CHAPTER-II

The cult of Manasa among the Rabhas

The people who have been residing in Assam since ages are mainly of Mongoloid race. All such groups of hilly people have their own language social rituals and internal governance. The ancient Pragjyotishpur and Kamrup were the old names of Asom or Assam. Mahiranga Danava, the oldest king of Kamrupa was a Mongolian and was also known as Kirata or Mlechha, and Ghatat Kirata followed him and Narakasura as a king of Pragjyotishpur, came after him. At that time, the most of the population of Pragjyotishpur were Kirata or Mlechha. During the time Naraka and Bhagadatta, the land had been exposed to Aryan Hinduism. According to historians, Shakti Puja (Nari and Devi Puja) of Hinduism was transmitted, in fact, from the non-Aryans, i.e. the tribals. Kamakhya Devi of Nilachal hill (Guwahati) and Tamreswari or Kechaikhaiti Gosani of Tamreswari Temple of Sadia, etc. are the examples of such female goddesses.

When we concentrate our mind to discuss the religious ideas and practices of the tribes, we find that it is almost inseparable from the ingredients of folk-etymology, folklore, folk-literature, folk theatre, etc. Folk songs also have a significant and great role in tribal folk religion. In the light of these aspects, we may say that, religious beliefs among the different tribes living in Assam have influenced Hinduism to a great extent. Many tribal groups of Assam have inclined towards the Assamese Hindu customs and traditions in every respect through the process of assimilation, acculturation and the process of Sanskritisation. Consequently, the tribal features of these tribal groups like Bodos, Rabhas, and Garos etc. have made inroads into the broader Assamese Hindu society in the field of religion and customs. The historical background of Assam is mainly responsible for such type of development in respect of process of assimilation and mutual exchange among the people of different ethnic groups of the state. Moreover, the
great Neo-Vaishnavaite movement under the leadership of Saint Sankaradeva and his disciples and followers in the 15th and 16th centuries had influenced all the communities in the land in such a manner that resulted in a kind of synthesis among them (Bora:2008:83)

As a major tribal group of Assam, Rabhas are also having their own folk deities with their own religious, beliefs and customs from the very early period. They have their own customs and traditions for worshipping these deities, which also bear the characteristics of their variations depending upon their sub-groups known as barais. However, the religious beliefs and practices of the Rabhas living in Assam are based on their traditional spiritual beliefs. Endles opines about their religious faith: *the general type of the Rabha religion is distinctly animistic but the one or two of the higher subdivisions especially the ‘Patis’ are said to show a leaning towards Hinduism of the ‘Sakta’ form.* (Endle:1975:85)

The philosophy behind almost all the religions rests on the idea of creation of creatures and all the living and non-living things. The religious idea of the Rabhas was also brought about through the faiths relating to that creation of creatures. They believed that, the first creation was the crab and bringing about the mud from waterlogged area, it created the earth. The second creation was the earthworm and the earthworm created the hills, rivers, lakes, marshes, etc. Thirdly, a tortoise was created and the earth was set up on it. (Rabha:2008: 95) The Rabhas believe that there were eighteen gods before the Earth was created. Among those, the *Rishi* was considered the oldest, most powerful and so, respectable. *Rishi*, for the Rabhas is a male deity, and also known as *Mahakal*. The Rabhas worship him in all the important social and religious ceremonies observed by them (Rabha: 1992: 65). On the other hand, historian Benudhar Sarma says that *Rishi* and *Charipak* are the main god and goddess of the Rabhas. They stay in heavens. For *Rishi*, another god *Tak Mambra*, who is not worshiped at all, controls the earth. The Rabhas believe in rebirth i.e. the belief that the soul enters a new body (human or animal) after death. They also believe in spiritualism and Optimism i.e. the tendency to expect the best
in all things or belief that god will triumph over evil in the end. They have also believe that all natural objects and phenomena such as trees, stones, the winds, river, hill etc. have souls. They never believe in the worship of non-existing objects. Before being hinduised, they were not idol-worshippers. They worship the natural things like stones, trees, etc. assuming as manifestations of the souls of their gods and goddesses, ghosts-spirits etc. All these practices are derived from the ideas of the fetishism. Fetishism is the magico-religious belief in and use of material objects held to possess supernatural value, either own or because of the presence of a spirit. A piece of stone, *Shiva linga, Tabij, Kaurie*, etc. are the examples of fetishes. Apart from these, the Rabhas believe that there is only one principal god. They do not reject the existence of many gods, goddesses, ghosts, and spirits. But, they believe that these are the creations of the supreme god, the creator (Rabha: 2008: 97). At the same time, they are the parts of the creator.

So, it is clear that, the Rabhas believe in different gods and goddesses and other supernaturals. They worship these gods and goddesses in their own way with offerings and animal sacrifices. These gods and goddesses, according to their belief live in the nature, i.e. trees, mountains, rivers, ponds and such type of other lonely places. These gods and goddesses are worshiped in the Rabha traditional society and divided in broader sense, into two types, mainly depending upon their functions. These are (a) benevolent and (b) malevolent. According to Rajen Rabha, benevolent deities are protectors of the human lives and animal kingdoms as well as controllers of different natural calamities. They are worshiped by the people for good crops, good health, and for any other such type of benevolent activities. These deities are highly respected and adored by the people. Some popular and respected benevolent deities worshiped by the Rabhas are — *Longamara, Khokchi or Baikho, Rishi Bai, Rantuk or Ghar Gosani, Mare or Bishahari*, etc. On the other hand, the malevolent deities are controller of diseases and pains. So, theses deities are motivated to destroy and do harmful acts like bringing disease, death, damage of crops and such type of other malevolent act among the people. Some of such deities are — *Marang Bai, Baima Bai, Bagra Bai, Bichayali Bai*, etc. (Bora:2008:89).
J.N. Bantho has divided the deities worshiped by the Rabhas into two sections — (a) *Rabha Bai* (Rabha deities or Rabha Deo) and (b) *Lama Bai* (Non-Rabha deities or Lema Deo). *Rabha Bai* is worshipped by fully Rabha traditional ways with *Rabha hymns*, (*Hangkrikai*). But, *Lema Bai* is worshipped by Hindu traditional ways with hymns by Aryan language. Pigs and fowls are sacrificed in the worship of *Rabha Bai*, but this is strictly prohibited in the worship of *Lema Bai*. In the worship of *Lema Bai*, goats, ducks or pigeons are sacrificed or let loose alive in the name of associated gods and goddesses. Flower offerings (*Puspa Karmani*) is not found in the traditional Rabha worship. However, this researcher found the use of floral offerings at present in the Manasa worship at Sukunia near Boko.

The worship of goddess Manasa was very popular and still continue to be so among the Rabha society in the western part of Assam. But, we cannot say when actually the cult of Manasa was introduced among the Rabhas as well as in Assam. Manasa seems to be originally a local deity worshipped by the non-Hinduised people of the province but in course of time she came to gain popularity among the upper classes of the Hindu society. As the name of goddess, Manasa does not seem to appear in the very early literature, it leads one to believe that Manasa is not a goddess with a Vedic and puranic past but assimilation from the outside. Snake worship is more widely spread and developed in more interesting forms among the various tribes of Assam, including the Rabhas. The story of Padma and Chandradhara throws an interesting light on how Aryans were forced to admit into their pantheon non Aryan deities to whom they were once inimical (Choudhury:2013:36).

**Manasa cult among the Rabhas**

Manasa puja i.e. worship of snake goddess is regarded as one of the most important and significant festival among the Rabhas. The main goddess of this puja is Manasa, the snake goddess. The goddess has various names denoting different qualities,
such as Mahamaya, Durga, Kali, Parvati, Kechaikhaiti, Barmani, Manasa, Bishahari, Nagmata etc. The worship of this goddess is known as Sarpa puja, Manasa puja, Barmani puja, Mare or Maroi puja, etc. The Rabha tribes of western Assam have worshiped Manasa as Barmani from the mediaeval times. Saktism is also more dominant in Rabha traditional society from the earlier times. The Rabhas particularly Pati Rabhas of South-east Goalpara and South-west Kamrup institute Mare puja or Maroi puja to propitiate goddess Manasa or Bishahari. Usually, there is a Mareghar (i.e. Mare than) in each Pati Rabha village where the goddess is annually worshipped. The Mare puja is primarily instituted seeking blessings against fatal diseases, natural calamities and also to allay fears from serpent during the year ahead.

The verses and songs, which are sung and recited at the time of Mare puja, are called Mare gan or Maroi Geet or Mare geet. Actually, the worship with animal sacrifices, different offerings, lamps, Dhup-Naivadyas only is called Barmani puja. On the other hand, the worship with animal sacrifices, different offerings, lamps, Dhup-Naivadyas and songs-verses, dances, music with traditional instruments, dramatic performing art forms is called Mare puja or Maroi puja. Mare puja therefore, is one of the most significant religious festivals of the Rabhas. They first worshipped Manasa as Mare in the districts of Goalpara and Kamrup particularly in the southern part of the river Brahmaputra. At present, the Manasa or Mare puja is mainly concentrated in the Rabha villages of this area where the Manasa-Thans are located. The goddess Manasa is popularly known as Marai or Maroi. The goddess is worshiped by the Rabha people to expel Mari-Marak i.e. epidemics or diseases for which the goddess is called as Marai goddess. There are so many evidences that, the Rabhas have been worshipping the goddess from the ancient time. The worship is generally held in the month of Jeth and Ahar (May-June-July). But, there are no particular fixed days to observe the puja. People perform the Mare puja as their own convenience to obtain their desired goals. Besides the Rabhas, at present Manasa is worshipped as a snake goddess mainly by the other
communities and tribes of lower Assam irrespective of caste, creed, language, religions etc.

In the Mare puja, the goddess Manasa is generally worshipped in Maju i.e. platform. Particular persons known as Maleya erect Maju. In the puja, Mare-gan or Mare geet, which is a kind of choral art form sung by Ojapali, is a must. This Mare-gan of the Rabhas of Goalpara district is not same as that of Durgavara and Narayanadeva of Mangaldoi sub-division of Darrang district. The Ojapali including Deodhani, a form of shamanistic dance, is an essential part of Mare puja or Manasa puja. The Deodhani are also most essential part of the Mare-gan. Both the Oja and Palis sing songs from the Bishahari Saga, which were prevalent among them in oral form in the past, and which are at present in the written form in the context of Manasa puja. The Deodhanis also display various dance movements with the rhythm of these songs sung by Ojapalis with the accompaniment of traditional musical instruments like Cymbal, Dhol (Drum) etc. At the time of worshipping the goddess, Deodhani acts as the medium of the deity by dancing inducing a state of trance. The Ojapalis among the Pati Rabhas generally recite the verses relating to goddess Barmani, which is also one of their oral traditional lore. They believe that the episode of Padma Purana is their own.

Though the Manasa puja is observed among the Rabhas as a community festival, it is also observed privately for fulfillment of one’s particular desire. In the puja, other deities such as Tukuria, Ai Bhagawati, Sitala, Dharma Devata, etc. along with the Bishahari i.e. Manasa are also worshiped. The Manasa puja is celebrated by the Rabhas in two ways i.e. (a) Phul Mare and (b) Gota Mare. Phul Mare is completed within one day and one night. Gota Mare is completed within three days. Apart from these, the Manasa or Mare puja, which continues for three days to seven days, is called Bhor Mare. But, already it is mentioned that, there is no fixed days and months for celebrating such type of pujas among the Rabhas. In the Manasa puja, in all the occasion, the deities are worshiped by sacrificing animals like duck, pigeon, buffalos, pigs, goats, etc. (Bordoloi:1991:130).
It is observed that in connection with the Manasa puja there is a tradition current in the tribal society of Bamunigaon area of the Kamrup district according to which, there was a Kachari King (Village chief) whose name was Bisuram Kachari, Chandra was his son who was born as a boon of Lord Bathou i.e. Siva. Chandra was a devotee of lord Siva and he had a son Lakhindar by name who married Beula. So, it is apparent from the tradition mentioned above that the tradition of singing Beula-Lakhindar lore has its origin at the Bamunigaon village of South Kamrup according to their belief. So, it can be assumed that the tradition of singing Beula-Lakhindar lore and the saga of the snake goddess continued in this area from the fairly ancient past.

South Kamrup is famous for religious rites and rituals particularly for the worship of different gods and goddesses along with the worship of goddess Manasa. So, N.C. Sarma observes that Dakhinkol (i.e. south Kamrup) is famous for the worship of Manasa or Bishahari or Sarpamata (Sarma:1987:18). In south Kamrup, Manasa puja is celebrated in Kamakhya, Garal, Mirza, Bajrapara, Rangamati, Chhaygaon, Boko, etc. In the month of Jeth-Ahar (May-June-July) Manasa puja is celebrated at Natun Jarabari, Batakuchi, Ratanpur, and Bamunigaon, Bangaon of Chhaygaon area with Brahmin preists, Ojapali and Deodhani. The Rabhas and the Bodos of Chhaygaon area also perform Maroi puja with the sacrifice of buffalo, fish, fowl, fruit and betel nut etc. Tribal people of Kulshi, Dakuapara, Ratanpur, Kalabakra, Kahua, Batakuchi, Bamunigaon, Bangaon, etc. observe Maroi puja with Ojapali, Deodhani dancing with the beating of Dhol (drum), Tal (cymbals), etc. The Ojapali songs of the tribal people are slightly different from the Suknanni Ojapali but the story is found to be same as that of Suknanni. The Bodos, and the Pati Rabhas of Bangaon Mauja in between Chhaygaon and Boko areas observe Mare puja annually during the month of jeth (May-June) collectively at Khatira (near Bamunigaon). The Ojapali known as Mare gan guwa ojapali is essential in this worship. The worship continues for three days. The worship is also held privately at village levels after completion of the worship performed publicly. The style of singing and body
movements of the *Mare gan guwa ojapali* bear similarity with that of *Mare-gan* current in South Goalpara. (Choudhury:2013:32).

In Tiwamara *than* near Kulshi also Manasa puja is observed annually with the performance of *Deodhanis*. In the tribal Manasa temple situated at Khatalpara of Bangaon, the goddess Manasa is worshipped annually which continues for seven days and seven nights. In these days Maroi puja songs are sung by the *Ojapalis* and female *Deodhani* dancers very often underwent a state of trance and in such a trance, they used to foretell the future and suggest the related remedial measures. In the Dudhkuwari *than* of Rangamati near Batorhat, Manasa puja is observed annually where the unique and main attraction of the puja is *Deodhani* dance. In the Nijeswari temple and Bagheswari *Devi Than* of Mirza, Manasa puja is observed covering for three days where almost ten to twelve *Jhakis* that is male dancers take part in the *Deodhani* dance. In this Manasa puja people generally offer goats, pigeons etc. in the name of the goddess.

It is remarkable that, in the south Kamrup area along with the Rabhas as well as with the other tribal and non tribal people, Muslims of particularly Chhaygaon area also participate in worship of goddess Manasa and sing *Ojapali*. In Jarabari area of Chhaygaon, some Muslim people started the worship of goddess Manasa and later on the Hindus also joined hands with them. The Muslims performed the Manasa puja as per their own rituals, dance and sing the songs related to Manasa as *Oja* and *Deodha*. But they do not use the traditional musical instruments like the other groups of tribal people in this context. At present Maroi puja is observed at Jarabari with *Deodhani* and they worship Manasa and Siva facing the western direction. In Batakuchi of Chhaygaon, Muslim residents started Maroi puja and worshipped goddess Manasa according to their own rituals and offered ducks, pigeons, fowls etc. and these creatures were sacrificed following *halal* as per Islamic tradition.(Chaudhry:2013:33)

In the religious belief of Pati Rabhas the goddess Manasa is not regarded as snake goddess, she is considered a goddess originated from the breath of *Anadi Gohai*
“Tini put dhianat jai       taka gohai roia chai

  Taka dekhi tej nihsare

  Tej nihsarila       Manasa kamani hoila

  Upajila gohainor dain pashe”

  (Rabha: 1987: 41)

(Meaning: His three sons have gone to meditation and Gohain looks them with wonder. He became mentally disturbed within and released a deep breath. As a result of such breathing Manasa was originated in his right direction. )

This myth in respect of birth of goddess Manasa current among the Pati Rabha is almost similar to the myth relating to birth of Manasa, which is described by the Bengali poet Jagjivan in his Manasa-Mangal verse. According to Mare gan i.e. songs of Manasa or Maroi puja of Pati Rabhas, Manasa committed suicide jumping in the burning funeral pyre of Anadi Gohain and later she was reborn as Durga in the house of Hemgiri rishi. One day the great god Siva or Mahadeva saw the fun and entertainment of a pair of goose in the lake and he was sensuously disturbed within, and released a quantity of semen on a lotus leaf. From that discharge of semen on lotus leaf sprang up a beautiful goddess with four arms and three eyes. Born out of Sivas’s mental disturbance and on a lotus leaf, she came to be known as Manasa, Padmavati or Padma. According to, Manasa poet Narayanadeva, she is known as Padmavati due to her birth on a lotus leaf. So he says as: Padmavati Padmapatre Janma Bhoila Padmavati nam thaila. However, at last in Assam and Bengal Manasa and Padmavati are regarded as the same goddess. Padmavati is the goddess of prosperity or fortune. Sree, Lakshmi and Kamala — all these three goddesses are also goddesses of fortune, for which the relation of Padmavati is very close with these three goddesses.
In such way, Bishahari or Bishahari Devi is also considered as the same with the
goddess Manasa. In Mahabharata, Bishahari is regarded as Astikmata. Manasa is again
considered as Jaguli or Jangguli Devi, Kirat Balika in Atharba Veda. It is found that,
there is a close relation of Manasa with the Vedic Devi Brahmani (Saraswati). As per
Vedic tradition, Brahmani i.e. Saraswati is the daughter of god Brahma. Apparently, in
new episode Saraswati is the wife of Brahma. From this point of view, it is clear that the
goddess of learning Saraswati is having relation with goddess Manasa. Among the Pati
Rabhas, Padmavati is known as Barmani. The term Barmani, is derived from the word
Brahmani i.e. Barmani > Brahmani. Manasa is considered as the supreme of Snake
dynasty for which she is also known as Nagmata or Nagnatorombika. There is a relation
between Manasa and Chandi. As per another legend or myth, Manasa is the step daughter
of Chandi. On the other hand, according to Sukumar Sen, in the ancient myth, it is found
that, Manasa was co-wife of Chandi. According to ancient Indian mythology, Ganga and
Manasa both are considered as supreme or goddess of Snake, and water. As per Manasa
epic Chandi and Ganga both is wife of Lord Siva. Manasa is the daughter of Siva. Sitala
was originated from the naval of Manasa for which Manasa has also relation with the
Devi Sitala. Folk god Dharma is also associated with the Manasa puja and Manasa
episode. Ultimately, such myths, legends, and beliefs are closely associated with the birth
of goddess Manasa and those are still prevalent among the folk religious beliefs and
traditions of the Rabhas. Apart from these, in the society of Pati Rabhas, the goddess
Mare or Maroi i.e. Manasa is regarded as Grihadevi (Ghar Goshani) and on the other
hand as Lakshmi Devi (Rantuk). Because in the rainy season at the time of cultivation and
in the month of Aghun at the time of paddy collection, as Grihalakshmi, pati Rabhas have
been worshipping Ghar Goshani according to their traditional way. Originally, the Pati
Rabhas observed this worship of Ghar Goshani or Griha Devi more intensively. But, in
the course of time, it is observed more extensively and widespread manner. Mixing with
the concept of Lakhar Deo or Garakhia Deo, Langa mara, Jhakua, Tukuria Hana Ghora,
Jhari Ghora, etc. the Manasa or Mare puja is developed among the Rabha people. It is
observed that in the Maroi Geets sung by ojapalis in the Mare puja, the Ghar goshani and
Ghar Devata are mentioned in various places, which reflect that in the Mare puja, Manasa or Barmani and Ghar goshani are same and inseparable.

**Barmani Puja**

One of the most important and significant religious festivals among the Rabhas are Barmani puja. Earlier it is mentioned that most probably the *Barmani* word is derived from the word *Brahmani* i.e. *Devi Padma*. There is a belief among the Rabhas that when someone expects or desires *bor* i.e. boon from the goddess Manasa with a very humble prayer, then the goddess offers the desired *bor* (boon) to the concerned person with a very simple way. For this reason, the goddess is popularly known as *Barmani* among the Rabhas from the early times. Another belief, associated with the *Barmani* is that, in the Rabha traditional society Manasa is one of the most respected and adorable goddesses for which she is considered as Barmani i.e. mostly respected and adored. However, Barmani is the another name of goddess Manasa or Bishahari whose worship is continuously prevalent among the Rabha people of the south Kamrup and Goalpara area of Assam till today. Therefore, the most adorable goddess in the Barmani puja observed by the Rabhas of Assam is Barmani that is Manasa or Bishahari (snake goddess). As per capacity of the devotee, he observes the puja depending upon his conveniences. There are different beliefs and traditional rituals associated with this puja among the Rabha people.

The rich people observe the puja extensively, but the common people observe it with simplicity and austerity. Both, individually and community wise or collectively the puja is observed. Generally, the Barmani puja is observed once in a year. In this puja, ducks, pigeons, goats etc. are sacrificed and the bloods of these animals and birds are offered to the gods and goddesses worshipped by them with their ritualistic manner. In connection with the sacrificial rituals, there is a belief current among the Rabhas that the same kind of animal must be sacrificed in the puja continuously one after another generation of the family. As for example, if a family sacrifices duck in the Barmani puja
annually, then the next generation of the same family must sacrifice the duck only in the observation of the puja. The main objectives of the Barmani puja are for safeguarding the family for the coming days from any kind of danger. This is also a belief prevailing among the Rabhas in the context of Barmani puja. There is no fixed day for observing the puja. In any fortunate or auspicious day within the year, the puja may be observed. Date of the worship may be changed as per their own conveniences without any restrictions. Someone of the Rabhas observe the puja during the time of Ag ana (carrying of first harvest) and Na-Khowa in the month of Aghun (i.e. November-December). There is another traditional belief prevailing among the Rabhas that Barmani Mao(mother) is blind for which she is also known as Kani.

In the area of western part of Goalpara district, Barmani puja is observed both individually and community wise by the Rabhas particularly of Rangdani and Maitori groups. An isolated place like forest or under the tree is selected for the worship. At first the place is cleaned by cleaning the grasses and make an alter which is prepared by elevated soil. This alter is prepared measuring five to seven feet long and one to two feet breadth covering the all sides except the front side only by bamboo fencing. The front side is kept open for the priest or deuri who perform the puja by their own rituals. This type of worship belongs to the group of Lema Bai (Lema Deo) for which the rituals, hymns, eulogy, incantations etc. are performed by Hinduised methods. A non Brahmin elderly person of the community perform the puja reciting incantations and others in the language of broken Assamese and Bengali as well as in the mixed language of Assamese and Bengali. The offerings are presented in the name of different gods and goddesses and keep them on the top of the alter separately. Along with the Barmani, the priest worships five to seven other gods and goddesses in the puja. It is remarkable that all these offerings are kept separately in the small Dona made of from the outer cover (bark) of banana tree. The offerings are very simple and natural in nature. Those are rice, basil leaf, peeled banana, dubari i.e. a kind of bent grass, etc. No flowers and vermilion are used and offered in the Barmani puja observed in the area.
Animal sacrifice is done by the deuri (priest) in front of the alter in a ritualistic manner. As the puja belong to Lama Bai group, so only duck, pigeon and goat are sacrificed or let loose alive in the name of the goddess as well as in the name of the god Dharma. The first pair of pigeon let loose in this manner is called dharma para i.e. pigeon of the god Dharma. The devotees offer these animals and birds for sacrifice in the worship for fulfilling particular wishes. Before performing sacrifice, the priest recites particular incantations and utters the name of the donor with his desired wishes seeking grace from the goddess. The sacrifice is performed by a particular kind of sacrificial chopper and the blood of sacrificed i.e. beheaded animals and birds are kept and offered to the goddess and also kept separately for other traditional rituals like to use in the preparation of community feast followed by the worship. It is observed that, till the day of worship, no member of the particular family or the community who organize the puja, take non-vegetarian food with oil, spices etc. The worship is observed in a very sacred manner from the beginning to the end. No traditional rice bear is used as offerings in the worship.

After completion of the puja, the priest closes the open side of the alter by bamboo fencing so that no animal can enter the area to damage it. But it is completely a temporary arrangement. The worship is followed by a community feast for the devotees and other local people. The feast is prepared generally in the house of the village head or in the house of the family who arranges the worship. The food items are cooked, without using oil and any spices. The meat and blood of the sacrificed birds and animals are used in the preparation. Before taking the meal, the local people or the devotees drink traditional rice beer sitting together and also maintaining their own traditional rituals. In this occasion, the men and women sit separately and they wear their own traditional dresses.
Different Manifestation of Manasa among the Rabhas:

In the Rabha folk society, Manasa is known with different names from the early times. These are prevalent among them through the process of oral and written traditions. These different names also reflect the different characteristics of the manifestations of the goddess Manasa. The different names i.e. manifestations of Manasa prevalent in the religious belief of Rabhas are mentioned below.

**Padma or Padmavati:** Born out of Lord Siva’s mental disturbance and on a lotus leaf, Manasa came to be known as Padma or Padmavati. She is not naturally born from the mother’s womb. All the Assamese Manasa poets used the name to denote the goddess Manasa in their writings. As a goddess of poison remover, Padmavati occupies an important and significant place in the Jainism also. It is found that, Padmavati has also relationship with the *Janguli Tara* of Mahajan sect of Buddhism. In the *Mayawanti Bishahari*, the Rabha Manasa text, the reference of goddess Padmawati is found more vividly and elaborately.

**Bishahari:** Who destroy or remove poison (venom) is regarded as Bishahari i.e. poison remover. The name of Bishahari is widely prevalent from the early times among the Rabhas as well as other tribal and non tribal people of lower Assam in the context of Manasa puja. In the different Manasa related texts, Bishahari is mentioned as a form of Manasa and regarded as the goddess of destroyer of poison or venom. In the Assamese Manasa texts also the name of goddess Bishahari is widely used by the Manasa poets.

**Maroi:** Maroi is another significant manifestation of Manasa in the context of Manasa puja. As the controller and master of *Mari-Marak* i.e. diseases and epidemics,
the goddess is known as Maroi among the Rabha people. In the particular areas of lower Assam, especially among the Rabhas, the worship of Maroi is called as Mare puja or Marai puja. In south India, the *Devi Marma* or *Mari Amma* is known as the goddess of Cholera and such type of other infectious diseases. It is observed that, there is a close similarity between the two goddesses in the context of their origin, nature and activities. The Bodos of Assam also call their *Nag puja* as Maroi puja for which the word Maroi may be associated with them in connection with the origin of the word.

**Kani:** One day Vasuki, the king of snakes sent Manasa to her father Siva’s place, where she had the misfortune of meeting her step-mother Chandi. Chandi out of petty jealousy and anger gave her some blows and blinded one of her eyes with strokes of her bangles for which she is known as *Kani*, which means blind of one eye among the common people. This myth is more popular and widely prevalent among the Rabhas of Assam. In the Manasa epic, Chandradhara rebuked the goddess Manasa using the term *Kani*.

**Barmani:** Manasa is also known as Barmani, which reveals that she is regarded as very respectable goddess. *Bar* according to the Rabhamese speaking people is big and *mani* is having respectability. Hence, the goddess commanding very high respect is Barmani. Of course, there are other interpretations regarding this etymology, which says that the name is derived from Brahmani in line with some Manasa poets who have called her as Brahmani.

**Totla:** Sometimes Manasa is mentioned as Totla. The Manasa poet used this word to denote Padma in the Manasa epic. Tara is considered an important goddess of *Mahayana sect* of Buddhism. Tara is also known as *Tuttora*. So, some want to say that,
the word Totla may be originated from the word Tuttora in the context of goddess Manasa.

**Nagmata:** Manasa is popularly known as *Nagmata* among the Rabhas along with the others. Manasa poet Narayandeva also mentions Manasa as *Nagmata* in his verses. Manasa is worshipped as a snake goddess, as a *Nagkanya* i.e. snake princess as master of snake dynasty and also regarded as mother of sage Astika. The sage Astika saved the serpent race from the sacrificial fire instituted by king Janmejaya for which the goddess Manasa is popularly known as *Nagmata* among the people.

**Bengkhaiti:** Folk society of the Rabhas along with others used the name *Bengkhaiti* to denote goddess Manasa. Since, Manasa is snake goddess and so *beng* i.e. frog is favourite food for her. For this reason Manasa is known as *Beng khaiti* i.e. *beng* or frog eater. In the Manasa epic, Chandradhara used this term to insult the goddess Manasa due to his enmity with her.

Apart from these, goddess Manasa is also known as *Jogat-gouri, Bahura, and Dhemena Bhotari* etc. among the people of lower Assam in the different contexts in connection with the Manasa epic still prevalent among them.

**Manasa Poets and related texts:**

In Assam the worship of Manasa is prevalent in the lower part of Assam particularly in the districts of Goalpara and Kamrup with the sub-division of Mangaldoi in the district of Darrang. Sculptural remains indicate that some sort of Snake-Goddess was worshipped in Assam from about the ninth or tenth century. But during that period
the goddess was not so popular and she did not come to acquire prominence among the people of these areas. But, the sixteenth-century poets like Narayandeva, Durgavara and Mankar composed different Kavyas and hymns in praise of the Goddess Manasa for which these poets are known as Manasa Poets. These are the three chief Manasa poets of Assam, whose songs are sung at the time of the Manasa worship. Mankar seems to be the first Assamese Manasa poet. Mankar, Durgavara and Narayandeva composed a good number of songs in praise of the goddess Manasa. Their verses are known respectively as Mankari, Durgavari and Suknanni. In the manuscripts of Narayandeva’s work, three other names ‘Janakinatha’, ‘Raghunatha’ and ‘Candrapati’ are found. These are probably names of contemporary minor poetss who joined hands with Narayandeva or of letter ones who interpolated their own verses into the work. (Neog:1984:48). This shows that by the time of the sixteenth century the worship of Manasa became popular in Kamrupa due to their Manasa Kavyas and hymns in the context of praising Manasa as a goddess.

In the verses of Manasa Kavya of Mankar, details about the life and works of goddesss Manasa are not reflected. Mankar only describes the aspects of Shristi Tattwa, Har-Parvatir Bibah and Padmar Janma Khanda in this context. His language in these verses is of a popular caste and represents the tongue of Goalpara and Kamrup at the first impact of Islamic language. The marriage rites as described by the poets conform to those of this region. (Neog:1984:52). The poet is considered as a devotee of Manasa, but he also regards and respects the Gods Narayana, Brahma, Ganga, Parvati, Kamakhya of Kamrupa and the Nagas of Patala among others. Mankar was basically a village poet and minstrel (musician), singing his own songs relating to Manasa with a pair of little cymbals in his hands. His language is simple and direct, which is an easy flow of imagination and of music. The erotic element is somewhat prominent particularly in the context of the Gandharva marriage of Hara and Gauri. On the other hand, Durgavara is a more cultured and dignified poet than Mankar. Comparatively he is also more skilled in the art of composition of verse (poesy) than Mankar and the earlier poets. In his Padma-
Purana, Durgavar pays homage to king Visvasimha the master of Kamata who probably made arrangement for the worship of goddess Manasa. The Manasa songs written by Durgavar are sung by the *Ojapali* during the worship of Manasa in Kamakhya. It is remarkable that the songs are basically tuned to a particular classical Indian *raga*, which is indicated at the top of each song. Durgavar’s description of actions, human form and natural scenes are more powerful and real than to his contemporary other poets. But, the story of Beula and Lakhindar is the main subject-matter of his writings. The text of the songs are narrative in nature, dealing with the myth connected with the snake goddess and her encounters with the merchant Chando.

Sukavi Narayanadeva is regarded as the most voluminous Manasa poet. He is claimed as own by both Assam and Bengal. His Manasa songs are prevalent in both the states. Narayanadeva is the author of the *Padma-Purana* in Assamese, dealing with the tussle between the Saiva merchant Chando or Chandradhar and the snake goddess Manasa or Padma. It is believed that Narayanadeva was a court poet of Balinarayana alias Dharmanarayana, the first king of *Darangi Rajya*, an offshoot of the Koch kingdom (early 17th century). There is a belief that it is Dharmanarayana, who instituted the worship of Manasa and of Durga in the royal household of Darangi kings. It is quite possible that as he is court-poet of Dharmanarayana, he composed his *Padma-Purana* under royal orders. His language in the verses is that of western Assam i.e. Kamrupi. Narayanadeva takes a broad canvas for his work and begins from the beginning of all things and ends triumphantly with the victory of Manasa over Chandradhara. However, the subject matter of the *Padma-purana* is the main sources of the *Manasa Kavya* composed by these three manasa poets which covers the myth and tale of the birth of goddess Manasa or Padmavati from no womb, the origin of her worship, her enmity and quarrel with the Saiva merchant Chandradhara, the life of Beula and Lakhindar, and the ultimate victory of Padma over Chandradhar.

It is earlier mentioned that the Rabhas of South-east Goalpara and south-west Kamrup institute Mare puja or Maroi puja or Bishahari or Barmani puja to propitiate
goddess Manasa. The methods and rituals of worshiping Manasa are not same with that of Manasa puja observed by the other tribal and non-tribal people of North Kamrup and Darrang district. In the Mare puja, in the context of the worship of the deity, various songs are sung by the Ojapali. The texts of these songs are narrative in nature and associated with the myths and legends as well as the tales related with the goddess Manasa and her enmity and encounter with the merchant Chando. But, it is significant that, the Mare geets sung by the Rabha Ojapali at the time of worshipping goddess Manasa are purely of their own. The text, lyrics, language of the text, methods of singing, tune etc. of these Mare geets are purely tribal in nature and these reflect directly the unique Rabha traditional as well as tribal culture. From this point of view, it is clear that the composer of this Mare geets are some unknown Rabha devotees of goddess Manasa and these are still prevailing orally among the Rabha. The words used in the Mare geet are completely a spoken Assamese called as Rabhamese. As for example, few lines from the traditional Mare geet are mentioned below.

“Sait khang mami apuner matha khang |
Jadi saitok larang mami paran haruang. ||”
(Meaning: Never I tell a lie and if I tell a lie, then I shall die.)

Again

“Ghar Goshani kate suta Gohain jhinai
Hen samay jai Narad bera bhonglai chai” (Rabha, P.:1987:154)
(Meaning: At the time of spinning and knitting by the Ghar Goshani and Gohain, Narada peeps through a hole of the wall.)

On the other hand, the Mare geet sung by the upper caste people of North Kamrup and Darrang district in connection with the worship of goddess Manasa are – Suknanni
Geet or Durgavari Geet which are quite different with that of Rabhas. The verses, which are composed by Narayandeva are known as of Suknanni Geets and the ones composed by the Durgavar are known as Durgavari Geets. It is observed that the Suknanni Geet and Durgavari Geet, are composed by the poets under the royal patronage, for which its texts, lyrics, tunes and methods of singing do not reflect the traditional tribal nature like Maroi or Mare Geets of the Rabhas. Therefore, the performing art form i.e. Ojapali who sings the Mare Geet and Deodhanis who perform dances in a semi-dramatic performane in the context of Mare puja also reflect the variations among the Rabhas and other tribes and non-tribal people of Assam. Though, such variations are found, in the worship of Manasa by them, yet it is clear that Manasa is the chief goddess whom they worship in the different forms like Manasa, Padma, Bishahari, Barmani etc.

We have already found such variations and differences in the case of the Mare or Maroi geets performed by the Rabhas and other non-Rabha people in connection with the worship of goddess Manasa. The verses and songs composed by the different Manasa poets also obviously reflect certain variations in this context due to different socio-economic and socio-cultural influences of the heterogeneous people of lower part of Assam in the early days. But, the main and original myths, legends and tales are found to be same in all kinds of Mare Geets which are prevalent among them from the early days till today. The different parts and episodes of the Mare Geets from the beginning to end are – Guru Bandana, Sristi Patoni, Padmavatir Janma, Bibhah Bichhed, Astic Munir Janma, Jalomolor Pora puja grahan, Chand Sadagarar Lagat Bibad, Beula-Lakhindarar Janma-Bibah, Sati Beular Devapuri Jatra, Lakhindarar punar Jiban labh, Chandor pora puja grahan, Beula-Lakhindarar Swarga gaman etc. In all these episodes of Manasa epic, the original myths, legends and tales are found to be similar to the compositions of Manasa songs and verses by the different Manasa poets with minor variations. But, in the case of Marai Geets of the Rabhas, besides these original episodes, other additional episodes are also composed, which are of their own. Example of such additional episodes is Sristi Patoni Khanda where the traditional rites and rituals about the social worship
performed by the Rabha tribes, their composite national culture, different myths, legends and tales associated with the various gods and goddesses worshipped by them and also the causes and methods of their worship are distinctly reflected. These aspects are not found in the writings of Manasa Poets like Durgavar and Narayandeva. In the Padmavati composed by Narayandeva and Manasa Purana by Durgavara, not all these aspects are reflected. For example, the ‘Ghar Goshanir puja, Lakhar Deo puja, Langa puja, etc. which are related to the traditional Rabha culture are not found in the writings of other Manasa poets. Apart from these, some traditional folk beliefs, values as well as myths, legends, tales etc., which are prevalent among the Rabhas are found nowhere but in the Mare Geets only. Such examples are –

1) Pakhi-Pakhinir Biya
2) Gohainor Nangal Sristi
3) Mul Gharar Dakhin Berot Rokha Phuta
4) Biyoi-Biyoni Bondha
5) Kawriay Shubha-Shubhor Batori Janowa
6) Sapor Nej Khora Huar Karon
7) Baghor Abhisap
8) Gorokhia, Halwa Aru Rowanik Diya Abhisap
9) Bhumurar Mur Sonali Hua, etc.

These are still prevalent among the Rabha society in connection with the worship of goddess Manasa from the early days reflecting their originality and uniqueness as well as reflecting their cultural identity.

Mayavanti Bishahari

Mayavanti Bishahari is the only authoritative and outstanding as well as extensive collection of Mare gan or Maroi geet of the Rabhas. Praneswar Rabha, a reknown Rabha
litterateur collected, compiled and edited the book in the year 1987. It is an important and valuable collection of traditional folk songs based on the myths, legends and tales of Goddess Manasa, her enmity and violent dispute with Chando Sadagor and tale of sati Beula. These songs are sung by the Ojapali at Mare puja performed by the Rabhas particularly of South Goalpara tribal areas. Earlier, these songs were scattered among the Rabha people of Rabha dominated areas in the form of oral literature. These songs are also closely associated with the performing art form of Ojapali and Deodhani regarding the worship of goddess Manasa by the Rabhas. Therefore, this compiled work of Mare Geets is considered as a valuable asset of traditional and unique culture of the Rabhas.

The Mare Geets compiled in the Mayavanti Bishahari are extensively collected by the Praneswar Rabha particularly from the Rabha populated tribal areas of south Goalpara. These songs (or Geets) are not composed by any other Manasa poets of Assam like – Mankar, Durgavar and Narayandeva. These are completely of their own oral literature. Being closely associated with the tradition of Mare puja, Praneswar Rabha collected the different elements of Mare puja from the seniors and well known Ojas of Daranggiri area of Goalpara district. He had collected more than five hundred songs during this period for his stupendous work consisting of 646 pages from different parts of south Goalpara tribal areas. These songs are traditional and oral in nature for which certain variations are found in respect of names of the minor and secondary characters from the original story, language and structure of the words, lyrics, tune and order (position in a series) of the songs etc. Except the major characters, various names are found regarding the minor and secondary characters in these songs due to different singers of different places. As for example we may mention – husband and two sons of Padma, six sons and daughters in law of Chando Sadagar, twelve ships, six sons of Bachu Sadagar, two sons of Ganga Devi etc. Since these songs are composed by unknown persons and also prevalent orally among the people, so naturally certain variations and variety regarding its language, tune and composition of words must be distinct. On the other hand, almost all the Manasa poets divided the epic into two distinct parts.
first part, the myths and legends of the gods and goddesses with their miraculous and divine powers are described. This part is known as Deva Khand or Sristi Khand. The second part is known as Nara Khand or Bonij Khand. In this part the tale of Chando Sadagar and Beula-Lakhindar are described. The myths, legends and tales described in the Mayavanti Bishahari through these Mare geets are quite different with that of other Manasa Kavyas composed by the different Manasa poets. Though this compilation is considered in the line of Panchali Kavya of Assamese literature, yet it reflects the socio-cultural life of the Rabhas living in the particular areas.

In the Mayavanti Bishahari all the Mare Geets are incuded and compiled in thirteen different parts depending upon the order of the different myths, legends and tales related with Mare puja which is observed by the Rabhas. These thirteen parts are mentioned below:

1. Sirasti Khand
2. Gohain Phuljhari Khand
3. Gohainor Biya Khand
4. Padmar Janam Khand
5. Gohain Dak Khand
6. Padmar Biya Khand
7. Chand Banij Khand
8. Lakhai Janam Khand
9. Lakhair Biya Khand
10. Lakhai Dak Khand
11. Bhel Bhani Khand
12. Not-Mandir Khand and
13. Samarani Khand

(Manasa texts are discussed in the next chapter)
Besides these texts on Manasa, there is another important book on the impact of Maroi Geets on Rabha society written by Biren Rabha in 1996. The name of the book is Maroi Geet Aru Rabha Samaj, written in the Assamese language. In the book the unique socio-cultural life of the Rabhas are highlighted through the analysis of the Maroi Geets, which are scattered among the Rabha people. The significance of worshipping certain gods and goddesses along with the associated folk beliefs in the Rabha society is the subject matter of the Book. For this purpose, the writer quotes particular Maroi Geets from the book Mayavanti Bishahari and from the common people in the form of traditional oral literature. He had also collected different materials relating to subject matter of his book from the popular and well known Ojas of Maroi Geets living in different localities of the area. In his book, Biren Rabha gives a brief description of three main pujas, which are still prevalent among the Rabha people emphasizing more on its socio-cultural aspects. These are – (1) Ghar Goshani Devir puja, (2) Lakhar Deo or Garakhia Deor puja and (3) Langa puja. Apart from these, nine folk beliefs of the Rabhas, which are not mentioned in Padmavati or Manasa-Purana, are also briefly discussed in the book.

**Sacrificial Offerings associated with the Manasa Cult among the Rabhas:**

We have already mentioned that among the Rabhas, the traditional methods of worshipping different gods and goddesses i.e. pujas are divided into two categories: (a) Rabha Bai (Rabha Deo) and (b) Lama Bai (Lama Deo). The Rabha Bai, methods of worship are completely of Rabha origin and all rites and rituals are performed with the traditional manner of the Rabhas and also with the Rabha language. Lama Bai follows the rites and rituals by Hindu ways and performs the worship by Aryan language i.e. Assamese or Rabhamese. In the different worships among the Rabhas, generally, domestic animals and birds are sacrificed in the name of particular gods or goddesses and
the blood of sacrificed animals or birds are offered to the deities concerned with a ritualistic manner. Therefore, sacrificial activities are unavoidable and important part of the worship performed by the Rabhas. But, in the worship of traditional gods and goddesses Puspa Karmani or offering of flowers is not done. In the Rabha Bai, pigs and fowls are sacrificed but in exception, Duck and goats are also sacrificed. On the other hand, in the worship of Lema Bai, pig and chicken are completely restricted. In such type of worship, only duck, pigeon or goat are sacrificed and sometimes instead of sacrifice, these are let loose alive in the name of gods or goddesses, which are called Dharam Dhankai in Rabha language.

According to Rabha religious beliefs, the major Lama Bais are Kali (Rup Kali, Smashan Kali, Bhadra Kali, Khelaram, Balaram etc.), Thakurani, Lakhar or Gohali Deo, Barmani or Bishahari (Maroi), Bishali, Dharam, Jhakua, Bira, Kuber, Khetor etc. Therefore, different sacrificial activities and rituals are considered as an essential part of the Manasa puja or Mare puja, or Barmani or Bishahari puja observed by the Rabha people of Assam. As a Lema Bai puja, in the worship of goddess Manasa, a pair of pigeon, goat or duck is sacrificed in front of the deities by severing the head in one stroke with a sharp chopper known as Hyter or Khorga. At the time of sacrifice the neck of the victim is kept on a particular place i.e. Korkha. After sacrificing, the blood of the sacrificed animals or birds is kept in the Tejmala, which is made of outer cover of banana plant or an earthen pot. The beheaded bodies are kept separately to use as meat for the devotees and the heads and blood are offered to the gods and goddesses for whom worship is performed.

In the Maroi puja, sacrificial rituals are closely associated with the Deodhanis. Here, the goddess is worshipped by sacrificing animals and birds as well as by dancing by the Deodhanis. In the Maroi puja, Ojapalis make the Deodhanis dance by singing Padmapurana or Mare-gan. There is a folk belief among the Rabhas that, in the early times, cowherds worshipped to the goddess Manasa by sacrificing a pair of grasshopper and birds along with the other offerings. Being satisfied with this worship, the goddess
freed their cows hidden by her in a crab hole. Therefore, in some places, during the Maroi puja the Barmani and the Gohalideo are worshipped inseparably. It is remarkable that, both in the Manasa puja and the Kali puja, before sacrificial activities a pair of pigeon or a goat is let loose by the Deodhani in the name of Dharam Devata. There are few legends among the Rabhas, which reveal that, in the ancient time human sacrifices also performed in the name of goddess Manasa. In the tale of Bandana-Chandana, it is described that, at the Hok-topola or Bai-Bhani Hill, a pair of girl child is offered to Sarpa Devata by the Rabhas who belong to Baksak barai.

From the above descriptions, it is clear that, like the Brahmanic tradition of Hinduism, Rabhas also believe the sacrificial rituals in the worship of their traditional gods and goddesses to fulfil their desired goal and aspirations. By sacrificing living animals or birds, to offer the blood and any part of the body before the worshipped deities are considered as a traditional puja rituals prevalent among the Rabhas. In the Rabha language, it is called Bai-thakai (sacrifice or immolation) and the sacrificed animal or birds are called Bolib-Budab (that which is offered to a deity). Rabhas believe that the soul of these sacrificed animals or birds go to the heaven and dwell there forever. So, self-sacrifice for the sake of their own land and race is recognized as a great job for them. Self-sacrifice is actually associated with the sect of Shakta, but it has influence upon the sect of Saiva to some extent. But the Rabhas are belonging to both the sect for which this tradition is prevalent among them.

**Performing Art Forms Associated with Manasa Cult Among the Rabhas:**

Performing folk art is one of the most important and significant field of folklore which consists of songs, dances, drama etc. The various performing art forms generally performed in connection with the different rites and rituals, fairs and festivals or public celebrations. The chief objectives of these performing art forms are to interact between the performers and the audiences, in the context of different traditional celebrations.
Through the medium of music, dance and acting, the performers express the main purpose of the celebrations and communicate with the audiences artistically and in addition to that, giving entertainment to them. Performing art forms consist of songs (music), dance and drama. But songs and dance is inseparable and drama includes both song and dance.

In the light of these aspects, the performing art form is closely associated with the Manasa cult among the Rabhas. In the worship of Manasa or Barmani or Bishahari, the performing art forms of *Mare gan* or *Maroi Geet, Ojapali* and *Deodhani* play a most significant and vital role. In the worship of goddess Manasa, both the *Oja* and *Palis* sing *Maroi geets* from Bishahari *saga* prevalent among the Rabhas of Assam. The *Deodhanis* also perform different dance movements in accordance with the songs sung by the *Ojapalis* describing various myths, legends and tales associated with the Manasa epic. In this performing art form in the context of Manasa puja different socio-cultural aspects of Rabha society are vividly reflected.

Generally, the performing folk art *Ojapali* is of two types – (a) *Biyah* and (b) *Suknanni* Ojapali. But, various other sub-divisions of *Oja pali* are also found in the context of these two broad categories. *Biyah Ojapali* sings and recites the verses from the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*. On the other hand, *Suknanni Ojapali* sings and recites as well as dances in accompaniment to the verses composed by *Narayandeva* (Sukavi Narayan Deva). The *Suknanni* type of *Ojapali* is closely associated with the worship of the snake goddess Manasa. As a performing art form, the *Ojapali* performers may be divided as given below:

**Oja:** *Oja* is the leader of *Ojapali* troup. As per his directions, commands and control, *Palis* and *Daina palis* perform songs and dances in the Manasa puja. *Oja* must be expert in music, dance and semi acting with the knowledge of *Raga, Tala*, etc. About the quality of an expert *Oja* in Manasa *Kabya*, it is mentioned –

“*Hate mudra mukhe pada pawe dhare tal*”
Moyur sadrisha nace sei oja bhal. ||’

(Meaning: The Oja who performs different mudras i.e. postures with his hands and simultaneously sings songs and dances like a peacock, is considered to be an efficient Oja.)

Pali: The Palis are main assistants of the Oja. Without the help and assistance of Palis, the Oja cannot perform his role in the worship. The Oja leads the chorus while the Palis dance, play small cymbals and sing narratives from the Manasa epic. Their dance forms bear certain aspects of Indian Ragas and classical dances like hasta, gati, mudra, asana, bhramari, etc. Like the Oja, the Palis are also expert in music, dance and acting. The Palis are divided into two types – (a) Dainapali and (b) Pali. The Dainapali is the principal assistant of the Oja and the Palis additionally support the Oja. The number of assistants to the Oja may be three, four or more.

Deodhani: The Deodhani or Deodhai is an essential part of the Mare puja or Manasa puja. The Deodhani dance in the Manasa puja is performed in a manner similar to the Durga, Sitala and Kali puja dances. With a big vermillion mark on the forehead and the tuft of luxuriant long hair untied, a ‘deodhani’ starts her dance and by and by quickens her steps when her hair flows in all directions with the movement of the head. It is a ‘tandava’ dance performed to the (accompaniment of) quick beats of ‘Jaidhol’ (big drum) and ‘Bhortal’ (a large cymbal). (Das.:1972:134). In the worship of goddess Manasa, Deodhani performs various types of dances and acting in accordance with the theme of Maroi Geets or Mare-gan sung by the Oja palis. Apart from these, the Deodhanis play the role of Chando Sadagar, Beula-Lakhindar etc. and perform the acting and dances to describe the different tales relating to Manasa epic. In the Mare puja or Maroi puja observed by the Rabhas, the Deodhanis are most essential to perform the act
"dakat para" and "dak tola" in connection with the myths, legends and tales of Manasa. There are different types of "dak" related to Mare puja, which are –

(1) *Phul dak*
(2) *Durga dak*
(3) *Gohain dak*
(4) *Chhaya maya dak* or *chhaya dak* and
(5) *Bhardak* or *Lakhai dak*.

(*Dakat para* and *dak tola* are explained in chapter VI)

Therefore, it is observed that worship of the goddess Manasa is considered as one of the most important socio-religious festival observed by the Rabhas along with the other non-Rabha people of Assam. The worship of this goddess is also popularly known as Manasa puja, Barmani puja, Mare or Maroi puja and Sarpa puja, etc. among the Rabhas. The goddess Manasa has different manifestations among them denoting different qualities such as Padma or Padmavati, Brahmani, Bishahari, Nagmata, Maroi Devi, and Kani, etc. Different performing art forms like *Ojapali* and *Deodhani*, Manasa texts like *Mare Geets*, Beliefs and superstitions, various rites and rituals along with the sacrificial activities are associated with the worship of goddess Manasa, Bishahari, or Barmani. From the early days, as a benevolent goddess, Manasa is being worshipped by the Rabhas on a community basis or individually. Therefore, ultimately we may conclude that all these aspects, which are related to the worship of goddess Manasa among the Rabhas distinctly reflect a true picture of socio cultural life of the Rabha folks of Assam.