (reception hall), \textit{barghar} (living room), \textit{gohalighar} (cowshed), \textit{gosaighar} (place of worship), \textit{bhoralghar} or \textit{bhakheri} (granary)\textsuperscript{209} and \textit{dhekisal} (room for \textit{dheki}, an indigenous form of the pestle and mortar used for pounding grains). The \textit{Darrangi} people stored their grains in \textit{gutibharal} - where the grains were stored after being separated from the \textit{gachi} or sheafs.\textsuperscript{210} It is

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
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\bibitem{} Kiran Chandra Sarma (ed.), op. cit., p. 113.
\bibitem{} Ibid, pp. 80-81.
\bibitem{} Ibid, p. 129.
\bibitem{} Sachidhar Nath (ed.), op. cit., p. 27.
\bibitem{} Kiran Chandra Sarma (ed.), op. cit. p. 129. The moustache had different names depending on the pattern such as \textit{maniki-madhuri}, \textit{chit-kichindou}, \textit{ledou} and \textit{fedou} etc.
\bibitem{} N. C. Dutta, op. cit. p. 137.
\bibitem{} Dineswar Sarma, op. cit. p. 110.
\end{thebibliography}
notable that there was no gachibharal -where the grains were stored without being separated from the gachi or sheafs- in Darrang as in Upper Assam. The construction of a batghora (entrance shed) at the entrance of the house was a significant feature of Darrangi society. There were two types of batghora prevalent in the Darrangi society such as thiya batghora and pathali batghora as illustrated in Figure 2. The former was used exclusively by the royal families and the upper class only, while the latter was for use by the common people. Another feature of the Darrangi house building system was that they constructed houses in four directions with a chotal (courtyard) in the midst. The houses were built primarily of bamboo and reeds available locally with thatched roofs. The walls were made of birina or ikra (reed) and plastered with mud and strengthened by bamboo or wooden posts. The floor was usually plastered with cow-dung. It was the general belief of the people that cow-dung purified their houses.

The furniture used in those days were simple and generally made of wood, bamboo and cane. The common furniture were khat (chalpira), tamulpiira (low wooden stool) and mat such dhara, merdhara, bardhara and patidhara. The use of pati dhara is also referred to in the nangali git. The pati was made of patdowa reed locally found in abundance. The well-to-do used paleng or bed. The people used jhapa (a kind bamboo box) as box to keep clothes, which was made of bamboo. Kakai, made of bamboo was used as comb. The Darrangis used different kinds of utensils made of brass, bell-metal, clay, etc., such as bankahi, banbati, kahi, lota, charia, and sarai, etc. Social stratification based on wealth was indicated through modes of dress. The royal and upper class wore pat, muga and mejankari, while the common people wore eri or endi and cotton clutches. Gold ornaments were generally used by the wealthy and upper class, while the common people used silver ornaments. Social status was also marked by the types of batghora or entrance shed to the house.

212 Sukabi Narayandev, op. cit. verse, 305, p. 65.
213 N. C. Dutta, op. cit. p. 137.
215 Sukabi Narayandev, op. cit. verse, 322, p. 68.
216 N. C. Dutta, op. cit. p. 137.
217 Sachidhar Nath (ed.), op. cit. p. 27.
218 Sukabi Narayandev, op. cit. verse, 52, p. 16.
219 Reven Chandra Nath, op. cit. p. 60.
220 N. C. Dutta, op. cit. p. 137.
Figure 2: Thiya batghora and pathali batghora.

(a) Thiya batghora

(b) Pathali batghora
Status was differentiated on the basis of the use of dolas. The dolas were used exclusively by the upper class. Different types and kinds of dolas were used by the different people according to their rank and dignity. The rajas used kekora dola, both the princes and the rajguru (royal religious teacher) used pari dola. The deposed rajas had to use hatubhangi dola while the ministers had to use dhekora dola. These rules were strictly enforced. Elephants too became status symbols of the upper class. Status of the common people was counted on the possession cows. Those who did not own a cow were regarded inferior to all in the agricultural society. Social stratification was also counted in imparting education. The upper class was given formal education facility while the common people were denied. Status differentiation even after death is evident as the upper class may use a dola or singhasan to carry the dead to the crematorium while the people of lower strata used the chang made of jati bamboo.

The Darrangi Rajas paid attention to the development of different kinds of games and sports. There was a special place called Rajapam near the Mangaldai river of about 0.5 square k.m. for the recreation of the rajas. Hunting was popular among all classes of people for which they used the net, khapara and spears, etc. The popular games and sports prevalent among the common people in those days were tanguti, doalmuri, chioghopi and dhal, etc. Besides, pasa (dice) and jowa (gambling) was also prevalent. Narayandev gives a vivid picture of losing everything in jowa khel.

It is noteworthy that during this period medical treatment for both human and animals were given equal importance. It was based on the traditional knowledge system. The Darrangis depended on baid, bez and dhanantari or Ojha for medical treatment. The progenitors of the Darrangi Phaid had traditional knowledge of medicine. Bishwa Singha himself was adept at it while his chief cook was an expert in baidya sastra (medical science).

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221 Kiran Chandra Sarma (ed.), op. cit., p.108.
223 Kiran Chandra Sarma (ed.), op. cit. p. 133.
224 Sukabi Narayandev, op. cit. verse, 332, p. 70.
226 Suryakndi Daibajyan, op. cit. verse, 180-81, pp. 35-36.
 Scholars divided the traditional system of medical treatment of Darrang into three divisions i.e. asuric, tantric and ayurvedic. The method of treatment included offering puja to the deities, mantra-tantras and applying herbal medicine. Most of the baids dealt with all diseases, while some were specialized and would treat only particular diseases. The people of Darrang had great faith on this system. Even today this system exists especially in cases of measles and snake-bite. The Darrangi Rajas appointed Rajbaid or royal physician to treat the members of the royal family. Medical treatment for animals was also greatly developed during the time of the Darrangi Rajas, as is revealed by the existence of books on animal treatment under their patronage. Sagarkhadi Daibajyan, a court poet of Raja Dharma Narayan wrote 'Ashwa Nidan,' a book on the treatment of horses and their different characteristics. It is thus clearly evident that the Darrangis had the knowledge of veterinary science too.

People engaged in different art and cultural activities some of which were particularly significant like Ojhapali, deodhani dance, dhepadhulia, kalia and cheradhek. The Darrangi Rajas paid special attention towards the growth and development of art and culture in the rajya. They patronized many artists and provided extensive grants for their maintenance. They even provided cultural training and facilities to the artists. Raja Bijoy Narayan established a big cultural stage called nityasala in front of his palace, which covered one pura or four bighas of land. The pillars of the stage were of beautifully carved sal wood. Such endeavourance of the rajas encouraged the people to engage in cultural activities. Therefore, during the time of the Darrangi Rajas different kinds of art and culture gained importance and popularity. Among them the Ojhapali was an outstanding art of Darrang, which became popular in the rajya. There were two types of Ojhapali i.e. Biyasar Ojhapali and Suknani Ojhapali prevalent in the rajya.

The institution of the Biyasar Ojhapali was an essential part of the Basudev puja or Gondchaupari sabha, which was connected with the Vishnu worship. Biyasar Ojhapali, also known as Sabhagoa Ojhapali, is a half dramatic institution, which

228 Dineswar Sarma, op. cit. p. 70.
229 Ibid. p.46.
230 Jagannath Bhattarcharyya, Koch Rajar Buranji.
performed song from the *pad* of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*.\textsuperscript{231} Biyasar Sanggit is a kind of *sastriya sanggit* based on *rag*. It is said that there were six *ragas* and thirty-six *raginis* in the *Biyasar Sanggit*.\textsuperscript{232} Some of the important *raga-raginis* performed by the *Biyasar Ojhapali* were mallow or *malo*, *saranga*, *susaranga*, *barari*, etc.\textsuperscript{233} *Biyasar Ojhapali* has three aspects i.e. dance, song and music which were together called *taujyatrik* whose highest level of perfection in performance was called *sanggit*.\textsuperscript{234} Thus the *Biyasar Ojhapali* performed the *Biyasar Sanggit*. *Ojhapali* is a team of artists of which had one *Ojha* or head singer, and four *palis* or assistants. The *Ojha* recited the *pad* from the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* and the *palis* followed him by blowing *khutital*, which was their only musical instrument. The chief of the *palis* was known as *dainapali*, as he was like the right hand of the *Ojha*. The *dainapali* explained the theme of the performed *sanggit* with humorous anecdotes to the audience.\textsuperscript{235}

It is the tradition that the *Biyasar Ojhapali* sang *jagar* and *malachi* in the *Durga puja* and *Siva puja* by taking *mudra yantra* or *taujyatric*.\textsuperscript{236} There is another tradition regarding the use of *mudra*. Under the patronage of the *Darrangi Rajas* the *sakti* cult expanded in the *rajya*. On the orders of the *rajas* scholars wrote many *malachi* of *Sakti* worship. The *rajas* wanted to apply these *malachi* through the *Biyasar Ojhapali*, which was chiefly a Vaishnavite institution. The *Biyasar Ojhas*, except one Sarbananda *Ojha*, refused to accept these *sakta malachi*. Satisfied at the acceptance of Sarbananda *Ojha*, the *rajas* regarded him *Biyasar Ojha* (expert in *Biyasar Sanggit*) and others as *pharingati* (lacking in knowledge of *Biyasar Sanggit*). To distinguish him as royal *Ojha* the *rajas* granted him a *mudra* of eight metals. The *mudra* was a symbol of *Sakti*. He had to sing *jagar* and *malachi* in the *Durga puja* held under the patronage of

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\textsuperscript{232} Hatibarua Vansaali, op. cit., verse, 22, p. 22.

\textsuperscript{233} Ram Chandra Deka and Prasanna Kumar Nath (eds.), *Saranga Saurav*, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{234} Sachidhar Nath, op. cit. p. 3.

\textsuperscript{235} Akshay Kumar Nath (ed.) *Darrangar Sathiya Sanskritir Rooprekha*, Sipajhar Sathiya Sobha, Darrang, Adhunik Chapasal, Guwahati, Assam, 2005, p. 31. It is learned from the *Hatibarua Vansaali* that Parijati, a beautiful girl of village Biyaspara near Sipajhar, introduced the *Biyasar Ojhapali* in Darrang. It is said that the Devi or *Gokhani* herself appeared in front of Parijati and taught her dances and songs with the six *ragas* and thirty-six *raginis*. She was to given dress to be needed and *nepur* to put on foot. Moreover, she was given secretly a *mudra yantra* of gold. The *palis* followed her song. Hatibarua Vansaali, op. cit. verses, 22-26, pp. 22-24.

\textsuperscript{236} Kiran Chandra Sarma (ed.), op. cit. p. 110.
the rajas by taking the particular mudra.\textsuperscript{237} Thus the Biyasar Ojhapali was recognized as royal Ojha and the other pharingati Ojhas continued to sing in the Vaishnava ideology and gained popularity. Thus an assimilation and integration of different traits of culture was conspicuous. The Biyasar Ojhapali became very popular art form of the Darrangi Rajya.

The ranggoa or maroigoa Ojhapali, popularly known as Suknani Ojhapali in Darrang was a significant art form, which was related to the Sakti worship. It was widely prevalent in the Darrangi Rajya. Scholars are of the opinion that the word Suknani is a corruption of the word Sukabi Narayandev.\textsuperscript{238} The Suknani Ojhapali recited pad from the Padma Puran written by Sukabi Narayandev. The Suknani Ojhapali performed Suknani Sanggit in the Durga puja and manasa or maroi puja. Therefore, the growth of the Suknani Ojhapali can be traced from the inception of the rule of the Darrangi Rajas. The two manasa poets Durgabar and Mankar of Kamrup wrote manasa pachali before Sukabi Narayandev. These were sung by the ranggoa Ojhas of Kamrup and Goalpara. The Suknani Ojhas of Darrang did not recite the manasa pachali of Durgabar and Mankar. They exclusively performed Suknani Sanggit from Padma Puran written by Sukabi Narayandev.\textsuperscript{239} Like Biyasar Ojhapali, Suknani Ojhapali is also a quasi-dramatic art form performed by a team of artists comprising of one Ojha or head singer and five to seven palis or assistants. In this form too one of the palis was known as dainapali or right hand assistant who explained the theme of the performed sanggit with humorous anecdotes to the audiences.

The dress of the Ojha and the palis was differentiated. The Ojha wore a special turban, called paguri, made of cotton or pat and was egg-shaped, a mark of red chandan paste on his forehead, a special shirt called chapkan and a bhuni of cotton or pat, a chadar or cotton shawl was draped around his body covering his left shoulder while leaving the right bare. He wore some special ornaments such as dholmadali around the neck, kariya in the ears, gam kharu on the hands and ring on the fingers.

\textsuperscript{238} Nabin Chandra Sarma, Asamiya Loka-Sanskritir Abhas, p. 344; and also, Satyendra Nath Sarma, Socio-Economic and Cultural History of Medieval Assam, (1200-1800A.D.), Pratima Devi, Guwahati, 1989, p. 335.
\textsuperscript{239} Akshay Kumar Nath (ed), op. cit., p. 84.
Besides wearing nupur or anklets. He was obliged to keep his hair long. The palis too used turban called mairachakia paguri but of a different shape and kind and which differentiated them from the Ojha, chauka chapkan shirt, bhuni, gamosa on the shoulders - unlike the chadar used by the Ojha,- red chandan mark on the forehead. They used joydhhol and khutital as their musical instruments. Those tal which were offered in honour to Ojhapali by the rajas was called Bhutia tal. This was considered as the best quality of tal and at the same time it indicates that it was supplied from Bhutan. Scholars divided the pad of Padma Puran sung by the Suknani or ranggoa Ojhapali into five divisions such as Puja Khanda, Deva Khanda, Baniya Khanda, Bhatiali Khanda and Swargarohan Khanda. The performance of the Suknani Ojhapali was a great source of entertainment for the people of the rajya. With its distinctive features, the Suknani Ojhapali of the Darrangi Rajya occupies a unique place in Assamese art and culture.

Deodhani dance was another significant folk dance of Darrang, associated with the manasa or maroi puja and Suknani Ojhapali. Suknani Ojhapali could be performed without deodhani dance, but the deodhani dance could not be performed without the Suknani Ojhapali. Beula, the heroine of the Padma Puran, had to dance for seven days and nights at devapuri to satisfy the gods in order to get back the life of her husband Lakhindhar. Some scholars are of the opinion that deodhani dance of maroi puja or manasa puja was a continuation of the tradition of the dance of Beula. The deodhani (doudhani) dance was prevalent among the Kacharis of Darrang before the establishment of the Darrangi Phaid. It was an integral part of the Bathou or kherai puja of the Kacharis. In this puja the deodhani danced to the accompaniment of the madal and chifung. The dancing deodhani drank blood of the sacrificed animals and went into a trance during which she made predictions based on omens when asked by the deuri or pujari. The rajas reorganized and patronized the deodhani dance.

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240 Lalit Chandra Nath (Ojha), op. cit., pp. 22-23.
244 Ibid. p. 20.
245 Lalit Chandra Nath, op. cit. p. 31.
247 Rajani Kanta Barua, op. cit. p. 100.
prevalent in the Kachari society and introduced it into the Durga puja or manasa puja. Thus a process of cultural integration and assimilation took place in the rajya. Mecha-Mechini nachan or dance remained as one of the part of the deodhani dance which proves the Kachari descent of the deodhani institution. After receiving royal patronage the deodhani dance became very popular and was widely performed in the rajya. According to Nabin Chandra Sarma, the word deodhani is derived from the word ‘deva-dhani’, which means words of gods or devata.\footnote{Kiran Chandra Sarma (ed.), op. cit. p. 20.} The girl, who became deodhani remain unmarried and dedicated her life to the gods. The deodhani wore a special dress and ornaments, which is described in detail by Lalit Chandra Nath (Ojha).\footnote{Lalit Chandra Nath, op. cit., pp. 29-30.}

The deodhani performed to the accompaniment of the Suknani Sanggit. The Ojhapali used joydhol and bhortal, when the deodhani danced. The Ojhapali performed different kinds of badi (musical notes) through the joydhol such as deobadi, joganbadi, gorbadi, etc.\footnote{Akshay Kumar Nath (ed.), op. cit. p. 94.} The deodhani performed different kinds of dances at different stages like sivanachan, harinachan, dharmanachan, etc.\footnote{Sachidhar Nath (ed.), op. cit. p. 75.} where she used different artistic aids like dambaru of kaltharua during sivanachan, a barhani in one hand and a kor (hoe) of kaltharua in the other hand when dancing the harinachan, etc.\footnote{Rajani Kanta Barua, op. cit. p. 105.} The deodhani swooned at different stages of the dances, which was known as dakatpara. The dakas included sivadak, chandidak, bardak, etc.\footnote{Lalit Chandra Nath, op. cit. pp. 51-57.} Like the Ojhapali and its variants the deodhani dance too became a very popular art form of the Darrangi Rajya.

Another significant art form of the Darrangi Rajya was dhepadhulia, which was not found in Assam.\footnote{Sachidhar Nath (ed.), op. cit. p. 4.} The performance of dhepadhulia was essential in the marriage ceremony, surakaran (tonsure ceremony), upanayan (sacred thread), brikhya rupan (tree plantation), and in different social functions. According to some scholars, originally it was a cultural aspect of the Kacharis.\footnote{Rajani Kanta Barua, op. cit. p. 119.} The chief instrument of the art of
dhepadhulia is the dhepadhol (a kind of drum) which is made in a special way. The principal feature of this instrument is that the talis or ends contained several pieces of leather. The right tali had a small hole, through which water was filled from time to time to wet the leather in causing changes in the tone and tenor of the dhol making it sound like a boom of thunder.\textsuperscript{257} The chief instruments used in the dhepadholia were dhepadhol and tal. Like the Ojhapali, the dhepadholia is a quasi-dramatic performance by a team of six to eight artists, of whom two were dhulia and others were taluai. One of the two dhulia was aag dhulia or chief and the other was known as pas dhulia or assistant. Similarly there were two aag taluai and others were pas taluai. The taluai played the bhortal. The chief dhulia initiated the song or gan and was hence known as gayan.\textsuperscript{258} The successful performance of the dhepadhulia mainly depended on the skill of the gayan. Members of the dhulia party kept their hair long and wore a short zama which covered them from the waist to knees and a shirt churiya called athumuria churiya under the zama. The gayan or the chief dhulia wore kharu on his hands and keru in his ears.\textsuperscript{259} The badi, the nachan or dances and gan or song were important features of the dhepadhulia. They attracted the audiences through good performance of different kinds of badi and nachan or dance. The badi had some special names such as devabadi, gorbdi, patalbadi, etc.\textsuperscript{260} So also the nachan or dances had different names which included khutinachan, garianachan, serkinachan, etc.\textsuperscript{261} The gan or song was another feature of the dhepadhulia.

Like dhepadhulia, bardhulia was also an important art prevalent in the Darrangi Rajya. It was performed by a team of artists in the social and religious functions such as Deul utsav, mathani utsav, Durga puja, etc. The chief instrument of this art was bardhol (big drum) and that was why this art was called bardholia.\textsuperscript{262} The dhol was comparatively big, but shorter than the dhepadhol. The bardhol was made of light wood and the two ends called tali were covered by leather and was slung around the shoulders. There were six or seven such dhol used in a bordhulia party. Bhortal was also used in the bardhulia. Generally four or five pairs of such tal were needed for a

\textsuperscript{257} Sachidhar Nath (ed.), op. cit. p. 5.
\textsuperscript{258} Ibid. p. 6.
\textsuperscript{259} Rajani Kanta Barua, op. cit. p. 123.
\textsuperscript{261} Rajani Kanta Barua, op. cit. p. 123.
\textsuperscript{262} Akshay Kumar Nath (ed.), op. cit. p. 60.
The artists put on a multicoloured zama or dress. Scholars see a Mughal influence reflected on the zama. The bardhulia party performed different kinds of dances and songs by playing the dhol and tal. The notable feature of the bordhulia was that they performed gymnastics and circus, which greatly attracted the people. A puppet show was a special part of the bardhulia performance. A particular puppet in the model of a man made of wood and fixed on to a special stick was used in these shows.

Another traditional significant art form of Darrang was kalia, which was specially performed during marriage ceremonies where kali was one of the essential musical instruments used. Reference to it is found in the marriage songs prevalent in Darrang. Kali is a musical instrument akin to the flute and is about one hand long. A pepa, made of mutha reed is attached at the head of the kali while the tail is made of brass. The middle part of the kali is made of wood and decorated with silver. Like a flute, there are six holes on the body of the kali. The man who plays the kali is known as kalia and he controls the tune of the kali by placing his fingers on the holes. The interesting feature of the art of kali is that it can be played continuously without showing any interruption. Kalia is an oneman show. Sometimes one man can play two kali simultaneously, which is known as jorkali. The Darranga Rajvansaali refers to both jaykali and birkali. The latter two kali were generally played at the time the expedition was undertaken.

Biyapad or biyagit (marriage song) was prevalent in Darrang like in other parts of Assam. This was performed exclusively by women during marriage ceremonies, who sang specific pad or verse at different stages of the marriage ceremony such as telarbhar or juran- a unique pre-wedding ritual in which the grooms family gifts the bride with clothes, ornaments, etc., suwagtola and panitola rituals related to the ceremonial bath of the bride and groom, dressing of the bride and groom, bar-jyatra.

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263 Rajani Kanta Barua, op. cit. p. 137.
264 Ibid. p. 137.
266 Dhulia Kalia Jaye Jokar / Kali Ja Lankeswar Ranarsambhar. - Cited by Reven Chandra Nath, op. cit. p. 61.
267 Sachidhar Nath (ed.), op. cit. p. 82.
or departure of the groom to the house of the bride, mita-bandha, etc. The woman, who initiated the pad was known as padeli and the others, who followed her were known as ayati. No musical instruments were used in the biyapad. Uruli is one of the important features of the biyapad. The biyapad was performed to invoke blessings on the bride and groom. Some of the biyapad were performed to create humour by teasing the family members including the father and the mother of the bride and groom. This kind of pad is known as nindapad. The biyapad has been handed down from generation to generation through an oral tradition.

Like biyapad, cheradhek or dhekgit was a ritual related to the marriage ceremony prevalent in the Muslim society of Darrang, which is rare in other parts of Assam. This was performed exclusively by men in the marriage ceremony of the Muslims. Those who performed the dhekgit were called dhekuai and the dhekuai party comprised of four to eight men of which one was chief dhekuai or ojha dhekuai and the others were assistant dhekuai or pali dhekuai. No musical instruments were used in the dhekgit. Generally the dhekuai party sat on a mat or dhari and covered one ear by a hand at the time of the performance of the dhekgit. It was sung in high volume and long tune. Scholars are of the opinion that it was influenced by the rag (tune) of Ojhapali sanggit.

Mahau khunda or mahau kheda was also another significant art prevalent in the Darrangi Rajya. It was performed on the purnima (full moon) night of the month of Aghon of Assamese calendar references to which are found in the mahau khunda git such as 'aghonar puni hal / mahau khundar hokum hal.' Literally translated as the full moon of the Assamese month of Aghon brings with it the traditional ritual of symbolically chasing away mosquitoes. This art was mainly performed by the cowherd boys and husbandmen. Scholars are of the opinion that through the performance of mahau khunda they tried to banish mah or mosquitoes from the area.

270 Reven Chandra Nath, op. cit. p. 55.
271 Uruli is a special tune made by the women with the help of their tongue.
272 Reven Chandra Nath, op. cit., p. 55.
273 Sachidhar Nath (ed.), op. cit. p. 64.
275 Dimbeswar Saikia (ed.), op. cit., p. 113.
276 Reven Chandra Nath, op. cit. p. 42.
which was harmful for both human beings and the cattle. On the particular night they went from house to house carrying one stick in their hands and performed *mahau khunda* art. One of them assumed the role of head singer, who initiated *git* (song) and the others, followed him by striking the ground with their sticks. An important and interesting feature of *mahau khunda* was the dance of the *bhaluk*. One of the men dressed like a *bhaluk* (bear) by covering himself in *kaltharua* or dry plantain leaves. In the midst of the *mahau khunda git* the *bhaluk* appeared and danced with the party. It amused the rural people greatly.

*Ainam* was also another significant art prevalent in the *Darrangi Rajya* like in other parts of Assam since remote past. This was performed by a group of five or seven virgin girls called *abiai sowali*. This art was performed with a view to seek forgiveness of *Sitala Devi* or the goddess of small-pox. Small-pox was also known as *saru ai* and so it was a prayer or *nam* to *ai* and hence known as *ainam* and *tuti nam* or prayer. A *noibaidya* or offering of prasad was offered by lighting a *saki* or earthen lamp. Generally the *ainam* was performed at midday either in front of the granary or in the family prayer hall. The *namati* performed the *ainam* without any musical instrument but was accompanied by a ritualistic clapping.

*Gopini nam* was a traditional religious art form prevalent in Darrang since remote past and was performed by a group of women. Among them was a head singer called *pathak* or *namati*, who initiated *nam* or *pad* and the others followed her. Scholars think that the *gopini nam* grew from the song originally sang by *gopinis* of Lord Krishna. The *gopini nam* generally was a kind of prayer addressed to Radha-Rukmini, Siva-Durga and the *pad* or verse were part of *Kritan, Dasama, Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. This was performed both in the individual households and in the public *namghar* or community prayer hall.

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277 Rajani Kanta Barua, op. cit. p. 234.
278 A symbolic bear.
279 Ram Chandra Deka and Prasanna Kumar Nath (eds.), op. cit. p. 93.
282 Rajani Kanta Barua, op. cit. p.171.
283 Ibid.

-58-
Nangali git was one of the folk songs of Darrang prevalent among the cowherds, which is rare in other parts of Assam. It was exclusively created and performed by the cowherds.\textsuperscript{284} One of the chief features of the nangali git is that it contained slang words and indicated sexual desires of the youth life and that was why it was performed primarily in the grazing fields or riversides. The girls also took part in the nangali git.\textsuperscript{285} Scholars express different opinion regarding the word nangali git. According to Nabin Chandra Sarma, the songs were sung by the people connected with cultivation and cowherds, nangal-joali is called nangali git.\textsuperscript{286} On the other hand, Reven Chandra Nath thinks that the word nangali derives from the word nangath (naked).\textsuperscript{287} Most of the nangali gits are contained slang and naked words. From this angle the latter view is more correct. Nevertheless, the nangali git occupied an important place among the rural population.

Chiya git was a significant devotional art form of the Darrangi Rajya prevalent among the Barkhelia bhakats. From the beginning to the end of the bhakat sewa, the bhakat-mahantas of the Barkhelia sect performed various baik-basan or prayers at different stages. These prayers were called sadhasar.\textsuperscript{288} The word sadhasar is formed by sad or sat (good) and achar (behavior).\textsuperscript{289} These sadhasars were known as chiya git.\textsuperscript{290} There are two meanings of the word chiya i.e. fame and remembrance of God.\textsuperscript{291} Sometimes the dambaru was used as an accompaniment to the chiya git. According to Reven Chandra Nath, the creator of the chiya git in Darrang was Sukdev or Sukura Mahanta.\textsuperscript{292}

The Darrangi Rajas patronized the traditional festivals prevalent in the rajya and contributed to its further development, which enriched the Assamese culture. Festivals are generally based on religion. Though the Darrangi Rajas were mainly saktas, they

\textsuperscript{284} Akasedi Uri Gel Bagakai Bagali / Taledi Uri Gel Kak // Garur Garakhiax Kone Bhal Paba / Hai Mor Bidhirs Biptak // -Cited by Rajani Kanta Barua, op. cit. p. 190.
\textsuperscript{285} Ahu Tali Tali / Ami Jiya Chali / Amako Nalage Pai // - Cited by Reven Chandra Nath, op. cit. p. 17.
\textsuperscript{286} Ram Chandra Deka and Prasanna Kumar Nath (eds.), op. cit. p. 173; and also Rajani Kanta Barua, op. cit. p. 184.
\textsuperscript{287} Reven Chandra Nath, op. cit. p. 15.
\textsuperscript{288} Lohit Chandra Kalita (ed.), op. cit. p. 64.
\textsuperscript{289} Rajani Kanta Barua, op. cit. p. 195.
\textsuperscript{290} Akshay Kumar Nath (ed.), op. cit. 63.
\textsuperscript{291} Reven Chandra Nath, op. cit. p. 76.
\textsuperscript{292} Ibid. p. 77.
liberally patronized and actively participated in other religious festivals too. As a result, there existed unity, integrity and brotherhood among the subjects. It is learnt from the *Hatibarua Vansaali* that Dharma Narayan, the founder of the *Darrangi Phaid*, first formally introduced *Durga puja* in the royal house, which became a popular festival of the *rajya*. He engaged priests and organized *Ojhapali* during the *Durga puja*. Since then his descendants followed him and continued to worship goddess *Durga* annually in the capital. It is important to note that during the reign of the *Darrangi Rajas*, the *Durga puja* was celebrated only in the capital city under the royal patronage. Other officials and subjects did not perform it separately but actively participated in it irrespective of caste and creed. As organized and patronized by the *rajas* the *Durga puja* became a popular festival of the *rajya*. A unique feature was the performance of *Suknani Sanggit* by Muslim *Ojhas* during the *Durga puja*. *Monasa* or *maroi puja* was another popular festival of the *rajya*, which was also related to the *Sakti* worship. The *monasa puja* celebrated continuously for several days—eleven, thirteen and fifteen days—was called *maroi puja*. The *monasa puja* celebrated for one or two days was called *rang puja* or *gokhani sewa*. Again the *monasa puja* celebrated for a day only was called *akparia rang puja* or *gokhani sewa*, where as the *monasa puja* celebrated for two days was called *gota rang* or *jagar puja*. Animal sacrifice formed an important part of the *monasa puja*. Goats, ducks, pigeons, etc., were sacrificed. However, *monasa puja* could be celebrated without animal sacrifice and this was known as *phul puja*. The *Darrangi Rajas* encouraged the officials and other *sakta* subjects to perform *monasa* or *maroi puja*. This was celebrated individually or publicly, and could be performed at any time of the year. However, the full moon day of Assamese *Swaon* month, which is known as *nag-panchami* was considered the most auspicious. The village *Maroi* near Sipajhar gets its name from the *maroi puja*. Thus, the *monasa* or *maroi puja* was celebrated widely in the *rajya*.

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293 *Hatibarua Vansaali*, op. cit. verse, 26, p. 24.
294 Ibid. verse, 21, p. 22.
295 Dineswar Sarma, op. cit. p. 17.
298 Ibid. p. 45.
299 *Hatibarua Vansaali*, op. cit. verse, 18, p. 21.
The Deul utsav was another popular festival of the rajya, which was not seen in other parts of Asssam. It was related to the Vishnu worship.³⁰⁰ It can be mentioned that the Deul utsav was celebrated in this area prior to the establishment of the Darrangi Phaid. It is learnt that Dharmadev Bipra Bhuyan, the father of the famous saint Siyalavaishnav performed Deul utsav elaborately at the village Barabari³⁰¹ under Sipajhar circle. After that the village came to be known as Bordolguri, which means the place of big Deul. It was celebrated by raising a Deul or sacred mound of earth on the first day of Bohag, the first month of the Assamese calendar. It is interesting to note that scholars think that Dharmadev Bipra Bhuyan was the initiator of the Deul utsav in Darrang. But the literature Siyalavaishnav Charit shows that he was not the initiator of the Deul utsav. It states that the sacred mound that he constructed was of such immense height the like of which was not prevalent in Darrang at that time.³⁰²

This does not imply that Deul was not celebrated in Darrang; in fact the Deul utsav was celebrated in Darrang prior to Dharmadev Bipra Bhuyan. It was celebrated at different places on different days of Bohag. The Darrangi Rajas, right from Dharma Narayan patronized it.³⁰³ They arranged a Vaishnava conference called Barnat at the field or deulkhala of the Bihubhanga Deul near Dighirpar where the devotees of Vishnu were invited.³⁰⁴ Provisions were made for further organization and development of the Deul utsav. It is said that the Darrangi Rajas stipulated on what day which Deul would be held in the rajya.³⁰⁵ After receiving the royal patronage and encouragement, the Deul utsav became a very popular and important festival of the rajya. People of the rajya irrespective of their caste and creed participated in the Deul utsav. Till today the Deul utsav is celebrated widely with joy and pomp in the district.

The Darrangi Rajas celebrated phalgu utsav, hitherto a Vishnu worship, at their capital city. Here an earthen doul was raised on which an idol of Doul-Gobinda (Lord

³⁰⁰ Akshay Kumar Nath (ed.), op. cit. p. 34; and also Kiran Chandra Sarma (ed.), op. cit. p. 64.
³⁰¹ Susandai Mishra, op. cit. verses, 8-10, p. 2.
³⁰² Ibid, verse, 16, p. 3. -Nahi tene rup Deul Darranga vitar- literally translated as no such type of Deul in Darrang.
³⁰³ Bijoy Kumar Sarma, op. cit., p. 83.
³⁰⁴ Dineswar Sarma, op. cit. p. 100.
³⁰⁵ Nabin Chandra Sarma, op. cit. p. 279.
Krishna) and worshipped. This was celebrated in the Assamese month of Phagun. Phalgu utsav was known by different names such as phakua, holi, doul purnima, etc. This festival became popular and widely celebrated in the rajya. The pacheti utsav, a festival related to the birth of Lord Krishna was another popular festival of the Darrangi Rajya. It was celebrated on the last day of Bhadra at Khatara Satra. The Darrangi Rajas extended their patronage to this satra. Scholars like Nabin Chandra Sarma think that the tradition of celebration of the pacheti utsav at the Khatara Satra continued since the time of Gobinda Atai. The dadhi-manthan function performed in the pacheti utsav was the main source of attraction to this festival. Besides, pacheti utsav was also celebrated at Debananda Satra and Outola Satra. People of different rank and creed participated in this festival.

One of the remarkable, traditional and popular festivals of the Darrangi Rajya was the mathoni utsav celebrated at the Debananda Satra on the last day of the month of Ahin or Kati Bihu day. According to scholars the word mathoni derives from the Sanskrit word manthon. The Darrangi Rajas extended their patronage towards this satra and helped in its further development. In the mathoni utsav a myth on the theme of sagar-manthon by devatas (gods) and danavas (devils) was performed. People at large participated in this festival. This tradition still in exists.

One of the important festivals of the Darrangi Rajya was Kherai puja or Kherai mohotsav, prevalent in the Kachari society since time immemorial, where Kherai nitya or dance was performed. It was the greatest religious festival of the Kachari and was a symbol of hope and desire. The main purpose of this worship was the welfare of both private and public lives and for good harvest as they were basically dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. During the Kherai puja along with Bathau their supreme God, many gods and goddesses such as Ailen,

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306 Dineswar Sarma, op. cit. p. 100.
308 Nabin Chandra Sarma, op. cit. p. 282.
309 Ibid, p. 287.
310 Bijoy Kumar Sarma, op. cit. p. 94.
311 Nabin Chandra Sarma, op. cit. p. 294.
312 Kiran Chandra Sarma (ed.), op. cit. p.45.
Angan, Khalia, etc., were worshipped where sacrificial offerings included pigs, goats, fowls, etc. Along with the usual rites and rituals many prayers were sung during the Kherai to the accompaniment of dance and musical instruments. The deori (priest) took care of the religious aspects of the rituals and a doudini (deodhani) with the Ojha the performative aspect of the Kherai worship. Kherai utsav was observed over a period of several days, usually three to seven days with very elaborate preparation. One significant feature of this worship was the Kherai dance, performed to propitiate the gods and goddesses. Another important aspect of this worship was the doudini who performed certain rites through song and dance and made several predictions in her state of trance during the Kherai worship with the help of the Ojha.\textsuperscript{315}

It is found that the society of the Darrangi Rajya was a Hindu dominated society, although the Muslims and ethnic groups coexisted while maintaining their distinct identities. The Hindu society was divided into jati-vittic or caste-based on endogamy and was stratified. The stratification was based on occupation, wealth and power rather than caste alone. The high caste people, such as the Brahmans (Bamun) and the Daibajyans were the influential castes in the society, and they did not enter into matrimonial alliance with the low orders. Brahman, Daibajyan, Kayastha and Jogi people donned sacred thread, a symbol of twice born or \textit{dwija}. The economic factor was no less important for the social change and mobility. The Jogi people, who were earlier looked upon as an inferior class, improved their position in the social structure because of their economic advancement in the monopoly of the \textit{patpalu} business. This social mobility impacted social practices as well.

Although the professional social groups carried on their traditional works, the rajas had the authority to debar a particular group from their profession if he so desired. Thus although professions were by and large hereditary, they could be conferred as well. Bandi-golam, a status symbol of the upper classes was widespread in the Darrangi society. Social differentiation was apparent with regard to dress, use of dolas, elephants, possession of cows and in the construction of batghora or entrance shed of the houses, and even in burial practices. Gender differentiation was conspicuous and it is seen that the women were subordinated in the patriarchal society

\textsuperscript{315} Anil Boro, \textit{Folk Literature of the Boros, An Introduction}, Adhunik Prakasan, Guwahati, 2001, pp. 49-50.
but the Kachari women enjoyed more liberty. Hinduism became the principal religion; Saktism being the dominant cult of the rulers. However, the rajas attempted a synthesis of the Sakti and Vaishnava worship as is evident in the introduction of the sakta malachi in the Biyasar Ojhapali. It marked a transformation and change in religious and cultural affairs. The Darrangi Rajas followed a policy of religious tolerance. Being in minority Islam was influenced by Hinduism and therefore, their manners and customs were similar to that of the Hindus, the ethnic groups continued their own traditional beliefs and uses. The Hindu-Muslim integration was a significant feature of the Darrangi society.

The rajya made significant progress and development in different arts, culture and literature. The Durga puja and Deul utsav became important major festivals of the rajya of all rank and creed. Formal education was limited to the high caste male population, while the women and common people were outside the pale of it. Thus the women and common people were placed on the lower rungs of the society. Under the patronage of the Darrangi Rajas many outstanding literary works were done which immensely contributed to the enrichment of Assamese literature. Some of the art forms grew and developed with distinct features. Among them Ojhapali, deodhani dance, dhepadhulia, chiya git and Cheradhek, etc., had a unique place in the Assamese art and culture. All these developments and achievements greatly depended on the economic conditions of the people, which will be discussed in the next chapter.