Chapter XI

Conclusion

In the foregoing pages an attempt has been made to study the fasts and festivals prevalent in the district of Kamrup. From the various accounts given here we may perhaps come to the conclusion that the Hindus of Kamrup have been observing these fasts and festivals since ancient times. As in other parts of India, the Hindus of Kamrup perform a wide range of sacraments and festivals, enjoined by the sāstras. The impact of local conditions and customs on these functions is indelible. Unlike the Muslims and the Christians, the Hindus have no fixed day in the week or month for offering community prayers in a temple called namghar. The day of the festival is always looked upon as the time of offering community prayers too. This is a special feature of the fasts and festivals of the Hindus. Almost all these fasts and festivals are religious in character. The multiplicity of gods and goddesses of the Hindu religion leads to the multiplicity of the fasts and festivals observed by the people.

It is a process of evolution that is manifestly at work to bring out new festivals and to wipe out some of the old ones. As for example, the religious ceremonies like the agnihotra, a form of havirvāja and the vaitanika rite (rites relating to

1. The Bargāon grant, v.17.
2. The grant of Balavarman, v.27.
three sacrificial fires) prevalent in Kamarupa in ancient times, are no longer practised in the district. The sacraments like sarbhaḍāṇa, sīmantonnavaṇa and puṃsavaṇa have almost disappeared. 

The mode of observance and the spirit of some festivals have undergone significant changes. The festivals like Durgā pūjā and sakrotthāṇa, formerly celebrated by the kings of Kamarupa, are now observed by the common people. Some of the sacramental rites, differing in import, are grouped together and performed on one occasion. The combination of cūḍākaraṇa and karnaṇvedha with upanavaṇa and of annapraśana with cūḍākaraṇa provides an example of such a change. Some new festivals have cropped up in analogy of some other festivals. Thus, the immersion ceremony, formerly associated with Durgā pūjā alone has come to be performed along with Sarasvatī pujā and Viśvakarmā pujā. Though there are no sāstric rites to be performed, people collect in large numbers on all these occasions and convert the solemn function into an occasion of sheer merry-making. Festivals like the worship of Satyanāraṇa, Suvaṇci, Śītalā, Manasā, etc., reveal that in course of time different cultures have coalesced through the medium of festivals. The use of areca-nut, fish and turmeric in sacramental ceremonies bear traces of non-Aryan culture. Keeping with the spirit of the time, a number of festivals like the Independence Day, Republic

3. See Supra, ch. III.
4. See Supra, ch. X (Bhatheli).
5. See Supra, ch. V.
Day and Gandhi Jayanti has sprung up since Independence. One more example of the expanding horizon of festivals is provided by the recent growth of public functions organised in connection with the birth and death anniversaries of the modern great men of our country. Some new social customs like the celebration of the birth day of children are also gaining ground.

Most of the people, in their unbridled enthusiasm for festive occasions, tend to increase the number of festivals; but they seem to be reluctant to adhere fully to the rules prescribed by the śāstras. All the articles (upacāras) mentioned in the śāstras are not collected in many of our festivals. On the other hand, the custom of giving token price instead of costly and rare articles or some common substitutes like rice or coins for gold, silver, cow, etc., has gained wide currency. As for example, we have noted elsewhere⁷ that water and earth procured from different sources are required for performing Durgā pūjā. But as it is impossible to procure these or such other articles, the worshippers offer only a token price for the function at present. The amount of the articles like ghee, rice and milk required for daily bhog (cooked victuals) has been drastically reduced in some temples at present.⁸

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⁷. See supra, ch.III (Worship of the goddess Durga).

⁸. As for example, we may refer to the offerings of the Bilvēśvara temple. About three kilogram of rice instead of five and about 125 grams of ghee instead of 150, are offered daily in the temple. Similar instances are also found in the temples like Ugratārā, Aśvakrānta and Kāmarāya (see supra ch.III). The reduction in the scale of offerings may be attributed to the falling income of these institutions.
These festivals have preserved the distinctive traits of the Hindu culture and tradition of Kamrup. The sacramental and funeral rites, observed from ancient times till today, point out the continuity and vitality of the Indian culture. Kāmarūpa, an ancient land, has its ancient temples, shrines and namghars where regular worships and prayers are performed. These holy institutions preserve the distinctive rhythm of life. Similarly, the adherence to the ancient ways and methods of worship shows people's love and respect for things traditional.

The observance of fasts and festivals is a potent factor of the development of artistic talents and activities of the people. In celebrating a festival care is taken to present dance, music and other literary and cultural items. The Kalikā-purāṇa, the Rāmāvaṇa of Mādhava Kandali and the Darrang Rai-vaṁśāvalī mention numerous musical instruments used in the celebration of the festivals. Some of the instruments generally used are: bells, conches, dhol, khol, pēṇā and tāl. The ojāpālī, an ancient cultural institution, is still prevalent in Kamrūp and is indispensable in the performance of Manasā-pūjā and Durgā-pūjā. The marriage ceremonies have produced songs, popularly known as bīvā-nāṃ, which are some of the brightest folk-songs of Kamrūp. In some of the ceremonies like pacati and āi-nāṃ women present choric songs from the beginning to

the end of the performance. Festivals have thus become the foun-
dain-head of a large variety of folk-songs in Kamrup. The dramatic
performances are held in connection with the worships of Durga,
Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, etc. This gives necessary incentives to the
people to develop their artistic, dramatic, histrionic and liter-
ary faculties. Image-making, clay-modelling, dancing, singing,
writing and staging of plays are some of the activities that find
ample scope of development in connection with many festivals. Orga-
isers engage their minds in planning, decorating and designing
the arches, gate-ways and pandals in different festivals. Māndālas
and ālpanās (designs) are drawn with utmost care and immaculate
taste.

Festivals are also a source of income to many people in
the villages or towns. The priestly class largely depends on the
income from these festivals. Many professional parties like pījā-
nąli, chūlīvā, khūlīvā and operas earn their livelihood mainly on
these occasions. The making of images, which fetch usually high
prices, gives the artisans a good means of livelihood. The commu-
nity worships, such as Durgā-pūjā, rāsa-pūjā, etc., have been an
occasion of the big business boom particularly for the cloth dea-
lers and sweet-vendors. The economic aspect of the festivals is
not always bright for all. People are sometimes compelled to go
beyond their means in meeting the expenses of a marriage ceremony
or a funeral rite; some of whom are thus reduced to penury. Time
has perhaps come to put a curb on such excesses and extravagances.

The exuberance of the festivals sometime inspires the
revellers to indulge in some unseemly practices. As for example,
some of the processionists, who take out the images in motor trucks and lorries on the immersion day of any pūjā festival, are often seen to dance grotesquely while singing vulgar songs and throwing rice on the pedestrians, particularly females. Sometimes, the victims of the frenzy sustain injuries. Similarly, the indiscriminate sprinkling of coloured water on the holi festival, reckless bursting of crackers on the diwāli night verge on vandalism. The revelers on the urukā night of the Māgh-bihu are a constant menace to the peace-loving citizens. The sooner these excesses are stopped, the better is the hope for the rejuvenation of our culture.

In spite of such abuses, the fasts and festivals have their salutary effects on the minds of the people. It is a source of immense joy and pleasure for all sections of people living in a society. There are Śāktas, Vaiṣṇavas and followers of other faiths in Kamrup. It is noteworthy that there is a great deal of religious tolerance among them. So, we find that the Śāktas readily participate in Vaiṣṇava festivals such as birth and death anniversaries of the Vaiṣṇava saints. Sometimes they perform nāma-kirtana on their own initiatives. Likewise, a Vaiṣṇava also joins the non-Vaiṣṇava festivals like Durgā-pūjā, Śiva-rātri, etc., and sometimes performs ceremonies relating to the worship of the non-Vaiṣṇavite deities like Śītalā, Apesvarī and Suvacanī. There are also functions like the bihu festival, birth and death anniversaries of the Vaisnava saints, litterateurs and political leaders,

11. See supra, ch.X.
and other local fairs and festivals in which Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, etc., join hand in hand and fully share the joy and mirth of the festival. Thus a festival gives an opportunity to all people to come together and sink their differences in an atmosphere of mutual love and respect. This paves the path for emotional integration, a goal that we have set for ourselves to build up a strong and prosperous nation.