CHAPTER - 4
### CHAPTER - 4

THE RELIGIOUS CENTRES AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Page No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>RITES AND RITUALS OF THE RELIGIOUS CENTRES</td>
<td>117-122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>FAIRS AND FESTIVALS OF THE CENTRES</td>
<td>122-130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CHANGES OF THE SOCIETY AND THE RELIGIOUS CENTRES</td>
<td>131-139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.3 (i) The Act of XX, 1863, and its effect</td>
<td>134-236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.3 (ii) The problem of changes - Castism and untouchability</td>
<td>136-139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>DISPUTES OF THE CENTRES AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY</td>
<td>139-146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>ASSAM STATE ACQUISITION OF LAND BELONGING TO RELIGIOUS OR CHARITABLE</td>
<td>146-148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>INSTITUTION OF PUBLIC NATURE ACT, 1959 (ASSAM ACT IX, 1961) AND ITS EFFECT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER-4
THE RELIGIOUS CENTRES AND
SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 RITES AND RITUALS OF THE RELIGIOUS CENTRES :

The epigraphical evidences of the period offers a significant impression that the rites and rituals of Brahmanical Hinduism found a fertile ground in the religious centres of the study area. Rites and rituals were performed in a grand manner as the smoke of homa (holy fire) enveloped the sky of the temple campus. This kind of epigraphical evidences shows that the rites and rituals in the religious centres have been continuing at least from the fifth century A.D.

Ancient Assamese religious scriptures like Kalika Purana gives a long list of tirthas and mentioned about some of the tirthas like Hayagriva Madhava, and Kamakhya, and records that the tirthas followed some rites and rituals. Kalika Purana records about the naiveddya (offerings) with various ingredients, like Gandha, Puspa, Dipa, Payasa, Modaka, Gur, Dodhi, Khsir, Ghruta, Nagrang, Kusmanda, Haritaki Suvarna, Majata, Narikal etc. Yogini Tantra also refers about the temples of medieval period and the similar types of offerings.

Other rites and rituals observed in the religious centers include avahan (invitation), Sadopacara (offerings) Japa (mantra) balidan (sacrifice) anga (invocation) mudra (script) etc. These rites and rituals were performed
in the places of worship according to the classical code laid down by these ancient scriptures, however, the form of some rituals is different from temple to temple.

Hayagriva Madhava temple observes the rites and rituals according to the norms of the daily Puja-Vihdhi (norms of worship), which is dictate in the ancient Assamese text entitled Manikuta. Accordingly the daily rituals starts at early in the morning by bath (snan) of the deity and then they are clothed in a new dress. Prior to that, water is collected from Visnu Puskar, the holy pond of Madhava temple. After that the deity is placed the ritualistic Jaalmala and Dhukdhukimala (garland made of Tulsi), and starts the offerings. The deity is offered regular worship three times a day—morning, noon and evening. The daily worship is started by the homa at morning 8 a.m., than at noon 2 O’clock the deity is offered with the Bhoga consisted of vegetarian items. At evening 6 O’clock the evening worship is performed by Sandhyaratri Puja (evening worship) which is locally known as Laah. In evening worship the deity is offered with Pitha (Assamese cake) and Bhoga. In this process the deity is again placed with Jaalmala and Dhukdhukimala and starts the ritualistic proceedings with Aarati (prayer) accompanied by musical instruments like Daba, Kah, Sankha etc.

Literary evidences like Yogini Tantra revealed the fact that in evening worship, Hayagriva Madhava temple witnessed a daily performance of dance by the Nati or Nartaki (dancers) with instruments like Mridanga and Taal. This kind of references testified the existence of Devadasi dance
Being a Visnu temple, Hayagriva Madhava temple witnesses a mixture of ritualistic ideologies with the Vaishnavite shrines of Assam. For instances during the process of daily worship in the temple, recitation of Bhagavata, (Bhagavata paatha) prayer to Visnu (Visnu Sahasra naam) and stuti to Madhava (Madhava Varnan Paatha) are also initiated as a ritualistic part of the temple. Usually this kind of recitation process is familiar only with the Sattra institution or Vaishnavite shrines of Assam, So this unique features of rites and rituals of Hayagriva Madhava temple really depicts the secular ideologies in performing the rites and ritualistic activities.

Like the Hayagriva Madhava temple the Kedaresvar temple, Kamalesvar temple and Kamesvar temple also performs certain daily rites and rituals. Being the Siva temples, all of them follows the same type of code and principles. At morning the main deity of the temple, Sivalinga is given a holy bath by milk and Bilva patra, and the rituals starts by offering Bhang (opium). During the days proceeding the matured goat meat is offered as Bhoga which is made of pulses. At evening, Aarati is performed and special Bhoga made of rice pest is offered to the deities. Yogini Tantra revealed that Kedaresvar temple had the services of Nati or Nartaki to dance in the temple premises to pleased the deity. In Kedaresvar temple only the non-vegetarian offerings are made during morning hours rituals.

The Kamalesvar temple has a special feature that no rites and rituals
are taken place in the temple except the worship of the deity. But in the name of Kamalesvar the Bardeuri (head priest) performs rites in the Kedaresvar temple itself. The Kamesvar temple has also some peculiarity as far as the rites and rituals are concern. Only vegetarian items can be offered in the temple as offering. These deities are also worship three times a day.

In addition to customary daily rites and rituals, these Siva temples observes certain Tithis through a common code with specific rites and rituals. Common offerings are also made to the deities through the naiveddy (offerings) which were fixed earlier by the Ahom kings and noble through their copper-plate inscriptions.

The Ganesa temple also observes some specific rites and rituals which are directly associated with the deity. From morning 6am. to evening 8pm. the temple observes three prahara rituals. The deity is given a holy bath at morning time and offered special Prasada to the Ganesa. At noon 2 O’ clock the temple is closed for a ritual to be observed before the deity, At 8pm. in evening the door of the temple is closed by performing the Aarati by the Bardeuri of the temple.

The temple observes the Ganesa Chaturthi with a day long rituals, on that day Ganesa Bigraha is given some unique treatment according to the code of the Panchatirtha written on the scripture Manikuta. During certain festive occasions the deity of Hayagriva Madhava, Kedaresvar and Kamesvar are assembled in the Ganesa temple locally known as
Devabhavan. On these day ritualistic activities are taken place in the premises of the temple. The Ganesa temple also observes the *Ekadasis* (half moon) and *Sankranti* (last day of the month) with offerings of vegetarian *Bhoga*.

Apart from the temple institutions of Hajo, the mosque complex, Poa-Macca also observes certain rites and rituals according to the Islamic scriptures and laws. The shrine is opened in the morning by burning incense sticks and candle at the *Mazar*. The visitors used to offer *Shirni*, a kind of sweet dish, in the tomb as a mark of prayer. *Urus* is a rituals which is performed from the first day of *Magha* (tenth month of Assamese calender) till the full moon of the month. During the ritualistic activities thousands of Muslims and non-Muslims of the country assembled at Poa-Macca with great devotion, and used to take part in religious discussion. The *Khadim* and his other associates burn incense sticks and candle at the evening encircling the tomb and at night when the shrine is closed for the day, the *Mazar* is covered by clothes and opened in the morning again. Five times prayer (*Namaz*) at the adjacent mosque taken place as a part of daily rituals. Devotees assemble in the mosque at dawn to offer morning prayer known as *fazr*. In noon with certain norms of measuring their own shadow in horizontal basis they offer *zahur*. Again in the afternoon it is time for *aasr* prayer. After sunset the devotees gather to observed the rituals through *Magrib namaz*. Normally all sections of the devotees from older age to children take part in this *Magrib namaz*. The day’s rituals is completed between evening to midnight and this
ritualistic process is known as *Issa namaz*.

To perform the rites and rituals of the mosque, the authority has certain *Sevait* (officers) with specific duties. The following table highlights these duties and specific rituals of the shrine:

### Table : 4.1

**RITUALISTIC ACTIVITIES OF THE SEVAITS OF POA-MACCA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name of the Sevait</th>
<th>Duties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Khadim Palla</td>
<td>To offer <em>gilap</em> (Cover of Koran) at <em>roja sheriff</em> (<em>dargah</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Korani Palla</td>
<td>To read the Koran at the <em>dargah</em> and mosque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Randhani Palla</td>
<td>To prepare the food, <em>Shirni</em> for the <em>dargah</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Mullah Palla</td>
<td>To sacrifice the animals offered to the <em>dargah</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.2 FAIRS AND FESTIVALS OF THE CENTRES:

As a mark of observation of some *tithis* (auspicious days), the religious centres of Hajo performs few particular days as a celebrated festival. Although these festivals of the centres bears some ritualistic approach,
the people of the locality observes them as most popular religious festivals of the respective shrines. In the 17th - 18th centuries the festivals of the centres received the royal support from the Ahom kings and nobility and sometimes the kings and queen themselves took active part in more festivals of the centres. On one hand these festivals reflects the life of common people, their ideologies and on the other these exhibit the socio-cultural linkage of the religious centres and the people. A few of them are explored as follows:

(i) **Magh Bihu or Manikuta festival**:

The festival of **Magh Bihu**, also known as **Manikuta festival**, is the much celebrated one of Hayagriva Madhava temple. This festivals starts on the **Maghi Sankranti** as its starts at the last day of ninth month of Assamese calender. In the early morning the people of the locality reached the **Barahakunda**, a nearby pond of the temple to have the holy bath. Thereafter they chants the **Kirtana** and entered the Hayagriva Madhava temple and worship there. They keep themselves busy in ritualistic activities on the whole day and in evening the **Chalanta Bigraha** (movable deity) of Hayagriva Madhava, Kedaresvar and Kamesvar are assembled in **Devabhavana** of Ganesa temple. The deities are given a holy procession at the evening through out the locality.
**Bulbuli Juj:**

*Bulbuli juj* (Bulbuli-a kind of bird, juj-fight) is the most celebrated and popular game during the Manikuta festival of Hayagriva Madhava temple (Plate No.-9). The day is celebrated on the 1st day of *Maghi Sankranti*, with a day long programme. According to the oral traditions the festival was started by Ahom king Pramatta Singha soon after he constructed the *Daulagriha*. The *Bulbulis* are caught in the jungle of the hillocks and prepared them for a month for the fights. The fights are taken place between the *Bulbulis* of various *Tolas* (neighbourhoods). Day before the fights the *Bulbulis* are given an intoxicated mixture of foods made by the village expert with specific herbal leaf. Two expert person of the locality take the charge of the fight and they are locally called *Masing*. *Masings* are expert and they judge the *Bulbulis* and declared the winners and losers. The losers *Bulbulis* are given a close haircut as a mark of humiliation. The winner *Tolas* are given prizes by the temple authority. The local people enjoys and celebrate this fight in a sporting way.

**Bar-Domahi :**

The second day is observed as *Bar-Domahi* and the worshipers entered the temple and assembled there for *Hari-Kirtana* (chanting the name of God). The most significant mark of the day is the *Manikuta Utsav* in which the people irrespective of their religion and religious beliefs starts their march from the Poa-Macca to Hayagriva Madhava temple to join
the Bar-Domahifest festival (Plate No.-10). They make an assembly of religious cohesion and unity which is very uncommon in respect of other religious centres. This type of cultural assimilation has enriched the culture of Hajo at large.

(ii) **Sivaratri**:

*Sivaratri* is the main festival of Siva temple of Kedaresvar, Kamalesvar and Kamesvar. Sivaratri is celebrated on the fourteenth day of wanning fortnight, which is known as *Sivacaturdasi* in the month of *Phalguna*. In this occasion all the deities of the temples are worship with milk and *Bilva patra*. Special worship with a day long programme is taken place in these temple according to the code and procedure laid down in the *Sivapurana*. The people of the area eagerly waits for the annual celebration and use to take part in the holy festival. During the day, special *Naam Kirtana* is arranged by the people in these three temples premises. Special Puja is observed at midnight and the *Bhoga* is distributed after the ceremonial festival. On this day the devotees are allowed to worship the main deity. In Kedaresvar temple animal is sacrificed, specially goat, and the meat which is used as *Bhoga of Sivaratri* and the devotee accept the *Bhoga* with great devotion.

(iii) **Daulotsava or Fakua**:

*Daulotsava or Fakua* is celebrated in the Hayagriva Madhava temple
since the period of Ahom rule. To celebrate the festival Ahom King Pramatta Singha constructed a brick mound known as *Daulagriha* in 1750 A.D.\(^{12}\). Since then *Daulatsava* is celebrated in the temple for three days and *Chalanta Madhava* is placed on the *Daulagriha* and brought down the *Bigraha* (icon of deity) on the last day of the festivals and *Fakua* (Holi) is placed on the deity. The *Bigraha* of Hayagriva Madhava, Kedaresvar and Kamesvar temple are assembled in the temple and a holy procession is taken out with the *Chalanta Bigraha*\(^{13}\).

(iv) **Raja Daul or Ramapati Daul:**

*Raja Daul or Ramapati Daul* is observed in the Hayagriva Madhava temple for five days. It was a special arrangement which were earlier made for king Siva Singha and his wife *Bar-raja* Phuleswari. According to the tradition related with the temple, king Siva Singha along with his wife came to Hayagriva Madhava temple to witnessed the *Doulotsava* there. But due to unavoidable circumstances the queen was unable to attend the function. With the request from the king the priest and temple authority arranged an alternative day to celebrate the *Daul* festival on the day of *Sukla-Ditiya Tithi*. So this festival is called *Raja Daul* or *Ramapati Daul*.

The king vested the responsibility to celebrate this festival on one Cheniram Thakuria of village Tokradia and he had to arrange this festival in a royal manner. He was also given a land grant of 94 *bighas* of land in
return for his service\textsuperscript{14}. During the days of celebration, Govinda Madhava is offered with special \textit{Naiveddya} with special dishes made out of the offerings. \textit{Vishnu-Sahasra Naam path} is organised by the temple with \textit{Bhagavata} recitation. The \textit{Chalanta Bigraha} is brought out to have a holy procession with the service of \textit{Dhulia-Khulia, Kalia, Dar, Chatri, Chowari} etc. and given a holy bath at river Brahmaputra along with the deity of Kedaresvar and Kamesvar\textsuperscript{15}.

\textbf{(v) \textit{Asokastami}:}

It is celebrated in the month of \textit{Caitra} (last month of Assamese calendar) and special worship is observes at the temple of Hayagriva Madhava, Kedaresvar and Kamesvar. On that day the deity of Madhava, Kedaresvar and Kamesvar are moved out for a procession via \textit{Bamuntola} towards Suaikuchi for a holy bath at river Brahmaputra. One significant aspect of this festival is that, \textit{Betdhari}, the elderly Muslim person of Hajo, lead the procession of the deity with a stick in his hands and a \textit{Chatra} (umbrella). People visits the temple from all over the places on this holy occasion.

\textbf{(vi) \textit{Baruni}:}

\textit{Baruni} is also a similar kind of festival with \textit{Asokastami}. The three \textit{Bigraha} of Madhava, Kedar and Kamesvar are taken out for a holy bath at river Nayanadi near Tokradia, which is followed by some particular rituals.
(vii) **Madancatrali and Madan Bhanji**:

*Madancatrali* is observed on the month of *Caitra*. The next day of *Madancatrali* is *Madan Bhanji*. In this festival the deities of Hayagriva Madhava, Kedaresvar and Kamesvar are taken out for a procession towards the *Lakhalitra river* (Puthimari river). Prior to the procession on the bank of the river temporary *Bedis* (alter) are constructed for the three deities and placed there for a ritual. This is known as *Dalakhela* (water sports) and the devotees collects water in a pot made of goat skin for ritualistic purposes. On this festival the devotees bring out the images with full dress and ornaments and throw coloured water to each other. This ritual is mainly associated with the *Saiva* temple.

(viii) **Sarandhowa parva**:

*Sarandhowa parva* is a popular festival of Hayagriva Madhava temple. It is celebrated mainly in the month of *Caitra* and *Bohag* (last and first months of Assamese calendar). In this festival the three deities of Hayagriva Madhava, Kedaresvar and Kamesvar are taken out and give their feet a holy wash by the local people. After this holy wash the *Bigraha* (deity) is kept inside the temple *Bedi* for a long period i.e. upto the month of *Magha*. From the month of *Bohag* to *Magha* (from first month to tenth month of Assamese calendar) the deities donot move from their respective temples.
(ix) Janmastomi:

*Janmastomi* (birthday of Lord Krishna) is observed in the Hayagriva Madhava temple. On that day the temple is encircled by straw, locally known as *khonkher* and bows and arrows are kept with the straw for the defeat of evil spirit. During the whole day the temple witnesses recitation of *Kirtana* and *Bhaona utsav* relating to the birth of Lord Krishna. This recitation of *Kirtana* and *Bhaona* signifies the influence of Vaishnavism in the temple of Hayagriva Madhava.

(x) Durga Puja:

*Durga Puja* is celebrated in Kedaresvar and Kamesvar with special worship. On the day of *Bijoyadasami* special fair is taken place in these Siva temples with sacrifice of animals and birds which are prepared as *Bhoga* of Kedera (Siva). The local people of Hajo has great devotion for this age old worshiping with utmost dedication and sincerity.

Besides the festivals noted above the religious centres of Hajo observes other ceremonies like *Buddha Purnima, Ganesa Chaturthi, Sravana Purnima, Panchaparvas* (five festive day in a single month) etc. in a ritualistic approach. Although these are performed not in a grand manner its significance can not be less as other festivals of the centres.

(xi) Urus:

*Urus* is observes as a festival of Poa-Macca with certain ritualistic
activities. The festival is taken place on the 1st day of Assamese month *Magha* and lasted up to the full moon period of that month. People from all over the country irrespective of religious believes assembled in the mosque complex and they offer prayer at the *Mazar* of Giasuddin Aulia. Community *Namaz* (prayer) is taken place before the *Mazar* with certain prayer through *zikir*, by which the service of the Muslim *Pir* is recalled with great devotion. *Shirni* is distributed among them in these days. During these days community *zakat* (gift) is also taken place on which the people offers *zakat* to the needy persons. The most important significant of the *Urus* festival is the participation and cooperation of the local Hindu people. Specially they look after the well-being of the visitors who comes from distant places to visit the sacred place.

Although *Urus* is celebrated to mark the respect and devotion to Giasuddin Aulia at his *Mazar* or *dargah*, the festival also great relevance to the Poa-Macca mosque also. As a whole the people of the locality has recognised *Urus* as the most popular and celebrated festival of Poa-Macca.

Thus the fairs and festivals of the centres earned a great popularity among all sections of the society of Hajo and the temple authority receives all sorts of co-operation from the people and hence the importance and significance of these festivals are gaining popularity.
4.3 SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CHANGES OF THE SOCIETY AND THE RELIGIOUS CENTRES:

A well-organised system was created by the Ahom rulers in Assam to look after the religious centres and its endowments granted to the centres. The centres were allotted large number of assignment of different categories of men with land. Daloi was entrusted the duty to supervised the over all activities of the temple or the centres. Belongs to the Brahman caste, Daloi was selected by the Bardeuris, the head priest of the temple. Under the Daloi and Bardeuris a large number of Deuris, priest, who assisted the Bardeuris in worshipping and then the Sevaits and paiks were granted to render manual services to the centres. Thus since the Ahom rule the religious centres of Assam in general and Hajo in particular witnessed different categories of assigned service to the centres i.e. the priests, Bardeuris and Deuris, the Sevaits and the paiks, who worked jointly to serve the religious centres or the temples.

The religious centres of Hajo witnessed a drastic socio-religious changes after the annexation of Assam by the British in 1826 A.D. During the British rule lots of experiments with regards to the temples of Hajo were committed. With the British occupation of Assam a new chapter with new development began in the affairs of temples administration and all forms of control over the temples by the state were withdrawn. Initially they did not wanted to disturb the existing norms of management of the temples. The commissioner of Assam were empowered to be the supervisor of the temples and along with its grants to the temple
properties. He was also empowered to make enquiries when necessary into the revenue matters of the religious institutions. It signifies the interference of the British official into the matters of ritualistic aspects of the area. Subsequently in 1833 A.D. British East India Company passed a regulation by relaxing the states control over the institutions. Gradually the religious centres of the locality witnessed chaotic situation due to the different claimants of the temple properties. The Daloi lead the list who misappropriated the fund and properties of the temples. The then Commissioner of Assam Mr. Jenkins stood for the temple’s management and doubted the integrity of the Daloi and referred the matter to the Governor General through the ‘Sadar Board’ of revenue to reconsider the existing policy, and advocated for strict supervision and control over the institutions. He argued that the temples did not belongs to individual property and hence they should be strictly preserved and controlled as public institutions under Government. However, the court of Director did not agree with Mr. Jenkins and consequently declared that no company official should engaged themselves in the temple affairs.

By this developments the government were prohibited from interfering in the management of the temples and the administration of the temples, were left out in the hands of Daloi, who adopted a policy of misappropriation of temples property with the help of certain corrupt British official, who acted for personal benefit. The Daloi started to grab the temple lands which were earlier granted by the Ahom kings for the
betterment of the temples and its activities. The influence of the Daloi was strengthened as the lands of the temples and fisheries were settled in the name of Daloi on behalf of the temples. This developments were taken place in 1834 A.D.

Taking the advantage of the British rule the Daloi started an administration of feudal character inside the centres and slowly widened the gap between the Brahman and non-Brahman sections of the temples. The Daloi being freed from the control of any authority tried to be acted as independent and unaccountable to anybody in the matters of the religious centres. With a huge grants of land and other properties, the Hayagriva Madhava temple witnessed anomalies as the cooperation ceased between the Daloi and the Sevaits. The amount of lands of the temple can be assessed from the following table of land grant which were recognised by the British government in the case of Hayagriva Madhava temple in 1834 A.D.

Table : 4.2

LAND AREA OF HAYAGRIVA MADHAVA TEMPLE
CONFIRMED BY THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the temple</th>
<th>Lakheraj Land</th>
<th>Nisfkheraj Land</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bigha</td>
<td>Katha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayagriva Madhava Temple</td>
<td>38103</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The large plots of land mentioned in the above table slowly given permanent settlement in favour of the Bardeuris and Daloi of the temple. As a result the priests of the temple enjoyed the estates as heritable and transferable. The British recognised them as the legal owner of the temple estates, but not as a trustee. They were entitled to pay taxes to the British Government, and, moreover, the Dolai and Bardeuris enjoyed the power to enhance the revenue rates of the lands which were actually possessed by the non-Brahman Sevaits of the temple. Thus in practical nature so long they paid taxes to the British, they enjoyed the ownership rights of the lands and could dispose of it as they pleased or wished. In such a way the Sevaits who were the actual owner of the land had to sacrifice their land rights to satisfy the Daloi and the Bardeuris and, thereby developed a strain relation between them.

The strain relation between the Bardeuris and Sevaits has greatly influenced the socio-religious activities of the Sevaits and their nature of service to the temple. Their obligation to the temple and deity slowly relaxed as they became free rayats, who had to pay revenue in return of their lands they possessed. The Bardeuris also offered them Kheraj Pattadars under their internal administration and the temple witnessed a major socio-religious changes in its affairs.

4.3. i) The Act of XX, 1863 and its effect:

In 1863, the British government enacted an important legislation
regarding the religious establishment. According to the provisions of the act, the government diverted themselves from the internal matters of the temples and issued orders that the charges and control of the temples, would be place upon respective ‘trustees’ of the temple. In this juncture different categories of people like Bardeuris, and other non-Brahman Sevaits related to the temple claimed the trusteeship. The Bardeuris, the most elite and trustworthy to the British, seized the power of the ‘trustee’ and became the sole authority in the management of the temple. By the dint of this law, only the Bardeuris had the right to watch over the administration of the Hayagriva Madhava temple and, as a class, they fell within the description of zamindars, who was the recipients of land rent of the rayat\textsuperscript{20}. The Daloi was continued to be selected by the Bardeuris and thus Daloi and the Bardeuris became the supreme authority in the management of the property of the temple\textsuperscript{21}. The Government also laid down some provisions and guidelines for the Daloi as follows:

A) The Daloi would follow the customs of the temple;

B) The Daloi would make proper arrangement for daily and annual worship in smooth manner;

C) The Daloi would collect the land revenue and survey the lands, waters and hills within the temple area;

D) The Daloi would repair the temples, walls, houses which needed repair in due course, failing of which he had to pay from his own pocket as cost of reconstruction, and
E) The Daloi would carry on all kinds of temples affairs with the consultation with the Bardeuris. Thus the act of XX, 1863, left the Hayagriva Madhava temple entirely in the hands of Daloi and Bardeuris and the importance of the temple as a centre of socio-religious and socio-cultural activities had gradually diminished in greater aspects. The paiks and the Sevaits, who were assigned to the temple by the Ahom ruler to serve in different nature became free from their services and responsibilities and they merely became revenue paying cultivators under the Daloi. The temple remained related with the government only with the matters of revenue payment, although, earlier the Hayagriva Madhava temple was a state run religious centres. Thus the centres shifted from governmental organisation to a semi-governmental organisation, and the objective of the British government was to merely collects dues only. As a result of this act the Daloi became more independent and refused to be accountable to any body in the period of 19th and 20th century.

4.3. ii) The Problem of Changes-Castism and untouchability:

In the last part of 19th century and first part of 20th century, the Hayagriva Madhava temple witnessed a major socio-religious change which was taken place regarding the affairs of the temple. Due to lack of knowledge of the of British government about the temple organisation and lack of supervision and control over the organisation, the Bardeuris
Dolai formed a specific elite class belongs to the priestly section. The other non-Brahman caste who were closely connected with the service of the temple with the capacities of their assignments viz. Bhagavati, Bhandar-Kayastha, Choudhury, Mazumdar, Mena, Meteri etc. could not tolerate the new feudalistic character and absolute authority of the Bardeuris. Therefore they with other low caste Sevait like Panitola, Baricoa, Kharibhari, Hatimahut, Dhanbana etc. formed a separate group based on caste. These low caste Sevait were not given same right as with the other Sevait.

Due to rivalry between the Bardeuris and the Sevait the temple building which was maintained by the Sevait and the paiks was faced severe ruin. The Sevait and the paiks who were depended on the temples also faced many hurdles. Aggrieved at this act of negligence both the sections put forwarded allegations and counter allegations. As a result of this kind of malpractices the daily snan, homa and puja were ceased to perform even for a period of seven days altogether, and a total disorder prevailed in the temple of Hayagriva Madhava.

A significant incident took place in 1st October, 1924, which brought the question of untouchability in the Hayagriva Madhava temple for the first time publicly. One Sahadev Sarma Bhagavati along with other Sevait of the temple submitted a petition in the court of District judge Mr. R.E. Jack, Calcutta. They alleged that the Daloi Jiban Chandra Sarma, allowed some untouchable like Jelias and Keots to enter into the Bhogghar and
the temple is thereby desecrated, the deity lost its dignity and the religious rites are violated. So they urged the court to issue an injunction by prohibiting the entry of degraded Brahman, the Jelias and the Keot community.

Again on 17th October, the same petitioner brought another suit against the Jelias and Keot in the name of untouchability. However, their prayer was ignored totally by the District judge. This suit paved the way for direct confrontation among the high caste and low caste of the locality. The so-called untouchables of the locality attempted to avail the advantage of the situation with the help of Indian Independence movement. In 1927, the Namasudras of the locality distributed leaflet by arguing their entry into the temple. They argued that whereas the Buddhist and Christian can enter their respective religious centres, they also had right to do so. Consequently the question of untouchability in Hayagriva Madhava attained high publicity and gained the support of freedom fighters like Tarun Ram Phukan, Nabin Chandra Bardoloi etc.

In 1931 by another significant move the District judge issued an order allowing the Namasudras to enter the temple immediately after the daily worship is over. The Namasudras, however, was not satisfied with this order and continued their movement. They were so desperate that one Beliram Das presented a memorandum to Mahatma Gandhi, when he visited Guwahati on 13th April, 1934. However, the problem of castism and untouchability remained unanswered until India gets
independence. On 8th February, 1948 the untouchable castes like Keot, Kaivartya and Namasudras under the leadership of Chandraprabha Saikiani, president of Assam Pradesik Mahila Samiti, marched towards the Hayagriva Madhava temple. The villagers of the surrounding villages took part in the procession and crossed the all barriers put forwarded by priests of the temple and forcefully entered the temple. Thus the question of untouchability came to an end by defeating the feudalistic powers of the priestly class of the Hayagriva Madhava temple.

Thus the socio-religious changes of the society of Hajo had a remarkable influence on the religious centres of Hajo. It changed the outlook and perspective of the feudal society with a growing sentiments of assertion of racial and social identity of the down trodden society at large and the Hayagriva Madhava temple in particular. The changes brought out by the society has changed the social structure of the religious centres.

4.4 DISPUTE RELATING TO THE CENTRES AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY:

It has already been discussed that during the period of British rule the Dalois and the Bardeuris enjoyed maximum settlement of the land property of the temples, which lead to the rivalry between Brahman and non-Brahman group of the temple of Hayagriva Madhava. This kind of development was noticed by the officials of the East India Company and
made the provision for any kind of disputes of the centres which must be decided by ordinary court of law. As a result, a series of disputes or litigation between the officials of the temple was initiated in different categories of courts of justice. Mainly two types of disputes taken place in Hayagriva Madhava temple, one was disputes between the Daloi and the Sevait and another was between the Daloi and the Bardeuris. A few of this kind has been discussed as follows -

(I) **Disputes between the Daloi and the Mazumdar, 1855 :**

The first litigation of Hayagriva Madhava temple is found in 1855 A.D. between Umadutta, the Daloi and Lakhsidah, the Mazumdar (accountant) of the temple. Umadatta, the Daloi dismissed the Mazumdar, Lakhsidah, on the pretext of negligence in performing his duties, and the Mazumdar, who was not able to accept the dismissal, filed a suit in court of Sadr Amin. The court decreed that the ancestors of Lakhsidah were appointed the Mazumdar, and he was rendering his service to the temple regularly and the Daloi had no power to dismiss him from his office. The Daloi then, appealed against the order of the court of Sadr Amin, in the court of E.A. Rowlat, the then Assistant Commissioner of Kamrup. Mr. Rowlat also upheld the decree of Sadr Amin and thus the dismissed Mazumdar was reinstated by the court of law in his duties. This suit is very significant as it uphold the rights of the Sevait in the temple and the Dolai received a set back, being the supreme authority of the temple affairs.
(ii) **Disputes between Sraddhacharan Choudhury, other Sevait\textit{s} and Daloi, Suryadatta Sarma, 1905 :**

The second important litigation of the temple was initiated by one Sraddhacharan Choudhury with the help of other \textit{Sevait\textit{s}} against the existing \textit{Daloi} - Suryadatta Sarma, the son and successor of Umadatta in 1905. The suit was filed in the court of the District Judge of Assam valley Districts under the provisions of section 539 of civil procedure code. They lodged a number of complaints against the existing system of the Hayagriva Madhava temple and alleged that the system of management provides enough scope for misappropriation of temple property by the \textit{Daloi} on behalf of the \textit{Bardeurs}.

The plaintiff sought the removal of the \textit{Daloi} Suryadatta and demanded an inquiry on the income and expenditure of the temple property, and necessity of a proper management establishment\textsuperscript{29}. In support of their claims the plaintiffs produced paper of evidences of misappropriation of temple property by the \textit{Daloi}. On 13\textsuperscript{th} September, 1905 the District judge passed his decree and observed that the temple is not in a good shape which need immediate repair and the servants (\textit{Sevait\textit{s}}) of the temple was not performing their duties and also the existing management was not in good shape.

The court also directed the management authority to submit the detailed account of temple property relating to the year 1903 and 1904 in order to restore the daily and periodical rituals\textsuperscript{30}. But the \textit{Sevait\textit{s}} were
not fully satisfied with the judgement of the District judge and made an appeal from the Decree no. 518 of 1905 which was accepted in the High Court on 14th May, 1907. Accordingly the respected High Court uphold the judgement of the lower court. Again the Sevaits raised hue and cry and submitted a detailed account of income and expenditure of the temple in 1908. They also levelled new charges against the Daloi and the Bardeuris of misappropriation of temple funds.

Although the judgement of 9th November, 1908 rejected the demand of the Sevaits for removal of the Daloi, it acknowledged the necessity of new management system in the temple. Taking this advantage the Sevait groups and the Daloi prepared and submitted their draft proposal for the management system by levelling counter charges and objections to each other. The British government empowered Hem Chandra Goswami, Extra Assistant Commissioner of Tezpur, to deal with the matter. Accordingly he put forwarded an accepted proposal to the temple of Hayagriva Madhava management system. In this system the Sevaits will have a small representations and the majority of being enjoyed by the Bardeuris again. As a whole it was a moral victory for the Sevaits as they won some kind of representation in policy making and execution in the religious matters of the Hayagriva Madhava temple.
(iii) Disputes between Sahadev Bhagavati and Daloi, Jiban Chandra Sarma, 1924:

Another litigation came into existence about the religious matters of Hayagriva Madhava temple between one Sahadev Bhagavati and the Daloi-Jiban Chandra Sarma in 2nd June, 1924. The plaintiff made allegation that due to the negligence of the Daloi the daily rituals as well as the daily worship of the temple had to suffer, and as a result the Sevaits and Bardeuris effected directly both socially and economically. In this case Sahadeva Bhagavati was supported by another four Bardeuris of the temple lead by Mahidhar Sarma Bardeuri. They pleaded the government to institute an enquiry into the financial matters of Hayagriva Madhava temple. Accordingly the District judge Mr. R.E. Jack appointed one noted pleader of Calcutta High Court, Rohini Kumar Choudhury, to enquire the matter.

On 2nd September, 1924, Rohini Kumar Choudhury submitted his report and admitted some faults in the temple management system. He also reported in his report that the worship etc. were very much neglected due to the negligence of the Daloi-Jiban Chandra Sarma and he acted against the provisions of the temple. A significant aspects of this suit was that the Bardeuris of the temple stood against the arbitrary rule of the Daloi-Jiban Chandra Sarma. It was a suit of priests vs. priests for justification of duties and responsibilities.
(iv) Disputes between Sahadev Sarma, 23 others and the Daloi, Jiban Chandra Sarma, 1925:

It was a litigation between some Bardeuris and Daloi for enjoyment of priestly rights. Sahadev Sarma along with 23 other Sevaits, Taranath Dev Sarma along with 13 Bardeuris and Thaneswar Sarma along with 4 Bardeuris sought the removal of the existing Daloi and prayed for the amendment of the management scheme of the temple. The District judge in his judgement ordered to curtail the financial power of the Daloi and made provisions for better management committee with 5 elected members besides the Daloi, and 2 members to be nominated by the District Court. Out of 5 elected members of the temple 2 were brought from the Sevaits. Hence the Sevaits get their representation in the policy making body of the Hayagriva Madhava temple.

(v) Disputes between Sradhacharan Choudhury and the Daloi, 1936:

Sradhacharan Choudhury came again into the limelight when he filed another suit in the District Court against the Daloi. He demanded a Government auditor to audit the income and expenditure of the temple. Accordingly a government auditor was deputed to the temple and the Daloi submitted the accounts before the auditor. The formal report was submitted on 25th June, 1938 and declared that a lots of anomalies are found in the papers and no thorough audit was done before by the Daloi.
about the temple's income, and the cashbook of the temple was not maintained in proper way.

At this juncture one Banamali Bhattcharjee transferred the suit from Lower Court to High Court on 12th May, 1938. On 29th April, the Honourable High Court prevailed the order of the Lower Courts and existing Daloi, Jiban Chandra Sarma, was allowed to discharged his duties as Daloi of the temple till his death. By this time a drastic change in the temple affairs was witnessed when the Assam Government passed the Assam Act IX, 1961. According to this Act, Hayagriva Madhava temple received an annual grant of Rs. 28,108,91/- only.

(vi) Disputes between Sevait and Secretary Bhupesh Malakar, 1976:

Last but not least, litigation of Hayagriva Madhava temple was initiated by a few Sevait and Bardeuris against the nominated Secretary of the temple, Bhupesh Malakar. They demanded a fresh election of the Secretary as the secretaryship of Mr. Malakar was a mid term arrangement. They also brought charges of financial anomalies against the Secretary and sought his removal.

The court of the session judge, where the suit was instituted ordered the removal of Bhupesh Malakar from his post as he was found guilty. Accordingly a new Daloi was elected to the office of Daloi.

Thus the important litigation regarding the Hayagriva Madhava temple
reflects an era of socio-religious changes that took place since the administration of the British East India Company till the later part of twentieth century. This era was a kind of transit period for the temple of Hayagriva Madhava in particular and all the religious centres of Hajo in general.

4.5 ASSAM STATE ACQUISITION OF LAND BELONGING TO RELIGIOUS OR CHARITABLE INSTITUTION OF PUBLIC NATURE ACT, 1959 (ASSAM ACT, IX, 1961) AND ITS EFFECTS:

An important legislation was brought as Assam Act, IX, 1961, which was popularly known as The Assam Acquisition of Land Belonging to religious or Charitable Institution of Public Nature Act, 1959. This legislation was responsible in bringing to an end all disputes and litigation regarding the movable or immovable property of the temples of Hajo. The main aim of the act was -

A) to ensure government supervision of all religious shrines;
B) to acquire all the lands of the temple, except the compound or orchard; and
C) to frame new scheme for proper management of the temples in future.

According to the provisions of this Act all the lands of the Hayagriva Madhava temple and the others one were acquired by the Government
and subsequently settled in favour of paiks, sevaits and tenants of the area who actually possessed and tilled the plot of land. Thus all the Devottara, Dharmottara and Brahnothara land of the religious centres of Hajo were settled with the original occupants under the provisions of different Acts. Thus the lands of the centres became liable to be assessed at full rate of revenue under the Assam Land Revenue Regulations of 1886, or the Assam Revenue Reassessment Act, 1936.

Under the provisions of the Act, the Government of Assam, vide notification no. RRT 19/67/30, dated 01.03.1967 acquired land of Hayagriva Madhava temple amounting to 60,612 bighas of land and subsequently given permanent settlement to the paiks, tenants and sevaits of the temple36. As a matter of fact, this Act was a tool to recover the huge amount of dues, arrears as well as regular collection of revenue from the lands of the centres. The temples or the centres lost its classical privilege of centre for worship. The deprivation of monetary profit and powers made the Bardeuris and the Sevaits began to isolate their centre of worship and the religious centres suffered a lot due to lack of money, priests and servitors. The centres witnessed a misrule and anarchism in the affairs of temple management and the age old culture and traditions suffered a lot. Presently, by dint of this Act, the Hayagriva Madhava temple (including Kedaresvar, Kamaleswar, Kameswar and Ganesa temple) received only an annual grant of Rs. 28,108,91/- only which is a minimum grant to observe the rites, rituals, fairs, festival etc. relating to the religious
centres. It also ultimately arranged a small amount of relief and compensation for the performance of daily *Seva puja* in the temple. The responsibilities of supervision of the temples were fixed on the Managing Committee. On the other hand the State Archaeology Department was given the charge for preservation of the temples and declared them as “Ancient and Historical Monuments” under the provisions of the state government.

Thus the provisions of the Act appears that the *Zamindari* rights of the *Daloi* and the *Bardeuris* upon the properties of the temples were ceased to work. The rights granted by the British to them was finally abolished by the national government to uphold the equality before law. The former *Sevaits* communities ceased to be the *Sevaits* of the religious centres and became merely paid workers of the temples.
REFERENCES

1. *Guwahati Grant of Copper-plate*, Indrapala, V.10
2. *KP*, 18-21, 54, 67
3. *Ibid*, Chs. 52-58
4. *HM*, S. Sarma, P-5
5. *HAI*, S. Kalita, P-18
7. *Ibid*, P-18
8. *REA*, G. Adhikary, P-83
9. *HM*, S. Sarma, P-17
10. *Hajor Lokasanskriti*, (ed.) A. Sarma, P-10
11. *Ibid*, P-11
12. *PS*, (ed.) M. Neog, Plate No. 56, P-163
13. *HAI*, S. Kalita, P-49
14. *HM*, S. Sarma, P-17
15. *Ibid*, P-21
17. *HTKM*, G. Adhikary, P-139
18. *Hajor Lokasanskriti*, (ed.) A. Sarma, P-43
20. *Ibid*, P-140
22. *Ibid*, P-156
23. REA, G. Adhikary, P-77
24. Judgement of Judicial Commissioner, 9th November, 1908, Decree No. 80 of 1909, P-68
26. After returning to Gujrat Mahatma Gandhi wrote an article about the question of untouchability in Hayagriva Madhava temple in his newspaper ‘Harijan’, and conveyed that the people of the area should come forward to solve the social issue amicably. REA, G. Adhikary, Pp-80-81
28. Information collected from Late Mamat Chandra Mazumdar, Grandson of Lakhsidah Mazumdar from the Courts Certificates in possession of Late Mamat Chandra Mazumdar.
29. HTKM, G. Adhikary, P-149
30. Paper Book in Appeal from original decree no. 80 of 1909.
31. REA, G. Adhikary, P-68
32. Ibid, P-70
33. Paper Book Appeal from original Decree No. 2 of 1926, District Judge, Assam valley Districts
34. REA, G. Adhikary, P-74
35. Hayagriva Madhava Temple Registrar no. 8