CHAPTER VII

THE HARIMANDIRA

7.1 LOCATION AND GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

The Harimandira has assumed an important place among the religious institutions in the district of Nalbari. This temple was established basing on the religious belief and faith of the people of the area centering the Rāsa festival. Hence a discussion relating to the history of the construction of the temple is deemed essential.

The Harimandira is situated in the middle of Nalbari town. Before the construction of this temple the Rāsa festival was celebrated in the old local board market area in 1933 A.D. in a thatched house. In that thatched house clay idols of mythological characters were installed and the Rāsa festival was celebrated. There were difficulties in the celebration of different religious functions due to the lack of sufficient space and the temporary nature of the temple. Hence the temple had to be shifted to another place under pressure from local people. The persons under whose patronage the Harimandira was established and the tradition of Rāsa festival was started in Nalbari, were late Amar Kundu (junior engineer), late Naren Basu (veterinary assistant) and the local people such as late Gadamalla Barua, late Dandiram Mahajan, late Batiram Deka and late Kirtiram Thikadar. It may be mentioned that the Janmāstami festival had to be celebrated in the Revenue circle office of Nalbari due to the lack of a permanent temple. Hence the Government land in the west of Nalbari Girls' High school was chosen for the construction of the permanent temple. But the proposal was withdrawn owing to some practical problems and another place was chosen for the purpose. Consequently a decision was taken to construct the temple on the land of Dag no. 584.
through the attempt of late Krisnaram Medhi, Sub-Deputy Collector. A committee was formed on the 9th November, 1940 with late Devendranath Bhattacharya as the secretary. It was reconstituted in 1943 with late Harinarayan Dutta Barua as the secretary. After Dutta Barua late Dr. Girish Chandra Choudhury and late Prafulla Deka were elected as secretary and Asst. Secretary respectively. During this period the earth filling work for the temple was done. The office room of the temple was also constructed. The first temple was constructed in 1965 A.D. During the period of Dr. Choudhury, the main mandap was constructed in 1968 with the contribution of Damahuram Mahajan. The responsibility of the architecture and construction of this mandap was taken by late Isvarchandra Barua. Sri Suren Roy worked as the assistant of late Barua.

During the period of Dr. Choudhury two Kathās of land with a building was purchased in the name of the temple for Rs. 50,000/- from Prabhat Narayan Choudhury an ex-M.L.A. of Nalbari. The plan of demolition of the old temple and construction of the new temple was finished in 1973. Dr. Girish Chandra Choudhury, a good physician, the secretary of the Harimandira committee died in 1974. Suren Roy was elected secretary in-charge of the committee thereafter and was vested with the responsibility of framing the constitution of the Harimandira committee. The constitution was approved in a general meeting held on the 24th December, 1975. Sri Narayan Chandra Mahajan was elected as president of the General committee. Since then all the documents of the temple have been preserved in the temple custody. The construction work of the main temple was started in the 1975. Four bighās of land were purchased in 1977 for the expansion of the temple. Theatre parties were invited from different places of undivided district of Kamrūpa and with the profits realised from the theatre parties the newly purchased land was developed to some extent and then the construction of the new temple was started.
The plan of the construction of the *nāmaghara* attached to the main temple was finalised in 1981. So efforts were being made for collection of money by inviting theatre parties and conducting lotteries. The land adjacent to the temple was purchased from the Nalbari Municipality Board with the money thus collected. Sri Joy Deka was appointed the peon of the temple that year. The construction of the *nāmaghara* was started in 1985. This year was celebrated as the Golden Jubilee year of the *Harimandira*. Late Dr. Nripendramalla Bujar Barua, a dedicated physician and social worker remained as the long-term secretary of the temple from 1978 to the 7th January, 1986 and during his tenure many developmental works of the temple were done. Then the *Harimandira* Committee has purchased two plots of land measuring three *bigbās* one *kathā* and ten *lechās* and also three *kathās* one and half *lechās*. A permanent stage was constructed in front of the temple in 1993. Thus the area of the *Harimandira* was expanded with the passage of time and today it emerges as one of the biggest religious institutions in the district of Nalbari.

After Sri Narayan Chandra Mahajan a social worker, Sri Haricharan Pathak well known advocate was elected as the president of the General Committee of the *Harimandira* in 1987. Sri Nripendramalla Bujarbarua, secretary of the Committee breathed his last in 1986 and Sri Ramen Barua, principal, Nalbari Commerce College was elected as the secretary. When he resigned in 1989, Sri Suren Roy was elected as the secretary for the period of eight years. Then Sri Nagen Deka and Sri Chandra Kalita were elected as the secretary and the president respectively. They are working as the secretary and president of the mentioned above committee till today.

We can see some temples in the area of the *Harimandira* such as the old main temple in the middle, the new *Harimandira* on its south in which the *Rāsa* festival and religious worships as well as
prayers are performed, the *nāmagbara* on the south of the new *Harimandira* and the big temple and the two storied conference hall on the south of the *nāmagbara*, the store house and the office room. The permanent stage is raised in the middle in which *ojāpālī*, *dhuliyā* and, *putulā performances* are held as well as other religious meetings are conducted.¹

### 7.2 SOCIAL ORGANISATION:

Social organisation is the organisation of society. Society is a vast system. It is a web of social relationships. It is the interrelationship of its constituents. The constituents of society are institutions, associations and groups. In an organised society the various-parts functions systematically.

Human beings are the part and parcel of the modern civilised society. We, not only live in, belong to and work through such organisations, but satisfy most of our desires and fulfil our aspirations through such organisations. These social organisation an active synthesis between the mutual activities of various units of society. Society has some implicit and explicit objectives for the attainment of which its parts work.

Here, in respect of the research, topic, we are concerned specially only with one aspect i.e., the impact and influence of religious institutions upon our day-to-day life. Though the modern era is the era of tremendous advancement of sophisticated scientific development and swift flow of different ideas and ideologies across the globe, it has not yet been able to unearth the religious instinct and sentiment from the core of the heart of the people. Rather natural inclination to the Almighty at any moment or at all the times has undoubtedly dominated even the great scientist also all over the World.

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The *Harimandira* may rightly be termed as social organisation of the district of Nalbari. An organisation is made by the people with a view to up bringing social cohesion, integrity, brotherhood and proper understanding. The *Harimandira* has grown into such a big social organisation due to dedication, endeavour and efforts of the people of the area irrespective of caste, religion and language. It is the centre of worship and prayer of the general people and the centre of excellence in the physical, psychological, spiritual, moral, educational, cultural and aesthetic spheres. Such an organisation has been marching forward in the path of progress.

The *Harimandira* was established in 1930 as a public prayer hall, but now the institution has emerged as an important social organisation. Although initially the need for construction of the temple was felt by the local people for the celebration of the *Rāsa* festival, only nevertheless its importances spread to the neighbouring villages even. The gradual increase in the number of visitors during the *Rāsa* festival inspired the *Harimandira* committee to build new temples. Besides the constitution of the committee is being framed and which is passed in the general meeting. The *Harimandira* Committee and the *Rasa* festival celebration committee have been formed in a democratic manner since the beginning. The names of the presidents and secretaries of the *Rāsa* festival found from the data provided by the temple committee are given below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>President</th>
<th>Secretary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>Pratap Talukdar</td>
<td>Bipin Chandra Sarma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Rabindra Narayan Choudhury</td>
<td>Jnanendramalla Bujarbarua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>Pratap Talukdar</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>do</td>
<td>Prafulla Deka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>do</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>do</td>
<td>Rabindra Narayan Choudhury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>do</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
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<td>(a) Girish Medhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Durga Singhania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>Rabindra Narayan Choudhury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Mahendra Narayan Choudhury</td>
<td>Jnanendramalla Bujarbarua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Mohanlal Jain</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>do</td>
<td>Sachibhusan Choudhury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>Sachibhusan Choudhury</td>
<td>Ramen Barua</td>
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<td>1970</td>
<td>Jnanendramalla Bujarbarua</td>
<td>Mahendra Dutta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Narayan Chandra Mahajan</td>
<td>Ramen Barua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>do</td>
<td>Rabindra Narayan Choudhury</td>
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<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>do</td>
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<td>1974</td>
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<td>do</td>
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<tr>
<td>1975</td>
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<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Sachibhusan Choudhury</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Hangamalla Barua</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Sachibhusan Choudhury</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
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<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Haricharan Pathak</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Sachibhusan Choudhury</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Haricharan Pathak</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>do</td>
<td>Banesvar Das</td>
</tr>
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<td>1984</td>
<td>Prafulla Kumar Goswami</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Binod Kr. Piparchania, D.C Nalbari</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Rajiv Jadav, D.C. Nalbari</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Prafulla Kr. Goswami</td>
<td>do</td>
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<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Prabhat Narayan Choudhury</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>not held</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Haricharan Pathak</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Prafulla Kr. Goswami</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Biren Dutta, D.C. Nalbari</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Jyotish chandra Pathak</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Prabhakar Bhuyan, D.C. Nalbari</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(a) Suren Roy</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Nagen Deka</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nagen Deka</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>do</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Dr. Chandra Talukdar</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Chandra kalita</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Mrigen Das</td>
<td>do</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[100]
Each Committee consists of a few members, whom may be termed as executive members. Similarly some a few Committees are also formed for the smooth functioning of the different activities of the temple complex. The members of the subcommittees are entrusted various duties associated with temple according to their efficiency.

The quantity of land and property of the *Harimadira* has been increasing day by day with form of donation of the general people and special contributions towards *Rāsa-Mahotsava* and other festivals as well as the profits gained from the theatrical performances held in various contexts. Besides, the temple committee gets regular income from other sources such as rents of the market complex built by the committee in the surrounding of the complex.

The meetings and conferences are held regularly in the *Harimandira* complex. Some social and religious functions and ceremonies such as marriage, *annaprasanna*, *cudākarana*, *upnayana*, death-rites are also held here. Besides *Baithakigān* i.e., *Samkīrtana* i.e., choral singing of the names of Lord Kṛṣṇa to the accompaniment of *mridanga* and smaller size cymbals and clapping of hands. Competition of the recitation of the *Śrimadbhāgavatgītā* and camps of the *Prajāpitā Brahmakumāri Isvāriya Viśvavidyālāya* and so forth are held in the Precinct of the temple complex.²

### 7.3 FESTIVAL OBSERVED IN THE HARIMANDIRA:

#### 7.3.1 FESTIVAL

Festivals are the outward expression of social behaviour. Folklorists asserted that festival is not a particular behaviour but it is a sum total of various traditional behaviours. Since a festival is more or

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² Informant: Sri Suren Roy (Male, 68), Nalbari, data collected on 16-10-98.
less associated with rites, rituals, songs, dances story telling and so forth. The tradition of the modern festivals emanated from the beliefs and magical rituals of the ancient community. William Hendson observes, "Festivals held by the primitive peoples consisted of collective magic or religious rites for propitiation of evil spirits and invocation of friendly supernatural powers, and were held on such occasions as the admission of new members to a tribe, disposal of the dead; and preparations of fisherman for the catch, hunters for the chase and warriors for battle." 

Festival involve a great expenditure of energy by the entire community. Positively it can provide occasions for redistribution of wealth while negatively, it may hurt the economy by taking people away from their day to day work." The central function of the festival seems to be to give occasion for men to rejoice together to interact in an ambience of acceptance and conviviality. Also festivals provide occasion and forum for positive group interaction, i.e., occasion to come together irrespective of their caste and creed. The repetition of such occasions creates bond of solidarity and opportunity to identify each other, know each other as a member of a community. To promote patriotism, to generate the intense feelings of devotion to the democratic or socialistic way of life in the form of rulers birthday, independence day, state festivals have long been used for political purposes.

The ritualistic and ceremonial functions of the festival are of following types, i.e., to bring prosperity or rain, to fortell and influence the course of events of the coming year, to honour someone etc. Thus, the festival is a prime device for promoting social cohesion, for integrating individuals into a society or group and maintaining them as members through shared, recurrent, positively reinforcing performance.

Festivals may be classified into the following sub-division, e.g,
i) Seasonal festivals
ii) Calenderic festivals
iii) Limited participation festivals and
iv) Sacramental festivals or festivals associated with the ites of the life-cycle.

7.3.2 JANMĀSTAMI FESTIVAL:

Janmāstami festival may be regarded as seasonal festival. Janmāstami is the birth anniversary of Lord Krṣṇa. Generally this festival is observed in almost all the nāmagharas and satras of Nalbari area. This festival is celebrated on the eight lunar day in the dark half of the month of Bhāda (August-September). But in other parts of India this festival is observed on the eight lunar day of the dark-half of the Srāvana (July-August). "The ancient literary works state that on the Janmāstami, a devotee worshiped Krishna and also devaki, Vasudeva, Balarama, Nanda, Yosoda and the cows. The Agni-purana and the Brahma-purana mention that a person who observed fast on this occasion, become the father of many good sons and attained salvation after death."

On that day, nāma-prasaṅgas are held in the religious centres of Nalbari area. The women folk read religious scriptures. The Janmāstami festival is celebrated in the Harimandira. A cultural procession is organised in the morning of that day. This festival is followed by Bālak Krṣṇa competition. The boys and girls of the whole of the district participate in this competition attaining with fancy dresses of Bālak-Krṣṇa. The successful participants are rewarded.

The religious conference is held in the afternoon or the day. The nāgarānām performances are also performed for the whole night. The pāṭhakas of these choral singing from different parts of the

district participate in this competition. The devotees enjoy the competition throughout the night. The female devotees perform choral singing performance by singing songs along with musical instruments and clapping of hands. One of the such song is given below as a specimen.

\begin{verbatim}
gbor andhakare sile barasile
nesuni prajara mat
pal prahari sabe nirda gaile
upajila Jagannath
bhadra masate krishnastami ye
marigal barare rat
kalmou patate gohai upajile
sugandhar lagale bati.
\end{verbatim}

i.e., nobody listens to the call of people in dark rainy of hailstones. Jagannath was born when all the guards of kanisha were asleep. The God was born on the leaves of kalmou on the day of astami tithi in the month of Bhadra. Janmāṣṭami is one of the important festivals celebrated in the Harimandira.

Pacati is another festival connected with Janmāṣṭami festival. Generally this festival is observed in the fifth day of the Janmāṣṭami festival by the women folk. The menfolk observe purificatory rites at the temple complex for sending off the unholiness due to birth of krṣṇa. On the other hand the womenfolk perform bhāona i.e., theatrical performance related to the divine sports of Lord krṣṇa. The narratives connected with the child krṣṇa evoke sentiments of affection and love as well as moral duties in the hearts of the devotee. The significance of Lord krṣṇa as the controller, creator and destroyer of the universe is also discussed.

This festival is observed in almost all the nāmgbaras and satras of Nalbari area.
Rāṣa-yāṭrā is one of the Vaiṣṇavite festivals which may be termed as seasonal festival since this festival is held fullmoon night of the month of Āghan, i.e., October-November. The festival aims to celebrate the occasion of Lord Kṛṣṇa’s amorous dalliance with the Gopis (milk-maids). Besides the Harimandira, this festival is also observed in different Vaiṣṇavite nāmaghara, satras and some important public places of Nalbari areas. Although the main festival is observed on the full moon night of the month of Āghan in actual practice, it continues for seven to fifteen days according to the festive mood and organizing Zeal of the public. The festival generally continues for eleven days at the Harimandira, while in other religious institutions like Dāmodardhām satra, Rāmpur satra etc. it ends on the third or the fifth day. The festival at a public place is centred round the worship of Lord kṛṣṇa and Radha. The description of Rāṣa-yāṭrā is found in the Book X of the Bhāgavata-purāṇa particularly five chapters from the chapter 29th to the chapter 33th.8

So in such public worships one finds a large number of images clustered round the image of Lord kṛṣṇa depicting his life and divine deeds. The other images displayed in the context of this festival are of various Gods and Goddesses, saints and sages. The images are installed in the Rāsa-māndapa along with the idols of Rādhā- kṛṣṇa.

The Rāsa festival was first celebrated in the old market place of Nalbari areas in the year 1937. The Rāsapūjā was held for three days at that time. The twin idols of Rādhā-kṛṣṇa were worshipped there in a thatched house made of bamboos, straws and banana leaves etc. There were about eighteen other idols. The idols of Rādhā and kṛṣṇa were placed at the centre and the idols of gopīs

and sages were placed around them. The worship continued for some years in that temporary temple. But the numbers of idol were increased day by day. The Rāsa festival was celebrated in the Harimandira in 1946. The idols of Gods and Godesses were placed in small sections of a structure encircling the main temple. This system improved gradually and the numbers of idol are also increased. Late Ambikanath Goswami of the village Dhurkuchi built the idols at that time. His brother Late Adyanath Goswami and another artists of village Naddi assisted Goswami. He was followed by sri Pavan pal and sri Nimai pal who had built the idols. Sri Makhan pal has been making the idols since 1965.

In the mandapa constructed with the contribution of Late Damahuram Das worship has been continuing since 1968. The twin idols of Rādhā and krṣṇa and the idols of gopī in different postures are placed on the mandapa. The enchanting scenery of the mountain, the architectural design and the lighting bring to the memory of the spectators.

_Sarat kālar rātri ati bitopan_
_rāsakrirā karite krṣṇar vailā man_

Sometimes a spring is shown to be flowing from the mountain. The flash of the full moon night of the month of October is projected on one side of the scene. Sri Adya Sarmadev has been the architect of this decoration of the mandapa for a long time.

There were fifty four room for keeping various idols in 1965. There were 247 idols at that time. Arrangements were made to keep the idols in a structure encircling the main mandapa. The idols have been arranged serially according to the events of the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata and the Bhāgavata purāṇa. The idols of the ten incarnations of viṣṇu are also kept in the first ten rooms. The number of idols and the rooms for keeping them from 1969 up to 1984 are shown in the chart given below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of rooms</th>
<th>No. of idols</th>
<th>No. of idols increased/decreased</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>+10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
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<td>354</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>-86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
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<td>279</td>
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</tr>
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<td>70</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>-6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The idols shown in different years up to the last year are given below. The decoration, construction, background, presentation and architectural designs of the idols may furnish the evidences of the artistic and symbolic perfections of the artists.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Icon based on the Rāmāyaṇa</th>
<th>Icons based on the Bhāgavat-purāṇa</th>
<th>Icons based on the Mahābhārata</th>
<th>Icons based on other purāṇas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creation of the Rāmāyaṇa, curse of the blind sage, birth of sita, breaking of the Haradhanu, svayambar of sita, conspiracy of Manlura, taking of Manlhara, taking of sleep of Viṣṇu,</td>
<td>Ten incarnations of God, Sukadeva and Parikshit, reading of Bhāgavat by Sukadeva, the distribution of the World, the eternal</td>
<td>Karna, the identity of the father of Karna, karna the giver, war of Babrubahan, fight of Bhim and Duryodhana, fight of Bhim</td>
<td>Oath of Ganesh, advice of mother to Ganesh Ram-Kṛṣṇa, disguise of Kṛṣṇa as Kali, destruction of sea, savitri-satyaban, Beula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icon based on the <em>Rāmāyaṇa</em></td>
<td>Icons based on the <em>Bhāgavat-purāṇa</em></td>
<td>Icons based on the <em>Mahābhārata</em></td>
<td>Icons based on other <em>purāṇas</em></td>
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<td>wooden sandals from Ramachandra, illusory golden dear, disguised Ravana, stealing of Sita, battle of Bali and Sugriva, Sita in Ashokaban, killing of Jatayu, building of the bridge, battle of Ram and Ravana, killing of Taraka, killing of Mahi Ravana, Hanuman the devotee of Ram, death of Laksman, by an arrow, reanimation of Laksman, Sri Ram and Guhak Chandal, binding of Ram and Laksman by snake, crying of Tara, breaking of sleep of Visnus assurance to His devotees to be incarnated to redeem to the World in the form of Kṛṣṇa, birth of Kṛṣṇa, carrying of baby Kṛṣṇa by vāṣudeva to the residence of Nanda, various devine sports of child Kṛṣṇa such as eating of butter and sweet, stealing of butter, eternal mother Yosoda, Radha waiting for Kṛṣṇa, playing on flute by Kṛṣṇa, different wives of Kṛṣṇa, such as Rukmini, Jamvavati, Satyabhama, Subhadra, dalliance of Lord Kṛṣṇa with Gopīs by and Bakasura, breaking of the thigh of Duryodhana, sucking blood of Ṭushachana, bed of arrows of Bhisma, Uttaravṛhannala, disrobing of Draupadi, kirat Arjun, march of the Paṇḍavas towards heaven, test of the righteousness of Yudhisthir, ascent of Yudhisthir to heaven, Sakuntala, the love of Sakuntala, the lessons to Bharata, Nal Damayanti, union of Harichandra and Saibya in the burial ground, Medi-</td>
<td>and Lakhindar, reanimation of Lakhindar, the tortures of Manasa, journey of Beula to Kailash, ash of Kamdev, killing of Narakasura,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Icon based on the <em>Rāmāyaṇa</em></td>
<td>Icons based on the <em>Bhāgavat-purāṇa</em></td>
<td>Icons based on the <em>Mahābhārata</em></td>
<td>Icons based on other <em>purāṇas</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kumbhakarna, battle of Kumbhakarna, boatride of Sri Ram, Sita in the Hermitage of Valmiki, songs recited by Lava and Kusha, advice of Ravana, ordeal of Sita in fire, entering of Sita into the earth.</td>
<td>spraying liquid colour, stealing cloths of Gopinīs, false sleep of Kṛṣṇa, killing of Putana, killing of Chakrabat demon, killing of Jarasandha, killing of Kārtabiryaṃjun, killing of Bakasur, killing of Karisa, killing of Vṛttasur, Sindhumuni, Ghatotkoc, Indrajit, Hiranyakasipu, Hirimba, Fight of the crocodile and the elephant, Agnigārha, Chitralekha, fight of the elephant and the tortoise, oath of Parasuram, kāliya daman, stealing of</td>
<td>tation of Dhruva,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Icon based on the <em>Rāmāyaṇa</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>syamantak mani, Samudra manthan, shalerring of the pride of Rukmabir, stealing of Rukmini, Bipra Damodara, curse of Parikshit, curse of Mohini, demise of <em>śrīkṛṣṇa</em> battle of Harilara,</td>
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<td>Sri Sarikaradeva, Madhavadeva, Chaitanyadeva, Mahavir</td>
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<td>Mahatma Gandhi and the three monkeys, statue of heroic Lachit Barphukan on horseback while going to war, Maniram Dewan with British magistrate and British police, hanging of Kushal konwar, Nabin chandra Bardoloi, the leader of the mass during the Freedom Movement, Ranapratap, Chatrapati Shivaji.</td>
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</table>

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<tr>
<th>Heroines</th>
<th>Social Problems</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statue of Kanaklata, who sacrificed her life for the sake of nation on 20th September 1942; Sati Jaymati, the picture of cruel punishment.</td>
<td>i) AIDS: the statues and pictures explaining the cause of AIDS and the ways and means of its prevention. ii) The torturing of women by C.R.P.F. and army personnel has been displayed through the statues and pictures. iii) Flood: the statues and pictures explaining how flood causes havoc in Assam. iv) Eradication: Giving up of wine and other narotic drugs. The statues of a dog urinating in the mouth of a drunkard lying in the street in an ebriated state.</td>
<td>i) Co-operative: the statues of shop-keeper and customer and the statues of farmer and bullock are shown to prove the good effects of co-operatives. ii) The participation of workers in industries—the statues and pictures of the industrialist and worker and of the exploitation of the workers. iii) Land reform: the statues and pictures of officers and zamindars and how they exploit the farmers.</td>
<td>1) Implementation of 20 point programme: the statues and pictures explaining how to effect intensive harvesting. ii) The picture of an ideal village. iii) The advancement of science: the picture of Apolo-II. iv) The statues of the soldiers of the war 1965 between India and China. v) The war of Kargil.</td>
<td>i) Family planning: the statues of parents and three children on one side and the statues of parents and seven children on another side are constricted to show that a family can have happiness with lesser number of children.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are some sayings written infront of the statues of traditional folk dances such as ---

\[ \text{nāchonere āmi karisu minati} \\
\text{utbā jāgā supta prān} \]

i.e., while dancing we are requesting all the people who are weak and feeble to rise up for the sake of the nation.

The statues are made more lively and beautifully with the help of electricity. Consequently the whole atmosphere becomes more charming. There are some sayings written in every room related to the theme depicted by the statues. These sayings are quoted from \textit{Kīrtanghosa}, \textit{Bhāgavat Purāṇa}, \textit{Rāmāyana} and \textit{Mahābhārata}. such sayings help the spectators to understand the themes conveyed by the statues. There is an artificial \textit{Vṛindāvan} on the southern side of the main temple. The statues of cow, deer and peacocks are there along with real dear, peacock and rabbits in this artificial \textit{Vṛindāvan}. The artificial \textit{Vṛindāvan} was built in 1973.

The planning, decoration and background of the rooms were first made by the artist Padum Gohain. Suren Roy was his assistant. That planning was a little modified according to the needs of the time but there has been no major change so far. Kamakhyaram Das of Guwahati and Thanuram Kakati of Palasbari have been managing the affair till today.\(^9\)

The visitors are demarcated for ladies and gents by the temporary bamboo structure erected during the \textit{Rāṣa}-festival, the ladies infront row and gents in the back. There is a one way traffic maintained by the volunteers to maintain peace and order. At the point of the exist there is the statue of a woman with a \textit{Sarāi} in her folded hands to give good bye to the visitors.

\(^9\) \text{Informant: Late Mehandranath Bujarbaruah (Male, 68) Nalbari, Data collected on 7.8.98.}
7.3.4 DURGA PŪJĀ:

Mother Goddess Durga is a symbol of energy, as such she is called *Parama sākti svarupā*. The tradition of the worship of the Mother Goddess Durga has been continuing in Assam from the ancient past. The worship of Durga is held in two different seasons, e.g. in the autumn season and in the spring season. The worship of the mother Goddess Durga held in the spring season is known as Basanti worship and the worship of the Goddess Durgā Devī held in the autumn season is called *Sārādiya Durgā Pūjā*. Of these; the tradition of Basanti worship is comparatively more popular in the district of Nalbari. Similarly the tradition of Durgā worship has also been enjoying popularity gradually. Even in the *Harimandira* also Durgā worship is observed with much pomp and gaiety.

Durgā worship has been celebrated in the *Harimandira* since 1943. On the sixth day of bright half of the month of Āhin-kāti (sept-Oct.) the Goddess is aroused (*vodhan*) under the vilva tree in the *Harimandira*. This is called *vilvavodhana*. On that day the items such as banana plants, paddy plants, pomegranate, haldi, ashok plants are collected and kept on the *pūjāmandapa*. This is called *navapatrikā*. On the seventh day an idol of Goddess Durga is made with these items and the worship of *navapatrikā* begins. The idols made of clay of Durgā, Śiva, Lakshmī, Sarasvatī, Gaṇesh, Kārtic and Mahisāsur are arranged and a *ghata* (a pot made of clay) with the branches of five kinds of trees is placed in front of the idol of Durgā. Then the *mahāsnāna* is conducted according to the vedic ritual and then the *saptami* worship begins. On the third day the *astami* worship is conducted. Sixty four *yoginis* are worshipped during this worship. The worship between *astami* and *navami* is known as *sandhi pūjā*. The navami worship is conducted according to the vedic mode on *navami tithi*. On that day the devotees assemble together, recite hymns from the *Devi-māhātmya* and pray to Goddess Durgā. On the *dasami* the
goddess is given farewell (visarjana) through the aparājitā worship. In the navami day homa is performed before the Goddess.

Animal sacrifice, particularly male buffalos, male goats, pegions, ducks, magur fish and so forth is essential for the completion of the Durgāpūjā. But the Durgā worship held in the Harimandira is celebrated without offering animal sacrifices. The vaisnavas are by and large antagonistic to animal sacrifices. As such, animal sacrifice is never encouraged in the Durgā-pūjā held in the Harimandira.

The ceremony of immersion of the Goddess Durgā is a very interesting occasion in the Harimandira. On that day the devotees take the idol of the Goddess Durgā along with other images on a decorated truck and circle the whole town in a procession after which the idols are immersed in the river Pagaldiah. Similarly another interesting occasion during the days of the Durgā worship is ārati. Besides ojāpāti, dhulītā and namapārti perform performances everyday.

The Durga worship festival is not only an occasion of pomp and ceremony or an occasion of religious rites but a cultural occasion for achieving perfection in the physical, psychological and spiritual spheres. Its uninterrupted flow should be there in Assam in order to unite and discipline the social life.

7.3.5. LAKSHMĪ PŪJĀ

The worship of Goddess Lakshmī is held in this temple every year. In the context of Durgā pūjā also both the Goddess of wealth and learning we also worshipped as the daughters of Goddess Durgā. That is why both Lakshmī and Sarasvatī worshipped alongwith Goddess Durgā.

Lakshmī is Goddess of beauty, love, prosperity, intellect and speech; she is spoken of as omnipresent, the eternal mother of the universe. " It is said that she issued from the ocean of milk, when
it was churned by the demons and Gods; thereupon she was crowned and, being adorned with heavenly jewels and a wreath of everlasting flowers, was received, was received in the arms of Vishnu as his bride. She became incarnate in Sita, the chaste and beautiful wife of Rama, and in Rukmini and Radha, the wife and favourite mistress, respectively, of Krishna. Radha is considered a lucky name for women, and such names as Radha Krishna, Lakshmi Narain, Ram Narain, Ramchand, Bishan (vishan) chand and Jagannath are common among them.¹⁰

The emergence of the Goddess Lakshmi can be studied from different viewpoints, e.g.,

Firstly, she is the beloved wife of Vishnu, as such she may be treated as spouse Goddess.

Secondly, the tradition of the worship of Lakshmi-Narayana has been continuing from the time of yore. Acharya Ramanuja who introduced qualified monism in the light of the doctrine of Bhakti. He used to worship Lakshmi Narayana.

Thirdly, Lakshmi is a daughter of Durga.

Fourthly, the Goddess Lakshmi is presumed as the mother figure.

Fifthly, the Goddess Lakshmi is imagined as an independent deity and is worshipped. This form has special significance.

Different scholars have investigated into the origin of the name and form of Lakshmi and have found the origin in Srisukta of Rigveda.¹¹ In this context Sashibhusan Dasgupta has commented that the Goddess Lakshmi described in Srisukta of Rigveda is not only wealthy and beautiful but there are many myths associated with her.

---

¹¹ Bardoloi, N.: Devi P.P. 66
Mention of the worship of Sri Devī is found in the *satpath.Brahmana*. Similarly mentions of the term Lakṣmī are also found in various places of the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Valmiki. The myth relating to the curse of Durvasa towards Indra, disappeareness of Lakṣmī from heaven, and the churning of the ocean at the behest of Viṣṇu-all are found in the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* and the *Viṣṇu-purāṇa*. The origin of Lakṣmī and her *svayambar* have also been described in *padma-purāṇa*. There is similarity in the description of the origin of Lakṣmī found in *Padma-purāṇa* with that of *Śrīmad Bhāgavata*. Devaraj Indra worshipped her first. She was satisfied with the worship of Indra and with her blessings the heaven was filled with wealth. After the introduction of the worship of Lakṣmī in heaven, it was brought to the earth by Narada. Owl is the vehicle of Lakṣmī. The worship of Goddess Lakṣmī is observed on the full moon night after the *Durgā pūjā*. The devotees remain awake throughout the night to worship the Goddess.

Ringing of bell and *barkāb* is strictly prohibited during the worship of Lakṣmī. The goddess is offered *paramānna*, coconut and coconut water during this worship.

The Assamese community considers rice to be Goddess Lakṣmī. The chief agriculture product of Assm is rice. Hence goddess Lakṣmī is worshipped when the crops ripen. That is why the Assamese community observes the worship of Lakṣmī whole-heartedly during *Abin-kati* (*oct.-Nov.*).

### 7.3.6. SARASVATI PUJA

*Sarasvati-pūjā* is observed in the *Harimandira* in the fifth day of bright lunar half. The fifth day of the month of *Māgh* is a day of joy for the Hindu youths. Besides the merriment and celebration it

---

has a religious and cultural significance. The students and the devotees worship the Goddess of learning with devotion and offerings.

It is believed that Sarasvati is the Goddess of merit and intelligence. Man cannot exhibit his knowledge without merit, imagination and reason. Sarasvati is also the Goddess of imaginative power and reason. Again sarasvati is the Goddess of 64 arts forms such as dance, song and music. There are many myths about the greatness of Goddess Sarasvati. Yagyabalka, the eminent sage has lost his merit and learning due to the curse of his teacher vaisampayan. Feeling helpless yogyabalka prayed to sarasvati with devotion and due to the blessings of sarasvati he got back his merit and learning. Similarly a sage named Takshya satisfied Goddess Sarasvati by his prayer and attained knowledge in all the subjects.

Another myth runs about the greatness of Goddess Sarasvati. Once there was a great famine in the land of Brahmarshi due to lack of rain and the drying of the rivers. The sage Bharat went to the Himalays and prayed to the Goddess Sarasvati. The Goddess agreed to descend to the earth on being satisfied with his prayer. Sarasvati followed the sage to the earth. She was named Bharati because the sage Bharat was successful in bringing down to the earth. It is widely known that Goddess Sarasvati was at the root of the development of the merit of poet Kalidasa.13

Sarasvati is the wife, or sakti (female energy), of Brahma and is analogous in western mythology to Minerva, the patroness of learning.14 She is the mother of the vedas. Her complexion is as white as snow. Her body is as soft as the lotus on which she sits. She is worshipped in different forms by different communities. This festival is observed by the students of all the communities. It is also known as

13. Ibid P. 74
14. Op-cit P. 60
The tradition of Sarasvati worship has been continuing in various places of India from the fairly ancient past. The worship of sarasvati is performed in the Harimandira according to the vedic modes and flowers are offered at her feet. After the worship is over the devotees receive flowers and prasāda. Community feast is a part of this festival. The people of different religious groups take part in this feast. In this context it can be said that the worship of Sarasvati has established unity in diversity.

7.4 VARIOUS ARTFORMS PERFORMED IN THE HARIMANDIRA:

The term performing art form suggests the meaning of an kind of singing and dancing and acting which has separate identity and consists of independent style and performance.

The domain of performing art form includes song, dance and drama.

7.4.1 SONG:

The act of singing of various songs by various singers have been playing important role in this temple. At the very dawn, the Gods and Goddess of the mandira are awakened by singing of Barīgita, a class of traditional and devotional raga base songs written by Sankaradeva and Madhavdeva. In this context the famous Barīgita composed by saint poet Mādhavdeva is sung. This Bargita is sung in a cassette. A few lines of the song are given as specimen, e.g.,

\[
\text{tezare kamalapati paravata ninda } \\
\text{terichanda mukhakepko uthare govinda.} \\
\]

Oh Lord, give up your morning drowsiness. Get up, want to see your moonlike face.
Thereafter, at about 5-30 a.m. the priests start their meditation which is followed by another prayer. A few lines of the prayer is as follows ---

*Brahmāadi kari jīva jata*  
*Rāma āra Rāma Rāma*  
*māyār saīyār māje*  
āchaya ghumati jāi

All the creatures including Brahma are sleeping on the bed of illusion.

After this prayer, the devotees begin to sing *Bārgīta* again. This *Bārgīta* is sung by the devotees who recide in the mandira permanently. e.g.,

*ubhava uṭha bāpu Gopālaka*  
*nīshi parabhāta bhāilā*  
*kamal nayana buli ghane ghane*  
*Jashowāi dākite lailo*

"Get up from bed, my son, Gopal, Because it is morning". Thus Jashoda (the mother of Sri Kṛṣṇa) begins to call him again and again addressing as kamala nayana.

After the recitation of the above *Bārgīta* the worshiper begins his another prayer sung with the help of clapping e.g.,

*Kṛṣṇa kām Kṛṣṇa kām*  
*Kṛṣṇa hari Kṛṣṇa Hari*  
*Ananta Achyuta ānātana Nārāyaṇa.*

(These are the names of Lord Kṛṣṇa.)

It is followed by another prayer with the help of tāla. a specimen of such prayer is given below.
Govinda Govinda Govinda Govinda Govinda  
Rāma murāry  
bhakati rachana dukha bimochana  
bhiyar maje nāmar bhāndār, mukhe  
bāj haya  
Rām nāme māranā nāmāre, pāpa  
katakār kṣīya.

"Oh Lord Govinda, you can create regards to you in our heart and keep us away from sorrow. There is a store of lord's name in our heart and they can be uttered with the help of our mouth again and again which destroy our sins."

This prayer is finished with the help of clapping uttering the following two lines repeating again and again.

· Rāma Rāma Rāma Rāma Rāma Rāma Rāma  
Hari Rāma Rāma Rāma Hari Rāma Rāma Rāma.

( These are the names of lord krṣṇa.)

This prayer is followed by another one which is called the last prayer in the morning.

mai durāchāra kewale tomāra  
aparādhi Nārāyaṇa.

"Oh Lord Nārāyaṇa, I am the most sinner in the World to you and convict. I pray you to rescue me."

After the prayer some songs are sung in the temple which are full of advice. Generally one of the three or four songs is sung everyday alternatively. Among them one is as follows.

abaloka Hari bhojyoko dharā tīto upadesha.

(Hello, people of the World, I pray to listen this advice for you salvation.)
Meditation and bowing to God are done at the end of the morning prayer in the temple.

Generally, these sings are sung three times in other temples. But in the Harimandira of Nalbari these are sung only two times. Morning prayer starts approximately at 5 A.M. It continues upto 10-30 A.M.

Sometimes at the noon the male devotees offer nāma-prasaṅga from the Kīrtan-gbosā to the accompaniment of big size cymbals. The nāma-prasaṅga continues upto 12 noon.

At afternoon (approximately 3 P.M.) the female devotees sometimes offer nāma-prasaṅga from the Kīrtan-gbosā upto 5 P.M. along with the clapping of hands. After the nāma-prasaṅga, at about 5.30 P.M. a Bargīta is sung with the help of cassette. Just after the sunset, the priest sings again the Bargīta. One of the generally sung Bargīta is as follows —

\[
\begin{align*}
Rāma & \text{ paramadhan chintoho bbāi} \\
& \text{tanu chintō binā janam biphal jāi.}
\end{align*}
\]

The real wealth is the name of the Lord Rāma, so, the mind should think or meditate His name, because our life is meaningless and useless if we don't meditate or think the name of God.

Then the Bhāgavata is recited in the presence of 20 to 25 aged males and females.

After the end of the recitation of the Bhāgavata, prayer to guru (Śārikaradeva) is done. This is as follows —

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Jaya guru Śāṅkara} & \quad \text{sarba gunākara} \\
& \quad \text{jākeri nābike upāma} \\
\text{tohāri charaṇa} & \quad \text{renu shatakoti} \\
& \quad \text{bāreka karoho pranāma.}
\end{align*}
\]

[ 122 ]
“Oh guru Śāṅkara, you are full of virtues. None but you can rescue us from this sinful life. So, we bow again and again to your feet which are full of light.”

Besides these, in the temple of Harimandira, various programmes are performed during various religious occasions. Some of them are nāgarā nam, āioti-nām and so forth.

**NĀGĀRA NĀM:**

Nāgarā-nām is a major performing artform of Nalbari area. It is, of course one of the most interesting performing artforms of Assam as a whole.

The nāgarā nām troupe is constituted with a group of people in which there is no definite number. The size may normally vary from twenty to fifty persons. The nāgarā and the bbor-tāl are two essential instruments for a nāgarā nām performance. It is a choral singing performance by a group of people. It is normally associated with religious functions. In most of the religious occasions of Harimandira nāgarā-nām is held. The nām starts with a benedictory song praying to God. The beating of the nāgarā, the bbor-tāl and clapping of hands starts simultaneously. The pāṭbaka (chorus leader) recites the verses and the pālīs (assistants) repeat them. The pāṭbaka often gives dancing movement with definite mudrās (gestures) in hand while he sings the song. There is definite body movements of the pālīs also with moving their heads and hands with clapping patterns. Hence, R.C. Thakuria remarked: “nāgarā-nām is a kind of multicoloured artform combined with gīta, pada, nṛtya, kathā and vadya which make it a distinctive folk institution.”

Nāgarā-nām is the major artform of the Harimandira of Nalbari. It is performed in the Harimandira during Durgāpūjā, Janmāstami, Rāsa festival and so forth.

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7.4.2. DANCES:

In the temple of the Harimandira of Nalbari dance is not done regularly along with other devotional programmes. Dances of various kinds are performed in the various occasions such as Janmāstami, Durgāpūjā and Rasā festival. In these occasions ojāpāli, dhulī, putalā-nāc are performed.

PUTALĀ NĀC:

The putalā nāc is appreciated throughout the world. There is the mention of the putalā nāc in the vāna-parva and udyog parva of 'The Mahābhārata'. It is also mentioned in 'Kathā Sarit Sāgar' and Kāma sutra. The name of the book 'Datringsat putalika' gives evidence of the popularity of the putalā nāc in ancient India. The putalā-nāc is an international dramatic art form.

It can be assumed that the influence of the putalā-nāc is indeed great on the development of the dramatic art in Nalbari area. There are various types of puppets. Such as Marionette, Hand or Glove puppet, Rod puppet and shadow puppet. The use of Marionettes is more in Nalbari. It is made of kubilyā (a kind of wild plant). The kubilyā is decorated with clothes, coloured papers, colours and ornaments. Then the eyes and lips are painted according to the requirement. A black string is tied to its body and it is made to dance with that string.

The characters in the putalā nāc have their respective roles like those of yātrās and theatres but there is not written script for this theatre. The stories and legends from purāṇas or epic are generally enacted in the puppet theatres. The puppet dramas based on Sitābarana (The stealing of Sita), Lankādāh (The burning of Lanka), Ravaṇbādha (the killing of Ravana) etc. are staged in Nalbari area.

17. Mahābhārata, Vānaparva - 3/30/26
    Udyogparva - 5/39/1

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There are 6 to 7 persons in a puppet theatre company to manage the things. A small stage is built and a black cloth is put as the fixed backdrop of the stage. On the back of the black cloth remain the sutradhār. He remains there with a whistle on his lips and the strings in his finger to which the puppets have been tied at the other ends. He delivers the speeches of the puppets with the help of the whistle and makes the puppets enter and exit the stage according to the requirement of the theme.

The putalā-nāc begins with purbaranga. The Gāyans and Bāyan take part in it. The leader of the group is called Bāyan. The theme progresses through the song of Gāyan and Bāyan. Though the influence of puppet theatre on the society is on its decline in Nalbari, the groups performing this artform still survive. There are 3 to 4 groups of puppet theatre in the district of Nalbari till today. They organise their shows in different places in the urban and rural areas. The putalā-nāc groups organised their shows in the Hari mandira. But now a days its popularity has gone down to some extent due to the popularity of television and theatres.

DHULIYĀ :

The dhuliya bhaona is a part of the folk culture of the Assamese people. It has preserved the glory of the past of Assam in its tradition.

It is very difficult to say when it originated. It is very probable that it had its origin in the beginning of the nature of state in ancient times. If we study the growth and development of the civilisation we will find that the sect or group declared war against other sect or group in order to strengthen itself. In order to declare such a war the dhol (a musical instrument) was sounded. The very sound of the dhol made the warriors excited.18

Though there is the use of *dhol* in the *Harimandira* of Nalbari, nothing can be said with any certainty about its origin. But it can be said that it is a very ancient institution because several generations testify to its existence.

The *dhuliya* dance begins with gurughat like the puppet theatre and *ojāpāli*. This gurughat is like the purbaranga described in 'Nātyasāstra'. Songs are also sung to the accompaniment of *dhuliya* at the gurughat. Songs about the origin of *dhuliya* dance are also sung. The *tāluais* and the *nāmuais* remain prepared on one side of the stage and on the stage the *dbols* with people are there in the descending from large order to small one.

The next item of *dhuliya* is *kusti*. After this the caricature item is conducted. Masque is used for this. The next item is drama. There is no written script for this drama. The characters put on different robes or masques according to the necessity. The main drama begins with a theme from 'The Rāmāyaṇa' or 'The Mahābhārata'. In most of the dramas the God is shown to victorious over devil or monster. While the play is on the jester comes to the stage and speaks slang in order to excite laughter.

The *dhuliya* performance is one of the important audio-visual artforms of Nalbari area. People are not only getting recreation through it, but also different religious functions have been performed in Nalbari area. It is conducted during *Durgāpūjā*, *Janmāstami* and other festivals besides the *Rāsa* festival. So, the *dhuliya* performance plays a dominant role in the social and cultural life of the people of Nalbari area.

**Ojāpāli:**

*Ojāpāli* is an important institution among the institutions observed in the *Harimandira* of Nalbari. This performing art is re-
lated to religion. From this perspective ojdpali is a religious institution. As religious institution is a part of social or cultural institution, ojdpali is also a social and cultural institution and this performing art has been a popular institution.

The appreciation of stories is universal and this universality is the main cause of the popularity of ojdpali. Besides describing a story, ojdpali also invents stories and substories. The role of ojdpali is very significant in popularising the myths, Legends, stories and folk-tales.

There are four kinds of ojdpali in Nalbari area. Such as - Sukanāni, Rāmāyan or Rayman ojdpali, Bīyāh ojā, sattriya ojdpali. Although the word ojdpali is a composite word made by combining two words with different meanings in Assamese, it is used as a single word with a single meaning. Says B.M. Goswami; " Although the word ojā and the pāli are two different words with different connotations nevertheless the two wordsconjoin with each other in such a way that they seem to be one and a single word with a single meaning i.e. the living and popular art forms of ojāpali. This performing artform consists, usually, of three to seven members i.e. pālis. The chief singer, i.e., ojā recites themes from the mythological stories with music, mudras and dance and the pālis take up the refrain and repeat the song with playing of cymbals and marking of time with their feet". 19

The expert among the group is called ojā, the main assistant is called dāināpāli and the rest of them are called pāli. The ojā begins with a song of gandharva rāg and then the bandana (prayer) of Ganesh is recited. There after the vandana of a specific God or Goddess is recited. After that a story from purāṇa is sung. The first time that the ojā sings is called dibā and the pālis repeat the line in unison. Then the ojā sings the pads and the pālis chant it with tāl. The dāināpāli

interpretes the lines dramatically to the audience and provides fun and laughter with humourous comments and gestures. No stage is required for performing ojāpāli. The audience divided into two halves. The idol of the Goddess remains in front of the ojāpāli.

Generally the group is named after ojā. The popular ojās of Nalbari are Ganagaram ojā of Belsor, Naro ojā of Belsor, Padma ojā of Belsor, Kashi ojā of Gandhiya, Dhajo ojā of Ulabari, Mahiram ojā of Dhurkuchi, Nagaru ojā of Makhibaha etc. Some of them are still alive and perform during the festivals.

The ojāpāli is an important audio-visual artform of the Harimandira of Nalbari. Ojāpāli is performed for 4 days in the Harimandira during the Durga-pujā.

7.4.3 NĀTAK (DRAMA):

Nātak i.e., drama is an important artform of the Harimandira. It has been there since the establishment of the temple. Of course nātak has its reasons for its popularity. Firstly it can be said that it is a visual art. It attracts people more easily than the other artforms. The illiterate people can also enjoy nātak because it is an audio-visual art. As nātak takes the contemporary incidents and events as its theme and such themes are enacted by the characters, it attracts the audience in large numbers. Similar is the case with the legendary or religious nātak.

Though there were Bāyan parties in Nalbari, they lost their importance and popularity due to the coming of the Bengali theatre groups in the beginning of the 20th century. Some of the Bāyan parties were converted into the opera parties. Brajanath Sarma joined the Sita opera party and improved the art of acting. Many actors such as Rajani Bhattacharya of Chamata, Gopal Sarma of Nalbari,
Sanatan Hajarika of Hajarabari, Kamala Baistab of Batsor, Rajani Sarma of Bihampur and Ambunath Thakur of Kaithalkuchi acted with Brajanath Sarma. Many yātrāpārty groups were formed under the inspiration of the above mentioned actors. Some such groups are Anandamayi opera of Nalbari, Piplibari Nātyasamiti of Piplibari, Kamala Nātya Samiti of Balowa, Tihu Nātya Sangha of Tihu, Bartola yātrā pārty of Bartola etc. Some of these operā parties got the opportunity to stage their plays in the Harimandira of Nalbari.

The Rāsa festival is celebrated for a long period in the Harimandira of Nalbari. The people from all the parts of the area and from outside the district come to enjoy the festival. After enjoying the festival throughout the day they do not get any means of communication to get back to their respective places. That is why the Rāsa committee invites theatre parties and opera parties to conduct their plays throughout the night to entertain the stranded people. Every year 15 to 16 theatre parties are invited to stage their plays during the Rāsa festival.

There is a very big stage and a temporary hall in the Harimandira. Due to the availability of this facility the local amateur theatre groups also get an opportunity to stage their plays during Rāsa festival. Thus it is seen that the Harimandira has played an important role in the theatre movement in the district of Nalbari.