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MAROI PUJA: A RELIGIOUS FESTIVAL OF THE KOCH RAJBANSHI

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ABSTRACT

The Maroi Puja is an important religious festival of the Koch Rajbanshi people associated with the worship of snake popularly known as Manasa (snake Goddess). The Maroi puja is normally performed by the Koch Rajbanshi in the particular day of the month of Jaistha, Asadha, Sravana and Bhadra (May, June, July and August) where other folk deities are being worshiped. Maroi is specially worshiped for the prevention from evil spirit and cure of snakebite, fertility and prosperity of human being. In this Puja, folk songs and Deodhani dance are performed to please Manasa deity who is called with other names such as Maroi, Bisahari and Padma in Koch Rajbanshi society. However, the mythological story of Chanda Sadagar, Behula and Lakshindar got significant role in Maroi Puja because of their life that was being ruined by Manasa deity

INTRODUCTION

The Koch Rajbanshis are one of the oldest aboriginal ethnic groups found in India, Bangladesh and Nepal. The Koch Rajbanshis are predominantly found in four Indian states such as West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya and Bihar; however, they are very popular in the district of Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling and Koch-Bihar of West Bengal which is popularly known as North Bengal region (Dutta, 1978:31). In the Brahmaputra Valley, majority of the Koch Rajbanshi people lived with rich culture and established historical background. No doubt, the religion, custom, beliefs and practices help to understand the background of any society (Bhakat, 2008:81). In the same way, ritual practices directly related to the economic aspect of life that was seen in the Koch Rajbanshi society (Bhakat, 2008:83). The Koch Rajbanshi believed in God and goddesses of the river, big trees, spirits etc. Apart from that, they also embraced different types of religion such as Shaiva, Shaja, Vaishnavism and Buddhist Tantras. In addition, the snake

goddesses, Bisahari, Durga, Kali, Lakshmi, Narayan, Vishnu, Hari etc are also being worshipped by them (Sanyal, 1965:143).

However, there are different types of ritual practices in the Koch Rajbanshi society associated with their socio-economic life based on agriculture. These ritual ceremonies included *Maroi* puja, Sannyasi puja, Chaunipuja, Tistaburi puja, Thankali, Bhadrakali, Madankam, Bash Muja, Dharam Thakur puja, Jagannath puja, Dhankata puja, Baruni puja, Nayakhawa puja, Shiva Ratri, Besma, Charakpuja, Kali Chandi, Hudum Deo, Kati puja, Shaleswari puja, Shitala puja, Budha-budhi puja, Kadakari puja, Satyapir or Satya puja, Sonaray puja, Suwachani puja, Lakshmi puja, Hargauri puja, Ajangar puja, Sital puja etc (Nath, 1988:94-96). Among the ritual ceremonies, the *Maroi* puja is the main puja of Koch Rajbanshi that is performed to please snake goddess in connection with fertility, wellbeing and prosperity of human being in the month of Jaistha to Bhadra. The *Maroi* is also popularly known as Manasa puja. In this context, she is represented as a symbol of women power. She protects everyone from dangers and fulfils the wish of worshippers. Mainly, *Ojapali and Deodhani* dance are performed in *Maroi* puja. And songs such as *Bandana, Shristi Patton, Neta Padyar, Bhashani* etc are sung and performed. In this puja, *Gidaals* perform dances and songs. In addition to that, *Dewari, Sukri and Baain* also perform dances and songs. (Baruah, 2018:4).

Maroi Puja

The tradition of *Maroi* has been inherited among the Koch Rajbanshis during the reign of Koch king Biswa Singha. There are two authors of his royal court namely Monkar and Durgabar who composed some valuable books regarding the folk tradition and magnificence of the deity in Bengali verse. Moreover, Sukanyani composed *Padmapuran* under the patron of Darangi Koch king describing about the myths of Chanda Sadagar (a businessman of Champak Nagar) who conflict with *Manasa* deity and popular mythical folk tale of Behula Lakshindar (Sarma, 1988:84-86). *Manasa* puja is called as *Maroi* puja. The word meaning of *Maroi* is 'Epidemic' and 'Head'. It is called as *Maroi* puja because during the time of epidemic this puja is organised by the head of the family who is called as *Mareya*. *Manasa* deity is known as serpent goddess who is regarded as the main goddess among all the god and goddesses, that's why this goddess is called *Maroi* (Das, 1988: 68-69).

The *Manasa* puja is popularly known as *Maroi* puja among the Koch Rajbanshi people of Assam residing in the districts of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Bongaigaon and Dhubri. The Koch Rajbanshi performed *Maroi* puja in the rainy season in the month of Jaistha, Asadha, Sravana and Bhadra (May-August) (Baruah, 1951:195). The *Maroi* deity is normally worshiped for three days and ends in the second day of Bhadra (Bhattacharya, 2013:6). There is no fixed date for holding this religious ceremony but generally it is held at the beginning day of rainy season and end before the beginning of Durga puja (Mukharjee, 2014: 39-40).

Manasa puja is also known as *Maroi* puja, *Padma* puja, *Bishahari* puja (Sarma, 1988:83). In most of the places there are some particular sacred spots where the

goddess is regularly worshipped once or twice in a year and those spots are popularly known as “*Maroi Than*” in the villages (Neog, 2008:320). There are two *Maroi Than* at Chaygaon in the district of Kamrup known as “DudhKhuri Than” “Rangamatir Than” where Manasa worship is held regularly (Neog, 2008:320). There are also some temples for example “Manasabari” at Abhayapuri, in the district of Goalpara, “Mukteswari Mandir” and “Padmavativir Mandir” in the district of Darrang can be cited (Neog, 2008:210). Moreover, in some places of Kamrup district like Pacharia, Gerua and Sualkuchi; *Manasa* worship is held annually for three or five days.

There are two main purposes of worship of *Maroi* puja among the Koch Rajbanshi to protect from snake-bite and epidemic and to fulfil the worldly desires (Baruah, 1974:21). She is regarded as a deity of fertility who can give son baby, wealth and prosperity in human life (Sarma, 2012:9). Therefore, Koch Rajbangshi believe that, *Maroi* is being worshipped to get bless with child and to save the life from the natural calamities as well as from the influence of evil spirit (Sarma, 2012:10).

Different Types Of Maroi Puja

According to the rules of worship, *Maroi* puja is divided into different parts such as *Gota Maroi*, *Pat Maroi*, *Deria Maroi* and *Kirtan* (Dhumkirtan). But the Koch Rajbanshi people worship *Maroi* puja in two different ways such as *Gota Maroi* and *Palatia Maroi* (Singha: 2021:91-92). However, the process of worship is almost same in all the *Maroi* puja. There are different types of *Maroi gaan* that are performed along with music, dance and act. *Gidaal* is the chief performer of *Maroi gaan*; he played an important role during *Maroi* puja who performed dances and songs during puja celebration. In the context of worship, he and his group perform various religious songs in sitting positions around the alter. Their performance gives immense pleasure and enjoyment to the general public. *Gidaal* recited the lyrics of the *Padma purana* which is a type of *Maroi gaan* that includes *Bandana* song and all the episodes of *Maroi gaan* in a comprehensive way specially the myths related to Siva-Parvati, Chanda Sadagar, Behula, and Lakshindar (Maity, 2003: 312-314).

During the time of the *Gota Maroi* worship, songs are sung for seven days and nights especially at the time of wedding ceremony. The worship of *Pat Maroi* ends in one and half day, *Deria Maroi* in two and half day and *Dhumkirtan* in one day (Das, 1988-94). But, the process of worship, rhythm of song, style of dance and acting between the song and dance especially the episodes which is performed by *Gidaal* is very similar. But now a days, it is found that due to lack of *Gidaal*, *Maroi* puja is rarely celebrated in some places. Moreover, most of the people prefer one day *Maroi* puja to curb high cost of expenditure (Ray, Brojen, 2021).

Gota Maroi holds a special position among the Koch Rajbanshi society in respect of its social rituals and unique way of worship. *Gota Maroi* includes all the episodes of *Maroi gaan* beginning from *Bandana* song to *Firani* song. *Gota Maroi* puja is seen mainly in Koch Rajbanshi family of Dhubri district (Ray, Brojen, 2021). In the past days, the *Gota Maroi* was continuously worshipped

for seven days. The form of worship associated with folk songs, dances for praising Manasa deity and various mythological incidents of Behula and Lakshindar are depicted through the performing art for four to five days (Nath, 2008:94-95). The first night of *Gota Maroi* puja is called *Jagaani* (waking up for the whole night) that is performed to awaken the goddess thereafter the actual puja begins on the second day. At night of the *puja*, *Manasa Mondus* is placed (Manasa Mondus is the image of goddess made of Indian crok and paper a ritualistic image of the goddess) (Ray, Brojen, 2021). On the third day, *Bhar Maroi* is held with *Bhatiali* song which is sung at night at the closing ceremony held on the fourth day of the *puja*. Thus, during the worship of *Gota Maroi*, the *Padma Purana* is sung from the beginning to the end of the puja (Nath, 2008:39-40).

Palatia Maroi starts at 9 o'clock in the morning and ends at 9 o'clock at night. Generally, all the process of religious worship are performed in the same traditional way that often accompany song, music and dances but the *Palatia Maroi* merely include the episodes of *Shristi* (Creation of universe) to the *Neta-Padyar Janmo* (Birth of Neta Padya) (Singha, 2021:92). *Pat Maroi* is worshiped for two and half days in *Maroi* puja, starting from the creation of *Rakhal* puja, birth of Chanda and marriage of Lakhai. Although this puja requires a priest, but due to lack of priests, puja is performed by Gidaal. Mondus and Tepari (Made of Indian crok and paper a ritualistic thing of Maroi puja) are also essential part of this puja. Some of the songs from the Ushaharan Khanda, Chandar Banijya Khanda, and Dhanantari Badh Khanda are sung to entertain the audience (Nath: 1988:95).

Deria Maroi is worshipped for one and half day during the time of *Maroi* puja. In this *puja*, Vighraha Mandus and Tepari are required, although the word Vighraha depends on the ability of the householder or Mareya. This puja starts with the beginning of the song and ends with *Rakhal* puja. The story of *Padma Purana* is also completely sung in some region during this puja (Nath, 1988:95). *Dhumkirtan* (Kirtan) or *Ekdinia Maroi* (One day Maroi) puja is performed only for one day. It is found that *Dhumkirtan* is performed only in Bongaigaon District (Barman, 2021). In this puja, the story is shared from the *Srishti Patton* (creation of universe) to the marriage of Behula and Lakshindar. *Tepari* (made of Indian crok and paper a ritualistic thing of *Maroi* puja) is also essential in this puja. Moreover, the main aims and objective of all the above-mentioned pujas are to fulfil the desires of the householder (Nath, 1988:95-97).

Moreover, the speciality of worshipping *Maroi* puja is that, before the starting of the *puja*, they set up a *Ghot* (a ritual pot) with a coconut inside the *Mandop* (a small square size boundary made of installing 4 banana plants) just in front of the idol especially made of clay or crok. All the people who are associated with the puja keep fasting for the whole period of the puja. The particular place of worship is nicely decorated with rice-paste drawing (alipana) (Bhattacharyya, 2013:6). The *Prasadas* (a devotional offering made to a God) are offered in *Dalas* (basket made of bamboo) and *Dongas* (a craft made of banana tree). Ripe plantain, rice, milk, curd etc. are generally offered as prasada and betel-nut, flower, bael, basil etc. are some other indispensable elements for worshipping in this puja (Choudhury, 2021: 71). Apart from these pujas, there are some other

Maroi such as *Sotaki Maroi*, *Poaki Maroi*, *Serki Maroi*, *Adhaseri Maroi* which are prevalent in Kokrajhar district (Choudhury, Preswar, 2021).

Dance Performance Related To Maroi Puja

In *Maroi* puja, there are different types of song such as *Bandana*, *Shristi Patton*, *Jagaani*, *Bhashani*, *Firani gaan* etc. which are sung through musical instruments by performing dance and acting. Apart from songs, different types of dances are also performed such as *Ojapali* and *Deodhani* etc (Bhakat, 2008:81-83). *Ojapali* is a folk dance that consisted of songs, dialogues, gesture, acting and drama. In this dance, *Oja* (chief narrator of song) leads *Ojapali* dance during the time of *Maroi* puja. In Darrang district, *Ojapali* is known as *Suknanyani Ojapali*. In Kamrupa, the *Oja* performed *Ojapali* dance with a marriage song at the time of marriage ceremony, known as '*Raymon Goa*' *Ojapali* or '*Bhaura*' or '*Bhaira*' *Ojapali*. In this ceremony, '*Gital* or reader of song and the assistant of *Gitaal* who is known as '*Juli*' also played an important role in performance of these songs.

Deodhani dance is performed only in public worship, but it is not performed in *Maroi* puja which is held at home. In Kamakhya, the event is generally known as '*Deodhani Utsav*' and those who performed dance are called *Deodhani* or *Ghoba* or *Joki* (Goswami, 1960:38-39). The traditional *Deodhani* dance is popular at Kamakhya, Geruwa, Pachariya. The *Deodha* dance is performed in the last two days of *Manasa* puja or *Maroi* puja especially 1st and 2nd days of the month of Bhadra (Goswami, 1960:40-41). *Deodhani* dance is performed by reciting '*Manasa Kabya*' composed by Mankar and Durgavar. In this dance all the men come to the stage in different ways and perform in different styles (Goswami, 1988:79-84). They understood *Deodhani*'s gestures in a special way and in the conversations that take place between them; *Deodha* is selected by a special test. During the time of *Maroi* puja, the elected *Deodhas* who ate only vegetarian food and abstained from having physical contact with their wives and eating fish, meat etc. In the early part of the night, they have to listen to the *kirtan* of the story of *Manasa* and on the last night each of them goes to the temple of their respective deity. *Dhuli* and *Kaliya* usually participated in this ritual (Baruah, 2018). There is a common belief in both the society that an unmarried wife can be fertile if she receives blessings or grace from the *Deodhas*. Secondly, many unmarried and their parents also pray for the grace of the *Deodhas* during the festival so that they and their survivors may be fit (Choudhury, 2019:117-18).

Types of Maroi Gaan (Songs)

The lyrics of the songs composed focusing on *Maroi* puja in this region can be divided into three main sections: (a) The birth of Padma and the Puja section (b) Padma Chanda Dispute (c) Bhatiali. The first part describes about the birth of Padma, Shakti Mahatmya, puja and the rules of worship. In the second part, Shiva devotee Chand Sadagar opposes Manasa puja. In the third part, it expressed the hopeless feeling, sorrows and unfinished feelings of love. Sometimes limitations of the life and spiritual thoughts may also be its theme. The husband who died of a snake bite on his wedding night, Behula's journey

to Devpuri, the life of the seven sons of Chand Sadagar and finally the worship of Manasa with the left hand of Chanda Sadagar are described. The lyricist of this Manasa puja is also called 'Dokzian'. 'Dok' means snake biting and 'zian' means giving life. It is associated with the death and resurrection of Behula-Lakshindar (Islam, 2016:16). There is only one lead singer in this group who is called as 'Gidaal'. He is followed by a number of fellow singers who are called as 'Pile' or 'Pali' and *Baain* who played musical instruments such as *Khol*, *Mandira*, *Ghuguru* and *Tal* (Tamuli, 2014:34).

Although the basic theme and mode of presentation are almost the same but on the basis of different geographical regions there are some deities which is traditionally worshipped in a different way. In upper Assam, it is performed in a slightly different way and called *Ojapali* and in some places of Lower Assam and North Bengal it is performed in a slightly different way accompanying *Dotora* (a stringed folk musical instrument). Whatsoever, on the basis of the way of performance, the *Maroi Gaan* can be categorized as *Padma Puran*, *Bashi Puran*, *Mukh Puran*, *Manasa Mangal* etc. (Nath, 2008:324-325). *Padma Puran Gaan* is performed on the Sankranti day of the month of *Shaon* (July-August) in the *Manasa* temple or in the house of a person (Bhakat, 2008:86). In *Padmapuran gaan*, a group of performers consisting of 10 to 12 persons jointly sung, performed dances and acting and glorifying *Maroi* (Tamuli, 2014:35). Along with the songs and dances, they also demonstrated the mythical stories of Behula and Lakshindar in a comprehensive way (Bhakat, 2008:79-84). Sometimes *Gidaal* sings this song for seven days and seven nights at wedding ceremony. Here we find some fellow singer such a *Baain*, *Pali*, *bhaoriya*, *sukuri* etc. The song uses instruments such as *Khol*, *mandira*, *dotara*, *jury*, *bahi*, *harmonium* etc. (Bhakat, 2008:82-83).

Baashi Puran Gaan is the combination of *Sunya Puran* and *Padma Puran*. Though, exceptional but the practice of *Baashi Puran Gaan* is still available in some parts of Assam and West Bengal. The creation of the universe is the main theme of *Baashi Puran Gaan* (Tamuli, 2014:138). Holding a *Choar* the *Mool* (chief performer) explains the glorifying story of the deity along with different mythical story of Behula and Lakshindar with the assistance of *Pali* dancing in meticulous way (Sarma, 1971:135-136). In this song, there is lots of talk about *Srishti Patton Gaan* (creation of universe) (Bhakat, 2001:11-12). The *Srishti Patton Gaan* is accompanied by *Bhaina Pali*, *Dain Pali*, *Pali*, *sukuri* etc. This song can be seen performed with the help of *Diana Pali* in a variety of style and postures (Bhakat, 2008:87-88). In *Mukh Puran Gaan*, a group of performers sitting in front of the idol of the deity perform songs verbally just to glorify the deity in a story telling method maintaining rhymes in a melodious way. No musical instruments are seen to be used in *Mukh Puran Gaan* (Choudhury, 2019: 19).

Manasha Mangal is the dramatic presentation of the different mythical elements related to *Padma Puran*. The magnificence of the deity *Manasa* is presented here in a comprehensive way through different characters along with the accompaniment of song, music and dances (Choudhury, 2019:21). Looking at the content of the song it can be seen that the songs are performed by *Mare Ojapali*. Sometimes *Ojapali* performed dances of Chanda Sadagar, *Narad*,

Yash-Yasini, Garo-Garwani, Bamun Bamuni etc., between the songs of Ojha. The content of *Ojapali* can be shared in this way-(a) birth of blacksmith, (b) birth of palm leaves, (c) birth of betel nut (d) birth of gardener (e) birth of weaver. *Ojapali* sing songs of God like Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar (Goswami, 1988:78-80).

On the basis of traditional method of worshipping *Maroi* or *Padya* puja can be divided into various segments and different types of episodes of *Maroi Gaan* (Nath, 1988:96-97). Although the basic theme and mode of presentation are almost the same which gave the *Maroi* puja a special dimension. It has no strict rule, sometimes it is spontaneously performed among the group of people and from generation to generation. Folk songs are not generally designed for public performance on the stage, these are characterized by simple steps and frequently repeated patterns of movement. Moreover, folk songs are performed for the enjoyment of the performers and audience (Das, 1998: 132). There are different episodes of *Maroi Gaans* that follows: *Bandana Gaan* (Prayer song inviting the Deity), *Srishti Patton* (The theme of Creation), *Jagaani* (The awakening), *Siver Biya* (Siva's Wedding), *Neta padyar janmo* (Birth of Netai and Padya), *Behula Lakshindarer Janmo* (Birth of Behula and Lakshindar), *Behula Lakshindarer Biya* (Behula and Lakshindar's Wedding), *Dangshan* (Snake bite of Lakshindar), *Bhashani* (sailings of Behula towards the abode of Gods and Goddesses holding Lakshindar's unconscious body), *Girdhanir Ghat* (A landing stage on the way to the abode of Gods and Goddesses), *Danir Ghat* (A landing stage on the way to the abode of Gods and Goddesses), *Goder Ghat* (A landing stage on the way to the abode of Gods and Goddesses), *Shankair Ghat* (A landing stage on the way to the abode of Gods and Goddesses), *Netair Ghat* (A landing stage on the way to the abode of Gods and Goddesses), *Debapur* (Abode of Gods and Goddesses), *Firani* (The Return of Behula along with her alive husband (Choudhury, 2019:20-21).

In the first episode, along with the Padya or Manasa some other deities are also adored during *Maroi* puja. First of all, the deity is invited to the prayer ground through *Bandana* songs for the wellbeing and the prosperity of the *Mareya* and his family (Choudhury, 2019:22). In the second episode, the *Geedal* performed and explained the songs related to creation of the universe. (Bhakat, 2001:11-12). In the folk tradition of *Maroi* puja there has been the recitation of creation of the universe, birth of Chandi, birth of Netai, Padya etc. With the intension of creation, Narayana gave birth to a daughter. The daughter again gave birth to a giant monster known as Madhukaitabh who was killed by Narayan. Thereafter, Narayana created Medini (earth) from the *Med* (blood) of Madhukaitabh. Immediately, Narayana entrusted Medini (earth) the task of creation. Then, Medini (earth) created Brahma, Bishnu and Maheswar (Tamuli, 2014:27-28). In the third episode, all the invited deities, accommodated staffs for worshipping *Geedal*. *Mareya*, *Nagini* (queen of snake) and even the musical instruments to be used are duly awakened and personified through this song. The *Mandop* (a small square size boundary made of banana tree) is also awakened by song (Tamuli, 2014:11).

In the fourth episode, Siva sent a proposal through Angira Muni (sage) as a Ghatok (Middleman) to marry Parbatia daughter of Himalaya. This proposal is

duly accepted by Himalaya thereafter, an auspicious date is fixed for the marriage (Choudhury, 2019:22). In the fifth episode, it was mentioned that, once Siva was resting under a bael tree on the bank of Kalidaha and the bael tree itself disguised as Chandi. Siva became excited while watching a pair of bael's assuming them to be a pair of alluring breasts of woman thus, his ejection took place. The semen of Siva was put on a leaf of lotus from where Padya was born (Bordoloi, 1986:116-117). Afterwards, Siva engaged in Tandap Nritya (rage of dancing) his sweats came out from his body and with this sweat Netai was born who was later sent to Kailash Mountain where he met Astobokro Muni (a sage having a curve physic). Netai laughed at Astobokro Muni after seeing his curve physic. Though Astobokra Muni extremely got angry but he controlled his emotion and cursed Siva's daughter to be slave of his younger sister forever (Bordoloi, 1986:116).

According to mythology, "Chanda Sadagar was born in a prosperous trader's family at Champak Nagar (Tripura). He got six sons namely Srikanta, Srikar, Gunakar, Madhukar, Durgabar and Sristidhar." (Include Reference) All the sons of Chanda Sadagar were married off according to their age and they began to lead a happy and prosperous life. Chanda Sadagar was an ardent devotee of Siva; but Manasa had set her mind to make him a devotee. She tried all the tricks to change the mind Chanda Sadagar but Chanda has protected himself with the mantras or mystic words he had received from Siva. However, when Manasa appeared to him as a beautiful woman, he let her know his secret. Thereafter, he lost his supernatural powers that came with the mystic words. When Chanda Sadagar still refused to be intimidated into worshipping Manasa, she started sending serpents that killed all his six sons (Choudhury, 1969:284-286). Thus, Chanda Sadagar's grief is expressed through this song: -

*O din geilre, geilre, din geilre
Haire, aanander din geilre.
Chay putra maril, Chandar sunya hail puri
Ante pure thaki kaande Sukula sundari
Chanda bole sunpriye amaro bochon
Aamar sanmukhe Jodi karahe krondon
Kanir utchisto putrok bhasaou sagore
Krondon sunile hashiben kaniye (Deb, 2016:69-70).*

English Translation

Days gone by; days gone by
Oh! Happy days are gone
After the death of six sons, the palace of Chanda became desolated.
Sukula sundari, the wife of Chanda cried her heart out in Antepure.
Chanda said "my beloved" listen to me.
If you cry in front of me
Floating my sons killed by Manasa in the sea
Manasa will laugh listening to our cries.

This song reflects the frustration and sadness of Chanda Sadagar. Chanda almost lost his interest in trade as he did not have the heart to look after them

properly due to the shock of death of his six sons at a stretch. Chanda's wife lost heart and began to cry. Then Chanda Sadagar tried to console his wife not to cry otherwise *Manasa* would become so happy and laugh.

Chanda decided to set out a sea voyage to rebuild his business destroyed by *Manasa* at Champak Nagar (Tripura). After a successful business tour of Chanda Sadagar, *Manasa* launched a storm and although Chand Sadagar initially survived with support from Chandi (wife of Siva), she was later asked to withdraw support from Shiva requested by *Manasa*. Once that happened Chand Sadagar's ship was wrecked, but *Manasa* swept him ashore at a place where an old friend Chandrakant lived. Chandrakant tried his best to bring him around to the goddess *Manasa* but Chanda Sadagar steadfastly refused. Though he became a beggar after losing everything still he worshipped only Shiva and Chandi who refused to bow to *Manasa*. It was traditionally believed that Chanda Sadagar's 14 dingas (ship) were wrecked at nearby place of Salchocha in the district of Dhubri in Assam which is at present popularly known as Chandardinga pahar (hillock). At last, after arriving at Champak Nagar, Chanda told everyone about the lost business story of himself and derogatory life ruined by *Padya*. After hearing the story of Chanda Sadagar, people felt sorry for him but by controlling emotion Chanda consoled them. This story is expressed in this song:

Dinga jabo harail, tate joto lok mailo
Chaidhya dinga dubil sagar
Morilen dari maji, sange mara gail saji
Dubil dinga Kalidaha sagar
Suniya rajyer lok, paiye onek sok
Moharol uthe desh juri
Chander chorine pori, kaande joto naronari
Soke dukhe jay ghora-ghori
Chande bole projagon, ken kando okaron
Aamikohi sun totto kotha
Jato lok moriache, bondi kori lobo pache
Kanike lagal paile hetha (Deb, 2016:69-70).

English Translation

Ships were lost, many people died
fourteen ships sank in the sea
Boatmen lost their life, many things destroyed
Ships sank in Kalidaha Sagar.
Hearing this, common people became sad
there was a hue and cry all over the state
All the people cried.
Returned home with joy and sorrow
Chanda told his people not to cry without any reason.
Listen to my spiritual speech
I will capture *Manasa* for killing many people.
if I meet *Manasa* here.

This song reflects that Chanda was a rich and prosperous trader. He was so determined that he wouldn't worship *Manasa* at any cost. As a result, his 14 dinga (ship) sank in the Kalidaha Sagar by *Manasa*. Many people who were accompanied him lost their life and property. Hearing this news, the people became sad and began to cry.

After returning to Champak Nagar from business tour, Chanda Sadagar rebuilt his life. After the death of six sons of Chanda Sadagar another son was born who was known as Lakshindar. At the same time Saha's wife also gave birth to a daughter, whom they named her Behula. Chanda became very happy to find Behula as his daughter-in-law. It is described in this song:

*Jatra kore Sadagar, sange putra Lakshindar
Jaibar Ujani nogore
Aage pache sainyo chole, madhye Chanda koutuhole
Saher tonoya juri bare
Sadhu hoilsoyar, sanmukhote malakar
Srigali dekhil bam pashe
Dakshinote bisdhor
Dakhiya koutuk boro
Sumongol dekhi Chanda haashe (Deb, 2016:50-52).*

English Translation

Sadagar start his journey, with his son Lakshindar
Going towards upper town
Chanda Sadagar had gone with curiosity with his force around him.
To arrange the marriage of the daughter of Saher
Saher became happy to see the idol maker, in front of Malakar.
Saw fox on the left side
And poisonous snake on the South
Become so excited
Chanda, the merchant smiled to see the good sign.

This song reflects the happiness of Chanda Sadagar. Chanda Sadagar had gone to Ujani Nagar along with Lakshindar and his soldiers to marry his son with Behula. The trader became happy to see some good sign at the time of journey. There was fear in the mind of Chanda because his six sons were already killed by *Manasa*. Therefore, after the marriage of Behula and Lakshindar, Chanda Sadagar immediately directed Kesai Kamaar to build an iron house without a single hole for the protection From *Manasa*. It is described in this song:

*Paan phul paiye haate, jato sabo kamaar
Lohar mondo lage gathi bare
Sollo soto Karmo kare, lage mondo gathibare
Dukan patiya thorok thore
Osto dhatu diyaghor, gothe oti monohar
Nana chitro paroma sundar
Dirgha kore saathaat, prosthelay poncho haat
Bhiti baandhi laage gathibar
Boroboro lahar khuti, jatno lore poropati*

*Sari sarilagay kata
Boro bror lohar paat, aaniya lagay taat
Chal khani lagay loharpata (Choudhury, 2016:33-34).*

English Translation

All the Kamaars were invited by Chanda
to build a palace with iron.
All the Kamaars started to build the palace
After hearing the command of Chanda with fear.
Build palace with eight metals, looked very beautiful.
The length of the house was seven feet and the breadth was five feet.
The foundation of the house was ready and plastered.
Thorn was used everywhere in the iron house.
large Iron sheets were used there.
the roof was also made of iron.

This song reflects that Chanda Sadagar did not want to take a risk. Therefore, he took extra care of Lakshindar. He decided to build a Basor Ghor (an iron palace for bride and groom) for the wedding night of Behula-Lakshindar without any hole so that not a single snake could enter the house. Immediately, he directed Kesai Kaamar to build such a proof house, it is defined in this song. But after marriage when the “Mer Ghor” or “Baser Ghor” was being built, Manasha visits Kesai Kaamaar and requested him to keep a hole in the house. It is described in this song:

*Ki more koirche mao oi ranga chorine?
Aamaar goitre amo ki hobe
Padyar bochon suni kesai kamaar
Kor jore manosak kore namaskar
Samanya manus aami Chanchal moti
NaJ aniya dos koinuk shomo padyawati
Jar nun khai aami taar karya kori
Na korire taa rkarya jai prane mori
Tumi kon ai jan Chanda Sadagor!
Koto bar lora diya polaicho dore (Deb, 2016:69-70).*

English Translation

What was my mistake, I seek forgiveness?
Now what will be happened to me
Hearing the voice of Manasa, Kesai
Kamaar bowed down to Manasa
I am an ordinary people, my mind is restless
I had done mistake unknowingly
I am ready to help those who helped me.
I can die for him who helps me.
Who are you, Chanda Sadagar!
Those who ran mostly in fear.

This song reflects that Kesai Kamaar begged *Manasa* to forgive him for not keeping a hole in the Mer Ghar as he was strictly instructed by Chand Sadagar to build a house in such a way that not even a single snake could enter. Chand Sadagar took extra care of Lakshindar. He decided to build iron house for the night of the newly married couple Behula and Lakshindar so that no snakes will enter. But despite his instruction Ironworks have been built by a craftsman named Kesai Kamaar who was later threatened by *Manasa* to keep a small hole or to be killed all his family members by serpents. Under the pressure of *Manasa*, he kept a small hole in the Iron wall. On the night of Basar (Marriage night), *Manasa* sent Kalnagini who killed Lakshindar. Then helpless Behula started to sing the following song:

*Bandung Ganga Chorone tomar
Bohuto bhakti kori, bandung Ganga Saraswati
Karunamoyee Sindhu Narayani
Sarge chil surdhawni Bhagirathe aage aani
Patakire korite utdhar
Hen Ganga bandung sire, kouti namaskar tare
Ganga bine goti naire aar
Dehar samart hakale sokole aador kore
Sokole koriya lay aador
Dehar obosan kale, chariya polay sobe
Dekhite sokole kore bhoy (Deb, 2016:94-96).*

English Translation

Worship Ganga at your feet
With much devotion
Merciful Sindhu Narayani
Holy Bhagirath in heaven
brought before to Rescue Pataki
Worship Ganga with much devotion
There is no way without Ganga
As long as the body lasts, everyone loves it
Everyone loves
Everyone leaves at the time of death.
At the time of death everyone leaves
for the fear of seeing the dead body.

This song reflects the emotion of Behula. Behula woke up all the night and decided to guard her husband by holding with her both hands. Thus, when Nagini comes, Behula sleeps protecting her husband in such a way that there is no way to bite any part of his body. But Kalnagini was already therein the hair of Behula which later stings to Lakshindar. She prayed all the Gods to save her husband's life from snake bite but her husband succumbed to snake bite. Through this song Behula wanted to express her sadness and helpless condition. In Netair *ghat* the raft was floating for six months but one day the raft arrived at the Netair Ghat, where *Manasa*'s foster mother stayed and worked as a washer woman and on the river bank the raft touched the land. Hearing Behula's

perpetual prayers to *Manasa*, she decided to take her to *Manasa* using her supernatural powers (Deb, 2016:102-103).

In heaven, *Manasa* gave a commitment to *Behula* that she will bring back her husband's life on condition that she must convince *Chand Sadagar* to worship her. Thus, *Behula* agreed that, she will convince *Chanda Sadagar* to worship *Manasa* at all cost. Immediately *Behula* approached *Chanda Sadagar* and cried in front of him explaining about the terms of *Manasa* to resurrect *Lakshindar*. Eventually, *Chanda Sadagar* decided to worship *Manasa* only with his left hand as he could not forgive the goddess for all the suffering he had to go through. For this, *Manasa* did not hold anything against him hence he brought *Lakshidar* back to life. (Choudhury, 2019:34-35).

Mythological narratives are an important part of the *Manasa* deity which is essential for the worship of other gods and goddesses. The role of *Behula* is particularly important because in many areas the story is known not as a story of *Manasa*, rather it is known as a story of *Behula* and *Lakshindar*. But *Manasa* is known as creator of obstacles and problems on the other hand *Behula* is known as a person who overcomes suffering and wins by having similar features and same nature. Interestingly the story ends with a double victory because *Behula* gets what she wants after her visit to the city of gods and judgement arranged by *Siva* and *Manasa's* wish is also being fulfilled by establishing a full-fledged cult on earth.

CONCLUSION

The above discussion is centred on the *Maroi* puja which is the most important puja of the Koch Rajbanshis, which held a special position among the social rituals for its unique way of worshipping. The Koch Rajbanshis worshipped snake goddess as a form *Maroi* puja with pomp and grandeur during the rainy season for the prevention of evil spirit, fertility, prosperity of human being and especially for the cure of snake bite. In the above discussion mention about *Manasa* is that *Manasa* puja is also called as *Maroi* puja because the serpent goddess is regarded as the main goddess among all the god and goddess that is why this goddess is called as *Maroi*. She is represented as a symbol of women power. She is believed to have protected everyone from dangers and fulfilled the wish of worshippers. There are different types of *Maroi* puja, songs, dances, segments and episodes of *Maroi* puja which is performed during the time of *Maroi* puja. In this regard *Gidaal* played an important role during the time of *Maroi* puja. Including *Gidaal* there are some other group members such as *Baain*, *Pali*, *Dewri*, *Sukri* also played vital role during the time of *Maroi* puja. Mythological narratives are an important part of this *Maroi* puja. Mythological narratives mention that *Manasa's* quarrel with *Candi*, *Siva's* wife, this occurred when *Manasa*, born as a snake in the underground world and never seeing her father, she visits the house of *Siva* and is misunderstood by *Candi* as a possible concubine or lover. When *Candi* kicks her, *Manasa* renders her senseless with her venom. A quarrel and battle between the two ladies ensue and her status of daughter proved and accepted with great difficulties. *Shiva* made a place for *Manasa* under a tree and created a companion, called *Neto* (*Neta*), traditionally imagined as a washerwoman. *Manasa* is being quite dependent on *Neta* for ideas and moral support. *Siva* himself takes the trouble to get her married off and

finds a groom with a very specific nature an ascetic who is not eager to be married at all. A story about *Manasa*'s marriage goes on to show that she was even an unwanted bride and how no good groom was interested in marrying her. The morning after the wedding a quarrel breaks out between *Manasa* and her husband. The pair separate immediately, but the aim of having children has already been achieved and *Manasa* gives birth to six little snakes.

The longest and most important part of the *Manasa* story is her struggle with Chanda Sadagar, who refused to worship her despite her wife doing so secretly. As a result, *Manasa* started to terrorise the family of Chanda Sadagar, killing his six sons and destroyed his property and business by sinking several boats full of goods. Lastly, she took the challenge to enter the iron house made by Chanda Sadagar for Lakshindar. Moreover, the story of Behula and Lakshindar is one of great virtue and fantastic stoicism. The role of Behula is particularly important because in many areas the story is known not as a story of *Manasa*, rather it is known as a story of Behula and Lakshindar. But *Manasa* is known as creator of obstacles and problems on the other hand Behula is known as a person who overcomes suffering and wins by having similar features and same nature. Interestingly the story ends with a double victory. Behula gets what she wants after her visit to the city of gods and judgement arranged by Siva and *Manasa*'s wish is also being fulfilled by establishing a full-fledged cult on earth. In connection with the Behula Lakshindar mythological story serpent goddess is worshipped as the form of *Maroi* puja in the Koch Rajbanshi society during the time of marriage ceremony because her worship involves negotiation with dangerous divine power, which generates insecurity and uncertainty, but at the same time rewards adepts with wonderful abilities. Since that time *Manasa* or *Maroi* puja played an important role in the daily life in several areas among the Koch Rajbanshi people.

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