CHAPTER-VI

Worship of Goddess Manasa— Mare puja

Like the other tribal societies of Assam, Rabhas are also considered as a traditional society with their own fairs and festivals through which their own cultural identity is reflected. At present, the process of Sanskritization or Hinduisation has influenced most of the tribal festivals of Assam. So, N.C. Sarma observes, The Assamese people may rightly be classified under two broad groups: (a) Tribal and (b) Non-tribal. (Bora:2008:92) The ethnic groups like Bodo-Kacharies, the Rabhas, the Karbis, the Mising, the Dimasas, and the Tiwas may be included under the tribal groups. In Assam, there is no difference between the tribal and non-tribal people like other parts of India. Both the tribal and non-tribal of Assam set an outstanding example of the process of acculturation and integration as well as assimilations and made tremendous impact in the making of the unique composite culture of Assam. (Sarma:1988:58). According to Dr. P. Goswami, the process of interaction between the Aryans and the non-Aryans and between the tribal and non-tribal are being carried on by the Assamese society from the days of year(yore). In the festivals too this process of interaction cannot be ignored. (Goswami:1959:16). From this point of view, at present we may say that, the Rabha community of Assam does not have any national festival of their own. The different groups of Rabhas celebrate their specific ritualistic festivals and worships, which reflect their own religious concepts and beliefs. Most of the
Rabhas have already adopted the customs and traditions, fairs and festivals similar to neighboring non-tribal people of Assam. Manasa puja is such a festival observed by the Rabhas as well other people of Assam.

Mare puja or Maroi puja or Marai puja is one of the most important religious festivals of the Rabhas, particularly among the Pati Rabhas of South Kamrup and South Goalpara of Assam. The Mare puja is basically, the worship of snake goddess Bishahari or Padmavati. Rabha people worshipped the goddess Padmavati as Bishahari and Barmani, because, like Lord Siva, the goddess also enjoyed the power to consume and destroy poison or venom for which the goddess is respected mostly by them. On the other hand, the goddess is worshipped to cure the *Mari Marak* i.e. disease and any type of epidemic among the Rabha people, as the goddess is known as *Marai-goddess*. The Mare-puja is performed by the Rabhas at level of the society as well as individual household level. The worship is generally performed in the month of *Jeth or Ahar* (April-June). Mare puja or Manasa puja is also performed among the non-tribal people of North Kamrup and Darrang districts. But, their methods of worship, rituals and performing art forms with related songs are completely different with that of Rabha people. Mare puja is not only observed by the Hindus, there are certain evidences, which prove that a section of Muslim people also worshipped Manasa and observed Marai puja. The famous Parasu Oja of Darrang was a Muslim who performed Manasa puja. Bodo-Kacharies observed Marai puja on any one night in the dark half of the month, generally within the month of *Bahag* to *Shaon* i.e. April-June. Among the Hajongs also the Marai puja is observed. The Hindus among the Tea tribes of Assam also observe Marai puja like other ethnic groups of Assam.

Bodos of Assam observes Maroi (or Marai) puja collectively or individually. They observe this Maroi puja generally within the period of *Bahag* to *Shaon*
(April-June) on any one night in the dark half of the month. Buffalo sacrifices are essential for this occasion. There are references, which state that earlier human sacrifice was also done in this puja. Apart from these, one pair of catfish, grasshoppers, fowls, seasonal fruits, betel nut, cakes, flat rice, cooked meal are also offered to the deities in this context. Unmarried boys and girls do not participate in this puja. In some places, it is customary to observe the Maroi puja in the particular days at least upto three years continuously for the welfare of the worshippers as well as the persons who are involved with this observation. Otherwise, it is believed that, it will be harmful for the people connected with this occasion. Traditionally, it is believed that through this puja one can increase his money and other wealth. The Goddess saves the worshippers from the other evil elements in their day-to-day life. Some localities in the North Kamrup, the Bodos worship the goddess in front of the Maju and after completion of the worship, they float the Maju in the river along with the offerings. So, in this way the Bodo people of North Kamrup and Darrang perform the Manasa puja. The Manasa puja is popularly know as Marai Devir puja or Maroi puja among the Bodo people of these area. But, the Bodos of Dakshin Kamrup along with the Pati Rabhas observe Barmani puja as Mare puja in this context.

Hajong people of Assam call the Manasa puja as Maroi or Kanideo puja. The Hajongs of Srihatta and Maimansing (presently located in Bangladesh) area observe this puja covering entire Sravana month, but, in other places, there is no fixed day to observe this puja. (Ray Hajong:2003:36). During the puja as per their conveniences, they observe Geetlu or Geetalu Gahen, (name for the Hajong version of the Ojapali), for the welfare of the family along with the other devotees. In this occasion, a make belief Merghar is constructed drawing the pictures of Mahadeva and different Gods and Goddesses. Around the Merghar, they perform
various types of Maroi dances and songs with different dramatic actions. Besides the deouri or Priest, there is a Geetal or Oja and Palies are present in the puja where Deodhani performs various performing art forms in the occasion.

Goddess Manasa is worshipped as the snake Goddess by other castes and tribes or other ethnic groups of Assam particularly of the lower part of Assam. But, according to Pati Rabhas, Manasa is the wife of Adi Niranjan and her other popular name is Bishahari or Padmavati i.e. the snake goddess. Padmavati is also regarded as the daughter of Siva. The most essential part of the Marai puja is the making of Maju where the goddess is generally worshipped. The Marai puja is performed in the permanent places, which are called Mare ghar when observed by the community. For this occasion, a Maju is constructed by maleya or Mali and placed in the Mare ghar as alter. As per the myth, Chando Sadagar made the Mare ghar to keep Beula-Lakhindar safe during their honeymoon night from snakebite. The Maju is the symbol of this Mer-ghar made by the Chando Sadagar. Maju is made of Bamboo strips, normally in the shape of a dome, which is covered by new papers or pith. Of course pith has become rare now a days for which it now made mostly of bamboo. In the Maju, along with the picture of Bishahari the other main characters like Chando, Lakhindar, and Beula etc. are illustrated in addition to other additional deities. Apart from these, in the Maju various remarkable characters of heroes and heroines of the Puranas, different animals, flowers and other religious episodes, which are described through the Mare geets are also depicted in a very significant and unique way. It is mentionable that, before placing this Maju made by Maleya, the Sola Janam, Kamar Janam, Kati Janam and Maju Kamani songs are performed in connection with this occasion.

(Hakacham:2010:121)
As per the objectives and importance of the worship, the Maleyas construct and erect the Maju in different forms and names. From this point of view, Majus are mainly found in three forms:

1. Dumaru Maju
2. Kamani Maju and
3. Pat Maju or SikiMaju or Sola Maju

_Dumaru Maju_ is made with the height of eight to nine feet to its apex point i.e. dome. Other additional four domes are found in the four corners of the _Dumaru Maju_, which are constructed below the main _dome_ i.e. the apex point of the _Maju_. In the _Kamani Maju_, there is another second dome along with the main one. The height of this _Kamani Maju_ is the same as _Dumaru Maju_ but, the breadth is less.

_Pat Maju_ is made comparatively in small shape with a very simple way than the other types of _Majus_. Instead of erecting these types of _Majus_, some round type of _Maju_, which is called _Tepari_ or _Petari_, are kept hanging in the puja _mandap_. At present, due to scarcity of _kuhila_ i.e. Pith, the _Majus_ are made with white paper, where different pictures related with the Manasa episodes are depicted with different colours.

Originally, among the Rabhas, Mare puja or the worship of goddess Bishahari or Barmani are observed formally for the seven days continuously. In these days, propitiation is performed along with the female shaman i.e. _Deodhani_ who performs different dance movements and the _Ojapalis_ sing variety of traditional folk songs, which are popularly known as _Mare geets or Mare gans_. The puja or worship is performed on the fifth lunar day in the dark half of the Assamese month _Shaon_. _Nag-Panchami_ is usually regarded to be the most
auspicious day for the propitiation. On the other hand, it is also observed on some other days as per conveniences of the people. In the Mare puja, besides Bishahari two other deities Sitala and Dharma Devata are also simultaneously worshipped in this context in separate altars. In some places of Dakshin Kamrup, along with the Mare puja, some other pujas are also performed separately. These are mainly Tukuria puja, Kamakhya puja and Dharma Devtar puja etc. (Bora:2008:87)

Depending upon the time span in respect of observance of Mare puja, it may be classified as mentioned below:

1. *Bhar Mare*: The Mare puja, which continues for three to seven days, is called *Bhar Mare puja*.
2. *Gota Mare*: Sometimes the worship is completed within three days, which is known as *Gota Mare puja*.
3. *Phul Mare*: The worship covering one day and night is called *Phul Mare puja*.
4. *Jagar Diya* or *Ek beliya Mare puja*: The worship that ends within a day is called *Jagar diya* or *Ek beliya Mare puja*.

In all the above performances in connection with the puja, the deity is worshipped by sacrificing animals and birds like buffaloes, pigs, goats, ducks, pigeons, etc. On the other hand, the other puja offerings are also very simple, such as — rice, banana, betel nut etc. Mustard oil is used for lighting the earthen lamps. Vermilion is also used for deities in the occasion.

Manasa puja is known as Mare, Maroi, or Marai among the people of Assam irrespective of tribal and non-tribal status. Different views and opinions are associated in this context.
According to B.K. Baruah and S.N. Sarma, at the very beginning *Moria* or *Marias* a community of Assam first worshipped Manasa, the snake goddess for which it is called as Mare or Maroi puja. In the particular areas of Mangaldoi and Kamrup, there is a legend that, *Morias* first introduced Manasa puja in ancient Kamrup. (Baruah and Sarma:1964:9)

According to M.C. Goswami, Mare this word may be originated from the Sanskrit word *Matri*. Matri > Mar + A > Mara i.e. Mar is originated from *Matri* and joining the ‘A’ suffix with the word *Mar*, Mare may be originated. Mare or Marai is the Goddess of *Mari Marak* i.e. disease or epidemic, cholera – measles etc. (Goswami: 1960:38).

Sukumar Sen opines that Mare is not originated from *Matri*. In his view, Mare or Maroi is derived from the Sanskrit word *Mandapika* i.e. Mandapik > Mandawik > Mandaweo > Mandaio > Mondia > Marai > Maroi or Mare. (Sen: 1948:58).

In the religious belief of south Indians, there is a goddess known as *Marriyamma*, with which the Manasa is compared. Devi *Marriyamma* is considered as the goddess of *Mari-Marak* i.e. disease or epidemic for which Manasa concept may be migrated to Assam from South India. (Whitehead:1972:29)

Actually, Mare or Maroi this word is originated from Assamese phase *Mari-marak* i.e. disease or epidemics etc. The goddess who is responsible or controller of such *Mari-Marak* is called Mare or Maroi. From the point of view, the concept of Mare or Maroi is associated with the Manasa.

**Deodhani and Ojapali**
Mare puja is observed along with the different performing art forms of the Deodhani and Ojapalis, such as Nritya, Git-vadya with Abhinaya. These are the essential ingredients in the worship of the Mare puja. (Bora:2008:87) Among these elements Deodhani and Ojapali is the most essential elements of the Mare puja. Both the Oja and Palis sing songs in the puja from the Bishahari saga, which is current in the form of oral literature among the people of Assam along with the Rabhas. The Deodhanis display various dance movements in accordance with the theme of this songs sung by them. So, N.C. Sarma observes that the Deodhanis are the essential units of Mare gan. Generally girls or women can take part in the Deodhani, the shamanistic dances in the context of Mare puja. Rabha people believe that without the grace of Deo or Devi (i.e.God and Goddess) none can become a Deodhani. Therefore, they consider the performance and the role of Deodhani in the Mare puja as a very sacred one. The Deodhani must know the Mare gan or Maroi geets so that, they can dance and act in different ways as per the theme of the Mare gan sung by the Oja palis. In this way, with the help of these songs, semi-dramatic acting of the characters like Beula-Lakhindar, they express the divine powers of the goddess Manasa.

The Mare puja begins with the worship of goddess Saraswati, which is known as Saraswati Bandana. This Saraswati Bandana is sung by the Ojapali in the sitting position for which it is called as Baheni sirastir geet (song of creation in the sitting position). On the second day, they perform Kumar Janamar geet (song of birth of the potter)and Ghat nirmanar geet(song of making the pithcher). In this stage, all the devotees along with the Ojapali, Deodhanis and traditional drummers go to the nearby river or pond and carry water in the name of different deities to be worshipped in the Mare puja. This is known as Ghat Burani (filling the pitcher). Then the Oja palis perform the songs such as Guwa Janamar geet (birth of the
betel nut), *Tanti Janam* (birth of the weaver), *Chandowa Janam* (birth of Chandowa) and *Pata Janamar* (birth of *pata* i.e. jute) geets simultaneously with the other activities and rituals of the worship. It is mentionable that, before placing the Maju in the Mare puja, the *Oja palis* sing the songs such as *Tal-Janam* (birth of the cymbals), *Sola Janam* (birth of the pith), *Kamar janam* (birth of the blacksmith), *Kati Janam* (birth of *Kati* i.e. an instrument to cut pith) and *Maju Kamanir* (making of the Maju) geets *etc*. These songs are like running commentaries of the acts they perform during the performance. After placing the *Maju* as alter in the *Mare ghar*, the *Deodhani* moves around the *Maju* for seven times and the *Ojapali* invokes the various deities by singing *deonamanir geet* (song of bringing down of the gods). Different types of sacrifices are also made in this context. In this way, the *Ojapali* recites different types of songs relating to *Bishahari* or *Manasa* and the *Deodhani* also begins her dances and dramatic acting vigorously for a long time and once she falls down on the earth in half conscious state. In this state, she is supposed to be possessed by the spirit of the goddess *Manasa* and is believed to have power of foretelling the future. This state of ecstasy of the female shaman is commonly known as *Dakat para* i.e. to be under the possession of the presiding deity. In this state the *dhulias* and *kalias* play on their traditional instruments vigorously. At last, the *Maju* is thrown into a river or a pond and thus ends the worship. (Bora:2000:88)

The dance forms of the *Deodhani* are full of dramatic elements. The *Deodhani* falls down on the earth, which is known as *Dak* in accordance with the theme of the mare-gan and as per the phase wise performance in the context of the worship. The word *dak* is originated from the Sanskrit word *Dangshan* means biting (*Dangshan>Dak*). In the Mare puja, in course of various stages or situations (incidents) of the different episodes of Manasa epic, Padmawati in the form of
snake herself and with the help of other snakes bite different persons and as a result those persons ultimately fall down with a sub-conscious state in the place of worship. The Deodhani plays these situations in a semi dramatic way of actions and dances continuously and at last falls down on the ground. This stage is called Deodhani dakat para.

There are different types of dak associated with the Deodhani dances of Suknanni Ojapali. Thses are:

(a) Phul Dak
(b) Durga dak
(c) Gohain dak or Siva Dak
(d) Lokhai dak or Bhor Dak etc.
(e) Chayamaya Dak etc. (Sarma:2013:215)

The performing art form Dak, which is associated with the Mare puja is performed by the Deodhani when the Ojapalis sing the songs from the part of Gohain Phuljari Geet of Bishahari Saga. In this stage, three kinds of Daks are performed simultaneously with the worship. First Dak is called Phul Dak and here the Deodhani in the form of Durga Devi becomes tired after plucking the flowers in the garden of Gohain and lastly falls down on the ground in a subconscious stage. Then Mahadeva comes, make her conscious, and thus ends the Phul Dak. The second dak is known as Durga Dak. In this stage, Padmawati in the form of a snake, bites Durga i.e. (Deodhani) and the Deodhani i.e. Durga falls down on the ground unconsciously. The Ojapali makes her alive by singing the particular songs with charms and thus ends the second Dak. The third Dak is known as Gohain Dak or Siva Dak. This is the act or a dramatic part, when lord Siva (i.e. Deodhani)
becomes unconscious after drinking the poisons created from the *Samudra Manthan* (Sea Stirring). The *Ojapali* then makes him conscious by singing songs and then ends the third *Dak*. The *Ojapalis* by reciting verses and singing different songs with the help of traditional musical instruments like cymbals, drums, etc. make the *Deodhanis* conscious or alive and this act is known as *Dak tola* (Hakacham:2010:122). On the other hand, in the later part of the worship, when *Ojapalis* sing songs from the part of *Lokhai-Janam*, the *Deodhani* performs another two types of *Dak*. During the time of observing marriage ceremony between Beula and Lakhindar, suddenly Lakhindar or Lakhai became unconscious seeing the *Nag mata* i.e. snake at the marriage place and falls down on the ground, which is called *Chayamaya dak*. The last *dak* is known as *Lakhi Dak* or *Bhor dak*. In this stage, inside the *Merghar* when Lakhai dies due to snakebite, simultaneously the *Deodhani* in the form of Lakhai performs the dramatic acting falling in the *Dak*, which is known as *Lakhi dak*.

The dances of *Deodha* or that of *Deodhani* is considered as an essential elements connected with the worship of Manasa held in Assam. Birinchi Kr.Barua and S.N. Sarma are of the opinion that *Deodhani* dance is probably of Kachari origin. It has some similarities with the dances held in connection with the serpent festivals of Kanada region of the Deccan (Sarmadaloi:1969:269). A *Deodha* or *Deodhani* is dedicated to the deity and she or he dances to the music of *Ojapali* in course of which she or he supposed to be possessed by gods and goddesses to acquire the power to be able to tell the future. In course of the frantic dance, she or he drinks blood of sacrificial animals in a state of divine intoxication (Sarma:1989:203). The male dancers are usually noticed on the occasion of the worship of Manasa. The male dancer is also called a *ghora* (a horse, i.e. the mount of a deity) or a *deuta* (one who is supposed to have temporary communication with
the divine community). It may be noted that the *Deodhani* dance has been prevailing among the tribal folks like Bodos, Garos, Karbis etc. along with the Rabhas from time immemorial and they performed it in the special religious celebrations. Afterwards, it was associated with the Manasa puja observed by them. One remarkable aspect is that, the rituals (*Vidhi*) of Manasa puja mention nothing about the functions of the *Ojapali* and the *Deodhani* but, in popular performance their functions are unavoidable (Sarmabordoloi:1969:271).

It is already observed that, the Mare puja is performed by semi-professional troupes called *Ojapali*. The text of the songs, which are sung by the *Ojapalis* is narrative in nature which is also closely associated together with some kind of other folk epics prevalent among the people along with the Rabhas. These songs are related with the myths and legends as well as tales associated with Manasa, the snake goddess and her enmity and encounter with the merchant Chando. In connection with the worship of the deity, various songs are sung and recited by the *Ojapali* troupes and such kind of songs are known as *Maregan*. This genre of songs are mainly of two kinds — (a) Eulogistic and (b) Etiological narratives (Bora:2008:46). *Oja* and *Palis* sing both kinds of these songs in sitting position with the accompaniment of cymbal only. *Ojapali* troupes recite the eulogistic songs in the context of worship of different gods and goddesses. Long ballads, which are considered as story context songs are sung by the *Ojapali* in standing position with the accompaniment of musical instruments like cymbals and anklets. Different kinds of performing art forms are intimately connected with the contexts of Marepuja.
**Bhor Mare Puja**

Both, the Mare puja and the *Mare gan* (Dance-song) which is performed by the *Ojapali* and *Deodhani* are intimately related and considered as inseparable. In the *Bhor* Mare puja, from the beginning to end, the *Ojapali* and the *Deodhani* remain present in the puja place continuously to perform the different types of performing art forms along with the other activities in connection with the puja rituals. On the day of *Adhivash* (first day), *Ojapalis* recite and sing *Saraswati Vandana* and *Tal sristir geet* from the part of *Baheni Sirastir geet* i.e. the songs which are sung in the sitting position. In the honour of Bishahari Devi and other gods and goddesses like Saraswati, Lakshmi etc, the *Ojapalis* sing different hymns and *Jagaran geet* and finish the puja rituals with the other formalities for that day. On the first day, there is no role of the *Deodhanis*.

The Second day morning is known as *Ghat Burani*. For this purpose, the *ghats* (pots) and water are essential for the worship for which the *Ojapali* sings *Kumar Janamar Geet* and *Ghat Nirmanar Geet*. Then the *Deuri, Ojapali, Deodhani, Dhulia* and other participating devotees proceed to a nearby pond or river to collect water for filling the *Ghats* (i.e. pitchers). The *Ojapli* and *Deodhani* perform different songs and dance movements in accordance with the rhythm of the *Dhulia* during this journey to collect water and back to the place of worship. In the bank of river or pond or ghat, *Nagini puja* is performed and singing the *Deo-Namanir geet*, different gods and goddesses are invoked to worship them with certain offerings and animal sacrifices. They fill the *ghats* by water separately in the name of different gods and goddesses and also invoke such gods and goddesses to the puja *mandap* by singing and reciting the songs and verses. The *Deori* of the worship establishes these *ghats* in the *mandap* against the name of different gods.
and goddesses and then the Ojapalis perform Guwa Janamar Geet, Tanti Janamar Geet, Chandowa Janam and Pata Janamar geet serially.

To observe the Mare puja, the most essential element is Maju, which is made of sola or kuhila (i.e. pith). Therefore, Ojapalis perform Sola Janam, Kamar Janam, Kati Janam and Maju Kamanir geet before erecting Maju by the Maleya on the alter. It is earlier mentioned that the pictures of different gods and goddesses, important characters of the Puranas, birds, animals, flowers, various characters related to Mare geets etc. are depicted artistically outside the Maju with different colours. It is believed that during the worship, the goddess Bishahari takes position inside the Maju. After the end of singing Maju Kamanir geet, the Maleya who himself construct the Maju, formally offers the Maju to the Deori for the worship giving the finishing touch to it with the rituals like Chakshudan (i.e. eye giving). The Deodhanis then move seven times around the Maju representing the goddess Bishahari and Ojapali starts singing of Deo-namanir geet for the second time and such way invokes the different gods and goddesses to the mandap (stage). Deodhanis offer various hymns to the gods and goddesses (Deo Hakure) and at that time, the Deori offers sacrifices of animals and birds in front of the Maju. In the afternoon, Ojapalis start the programme by singing Sristi patanar geet and after it sing Durga Janamar Geet and Deo-namanir geet for the third time in the worship.

The Deodhani and Ojapalis continuously perform the dance movements and songs in the worship covering the whole night and ultimately the Ojapalis finish the first part of the songs. During this span of time, especially in the night, Deodhanis perform the significant performing art forms of dak i.e. Phul Dak, Durga Dak and Gohain Dak. After the performance of Gohain dak, Ojapalis perform the songs associated with the Padma Devir Bibah, Lakhar puja, and
Jhalo-malor geet in the sitting position. Deodhanis have no role in this stage. Animal sacrifices take place in the worship after the end of singing Lakhar pujar geet.

After an interval, in the afternoon songs of the second stage are performed. Ojapali then sings the Chand Banijar Geet and in accordance with the songs, one Pali performs the dramatic acting in the role of Chando Sadagar and simultaneously the Deodhani plays the role of Beng Khaiti Kani, which provides entertainment and amusement to the audience as well as to the devotees. In this stage, the Palis and the Deodhanis significantly display the performing art forms relating to Chand Sadagar’s trade voyage, the enmity of Padmavati to Chand Sadagar and its consequences. Finishing the performance of Chand Banijar geet, Ojapali and Deodhanis take a minor break and then they again start the Lakhai Janamar geet from the evening and continue it without break throughout the night.

In the third night of Bhor Mare, the main story of Beula-Lakhindar i.e. Birth and marriage of Lakhai, his death due to snakebite, floating of his dead body on a Bhel (raft), Beula’s effort to make Lakhai alive, all these long episodes and tales relating to Beula-Lakhindar are performed with the help of different songs, dance movements and dramatic actings by the Ojapalis and Deodhanis. During this performance, the Deodhanis again perform two daks, which are known as Chaya-Maya Dak and Bhor dak or Lakhai dak. In this stage, Beula’s effort to make her husband (i.e. Lakhai) alive, her devotion, courage, patience, and mind power etc. are significantly emphasized.

After the end of different performing art forms of Bhor Dak, which are performed by the Deodhanis and Ojapalis, it is considered that, a special part of the worship along with the Mare geets become completed. Then Ojapalis sing and recite the songs relating to the story of making the Lakhai and his six brothers
alive, recovery of ship owned by Chando Sadagar, return journey of Lakhai and Beula to their Champali, etc. Again, Deo-namanir geets are performed in the worship along with the various sacrificial activities. During this time, gradually the Deodhanis perform frantic dances and along with the Deodhanis, the Ojapalis, and the Deori are also supposed to be possessed by the worshipping god or the goddess i.e. divine power. Traditional musical instruments like Dhol, Tal and Nagaras are beaten with a sound of high intensity. Deodhani or Deodha drink blood of sacrificial animals in a state of divine intoxication. Ojapalis sing songs with high volume and dance with a particular postures i.e. Mudras. Before the sacrificial activities are performed in the worship, Ojapalis perform the various traditional dance forms such as Jakh-Jakhini Nac, Parua Deo nac, Maina nac, Musalman nac, Bamun-Bamuni Nac along with singing of Deo namanir geets. In this way, Deo namanir geets and sacrificial activities become more interesting and attractive in connection with the Mare puja.

After the completion of all the sacrificial activities, the Deori, Ojapali, Deodhani, and Dhulia along with the other devotees go to the nearby ghat of a river and float the Maju along with all the deities and came back to the place of worship after taking bath. After performing certain traditional rituals according to puja-vidhis i.e. canons of worship, the Deodhani again dances to the songs of Ojapalis at the puja mandap and thus formally ends the Bhor Mare puja. In the Phul Mare puja, Maju is emersed in water on the second day followed by performance of the Chand Banijar Geet and Deo-namanir Geet. Likewise, in the daylong Mare puja, Maju is emersed in water following the particular ritualistic performances. (Hakacham:2010:123-124).

It is observed that the Mare puja observed by the Rabhas particularly of the Pati group is greatly influenced by the Mare puja, which is observed by the non-
tribal people of Assam in respect of different rites and rituals or the *puja vidhis*. The characteristic of Non-Brahmin priest in the Mare puja observed by the Pati group of Rabhas is significant and remarkable in this context. Maroi puja or Manasa puja is also observed in the particular areas of North Kamrup and in the Darrang district by the upper caste communities. But, their methods of worship and related rituals are not similar to that of the Rabha people. The offerings in the context of the worship are also not similar. The offerings and materials related with the puja observed by the Rabhas are natural and easily available. For Rabhas, *Maju* is most essential to observe the Mare puja. It is considered as the symbol of *Merghar*. The construction of *Maju* and the colourful drawings and paintings of the *Maju* really reflect the unique expertise of art and craft of the Rabhas. Apart from these, the *Deodhani* dances and *Ojapali* also bear the traditional folk culture of the Rabhas with its various traditional performing art forms more vividly. But, in the Rabha traditional society, no male *Deodhani* i.e. *deodha* is found in any occasion in the context of Mare *puja*. Only girls or women can perform the *Deodhani* dances in the Mare puja, which is also considered as a unique feature of the Rabha traditional society.

Like the puja rituals and methods of worshipping, there is a vast difference in respect of *Mare geets* sung by the upper caste people of North Kamrup and Darrang district with that of the ones performed by the Rabha *Ojapalis*. The *Mare geets* performed by the Rabha *Oja palis* bear the distinct and unique characteristics of different socio cultural elements of the Rabha folks. These are composed by the unknown Rabha poets, most of which are oral in nature. The language, rhythms, music and styles of composing of these *Maroi geets* are purely tribal in nature. Tunes of such geets are not similar to that of Durgavarai or Suknanni verses. The tunes of the Rabha *Mare Geets* are very simple, easy and bear the character of
spontaneity or continuity. The costumes of the *Oja palis* who sing the *Mare Geets* of Suknanni and Durgavarai types are also quite different with that of *Oja palis* who perform the Rabha *Mare Geets* or *Mare gans*. In respect of the Durgavarai or Sukannanni types, the *Oja* dresses like *Sutradhara* of Satriya Dances and the *Palis* wear their dresses with simple *Dhuti* and *Chola*. But, in respect of Rabha Mare puja, the *Oja* wears *Dhuti* and *Chola* (shirt) placing one *fali* or *chadar* on the neck hanging both the sleeves up to the knees. Like the other forms of *Ojapalis*, the *Ojas* occasionally wear the *paggri* on his head, which is made of white cloth. Generally, in respect of *Mare gan guwa ojapalis*, the *Oja* does not wear head-gears like the *paggri* but wraps a *gamosa* on his head. The *Palis* wear white *jamas* around their waist and tie a coloured and flowery *Gamosa* tightening their waist and also take a flowery *fali* or *chadar* placing on the neck. They generally wear white vest without a shirt. The Rabha weavers with the help of their traditional handlooms, which also reflects the expertise of the Rabha weavers, weave these coloured and flowery falis or chadars. This reflects that, the women of the Rabha traditional society are expert in weaving and spinning from the early times. The dances which are performed by the *Rabha Ojapalis* are also recognised as a revelation of their unique culture with full of different tribal elements.

In the opinion of Prafulla Datta Goswami, regarding *Suknanni Ojapali*, “The *Oja*’s dress is not formal as that of the *Biyah* type. He has a *Paggri* on his head, a long *Panjabi* and a *dhoti*. The *Palis* also have *paggris* on their heads. They may have a *Chadar* or *Gamosa* towel hanging from their shoulders. In southern Kamrup, I have seen among Rabha tribals an *Oja* with a *genji* on top and a *ghagra* from his waist. The *Palis* had just *genjis* and *dhutis*.” (Goswami:1994:38).

Therefore, as a concluding remark, we may mention that, in the Mare puja observed by the traditional Rabha folks, the chief goddess is known as goddess
Padma or Bishahari. Among the Rabhas, the goddess Bishahari is also popularly known as Barmani. In the observation of the Mare puja by the Rabhas, the Ojapali sing songs and recite verses which are composed by the unknown natural poets and secluded votery of goddess Bishahari. At present, the Ojapali of Rabha Mare puja also sings songs and recite verses composed by the other Manasa poets like Dugavar and Narayandeva. It is observed that, the manners or customs of the worship, different rites and rituals related with the worship and various songs of the Mare puja observed by the Rabhas are distinctly different with that of Mare puja observed by the non Rabha people of Assam. In the Mare puja, the female performs Deodhani nac only. There is no tradition of Dinapali and Deodha (male shamanistic dancer) performances in the Mare puja observed by the Rabhas. The tradition of erecting Maju in the Mare puja is not found among the non-Rabha people of Assam other than the Rabhas. The dresses and ornaments of the Rabha Ojapalis are also very simple and not common with other forms of Ojapalis of Assam.