Beliefs and superstitions are an important field of traditional culture and also the inseparable elements of a tradition bound society. They distinctly reflect the different socio-cultural aspects of the society. These are closely associated with the cultural history and identity of a particular community. “In fact, these folk beliefs along with customs and traditions may be considered as unwritten social laws, which keep the society intact”. (Ahmed:2012:96) The English antiquaries used the term Custom and Usage instead of social folk custom and tradition. Social custom is always associated with folk beliefs and traditions. The beliefs constitute a genre of folk culture. Customs, which contain magical and sacred potency, may be termed as rituals. (Dorson:1972:3). Folk beliefs and superstitions may be considered as very useful and handy references for the unsophisticated traditional as well as rural mind. These bear the collective wisdom and experiences in the context of socio-cultural aspects of a society or of a particular community, which have been traditionally handed down from generation to generation. Generally, beliefs are associated with the conduct of social life of the people with their religious bearings. Some of them are related with different superstitions and fear of the unknown sources. However, beliefs covering family, kinship, the community, physical activity, the supernatural standard of decency etc. constitute a code, which lubricates the social life to run smoothly. (Rajkhowa:1973:5).
On the other hand, “superstitions are the outcome of fear of what is unknown and mysterious based on irrational beliefs and practices, such as in magic, ghosts, witch craft, etc. They are found in all the communities and even in the enlightened sections. Many of them are hallowed by time, and have their basis on religion.” (Ahmed:2012:106). Most of the superstitions prevalent among the society are basically associated with a fear complex. In fact, the superstitions are certain beliefs, which are related with the supernatural world having no real and scientific foundations. So, in the words of B. Rajkhowa, Superstition is a plant which refuses to die out. You drive away one superstition and another will step in and take its place. (Rajkhowa:1973:14). Many of the superstitions are mainly connected with ghosts and spirits. Some examples of popular spirits, which are prevalent in the Assamese society are: Jin, Pari, Jakhini, Daini, Bhoot, Pret, Khetar, Bira, Parua, Dot, Yama, etc.

In the traditional society of the Rabhas, different types of beliefs and superstitions are found in connection with their socio-cultural and religious life. But, in these descriptions, we are going to mention various types of beliefs and superstitions related to Manasa cult only among the Rabhas. Of the substantial number of beliefs and superstitions related to Manasa cult prevalent among the Rabhas, some common and popular ones performing to various fields are mentioned below.

There are various lore and beliefs among the common Assamese traditional society as well as the Rabha folk in regard to snakes. These beliefs related to snakes reflect their unique traditional socio-cultural aspects along with different tribal elements. They do not speak the word sap (skt. sarpa) generally at night, due to fear that, the snake will come to bite them. This is a common and general belief among almost all the traditional folk of Assam. So, they use such euphemistic
expressions as *dighal-thengia* (the long legged), *dighal paruwa* (a long ant), *paruwa* (an ant), *poka* (insect) meaning the snake, or even the Sanskrit words *sarpa* and *naga*. According to W. Crook, “This is of course unlike the totemistic belief of the *Sanjhara* women of Madhya Pradesh, who would not mention the name *nag* aloud at any hour of the day.” (Crook:1978:389). It is also considered as fortunate to see a pair of snakes in embrace, but one has sight of it to take off the wrapper from one’s own body and throw it in the direction of the snakes. The wrapper should later be taken home and preserved. It is believed that, if anyone keep and preserve such type of wrapper in his house, prosperity and success is sure and certain to him. In Kumaon, when a man sees his path crossed by a serpent, he must tear a rag from his body and place it on the tail of the reptile, lest sickness or other evils overcome him.

It is considered as evil or misfortune if a snake crosses one’s path from the left to the right or to see serpents on the way on great occasions. The sight of a frog trying to devour a snake is believed to have the power of bringing luck of the family in whose orchard the freak takes place. Again, it is believed by somebody that, if anyone spies upon a mating couple of snakes, it is a very good sign for victory in love and war. In ancient Assamese sculptures, therefore, mating snakes were engraved as symbols of fertility. Snake poison and slough (the off skin of a serpent) are sometimes used as medicine, particularly to succeed with women. Seeing a snake in a dream may mean conflicts with one’s best friend. The Mizos also believe that seeing mating snakes means serious illness. Along with the Rabhas, many tribal people carve snake images on handles of *daos* and spears as a sign of fortune.

Snakes suck milk from the udder of cows and make their abode inside people’s house, and in the both cases, they are not to be driven away. Because, it is
believed that in such cases they are then counted as guardians of family wealth. There are many *bej* (Skt. *Vaidya*) or *ojas* in the villages from the early times, and it is believed that such a man can cure people of the bite of venomous snake even after they apparently die. It is probably in this belief that persons dying of snakebite are sometimes not burnt or buried but are floated down a river on a raft. On the other hand, there are a large numbers of mantras or spells known as *sape khowa mantra* (spells of snakebite) or *sapar dharani dhara mantra* or simply *dharani mantra* (incantation to prevent the spread of snake poison). With the help of such incantations i.e. *mantras*, the *bej* or *ojas* try to cure the person of snakebite. This type of belief is still prevalent among the tribes and non-tribal people of Assam. (Neog:2008:46-47).

There are many other beliefs and superstitions connected with snakes. All the people of Assam have accumulated experience about snakes, making it a part of their culture. Like the other non-tribal Hindus and Aryan people of Assam, almost same type of beliefs and superstitions related to Manasa cult are prevalent among the traditional society of the Rabhas along with other tribes of Assam. To the tribals and non-tribals of Assam along with the Rabhas, a belief prevalent among them is that, cobras when seen in pairs, are keepers of the granary and if they make their abode inside the store house, the store will be abundant, he will not harm them. The pair of cobras are considered as sacred i.e. *Goshani* and keepers of the store for which they are worshipped by offering milk. Snakes also make their abode inside the some old shrines, Namghars, etc. and they are also considered as sacred by the devotees. They are not to be killed, devotees are firm in their belief that these snakes are keepers of the Namghar and the shrines, these snakes will never harm those who come to pray in the place. Among the Vaishnavas of Assam, killing cobras is unacceptable as Sri Sri Sankardeva, their guru was once provided
shade by a cobra with its hood. In the myth of Lord Krishna’s birth, it is found that, the infant Krishna in his father’s bosom was protected from rains by the serpent’s hood while he was being secretly taken to Nanda’s house.

There is another belief that, when a woman is pregnant, she or her husband will not kill a snake for fear that the newborn baby may not be a perfect child. Several Naga tribes also hold such types of beliefs among them. Man who dies of snakebite is considered as unlucky for the people. They will not consign his mortal remains to the fire, but will bury him. Some people also float him on a rafter made of banana trunks in the river and they believe that, expert bej or oja will make him alive by the mantras i.e. incantations. This is how the story of Sati-Beula goes; when her husband Lakhindar was bitten to death by the venomous Kali Naga, she accompanied him on his rafter of banana-trunks floating on the sea in search of the gods in order to restore to life. Therefore, such type of beliefs is associated with the tale of Manasa epic, which is prevalent among the Rabhas along with others. It is remarkable that as per traditional belief, Beula and her father-in-law Chandradhara, the great merchant were the residents of Chhaygaon area of South Kamrup. (Das:2010:52).

According to the beliefs of Hindus as well as the other tribes, Vasuki Naga is supporting the earth on his hood from the nether world. So, there is a common belief among them that, when Vasuki shakes himself, there is an earthquake. On the other hand, along with the Rabhas other tribes also believe in the supernatural power of an imaginary snake god or snake goddess. “The Mishimis think that the earth is resting on a piller; an enormous snake sometimes gets angry and shakes that piller; we then feel the earthquake and many people die. Some Kukis also imagine that a snake stays coiled around the earth; at times, it bites its own tail and getting hurt begins to shake which causes an earthquake. Among the Khasis, U
Thlen, the snake god was worshipped by offering human blood.” (Das:2010:52). In such way, along with the Rabhas, many people in Assam are associated with the worship of snake goddess Manasa or Maroi or Mare, Barmani or Bishahari, etc. On the other hand, a number of folk tales about snakes are found among the people of Assam, in which the snake was considered as a disguised god. So, from this point of view, these people always consider the snake as a sacred creature and except certain circumstances, it is not killed.

There is a common belief among the tribes and non-tribes of Assam that, snakes stay at water and at the store of one’s money and other valuable properties as keepers. Sukumar Sen also remarks that there is a close relationship of Manasa or snakes with the Jal Puja (i.e. worship of water like running water, wetland etc.), Paniya Puja (i.e. worship of wine and venom), Gach Puja (i.e. worship of trees like lotus, siju etc.) and worship of snake pillers, etc. Most of the tribal people consider snake as Jal Devata (god of water). Therefore, in the ancient time, when people dig their ponds, they place a post (probably to measure the level of water) at the middle of the pond and also carve a snake image on the body of the post. That post is called as Naga and they believe it as Jal Devata (God of water).

Apart from these, there are various beliefs and superstitions related to Manasa cult in connection with the Mare puja and its associated other songs, different performing at forms, various rites and rituals etc. which are observed by the Rabhas. They believe the snake goddess Manasa or Bishahari or Barmani as Marai – Goddess. Because, as per their traditional and religious beliefs, the goddess is worshipped to expel mari-marak i.e. diseases or epidemics for which the goddess is known as Marai-Goddess. So, in their traditions and religious belief, a minor variation is found regarding the Marai-goddess with that of the snake goddess Manasa. The Rabhas also believe that, through this Mare puja one’s desire
and expectations are fulfilled if the devotee worships the goddess whole-heartedly and more devotionally. Traditionally it is believed that by worshipping the Mare puja one can increase his money and other wealth. The goddess also saves the worshippers as well as devotees from the different evil elements in their day-to-day life. Another belief associated with the Mare puja is that, sacrificial rituals are essential for this worship. So, to fulfill one’s desired goals and expectations, animals or birds are sacrificed in the name of goddess as her offerings. Rabhas believe that, the souls of the sacrificial animals or the birds i.e. Bolib-Budab (that which are offered to a deity) go to the heaven and dwell there forever. On the other hand, in their religious beliefs, two types of deities are worshipped by the Rabhas, These are – Benevolent and Malevolent. The Mare puja is considered as benevolent in this context.

In the religious beliefs of the Rabhas, Manasa is not a serpent goddess, she is goddess originated from the breath of Anadi Gohain (the creator of the Universe). This belief reflects the differences between the myths of Rabhas with that of others in respect of birth of snake goddess Manasa. Manasa is believed as a rebirth of Durgadevi. However, as per their religious tradition, Barmani, Padmadevi, Bishahari, and Manasa are the different names of the same goddess. Yet, in the different areas where Mare geets are prevalent, the goddess is not generally recognized as Manasa. In their belief the goddess, who is born out of Siva’s mental disturbance and on a lotus leaf was goddess Padma, not Manasa. In this respect, religious belief among the Rabhas is quite different with that of others. This belief is distinctly their own and reflects their own tribal elements. Rabhas also worship the snake goddess as Barmani individually or collectively. They observe the worship every year. There is a belief among the common Rabha folk that, to avoid misfortune i.e. evil in one’s family, they intend to observe worship to the goddess
in advance. The family also believes heart and soul that, for this act of worship, the
goddess will keep them in safe in the coming days. Another belief associated with
this worship is that, if any one discontinues the puja instead of observing it
annually, sure misfortune and evil will come to his family soon.

On the other hand, in respect of Deodhani, they believe that the shaman
(Deodhani) must be a female with virtuous nature based on sanctity. In the
performance of Deodhani, it is believed that she is supposed to be possessed by the
spirit of the goddess Manasa and is also believed to have power of foretelling the
future. They also believe in the different performing art forms of Mare-puja, which
are known as dakat para i.e. to be at the binding of the presiding deity and dakat
tula. There is a belief that, if in the Mare puja ritually impure work is done or the
Ojapali performs songs and dances in a wrong way, then it is very difficult to bring
back the Deodhani to life (i.e. the act of Dakat tula) from the stage of dakat para at
the time of Bhor dak.

It is already mentioned that Mare geets or Maroi geets or Mare gans are
most important and essential element of Mare puja observed by the Rabhas. These
songs, which are prevalent among the Rabhas in the form of oral literature
distinctly reflect their socio-cultural aspects along with their own tribal elements.
In addition to these aspects, some popular beliefs and traditions of Rabha folks are
associated with these Mare geets. These are briefly mentioned as given below. It is
remarkable that these folk beliefs are not found in the Padmavati or Manasa Purana
other than the Mare geets only.

_Pakshi-Pakshiyanir Biya_
(Marriage or making pair of birds)

According to the belief of the Rabhas, Anandi or Anadi Gohain created the whole Universe. After creation of the Earth, he created human beings, animals, birds, insects, etc. A popular belief is associated with the creation of birds and subsequent effort of Anandi to make them as pairs, for reproduction, which is mentioned only in the *Mare-geets* of the Rabhas.

One day a pair of birds i.e. *Pakshi* and *Pakshiyani* reached Anandi to ask something to him. Seeing both of them as absent minded, he advised them to get married with each other. But, *pakshi* and *pakshiyani* refused and objected the proposal and told him as:

“*Kun kale dekhisa Gohain kun kale hunisa |*

*Bhaike boinike naki du biya karaisa ||*

*Kiba jane keba hune keba patiai |*

*Bhaia boinike naki du biya karai ||”*

(Rabha, P.:1987:44)

(Meaning: When and where you heard or seen, that own brother and sister marry each other.)

Hearing the objections from the *pakshi* and *pakshiyani*, to fulfill the secret purpose of the creation Anandi Gohain sent them to the bank of river Bhagirathi to search their food. Ultimately as the wish of the Gohain, they unknowingly got married to each other.

“*Ujanate paril pakshia bhatit pakshiyani |*
Ujanare pakshia mac magar khai |

Bhatire pakshiyani bhukate lelai ||

Mac magar khai pakshiyar tusta hoila man |

Kame talbal pakshiya kam sara dil |

Pakshiyare kam khini jalate bhahil ||

Pakshiyare kamkhini jale bhahi jai |

Ahar buli take pakshiyani thoten tuli lai ||

Pakshiyare kam aru pakshiyani khai |

Sai belate pakshiyani garbhavati hai ||” (P-44)

(Meaning: The male bird i.e. pakshi consumed fishes and others in the upper side but the female one i.e. pakshiyani became hungry without having any food in the lower side. Being more energetic, the pakshi became sensuous and released a quantity of semen on the water, which was consumed by the pakshiyani and ultimately she had become pregnant.)

Then, they again reached the Gohain and he asked them to sit on his extended arms. With joy and satisfaction, both sat on the both arms of the Gohain and then he felt the weight of the pakshiyani, which more than the pakshi. Gohain asked them –

“Agate nakoisilung pakshiya du biya karaw |

Ala kene pakhiyanir garbhati gawa ||
Apunera srijani Gohaiye apuner palani |

Bhal Jadi dekha biya karaore apuni ||” (P-45)

(Meaning: Earlier I told you to get married but now how have you become pregnant. Being the creator, Gohain asked them to get married.)

From that incident, birds being brothers and sisters of the same parents make a pair between them. This is a popular folk belief among the Rabhas. Such type of beliefs regarding the pairing of birds is found only in the Mare-geets of the Rabhas.

Nangalor Sristi (Creation of Plough)

One day, lord Mahadeva desired to create a flower garden (i.e. Puspak ban). Therefore, to till the land a nangal i.e. plough was required. Mahadeva sent the sage Narada to the Kurmi Raj i.e. Biswakrama for making a plough for this purpose. In the direction of Mahadeva, Kurmi Raj had gone to Satali hill in search of proper wood for making the plough. For a long time he searched for a trunk of tree, which would be bent in the middle portion and that would be proper for making the plough. At last, after a long time he got such type of tree in the middle of the hill and cutting the tree, he made the plough for Mahadeva.

“Madhyar thalate gach asere gajia |
Dakshin dishe thanidal asere haliya ||
Chutar para gaje gach majate bhanj hoiya |
Saina gachoke kurmi phelale dhal diya ||
Katane katil gach chachane chachil
Onek jatan kari muthiku rakhil
Nangalar bukate kurmi lagai dile dila
Dila bhal nahali nangale pare dhila
Nangalar mukhate kurmi lagaise ruper phal
Haluai sukhe hal bai sarbati kal

(Rabhas, P.:1987:71)

(Meaning: A branch of the tree was leaning towards the south. The Kurmi, i.e. Viswakarma had cut the trunk of the tree having a bend in the middle part. Someone had scrapped and someone had cut and ultimately made the nangal i.e. plough with the handle of the plough.)

In that way, Kurmi Raj supplied the plough and related implements to the Mahadeva for tilling the land. Mahadeva ploughed the land holding the handle of the plough. For that kind of act done by the Mahadeva, Rabhas carve a step (Ghap) below the handle of the plough and it is known as Deomuthi or Gohain Muthi. In this way, in the traditional belief of the Rabhas, Mahadeva created plough and he first used it for tilling the land. This is also a popular folk belief associated with the Mare Geets scattered among the Rabhas.

Mul gharar dakshin Berot phuta Rakha (Keeping a hole in the wall of south side of the main house)

There is a tradition among the Rabhas from the early days according to which they keep a small hole in the wall of south side of their main house. Because, to save the life of his son (Lakhindar) from the angry look and threat of life from the Padma, Chando-Sadagar ordered to construct a Kanchan Merghar by expert blacksmiths of the state for safe stay of Lakhindar on the night of their
honeymoon. Accordingly, under the close guidance and supervision of Chief Blacksmith Thawai, thirty-two expert blacksmiths started the construction work of the Merghar. But, to fulfill the evil purpose of Padma, she ordered the chief blacksmith Thawai in his dream as –

“Shitanate basia Padma dekhai sapun |
Tumak balang Thawai mur bachan shun ||
Tamul diya Chanda aru nidib Chun |
Dakhin dishe Mer gharar rakhi thabi ghun ||
Tamul diya Chanda aru nidib pan |
Chunar phut di thoiya rakhibi chin-bhan ||
Chandae sote bibadiya lagi asung bad |
Sadhiba narang Chandar bad sadhim tumat ||
Chhay kumarak mari dunika karisung hani |
Sat thawaik mari tirike korim barri ||”

(Rabha:1987:323)

(Meaning: Sitting on the head of the bed Padma showed him in dream asking Thawai to obey her order. She ordered him to keep a **ghun** i.e. a small hole in the south side of the wall of the Merghar. She also ordered him to keep the small hole covered by **Chun** (lime) to identify the position of the hole. I have my enmity and quarrel with Chando. If I cannot fulfill my revenge by biting his son Lakhai then I will take revenge on you like six sons of Chando Sadagar and your wives will be widowed.)

In this way, Bishahari (Padma) warned Thawai in his dream and subsequently awakenning from his sleep, Thawai remembered the dream and told her as —

“Hai hai Barmani ai toke Karang sewa |
Chando gharar jata boiri amar easta deva ||
Tuti Karang ore ai bhakti Karang Tuk |
Tuti bhakti Karang ai kshema diya muk ||
Chandor beta Lakhindar baroi durjan |
Jadihe meror khun pai badhiba jiban || (P-324)

(Meaning: I have my devotion and worship to you, so forgive me. Lakhindar, son of Chando is more dangerous. He will kill me if he gets any fault in the construction of Merghar.)

Then Padma assured the Thawai as —
“Barmani uthiya tate bulila bachan |
Sai bela muk tai karibi sutaran || (smaran)
Garundra rup loia mai berat parim |
Merar chow chalkhan dhakiya rakhim ||” (P-324)

(Meaning: Barmani then told him to remember her at due time and at that time, she will cover the top of the Merghar in the form of Garundra.)

After getting assurance of safety, the blacksmith Thawai completed the construction of Merghar with the help of other thirty-two blacksmiths. In the walls, he painted the pictures of almost all the gods and goddesses, animals, birds etc. and at last kept a very small hole in the wall of the south direction closing it by a mark of lime (Chun). In the honeymoon night of Beula-Lakhindar, through this hole Padma sent the Ajogar, the snake inside the Merghar to bite Lakhindar as per her previous challenge to Chando Sadagar. In such way, Padma made her win over Chando Sadagar.

The Rabhas of Assam worship Padma as Barmani or Bishahari from ancient times. So, as a token of devotion and respect as well as to avoid her enmity or her devils eye, still the Rabhas keep a small hole in the corner of southern wall of their main house. This is also considered as a popular folk belief of Rabhas associated with the worship of Manasa or Barmani or Bishahari.
**Sapar Nej Kharan Hua** (Cause of docked tail of snakes)

Among the Rabhas, there is a folk belief relating to cause of docked tail of the snakes. As per their belief, if any snake bites man or cows then, the tail of the snake gradually becomes short. Because, in the *Mare geets* it is mentioned that, Beula had cut the tail of the *Ajagor* who had bitten Lakhindar inside the Merghar and left the snake being assured that the snake would never bite any man or cows. Besides it, Beula cursed the whole serpent race as whenever any snake would bite any man or cow, and then the tail of the snake would be docked like the *Ajagor* to be identified by all.

> “Sait bancha khowai Beula nathakil roiya |  
> Subarna muthi katari lo’l hatat kariya ||  
> Ajagarar lej Beula dilare katiya ||  
> Ja ja re Ajagar tuk dilung bar |  
> Manuh garu khale habo ai athantar |  
> Anti janamat Beulai dise bar |  
> Ajio lagi ase sarpar sai athantar ||” (P-574)

(Meaning: Beula promised the Ajagor and cut his tail by a knife. She cursed the snakes if they bite any man or cows in future, then they will have to face such type of misfortune which is prevalent among the serpent race.

**Bhumurar Mur Sonali Hua** (Cause of Head of Bumble bee becoming golden)
There is another folk belief associated with the part of *Srīsti Patani* of *Mare geet*, which mentions why the head of Bumblebee (or black bee) is golden in colour. One day Durga Devi desired to go to the flower *Malanch* i.e. garden created by Mahadeva. On the day, she became puzzled about the matter how and by which way to reach the garden. She asked many, but none gave her proper information regarding the way to reach the garden. At last, Durga Devi met the bumblebee and asked the bumblebee the proper path to reach the said garden.

“*Jadi kuwa sancha katha
Subarnare banam matha
Manike bandham dui pakha |*
*Jadi bhumura misa kuwa
Mosarai singim matha
Sai matha gohaink jugam
*Tuk khuam lutiya pimpar |”* (P: 95)

(Meaning: If you say the right thing, I will bedeck your head with gold. If you lie, then will cut down your head and give it to the Gohain.)

The bumblebee then in the fear of Durga told the truth as –

“*Alai karilung madhupan
Kene paran haruang
Koiya dayong malachare katha |
Pakhar mariya thar
*Dekhuai gohainor malach khan ||
Muk chari kata dur jabi
Kanika saigar lag pabi
Saigar dekhibi bhay bhayangkar |
Guru ke sutaran kori

...
Saigarat dibi bhari
Saigar habo athuman pani
Tak mawa hoiya jabi par || (P-96)

(Meaning: I shall speak the truth about the garden. In this way, flying the wings, the black bee indicates the location of the garden. The black bee then tells her to go to the Kanika sea remembering her beloved god and also asked to cross the sea to reach the garden.)

As per the bumblebee’s directions, ultimately the Durga Devi reached the flower garden of Mahadeva. Being satisfied with the bumblebee she made the head of bumblebee golden and the wings are turned luminous instead of black colour. This belief is still orally prevalent among the Rabhas.

Abhisap grasta Bagh (Cursed Tiger)

This belief is associated with the part of Sristi Patani of Mare geet. One day Durga Devi wished to visit the flower garden (Malanch) of Mahadeva. On the way to reach the garden, she felt very tired and sat down under a tree. Being very tired she yawned. From the hot air of her yawn, a tiger calf was born. The greedy tiger calf desired to consume her seeing in front of it. Durga Devi then due to anger, broke the face of the tiger calf by a huge slap and cursed the tiger as –

“Mure srijanir bagh
Muke khuja khaibak
Hawk tur oiranat bash |
Garu manuh dhari khabi
Munishar hatat badh jabi
Tuk mariba ina maya jale ||
Mukh chai maril char
Mukh ho’l tutla bar
Anchale tulia karhe rao ||
Kumar chai marila gundri
Kumar ho’l leri pheri
Kumar hoila awan suter jari ||
Bara basarat dibi dhen
Tahe pabi ek biyan
Baghar dare phuribi lukai ||” (P: 92-93)

(Meaning: I have created you, but you want to consume me. So, as my curse, you will have to live in forest. You will eat cows and men. Man will kill you. She had hit a slap on the face of the tiger and thus broke its face. She hit a kick on the waist of the tiger for which the waist became very lean and thin. In the interval of twelve years, you will give birth to your calf.)

From that period, according to belief of the Rabhas, tigers are live in the forest. Due to the slap of Durga, the face of the tigers now look in the deformed shape, and the waist of the tigers look very lean and thin due to her kick. In the same way, due to the curse of Durga Devi, tigress give birth their calves in the interval of twelve years.

**Dhoran Sapar Bish Nuhua Huar Karan** (Cause of loosing venom by rat snake)

Padma Devi called all the snakes to bite Lakhinder in their honeymoon night. At first, she asked the very angry and venomous rat snake (*Dhoran Sap*) to go to the *Samphali nagar* where Beula Lakhinder stayed. Padma also gave him
more additional venom for the purpose. Being satisfied for getting such additional venom, the rat snake started his journey to the *Samphali nagar* to bite Lakhindar inside the *Merghar*. But, due to rainy season on the way he saw that all the ponds, canals and low lands were full of rain water and different types of fish, frogs, crabs, insects, etc. were moving there. Being tempted to consume them, the rat snake kept his venoms on the nearby heap of cow dung and started to consume these.

“*Dhora sarpai bule mai are kiba chang |*  
*Kakar kusia khai mai udar bharang ||*  
*Cheng Beng khai mai gawat karang bal |*  
*Lahe lahe dakim jai dulav Lakhinder ||*  
*Arai tula bish thal gubarer upar |*  
*Jhampa diya naml dhora jaler upar ||*” (P: 384)

(Meaning: The rat snake desires to fill his stomach by consuming the crabs, snakehead fish, frogs etc. In this way, being more energetic, leisurely he will go and bite the Lakhindar. Before doing that act, he had kept the additional venoms on the top of cow-dung.)

In the mean time, the snake was busy with his eating and the rainwater already floated away all his venoms from the top of the cow-dung to the nearby low land. The fishes like *Ari, Singi, Tingira, Gagal*, etc. applied these venoms in their fins (*Kainte*).

“*Cheng Beng Kani-Puthi dhari dhari khai |*  
*Dakshina dhale bishak utai loiya jai ||*  
*Aari gagala bule are kiba chang |*  
*Dhoran betar bishkhini katat bhejang ||*  
*Singi magure bule are kiba chang |*  
*Dhoran betar bish khini katat bhejang ||*
Chela- kumati bule are kiba chang |
Dhoran beter bishkhini dantat bhejang ||
Poka pipare bule are kiba chang |
Dhora beter bishkhini hulat bhejang. ||” (P: 384)
(Meaning: At the time of consuming frogs, fishes etc. the rainwater floated away his venoms in the south side. The Ari, Gagal, Singi, Magur desired to apply the venom of the snake in their fins.)

When the rat snake saw the loss of his venom, immediately he came back to the Padma and told her the incidents in details. Hearing the incident, Padma got angry with him and cursed the snake as –

“Ja ja re dhoran beta tuk dilung bar |
Kati maha dhalat tai khokat bhiji mar ||
Ahin kati mahat thakibi khokat bhijiya |
Kal munishe pale tuk phelaba mariya ||
Anti janamat dhurank Padmai dise bar |
Aji kao dhoran betar sai athantar. ||” (P: 385)
(Meaning: It is my curse that in the rainy season you will be caught by khoka, i.e. a kind of fishing implement and man will kill you.)

According to the beliefs prevalent among the Rabhas, from that time the rat snake i.e. dhoran sap lost venoms from their teeth. As per the curse of Padmadevi, the rat snakes are caught along with the fishes by the fishing implements like Khoka, Chepa etc. at the time of rainy season and also men kill the snakes. On the other hand, at the time of piercing by fins of the fishes like Ari, Gagal, Magur, Singi etc., we feel pain and suffer from fever subsequently.

Borali Machor Gat Siyonir Chin (A mark of seam in the body of Cat fish)
This is also considered as a popular folk belief prevalent among the Rabhas, which is associated with the Mare Geets, particularly in the part of Nat Mandir of Gohain Nagar. In the Gohain Nagar, when Mahadeva ordered Padma i.e. Bishahari to make Lakhai alive, then they saw that, a kneecap of the Lakhinder was not available with his skeleton.

“Dhui dhai ostimala gani parhi chai |
Sakal osthi ache athur chaka nai ||” (P: 509)
(Meaning: After proper arrangement, it is found that except a knee cap all other bones are available).

Beula then told them crying –

“Titadeor name mai bukani malilung |
Ae dev samajar majat osthi harualung ||” (P: 510)
(Meaning: I have lost the bone i.e.osthi of my husband in the assembly of the gods and goddesses.)

Gohain then felt sympathy to Beula and asked the Bishahari to search the kneecap of Lakhindar. Bishahari replied Gohain that, one day Raghuwa Barali (a big catfish, Wallaga attu) of Tripani sagar devoured the kneecap of Lakhindar at the time of washing his bones by Beula. Hearing the reply of the Bishahari, Gohain ordered the Saruja Dumuni to catch the Raghuwa Barali from the sea of Tripani.

“Dhar balang dumuni lay hare tamul khawa |
Tripani saigorak lage ai ghari chali jawa ||
Saigar juriya tumi ae jal phelawa |
Athu churi raghuwak aniya jugawa ||” (P: 511)
(Meaning: Fisherwoman! you go to the Tripani sagar and catch the Raghuwa Barali by your net because he has devoured the kneecap of the Lakhinder.)
As per direction of Gohain, Saruja Dumuni ultimately caught the *Raghuwa* and handed over it to Mahadeva. Mahadeva by the golden knife split the belley of *Raghuwa* and brought out the kneecap. With a stitch of the belley, Mahadeva again made the *Raghuwa Barali* alive and left him in the water.

“*Subarna katari diya tutula pharai |
Lakhindaror athur chaka tat lagal pai ||
Lakhindaror athur chaka ulai are lai |
Subarna beji diya tutula shiyai ||
Amrit hat machi raghuwak dila jeewdan |
Bhumin pari raghuwa buali bule ram ram ||” (P: 512)

(Meaning: With a golden knife belley is operated and the kneecap is brought out. After a stitch in his belley, again *Raghuwa Barali* was left in the water.)

Again, Gohain said to *Raghuwa* giving him a boon –

“*Ja ja re raghuwa tuk dilung bar |
Jethe-boishakhe aru toi ujan dhar ||
Anti janamate raghuwak dise bar |
Ajikao raghuwa bualir sai pathantar ||” (P: 512)

(Meaning: Go back Raghuwa with my *bor* (i.e. boon) and will make your shoal in the month of *Bohag* and *Jeth* forever.)

Therefore, there is a mark of stitch in the body of *Barali* even until today. Rabhas believe this mark as a result of stitch done by the Mahadeva.

Therefore, these are the folk beliefs associated with the different *Mare geets*, which are still scattered among the Rabhas in the form of oral literature from the early times. These are therefore, considered as a mark and identity of their colourful tribal culture. (Rabha:1994:23-33). On the other hand, it is observed that, in their common beliefs the serpents i.e. snakes play a very significant and important role in the context of Manasa cult of the Rabhas. The Mare puja and the
Mare geets bear such types of various beliefs and superstitions, which are still prevalent among them. Different socio-cultural aspects of the Rabha traditional society, their unique and original tribal elements, various performing folk art forms etc. are distinctly reflected through these common beliefs as well as the religious beliefs of the Rabhas. They also share some such type of beliefs and superstitions associated with the Cult of Manasa with the surrounding other tribes and the non-tribal people of Assam.

(Verses are taken from the books, the Mayavanti Bishahari of Praneswar Rabha and the Maroi Geet Aru Rabha Samaj by Biren Rabha)