CHAPTER - IV

MAJOR SĀIVA CENTRES
IN THE DISTRICT OF NALBARI
CONNECTED WITH VARIOUS MYTHS, LEGENDS,
WORSHIPS, FESTIVALS AND PUBLIC CEREMONIES.

Worships and customs and rites in Śaivism have gained much popularity than other cults in Pragjyotish Kamrup, Assam.¹ The origin of Śaivism can be traced back from the pre-historic Harappa civilisation. We get evidence of the worship of equivalent Gods of Pasupati Śiva and Linga in Harappa and Mahenjodara.² According to the specialists of Indian culture the worship of Linga has been in India since very ancient times. Mentions of the term Sisnadevas are found in Rigveda.³ It may rightly be conjectured that the worship of Śiva was current in Kāmarūpa since the ancient times. It is evident from the Kālikāpurāṇa that Śaivism was earlier than Sāktism.⁴ The existence of Śaivism can be traced even during the evolution of Neo-Vaiśnnavism in Assam. It is said that Śārikaradeva himself was born by the blessings of Śiva of Gopeswar and was named as Śārikarbar.⁵ Śārikaradeva and his disciples have not shown such antagonism against Śiva as they have shown against Sākta.⁶ Śārikaradeva in many cases has equated Viṣṇu with Śiva.⁷ Śiva and Viṣṇu were worshipped equally in the Venkatesvar temple, a Vaiśnava temple in southern India till the appearance of Ramanujan.⁸ According to Farquhar, “(There is) a special community of Vaisnavas, found today in most part of south India,

⁵ Ibid. P. 29.
⁷ (i) Kirtan Ghosā Pud. 594.
(ii) Bhāgavat 8/8575.
who really adore Visnu, but recognise the equality of the Gods." The icon of HariHara (Viṣṇu and Śiva) has been recovered in Assam. According to Charles Eliot, "Visnuites don't desbelieve in Siva, but they regard him as a god of this world whereas their own deity is cosmic and universal. This concept of the inseparableness of Hari-Hara (Viṣṇu and Śiva) has been there in Assam since the ancient times.

Sāivism gained special recognition in Assam during the reign of the Ahom Kings. King Pratap Simha constructed a new Śiva temple after demolishing the old Śiva temple at Negheriting of Dergaon. Later on the Ahom Kings such as Godadhar Simha, Rudra Simha, Śiva Simha, Pramatta Simha and Rajeswar Simha etc. built a large number of Śiva temples in Assam. "Besides the Śiva temples the thāns of Burhagohain, i.e. Śiva are found almost in all the places of Assam. It has been indicated in the Kālikāpurāṇa that these are the unknown residences of Śiva. It is thus seen that though there is no Sāiva sect in Assam, the Śiva temples have assumed a special importance in Assam. Śiva temples and Burhagohain thāns are scattered throughout the district of Nalbari. Though the Vilvesvar Siva temple of Belsor is an ancient temple nevertheless the other Śiva temples were established in the early part of this century. The Śiva temples found in the district of Nalbari through the field study are shown below :

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belsor</td>
<td>Vilvesvar temple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadlā (Chamata)</td>
<td>Nadla Śiva mandira</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dingdingi (Kamarkuchi)</td>
<td>Jaypāl devālaya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbari</td>
<td>Barbari thān</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kardaitolā</td>
<td>Burhā Gohāir thān</td>
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The major Śaiva centres of the district are described as below:

4.1 VILVESVAR TEMPLE:

This temple is situated in Belsor village. It is also called Belsor temple after the name of the village. It is mentioned in "Yoginītantra" that there was a mountain named Vilvasri. It is probable that the name of the village Belsor is derived from Vilvasri. On the other hand as the idol of Śiva was found from under the birinā plant the name of Śiva has become Vilvesvar (Binnā + Isvāra). According to some people there was plenty of Bel trees in this area. Hence the name of Śiva has become Vilvesvar (Vilva + Isvāra). Otherwise it can be thought that the name Vilvesvar is derived from plenty of Bels which are found profusely in this area.

Many legends are current regarding the Vilvesvar temple of Belsor. It is told that a poor Brahmin had a cow. The cow used to pour milk over the birinā plant in the field. The cow could not be milked though she had milk. The Brahmin developed suspicion about it and tried to find out the real cause. One day he hid himself in the birinā shrubs. Suddenly he saw that the cow milked her milk on the birinā shrub. This phenomenon was observed by him for days together. Out of curiosity the Brahmin started to dig the birinā shrubs with a pick-axe. He got an idol of stone from under the earth. He tried
to bring out the idol but he could not succeed in this attempt. At last he tried to bring it out with the help of an elephant. But it sunk under the earth. At last he began to worship Lord Śiva. The idol was broken because of the use of pick-axe. Now-a-days also the broken idol is visible when the water dries up.

The Brahmin had a dream in the night. In his dream an old Brahmin told him that he was no other than Śiva Himself who was lying for such a long time without being seen. His cow had been worshipping Him by giving Him milk. So he would be saved from all his evil deeds if he informed His existence among the people. So the Brahmin started to worship Lord Śiva from the next morning with all devotion. Thus the worship of Śiva was started in this area and this tradition is still continuing today.14

Although the detailed description about the construction of the temple is not available nevertheless we can have some ideas about the construction from oral history current in this area given below.

Śasanka, the king of Gauḍa fought with Kumar Bhaskara Varmana to capture Kāmarūpa. Nāgasāṅkara or the king Nāgāksa was the descendent of the king Śasāṅka. Nāgāksa ruled over Kāmarūpa in the fourth century A.D. Pratapgarh of Tezpur was his capital.15 Having realised the power of Lord Śiva, he constructed the Vilvesvar temple and made arrangements for the worship of Lord Śiva. Hieun-Tsang, the traveller from China, wrote an account of Kāmarūpa when Kumar Bhaskar Varma ruled over Kāmarūpa upto the last part of sixth century.16 According to that description there were many temple and mathas in Kāmarūpa at that time. In that perspective it can be presumed that Vilvesvar Śiva temple was constructed before the visit of Hieun-Tsang.

The Vilvesvar temple is situated in the mouza Dharmapur. King Dharmapal ruled over Gauḍa in the ninth century A.D. He conquered Kāmarūpa and concentrated his mind for the all round development of the temples. It is also mentioned that he contributed landed property to some temples. Tradition has it that the mouza Dharmapur has been named after king Dharmapal.

It is also conjectured that Kalapahar, the general-in-chief of the king of Gauḍa destroyed some temples during the Koch regime. But king Naranarayana and his brother Chilaray, reconstructed those temples. The pond near the Vilvesvar temple is called the Dewān pukhurī (pond). This pond is probably named after Chilarai Dewan, the brother of king Naranarayana.

Pratap Simha ruled over Kāmarūpa in the beginning of seventeenth century. The pike system was introduced during his rule. The people engaged in cultivation in the lands of the temples were called pike or rayot. Hence such lands were called paikān land. During the reign of Pratap Simha it became a rule to donate Devottara and Brahmottar lands. Sīva simha reigned till the end of the seventeenth century. He did much for the uplift of temples and mathas. His successor Rajesvar Simha constructed many temples and mathas. Lakshmi Simha became the king after the demise of Rajesvar Simha. The name of Lakshmi Simha is found on the inscription of Vilvesvar temple.17

There is a Perākākat (rolled document) of Vilvesvar

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17. Copy of inscription:

"Śrī Śrī sasthi Śrī Rāja Hara-Haranāchāra-Harāripu-pramāṇa-punya Śrī Śrī Lakshmi Simha nāmākṣaya Rajadhirāja charane pradhān Śrī Śrī Vilvesvar prabardeva nandana padma madhu-mattā brahmatyanam Śrī Śrī Mallahala bangosodvaba bhikha phukonena graha nīdhi rasa chandra ganiṣa sake bhava Vilvesvara jīrṇa mathodhara bibhu-khanda grahastanam. Baisakha Śrī Śrī Lakshmi Simha bhupati mahabisha. Śrī Śrī mallahana bangosodvaba sarbāgra sunā prabāda - Śrī Śrī Lakshmisimhenā uddhārita aishya bahkhi jirnamathang susanskrit mahatma Śrī Śrī Lakshmisimhenā rājūsottam karmanā."
The kākat is in the house of prof. Rabindra Sarma of the village Gandhiā. It is found in the Perākākat that 32 people were in employment in the temple. The king had brought a Brahmin family for the astrological study in the temple. The Brahmin was called Tirthakar. It is known that the inhabitants of the village Gandhiā are his descendents. They got lands for working in the temple. The muslims were also in employment in the temple. All the employees of the temple were called Pāikāns. All the details about the duties of the employees, the festivals and celebrations and the materials etc. are found in the Perākākat. Of course so far the total recension of the inscriptions and the Perākākat of the temple has not been done.

Though it is evident that there is much landed property in the name of the village, the government has taken away much of it. Now only 25 bighās of land is in the name of the temple. The land kept for the Prasād of the temple is called Bhogdhānt land.

The Vilves'var temple is also a centre of Sākta worship. Hence, besides the daily worship Durga pūjā, Lakshmi pūjā, Shyama pūjā, Doulatsav, Sivaraṭri are celebrated in a grand manner. Four Brahmins have been employed for the worship in the temple. Though Viṣṇu, Siva, Durga are worshipped in the temple, the temple is chiefly known as Siva temple.

The main temple is concrete in structure. The main temple is down by ten feet than the manikut situated in the western side of the temple. The idol is in the main temple. There is a well on the western side of the temple. There is a link between the temple and the well below the surface. The water, milk etc. of the temple flow

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18. Copy of perākākat:

“Sri Rām 1667 Sak. Taranga rasa rasendu sāke swastisakala kalā prāllingkita kāmeswar Sri Sri Vilvesvar mahārudra padārbinda Madhubrat Srijut Tarun Duora brikhat phuknena nānābīdēh sevā bhog naibidyādināncha patrikeyang sebāita pāikeyang (1) Brahman bardeuri Nilkantha Pāthak (2) Muhimna Pāthak Śivan (3) Pāth (4) Rudra Pāthak (5) Subhak (6) Tithikar (7) Sudrasevak jāyeyang āhpar” etc.
into the well through this passage. As the structure of the main temple has sunk into the earth it remains submerged in water, hence lord Śiva is worshipped in the structure of the manikuta. There is a big tinned house at the western side of the manikuta. It is called nāmagbara. As there is a big Dobā (big drum) in the nāmagbara, it is also called Dobāghbara. At the back of the nāmagbara there is the Devīghara. In front of the courtyard of the Devīghara there is a conference hall of the size of 50 ft. breadth and 100 ft. length. But this has become a dilapidated structure due to various reasons. Recently these structures have been reconstructed and decorated. A nāmagbara has been constructed in the western side of the main temple recently. Besides such immovable property there are many vessels of gold and bell-metal and copper. There is also one stand for 120 lamps of the time of Ahom kings. There are many oxes of the temple.

There are many folk-beliefs associated with Belsor temple. It is believed that if a person decides to make an offer of a bunch of banana to lord Śiva of the Vīlvesvar temple out of whole, it is converted to a small bunch. Once the son of the Bhārākāith of the temple was implicated in a case of murder. The father of the boy prayed to Lord Śiva that if his son is released and allowed to go scot-free, he would decorate the horns of a pair of goats with gold. It is known that Lord Śiva appeared before Bhārākāith, a devotee of Lord Śiva, in a dream and told him that he had ordered the judge to release his son. Accordingly on the next day the boy was released and allowed to go scot free.

Once a thief stole the vessels of gold and hide them under a coconut tree. The next day the ox of the temple recovered the vessels by digging the earth with its horns.

Once a man was fired at 27 times but he was not hit. It is told that he called Lord Śiva while in danger.
During the Rhino operation in 1992 the soldiers camping infront of the temple saw a man riding a horse one night. When the soldiers were about to shoot him under the direction of the major, the man disappeared. Later on it came to known that the man was none but Lord Śiva because he got into the temple on the back of an ox. The next day the soldiers cleaned the outskirts of the temple, made offerings to Lord Śiva and donated a ghantā (bell) to the temple.

Though there is a huge snake in the temple, it does not harm anybody. It is believed that there is the mark of the toes of the feet of Lord Śiva on the wooden sandal worshipped in the temple. The priest sets the bhog on fire in the Bhogghar and closes the door from outside and the bhog is prepared automatically.

Regular Śiva worship has been conducted daily in Vilvesvar temple since the year 549 A.D. The Śiva worship is conducted here with much pomp and royalty on the day of Śivachaturdasi of the month of phalgun (Feb.-March). It is believed that the devotee receives the blessings of Lord Śiva if he worships the Lord with much devotion on Śivachaturdasi. Many visitors come to visit the temple on that day. Again Lord Śiva is taken to the river Burhādiāh for bath on the day of Asokāstami.

Durga pūjā is celebrated in the permanent temple of Durga of the Vilvesvar temple during autumn (Sept.-Oct.). Buffaloes are sacrificed during this celebration. Of course such sacrifices are made on the Saptami and Navami tithis. Goats, Ducks, Pigeons and sugarcane etc. are also sacrificied. There is no idol of clay in this temple. The structure of goddess Durga is erected with the help of small banana plant and costly clothes.

Ārati (evening ritual) is conducted in the evening. On the day of Bijayā Dasami Goddess Durga is immersed in the Dewan pond after making the idol circle three times around the temple.
students write "Śrī Śrī Durga devyee Namah" 108 times on a piece of paper and immerse it in the water. The people believe that Goddess Durga will make the students learned.

_Jetbuā nām_ is conducted every monday in the month of _Jeth_ (Jun.-July) in the Vilvesvār temple. Both male and female parties participate in this _nām_. The people come to participate in _nāgarā nām_ in this temple from the different parts of Nalbari district. There is a huge congregation of spectators during such occasions.

_Barātar nām_ is conducted in this temple on the 3rd day of the month of _Ahar_ (July-Aug). Thousands of men and women congregate in the temple on this day. Fruits of various kinds are kept on a _barpirā_ (stool) and after the completion of _nām_ four devotees take the _barpirā_ (stool) to the pond and turn it upside down. It is believed that a barren woman can attain motherhood after taking the fruit of _barātar nām_. The people jump into water to collect the fruits after the _barpirā_ is turned upside down in the pond. It has become a custom that the _doloi_ of the temple should tell folk-tales to the women in the afternoon on the day of _barātar nām_.

Daul festival is observed in the Vilvesvār temple during the time holy. It is held on the _purnimā titbi_ of the month of _Phalguna_ (Feb.-March). There is a small house of C.I. sheets on a heath of 6/7 feet high infront of the temple and it is decorated very nicely on this day. The idol of Lord Krisna is raised on to the heath on the eve of Daul _pūjā_. On that night a small house is made with banana leaves near that heath. A goat is tied in that banana leaf house and the house is set on fire. The young boys of the village devide themselves into two groups and engage themselves in a tug of war to take away the goat. Lastly, they enjoy a grand feast. The night prior to the Daul is called _Bahnyotsav_ (fire festival). On the last day of _Bahnyotsav_ the idol of Lord Krisna is taken in a _Dolā_ and is circled in the neighbouring
villages. The priest (Purohit), the bharali (store keeper) and the doloi along with many people follow the Dolā in a procession. When the idol of Lord Krisṇa is moved round the villages the villagers pay their homage to the god. The priest gives them the marks of phākuā (coloured powder) on their forehead. The people make their courtyards clean and sanitation it with cowdung water and invite Lord Krisṇa into their courtyards. They make offerings of gāmochā (towel) to Lord Krisṇa and offer charbat (drinks) to the followers.

The Bhatheți festival is observed on every 7th day of the month of Bobag (April-May) in the temple. Two long pieces of bamboo are decorated with clothes of many colours and are made to stand erect with the help of branches to resemble bride-groom and bride. Then a small house is made with the banana leaves and within it rice, banana and coins are kept. It may be called bamboo worship. Then the Bhatheți festival is concluded in the evening by demolishing the house of banana leaves. The Bhatheți festival is the Bobag festival or the folk festival of lower Assam. In this festival the influence of folk-custom and the spirit of celebration is more than that of traditional worship.

There were dancing women known as Devadāsī or Natis in the Vilvesvār Śiva temple. Devadāsī dances were prevalent in this temple up to 1925-30 A.D.19

4.2 BARBARI THĀN:

At the beginning of the twentieth century Barbārī thān was filled with thick jungles. This thān is situated 8 Kms. away from Nalbari on its north-east side. This place is a very old religious place of Nalbari district. There was an enormous peepal tree. The jungle

with the peepal tree and many other thorny plants was known on Barbari. Barbari was on a higher plane than the neighbouring areas. The Pagladia river is situated about half a kilometre away in its west. Though the neighbouring areas were submerged during the rainy season, Barbari remained a dry place. It is told that occasionally the wild elephants used to worship the place under the peepal tree with bananas. The natural beauty and the supernatural power of the area attracted a woman named Janaki. She began to worship under the peepal tree with the offering of naivedya, dhup and dhunā. Occasionally some women of the locality sang in praise of God along with her. Seeing this one villager of Dhamdhamama named Late Shantiram Deka constructed a temple with two pieces of C.I. sheets and started the worship of Lord Śiva. Later on Late Purna Nath Deka of Cordoitola worshipped Lord Śiva day and night at that place. He planted a Vatabriksba there and thus Barbari than became famous. Later on Late Debanath Sarma of village Barmurikona continued the worship of Lord Śiva every year with the co-operation of 10/12 families of Dhamdhamama.20 Now a concrete Śiva temple has been constructed in Barbari than. There are Basanti temple and Durga temple near the Śiva temple. Now Sri Kanak Sarma worships in this temple.

Every year Śiva worship is conducted here on the day of Śivachaturdasi. Centring this worship Sākti worship originated here. The local inhabitants such as Chandicharan Talukdar, Debananda Sarma, Senapati Mahajan, Prithuram Das etc. thought of observing Basanti pūjā. The people such as Late Bidyadutta Chakravarty, Arun Deka, Sarbesvar Sarma and Bhairav Sarma etc. encouraged them much in this regard.

The Basanti pūjā was observed in 1920 at the place where

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the *bat* tree was planted in Barbari *ṭhāṅ*. Consequently Basanti *pujā* has been being celebrated here with much pomp and royalty along with Śiva worship.

Durga *pujā* has been being celebrated since 1970 in the Basarit temple of Barbari. The Durga *pujā* and Basanti *pujā* are celebrated here for days together.21

4.3 ŚRĪ ŚRĪ JAIPAL DEVĀLAYA:

Jaypal *devālaya* is situated on the eastern side of the river Pagladiah in the village Dingdingi. According to the legends the place of the present *devālaya* was a pond at one time. Due to the earthquake and other natural calamities the pond was converted into a forest. Jaidev Sarma of Dingdingi village had a cow before about 400 years. The cow used to give milk on the *birinā* shrubs in the jungle. The owner of the cow presumed that the cow used to go to graze in the jungle. But when the cow returned it could not be milked. This phenomenon continued for some days. So one day the owner followed the cow and discovered the place where the cow gave milk. The owner was surprised to find that the cow had lifted one of its rear legs over the *birinā* shrub and gave milk. So Jaidev Sarma informed the villagers about the matter and began to dig the *birinā* shrub. Surprisingly one Śivalinga was discovered from under the *birinā* plant. Jaidev Sarma and the other villagers laid the foundation of the temple there and began to worship Lord Śiva. It is told that the temple has been named Jaipal *devālaya* after the name of Jaidev Sarma.22

Initially the villagers of Dingdingi donated six *bighās* of their land to the temple for its security and permanence. It is known that then Late Dhir Narayan Sarma Bhagawati, Late Chandradutta Sarma

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22. Informant: Sri Rajat Ch. Kalita (male, 50), Barbari, data collected on 7th April 1998.
and Sri Baikunthanath Goswami donated 47 bighās of land to the temple. But now only 13 bighās of land is left with the management committee of the temple because of internal clashes and self-centric attitude of some of the villagers. Now the temple, manikuta, pond and nāmagbāra exist on about 4 bighās of land. Some of the land of the temple have been consumed by the Pagladiah river and its dam. The present temple dates back to the period of reign of Siva Simha (1714-1744). But half of the temple sunk into the earth as a result of the earthquake in 1897. There is the mark of the trisbul of Mahadeva on the peak of the temple.

There is a Śivalinga in the temple. During the rainy season the idol remains submerged in water for 6 months and it is worshipped from outside. At other times the worship is conducted within the temple. Besides the old temple there are manikuta, nāmagbāra and bhogghara.

The worship is conducted regularly in the temple. Pilgrims come to visit the temple from far-off places. The priest and the deuri are there to conduct the worship. The main festival of the temple is Śivaratri. Men, women, young people, children and old people congregate at the temple from the morning of the day of the festival. The Śiva worship is conducted by the priest in the night. The place becomes resounded with the nāma by ladies, ojāpāli and nāgarā nām. Dramas are staged here. Fairs are also arranged on the occasion of Śivaratri.

Religious meetings are also conducted in the temple at this occasion. Here discussions are arranged on the topics such as Śaivism and its influence on the society, the origin of Śivapūja and its necessity.

On the fifth day of Bihu in the month of Bohag (April-May), Bhateli festival is celebrated in this temple every year. The young boys perform nāma on this day and a fair is held in the Devālaya.
It is known that a monk named Janaki Ballav from Mithila lived in this temple fifty years ago. Another monk named Sitaram probably from Bihar also lived in this temple. The people say that the Rāmnavami festival was celebrated in this temple in the month of Bobag at the initiative of this monk. This festival ceased to be celebrated after the departures of these two monks.23

4.4 DHAMDHAMĀ TEMPLE:

Dhamdhamā temple is situated 13 Kms. away from Nalbari in its northern side. The origin of this temple is given below. Bansiram Das along with some of his friends constructed a temple of thatched structure at the backside of Dhamdhamā High School in the year 1951. There Kavi Sarma, a resident of Dhamdhamā, setup a Śālagrām and made arrangements for the worship of Lord Śiva. But unfortunately on the very night of Śivaratri the old construction of the temple was destroyed by the storm. On the otherhand it occured to Śankar and Kalaram Das in dream that they should remove the Śālagrām from the temples and setup the idols of Śiva-Parvati and build a Śiva temple there. On the very next day Kabi Sarma was asked to remove the Śālagrām and attempts were made to build a Śiva temple there. According to a legend there was a Śiva temple established by King Phengua at that place. The land on which the temple was built was government land. Some people did reside near the temple. Hence the government demolished the houses of such people with the help of an elephant. When the elephant moved ahead with tremendous face to demolish the temple, the door of the temple was open. Instead of demolishing the temple the elephant feel on its knees infront of the door of the temple. The mabou could not make the elephant stand up inspite of repeated attempts. Lastly he had to

take back the elephant. Then attempts were made to demolish the temple with the help of Army. A surprising incident took place at that time. When the soldiers did proceed to demolish the temple many kinds of snakes appeared and were about to bite the soldiers. Consequently the army had to retreat. So, the S.D.O. (civil) assured the help of timber and C.I. sheets for the construction of a permanent temple instead of demolishing it. Consequently the temple was built properly with government assistance. Soon the idols of Śiva-Parvati were built in the temple. The general people have ultimate faith in and devotion for this Śiva temple. The Śivarātri worship is conducted here with much pomp and royalty every year. The women folk perform nāmaprasanga in different occasions.24

4.5 BURĀH GOHĀIN THĀN OF BARKHALĀ:

This place is situated in the village Barkhalā 18 to 20 Kms. away from Nalbari town in its south-east direction. This place of Śiva worship was established by Acharyya Jaybharati, a learned and pious Brahmin of Barkhala. It is said that having seen a big frog consuming a snake, Jaybharati presumed that the place had some greatness and sanctity and hence he established the temple for the worship of Lord Śiva. It is conjectured that this temple was established towards the last part of the sixteenth century. There is a manikuta and a nāmagbara here. The Burāghahāin of Barkhalā is the Śivalinga with the power of Śakti. Besides the Śivalinga there is a piece of stone which is worshipped as Durga or Parvati.

Durga pūjā and Śiva pūjā are celebrated here with much pomp and royalty. The women folk observes nāmaprasanga in different occasions. The women sing the general folksongs. The bhog is offered in this temple by the priest with the accompaniment of

recitation of *mantras*. *Kechari* (rice, banana and milk) and *Pakabhog* (khichiri, dal, rice, curry) are offered in this temple.

There are two types of worship according to the rules of scripture - regular worship and worship on special occasions. There is no system of offering *bbog* during regular worships, only *naivedya*, *dhup* and *dhunā* are offered. The special worship is of two kinds - one is the worship conducted during Śivaratri and the other is the worship conducted by people individually on special occasions. There is a big place for *yajña* near the temple. Every year the yajña is performed there with much pomp and royalty. There is a big pond close to this temple. This pond was filled with fish and tortoise before about 30/40 years. The people considered the fish and the tortoise to be of Lord Śiva and hence thought them to be sacred. Nobody, dared to steal them in fear of the curse of Lord Śiva. Once a big tortoise of this pond died. The descendants of Jaibharati burnt the body of the tortoise with much devotion.

It is customary to worship Burahgohain first before *annaprāsana*, marriage and other ceremonies. Moreover people make promises of worship in order to get rid of evils, diseases and disasters. At the beginning of public functions *naivedya*, *chāki* and *dhup* are offered to Burahgohain. It is told that many British officials conducted their trials in this temple. Now-a-days also many trials of the Barkhalā village and many other villages are conducted here.

The temple is not respected by the Hindus alone, but Muslims also respect the temple.25

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25. Informant: Sri Kusum Chandra Sarma (Male, 64), Barkhalā, data collected on 10th April 1998.