

**RESEARCH PROJECT**

**BENGALI RITES AND RITUALS  
OF BARAK VALLEY: A SPECIAL  
STUDY ON BRATA PARVAN**

*Submitted by*

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Cachar, Assam

*Sanctioned No.*

**F. No. 6.66/NERC/Pro-KD/2019-227**

Dtd. August 19, 2019

*Submitted to*

**Indian Council of Social Science Research  
North Eastern Regional Centre (ICSSR-NERC)**

**NEHU Campus, Shillong, Meghalaya**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I have been born and brought up in a village. I have inherited the cultural rites and rituals from the rural cultural perspective. From the very childhood, I have been associated with rituals and rites from the 'Brata Parvan' that have been performed by my mother and her associates. It was likewise their part of life. I used to listen the *brata* tales and *brata* rhymes in close contract that have been uttered by my mother and her associates while performing the *Brata Parvan*.

It is still reverberating in my mind. It has a great significance on my scholastic studies. From where came the concept of the text in research under the title "**Bengali Rites and Rituals of Barak Valley: A special Study on *Brata Parvan***". Because of the process of urbanization is leaving its paws to the conventional rites and culture and pulling them in the backseat towards annihilation of folk rites and culture. It is on the extinction due to which I feel the onus to work under the project as a part of nationwide drive to rescue it from the verge of extinction.

Hence, I had submitted a project proposal to the Indian Council of Social Science Research-North Eastern Research Centre (ICSSR-NERC), Shillong, Meghalaya, seeking financial assistance in the year 2019. Accordingly ICSSR-NERC authority has granted the said research proposal and sanctioned a sum of Rs. 80,000/- vide sanction no. F. No. 6.66/NERC/Pro-KD/2019-227 dtd. August 19, 2019 for doing the research work smoothly. I would like to express my deepest sense of gratefulness, as it could not be possible to complete the research work without their financial assistance and cooperation for the same.



This project has not been fulfilled if I didn't have adequate information from the resource persons under this research oriented survey work. I have mentioned their names in proper places. I am grateful to them. In fact the man behind this research project is Biswajit Nath the Project Assistant, he helped me a lot in this course of studies during last six months. I convey my sincere gratitude to Biswajit.

My best wishes go to the Principal, teaching and non-teaching staff of Radhamadhab College, whose enthusiasm and encouragement helped to complete the research work in proper time. I have been assisted with various books and journals from the Radhamadhab College library and the other neighbouring college library, I am grateful to them. Besides this venture, here is Bhaskarjyoti Deb, famous poet and writer of the valley, Dr. Ramakanta Das, Assam University and Dr. Priyabrata Nath, S.S. College, Hailakandi, they have advised me with their valuable suggestion, for which I shall remain grateful to them.

  
**(Dr. Kalipada Das)**  
*Project Director*

## **CHAPTER - I**

### **THE REGION OF BARAK VALLEY: IN SEARCH OF THE ROOTS OF BRATA PARVAN**

Bengali community is a dominant linguistic race in the Barak Valley of Assam. The Social, Cultural and Rural life of these Bengalis are influenced by the Sylheti Locale in the Barak Valley. If we see the Territorial Limit, we could find Bengal, Bihar and Orissa were under the dominion of the then Nawab of Bengal. The East Bengal was demarcated by Karimganj district along with the Badarpurghat of Larger Barak Valley. Sylhet was segregated for the smooth functioning of administration by the British in the year 1874. Sylhet was annexed to Assam at that period. The Surma Valley Division was formed with Sylhet and Cachar. A greater portion of Sylhet Locale went outside India in 1947 due to the Partition. Three and half thana (Police outpost) of the Karimganj Subdivision within the territory of Sylhet district had been left as victims with the rootless culture which today is a part of Barak Valley. Like the ethnic group of North East, Hindu Bengali today have their own original characteristics. According to the census, it is



seen that thousands of rootless people came to take shelter in the state of Assam due to Partition. But the contexts of rites and rituals of the evicted people were unperturbed. They bear the Legacy of Sylheti in their hearts and minds with *Brata parvan* in their daily living in Barak Valley.

In every country, there are some kind of social, household and religious rituals because man wants to taste the newness among the stagnant whirlpools of everyday life. So there came the rituals and rites, which is seen mostly in the Hindu Bengali community. In respect of racial identity, Bengali likes to perform the rites and rituals, amidst pangs and pains that they experience in course of living. Here, the life force of Bengali, lies in the feast and festivities of Taboos and rituals. These festivities are performed in various segments and occasions. If watched, these activities have their roots in various caste and creeds, that found voices in collective endeavours. Beside these, there are local variations and varieties as well as the radical cohesion of different races into Bengali, with religious fervour in Bengali women society. These rites are being performed from time immemorial. *Brata parvan* have a significant place in search of devotion.

In fact, Barak Valley is constituted of the parts of pre-independent Surma Valley. And Surma Valley, belonged to the greater Bengal communities. So, before the search of the roots of rituals and Brata *parvan* one has to take into account the greater Bengal. This Bengali Community belongs to '*Baro masher tero parvan*', thirteen rites in twelve months. There are hardly any month which do not have any Brata or rites. In a word, Brata is performed in order to the fulfilment of the Bratees hopes, aspirations and cravings among the women's women hoods in social strata, which is performed from time to time. Brata is a household part to religion. It also entails magic one who perform brata, is called *bratee*, the Bratees are mostly seen in Bengali society.

The word Brata has come from the root syllable "Br" [ √ + Br + Aut (Autak) = Brata] the common meaning of Brata is regulation sacrifice. The meaning of the word Brata is performance of rites. It is performed in groups. These are pious activities. Every women have their own cravings and desire in terms of the performance of Brata. The common belief goes that if Bratas are performed one may find solace and earns virtues. Bratas are the rituals, seeking the well-being and



desire of the Bratees. As man has cravings so the 'Sanyasi' do have. The desire to meet the *Sanyasis* is the desire to meet the god. To meet the desire end, *Sanyasi*, also perform Brata. Their rites too are one kind of Brata. Abanindranath Tagore has said, The rituals that came hand to hand in order to fulfil the desire, is called Brata.<sup>1</sup> Mankind's hopes and aspiration are expressed through the performance of Bratas. It is a kind of sacrifice alleviation of sins. There are common elements in the Bratas. But festivities with Bratas belong to a different scale.

In terms of the history of Bratas and Bratya's (untouchables) Niharranjan Roy has said, the history of Bratas are complex and ancient. But it has emerged from pre-*vaidic* period. They belong to the *bratya* (untouchable), that gave them the status to be called subaltern, by the Aryan Brahmin. But it is difficult to prove the relationship between *Brata*, and *Bratya*. Yet it may have a connection, with no illogic and unhistorical.<sup>2</sup>

In the aspect of *Bratas*, Gurubandhu Bhattacharjee has said "From time immemorial, there are Bratas, performed in every locale and village by the Hindoos. There are pedagogy of

beautiful and moral lessons. The words of *bratarities* are unwritten oral words of hopes and aspiration, desire and cravings of people at large. There are strange union between individual and society. These aesthetic values belong to the irrespective to mother. Proud with devotion to guru, compassionate to the sisters, heavenly to the husband, that found words in rhymes and *panchali*. These inject wonder with stars, sun, moon into the minds of the Bratees.

The ancient emotional sentiment belong to the father, brother and husband. The women bratees desire for their well-beings. Into the roots of the bratees, there are collective cravings of women who performs bratas to meet their desire and demands. This too, is seen in the primitive communities. These are coalesced and find oneness in collective works with enthusiasm. Taboos and social rituals are part of the Bratees, activities with the so-called *Bratyas* (untouchable). One has to understand the basics of cohesion between Aryan and non-aryan culture to understand the Bengali race and their culture. In this respect Abanindranath Thakur has said, the Aryans who have come to India from outside India and met those; gave them the name 'Aryabrata'. Before the arrival of the



Aryan these Aryabrata live peacefully side by side as son and daughter. Young girl and boy, old men, warrior and farmer, among there weal and woe. Communication in the form of marriage and feasts were there between the Aryan and non-aryans. The roots and the sources of gods and goddesses, the give and take history, the performance of rituals are the history of ecclesiastical Bratas by the devotees and bratees, who are our household members.<sup>3</sup>

More on the sources of the bratas can be said that the worship of the trees came hand to hand from the Tribal Society. These have found expression from the social strata and the subaltern significance that found extension to the rites and rituals further.

It is only a social capacity in order to gain control over the nature, as a magical rites, that came from the primitive people, as a legacy. To gain, Bengali have been imbibed to gain control over the nature and natural calamities through the worship of trees like (Banyan, *Aswatha*, *Sheora*, *Pakur*, *Mahua*, *Dumur*, *Neem*, *Siz*, *Banana*, *Dhan*) and stones, hills, fruits vegetables, birds, animals, lakes and rivers. These have roots in primitive civilization.

Worship of "trees" are legacy to the collective primitive society. But people have worshiped them as gods and goddess, to name a few, such as *Shiber bell*, *Monosar sez*, *Aswathwa of shasthi*, *Tulsi of Vishnu*, *Kadam of Krishna*, *Kalagach of Lakshmi*, *Neem of Shitola*, *Sheorabrikshwa of Rupashi*. Beside these there are also *Banyan trees*, *Aswathwa*, *Bamboo* (Bamboo worship are also common among the 'garos').

Many trees, *Palash tree*, *Amlaki trees* too are also there which gained status as gods and goddesses. The worship of trees are age-old and nurtured from time-immemorial, more can be seen where uses of branches, and leaves, to meet the demand of rituals. Moreover, there are coconut, *chalkumra*, *kolarthor*, *Sunda*, *Til*, *Chaltapata*, *Mankochu*, *Lo-ghatu*, branches of *Kashfull*, *Kolapata*, bark of *Banana*, and branches, holy grass, *Dhan Durba* Turmeric, betel nut, *paan*, vermilion *mangalghat* etc. Imageries upon the earthen pots, *alpana* with leaves and grass, cow, fish, symbol of feet (goddess *Lakshmi* feet) etc. Again, the few elements of the *bratas*, are seen as the cultural inhibition and memories of the primordial society, such as mango-leaves, corn-stock, bamboo-pen, banana, sugarcane and many other branches etc. Things many can be seen in



*Kumari* brata, which takes elements of corn and rites to augment rice cultivation as performed.

There are many *bratas* in Bengali, which were relevant in the ancient tribes as to & rites to fertility and harvesting. These *bratas* came to be the descendent from the ancient primitive community and a few Aryan-Brahmin culture.

The brata-word, English ritual or rites, leaves to be discussed at length. In respect to these, Turner in his 'Religious celebration' has said "Rituals celebrate or commemorate, trans-human power which though invisible, are regarded by believers as the first and final causes of natural and cultural phenomena. With brata, there is a close relation to behaviour. It is materialist in concept."

Brata does not belong to individual. It is a typical activities of collective society. It has no end. On the one hand the *bratas* are of the virtues of gods and goddess, on the other hand, it delineates, their power, with the desire of well-being. Women does not perform their *bratas* for their well-being as individual. Private, but as a collective endeavour. "*Bahujan Sukhaa cho, Bahujan Hitaya cho*" are their fundamental basics.

Transformation of nature, changes in season, days and nights. The rising and setting of sun and moon. The death of leaves and animals have helped people to give them impetus to be conscious through the religious rites and rituals. People witnessed the rapid changes of climate and seasons and that created consciousness among them. To alleviate and get rid of this, people conjectured gods and goddess as imageries with harvest and festivals, among which; Brata is a significant way out.

On the purpose of Brata performance Kashiram Das in the 'Shantiparva' of 'Mahabharata' has said –

*“Suddhwa chitta brata jei kore acharan  
Swarbe dukhe tore sei pap bimachon.”<sup>4</sup>*

*(In pious mind who behaves all good omen goes with this)*

Those who performs bratas, are called Bratees – the meaning of Bratees belongs to the responsible person, who takes responsibilities to safeguard their people belonging to their communities. Women has had a significant role to play in their families and society. The family can be good and virtuous with the sacrifice and ideology. That is why it is said – 'Sansar Sukher hoi, ramanir gune'.

Family becomes happy with the virtues of woman. The heads of society could know that it is only due to the women that a family is complete with their knowledge imparting to the children and their dedication. That is why through the *alpana* of brata, rhymes and songs, it becomes one kind of pedagogy to teach and perform.

In fact, bratas are performed by the women. The picture of Bratees, with their hopes and aspiration, is reflected in their rites as such that is why, whatever may be there are variety. Yet it has common threads.

It aspires, sometimes to the goodness of husband and children, sometimes, to get rid of evils, Sometimes in the cravings for Rajas and protection, everywhere women are there to perform. In our counts, women from the ages have been practising worship to the guru, belief in religion. Faith in household matters. In this respect Sister Nibedita in 'The modern Review' (monthly journal) has said.

"Great men workout knowledge and give it to the community. Thus each civilisation becomes distinguished by its characteristic institutions. Nothing could be more perfect educationally than the brata's which Hindu society has



preserved and hands to its children in each generation as perfect lessons in worship, so is in the practice of social relationships or in manners. Some of these bratas – like that which teaches the service of the cow, or the sowing of seeds, or some which seem to set out on the elements of geography and astronomy – have an aim of desiring to impart which we now distinguish as secular knowledge. They appear in fact, like surviving fragments of an old educational scheme. But for the most part, they constitute a training in religious ideas and religious feelings. As such their perfection is startling. They combine practice, strong game, and object with a precision that no Indian can appreciate or enjoy as can the European familiar with modern educational speculation. India has in these, done on the religious and social plane, what Europe is trying, in the Kindergarten, to do on the scientific. When we have understood the bratas, we cease to wonder at the delicate grace and passivity of the oriental woman.”<sup>5</sup>

That is why through the performance of different brata, the women bratee’s desire, not only of herself, but also of others even to the society, are expressed. In this context it can be cited, A *brata* rite to be specially, called as such must be

observed collectively by people having the same emotions and feelings. At least individual desires must have a collective basis. When a girl observes a rite for the growth of paddy or for rain, she observes it not for herself alone but for the common desire of the community; find expression in the rites she observes. These brata rites are really observed for collective social prosperity.<sup>6</sup>

Man, by nature is optimistic. And Bengali are a little more optimistic, they perform several bratas in order to fulfil their desires. In to the performance of bratas among the Bengali women, there are belief, conventions, feel, and the desire to have goodness. The *bratees* observe the *bratas* which strictly adheres to times and occasions, in Hindu theology. Though in many bratas, the women, observe it according to Moon almanac, but in most of the cases they observe the sun-*almamac*. In fact, into the performance of bratas 'Sankranti' has had a significant place.

To perform bratas, a few things are required. These are the element of Panacea. Certain things such as *Ghat, Amrapallab, Flower, Durba, Dhan, Pradip, Tulsi, Belpata, Siddhi, Horitoki, Dadhi, Madhu, Chini, Ghrito, Sashish-Dub, Panchya sashya,*

*Paan, Supari, Chal, Chaler Guro, Dhaner Sish, Kulo, Sidur, Pituli, (for Alpana), Pakakola, Bastro, (Dhuti-or Shari), Gamcha, Dhup-dhuna, Ghati, Sora & Thala, Madhuparker Baati, Thamarthali, Gangajal, Asan, Piri, Pusphomala, Chandmala, Phalmuler Noibydy, Jagyakath, Patkath, Chandankath, Bali, Dakshina etc. Among the element Dhaner Sish, Pituli, Sora, Piri, Ghat, Pradip, Amrapallab* are the element of artistic and craving for well-being. These elements cited above, unveils running picture of socio-economics and eco-system. Among the elements the water-pot, and row grass; above row coconut and the artistry with the oil-vermillion in the body of the pot reveals the concept of Matriarchal society. The elements of the Bratas can be seen as symbols of living humans. As for example Banana and the row coconut is the typical account of fertility symbols. Because row coconut and Banana blooms in a single *khadi, kari* is the symbol of riches and betel nut leaves is the symbol of vagina. Again the pot with water and the row coconut are the symbols of pregnant women, the mango leaves are the symbols of life's well-being. The coconut placed on the body of pot is also the symbol of Vagina. This pot mango leaves and coconut have been expressed as the life-cycle. Again the



seeds of corn or the paddy that is placed into the body of the pot, too is the symbol of fertility. This fertility symbol is closely related to the human life with the images of human anthropomorphism by oil and vermilion.

A few things have to be observed into the performance of Brata. Woman performer has to go on fasting after the bath. Through the performance of rites the women's sacrifice, loyalty and hidden desire and concentration on religion are expressed in consequences. In a word, the methods related to the Brata, belong to the early bath, performance, fasting, drawing of *Alpana*, rhyming and listening and citing of the Brata tales. The day before the performance, eating of vegetables, fasting, fruits, milked rice, Habishya part of foodings is to be strictly observed before the performance. But there are variations.

After the *bratas* performed, there are tales, of Bratas, related to the performance. The spokesman of the Bratas belongs to any aged women. (If it is male story-teller, after that it goes to the aged man of the family. The devotees listen eagerly the tales of Bratas with the holy grass and flowers. At the time of listening women express their language in times of ups and down of the Brata tale. After that the bratee, bow at clay feet of the gods

and goddess with hope of their virtues and goodness. This system or method goes hand to hand as linear process among the bratees.

The tales of *bratas* are directed only for the propagation of bratas. These tales are the tales of ups and downs of the families and here lies the influences of gods and the devotees prayer for her mercy. With these purities the Bengali is still alive with such *bratas*.

Till today, Bengalis are living with her subaltern deities in terms of peace and happiness and beauties in nature along with its knolls and dells. There are individual cravings for the goodness and safety of the *bratee's* son and her children. In order to keep intact the pious activities the women devotees perform rites through kirtan and it is due to this influence, Bengalis are living with her devotion, compassion, modesty, pedagogy that is spreading its message over their locals. This is conducive more than the formal training and education that we receive in our classroom teachings. In this way the rites and rituals came and went hand to hand in search of true, human religion.<sup>7</sup>

The values and importance of Bengali bratas are immense. Because it is through *Bratakathas*, that we receive and perceive the picture of identity of Bengali. Among these, the picture that we receive from the tales of *Saat Rani*, *Sathin*, belong to the commentary on polygamy that was rampant in the then society. As because there were pains enthralled upon the good wife by the Satin the women prayed for the desire to be liked by their own man. As because the process was there to be the mother of many sons, so the women prayed for sons, at large. This desire came into vogue from the societal structure. That is why one cannot gainsay the historical values of the *Bratakatha*. Moreover many elements of primitive society could be seen in the consequent form of the Bratas. Among this sacrifice, sorcery, and magic realism could be seen in many Bratas which are dependent upon the magics, performed by the bratees.

Man is the lover of beauty. From time immemorial the concept of beauty came to be related to his life and time. Man has ornamented his body to fulfil their dream of beauty. Art came into existence after their own desire to beauty. Gradually man came in group who has built convention that had left their



civilized glory with societal culture. This can be proved into the stone-inscription in the cave's artistry. These are purely aesthetic. The *alpanas* here came from the artistic consciousness that were drawn by the women from Bengal. Here, they are at par with the artistic excellence of the Man-artist. *Alpana* could be thought of as the mirror of the women's mind and their aesthetics. Because the women portrays their hopes and aspiration through these *alpanas*. That is known to everybody. This are of variety in origin. The world of *alpana* is the world of women's mind.

A special part of Bengali Brata is *alpana*. Here their desire and cravings find form of their mind's sketches. There are symbols in *Alpana*. These symbols are said to be the sources from primitive magic. The much used lotus and the creative cycle are representative of womens and men's physical plain.

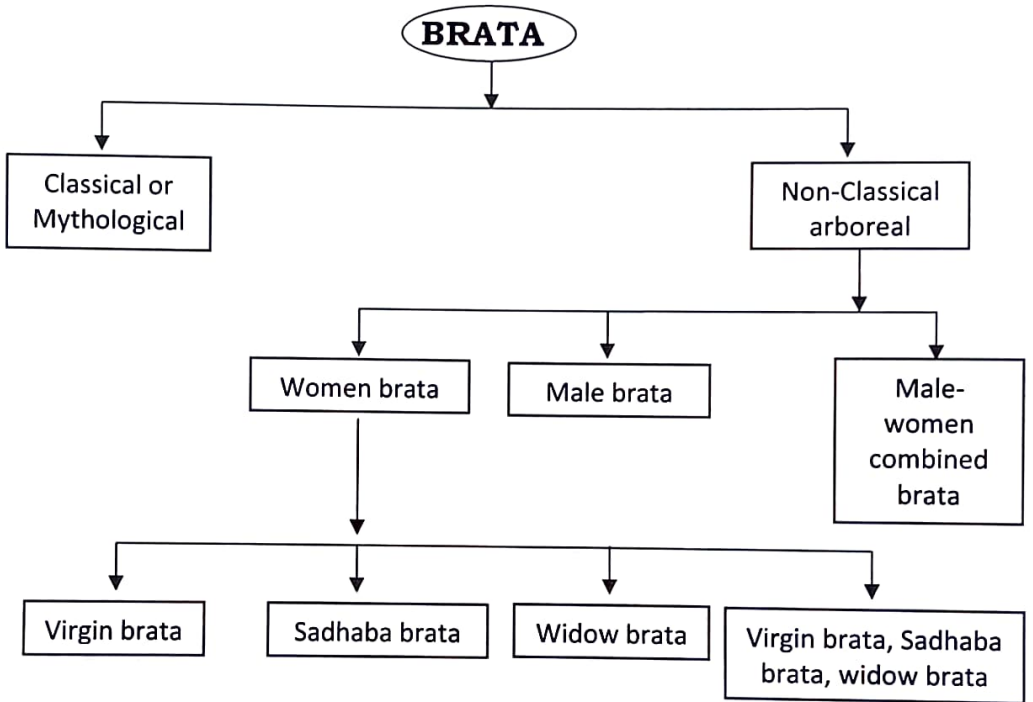
After the hunting life there came agricultural system. By the way the form of signs and symbols too, came to be changed. Into the drawings of *Alpana* of the Bratas, many sketches and motifs could be seen. These are lotus flower, the seeds of corn, ornament, owl, *langool*, ladder, the vermillion case, leaves and twigs. The feet of Lakshmi and her pitcher, palanquin, birds,

elephant, horse, *dheki*, comb, sun, *kori*, banana tree, fish, sign of the Palm, the sign of the Foots. These are significant to our studies on Bratas. For example the good signs of the feet. Into the performance of Lakshmi worship, the drawings are faced to the front side of the house. Because, Lakshmi would arrive to the house, and the house will be full of riches, is conjectured.

*Bratas* are the performance of cravings and desire specially, women perform the rites on the one hand is imaginative and other hand passionate. It is both individual and type. The rhymes are indispensable part of Bratas. Brata is the mirror of women. The performer sees her own image in the *Brata-parvan*. The hopes and aspiration, cravings and desire are echoed in such type of Brata tales yet it is different in form, place to place. It is the expression of wellbeing, desire to the riches, parent's in-laws house, kith and neighbours.

The mindscapes of women and man are expressed in the brata-rhymes. Sometimes this is linear, sometimes it is dramatic. Abanindranath Tagore on his way to define the bratas, citing examples have said where the rhymes of bratas were cemented by the adhesive of the different parts of rhymes, there dance and songs, too are left to be taken place.<sup>8</sup>

Brata in one sense, is performance for the goodness. The desire of Bratees is reflected in variety of performance. Bratas are performed throughout the year in different days. This can be said graphically.



In the classical Brata, there are spellings of *Swastibachan*, *Karmarambha*, *Swankalpo*, *Ghatsthepan*, *Panchogoyva Sadhon*, *Santimantro*. After that dedication of *Bhujji Dakshina* is given to the Brahamanas. In classical brata, the Aryan saints pray for riches and well-being, rice, longevity and progress to the goddess along with the tales related to the gods. With *ghritahuti* if these bratas are performed than the



bratees are supposed to have the abode of *Vishnulook*, the abode of Krishna, after their lives in the earth.

There is no such pomp and splendour into the non-classical brata like classical Brata. Here the bratees pray to their desired god in solitude. From this point of view, *Loukik* Brata could be said to have same pomp and splendour like the classical. But though the purpose is same the methods are different. All the *Shastriyabratas* are one. But there are differences into the performances of brata from locale to locale. For example, we can cite the performance of *Ambubachi* and *Raja Sankranti* of Oddisa.

In to the bratas, Bengali women play a significant part to it. Among the many bratas by women, the *kumari* girl observe this brata. After the marriage, the bratas that the *Sadhabha* performs is called *Sadhabha* brata. *Sadhaba* bratas are – *Aeio Sankranti brata*, *Joymangal chandi brata*, *Harish mangalchandi brata*, *Natai mangalchandi brata*, *Sankat mangalchandi brata*, *Sidalnatai brata*, *Sankatrani brata*, *Sankata brata*, *Rupasi brata*, *Shitali brata*, *Sabitri brata*, *Sitalsasthi brata*, *Aranyasasthi brata (Jamaisasthi)*, *Nilsasthi brata*, *Dulasasthi*

*brata, Durgasasthi brata, Ashoksasthi brata, Akshoysidur brata, Akhoyghat brata, Madhu sankranti brata, Ghrito sankranti brata, Chatu sankranti brata, Dorpan sankranti brata, Rupholud brata, Adaholud brata, Jacha paan brata, Adar sinhasan brata, Mistipurnima brata, Padmapurnima brata, Baishakhipurnima brata, Soubhagya chaturdoshi brata, Prithvi brata, Bipadnashini brata, Kujagori purnima brata, Lakshmi brata, Jorajori brata, Jolsankranti brata, Shiboratri brata, Santoshima brata, Baromeshe mongal chandi brata, Ghatmangal chandi brata, Nagpanchamir brata, Surya brata (Kalathakurer brata), Fulkar Thakurer brata, Kartik brata, Achambit Thakurer brata, Aat Aanaj brata, Jhatpat brata, Karmapurusher brata, etc.* The married women performs the good task based upon the lesson that they have learnt before their marriage at their parental space. That is why the women strive to protect their moral and religious rites. The bratees by *Sadhava* could be divided into a few parts. *Dhwansampad* (Riches) *Saubhagya* (good luck) progress for Lakshmi to the devotion of Lakshmi for the good cause of their children for the betterment of their son-kith and kin. Beside this there are also

bratas aimed at the well-being, against premature death, annihilation of the widowhood and longevity.

The widow too, perform a few bratas such as *Ambabachi* and *Ekadashi* brata. Into the *Ambabachibrata* the widows cook their food before three days of the performances of *Ambabachibrata*. Upto the three days no fire is burnt from that of the month *Ashar* and the widow takes only raw milk, fruits and *shaboos*. Bratees are on the view that at that period the earth goes on her family way. That is why at that period they perform ascetic living. At that time, no cultivation is done into the paddy field. It is the common belief that at that period harvest seeds not even the digging of earth take place. This brata by the widow women are performed in many method and utter sacrifice with constraint.

There are few *bratas*, that were performed by the male. Such as *Kalkinarayan* brata, *Trinath* Thakurer brata, *Babahar* Thakurer brata, *Dhakshinaroyer* brata (*Bhager sharnnee*) etc. and few Bratas are performed by the male and female jointly such as *Karmapurusher* Brata, *Shivaratri* brata etc.



Brata tale *Bratakatha* is an indispensable part of Bengali folk culture with the Bratakotha there are inhibition and faith. A few *bratakatha* celebrates the goodness of God's and goddess. There are cravings of human beings followed by ascetic life among the bratees. The *bratakatha* ends with the protagonists safety and salvation earned by the bratees. It is believed that on hearing of *bratakatha*, the listeners earn virtues. Besides this the end of *bratakatha* takes place with the virtues, latent into the tales methodically. It can be said that tales of bratas are composed of the greatness of gods and goddess. It is the treasure of Bengali.

In to the analysis of *brata* a few characteristics feature could be surmised. (a) propagation of gods and goddess's greatness (b) Unchangeability (c) the power to bear the tolerance (d) The prevalence of magic. (e) In women's power to the women's tales (f) The expression of prose (g) The affection of mother (h) The role of women to propagation of the *bratas*.

Into the rural literature *bratakotha* occupies a certain motifs. The kindness and tortures could be seen narrated into the bratakotha of the gods and goddesses. The bratees if she

performs than she receives blessings from the goddess and her house gets happiness and peace. And if anyone goes against the gods and goddess then the bratees go under evil omen. Regarding the purpose of *brata* Ashutosh Bhattacharjee has said "To identify the good luck of picture, one has to acknowledge the presence of a Brahmin. With the word *Ek Baman*, it may be added with the word of poverty and beggars. A few *bratakatha* begins with *Ek Vikswa Sur Baman* (one beggar). Besides the king merchant *Baman* there is one more reference to the character – such as an old women the old women, In general it accursed which she can overcome with the blessings of gods and goddess. Beside this young maiden or young bride is another character to the *bratakatha*. In general, she overcomes the weak point by the blessings of the gods. It is a general issue to the oral literature".<sup>9</sup> Women are emotional. She becomes glad from any kind of apprehension, the power of which she earns by her devotion to the gods and goddesses.

Brata rituals are the sources of recreation in Leisure time to the women. A time was there when the women were not permitted to go outside their own family. Strict rules were

imposed upon them-and due to their marriage in early ages, they bear children and many sons. That is why to get rid of the embarrassing life Bratas were performed in variety of occasions. Bratas are each type of performance which include music, recitation, dance and their expertise on art works and the wish fulfillment of their cravings. Into Brata performance, women herself is an emperor and sometimes she performs the rituals taking also other.

If analysed, one can find a form that takes place into the Brata-rituals. Into the Brata rituals, there are amalgamation of paintings, Music and dance. Most of the women-rituals there, are devotion to the gods and goddess's that is non-voidic, non-traditional, non-Brahmanic and the magic of fertility. Bratas of Bengal are mainly connected to harvest rituals. The collectivities and community lives, are the sources of *bratakatha*. Again Bratas change from time to time in different name, the performance of Bratas. One can find socio-cultural changes that took place and came in vogue.

*Bratas* are performed mainly in villages. Whatever may be the advancement and development of Education and Urbanisation,



Bratas are still alive. Because though man changes externally his internal demeanour are not changed basically because it is close to their heart. Beside this the cravings of man are mainly one. It is aimed at understanding life and living beside all types of complexities like the flow of river, that is why it is the cravings of women bratees sought to be like Bharat Chandra as "*Amar Santan Zeno Thake Dadhe Bhate*". Let my child be happy with rice and milk.

Bengali by nature is emotional. Bengali women perform bratas rituals and the pujas throughout the year. The ancient rural ethos have come often hand to hand from the primordial imageries to the present state there are sweet cravings of women in terms of achieving the wellbeing had superfluous lives among the society at large. Their mind is spoken in such Bratas. The women wants family, husband, sons, kith and kin and society's well-being. In a word they want a social life. Into the Bratas of Bengali there are element of wish fulfilment, in regard to their own culture.

Sometimes in to the performance of Brata women sings and dance *dhamail*. In a few bratas one can find magic aimed at

the fertility, an example of which is *Suryabrata* there are primitive rituals in a few of the Bratas, an example of which is *Maghmandal Brata*. In some of the Bratas, there are devotion to the trees, an example is *Rupashi Brata* which is the wellbeing of children and aimed for the longevity of the husband is *Sabitri brata*. In order to bring goodness and solvency of their families, the ritual of Lakshmi and *Mongalchandi* by the maiden that aimed at free spaces with danger is *Bipadnashini brata* and *Sankata brata*. To gain rapid solution of work, there are *Jhatpot brata* and *Lakshmi brata* to bring riches for the well-being of their own families and kith and kin.

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**CHAPTER - II**  
**SYLHET LEGACY IN BARAK VALLEY AND THE**  
**INHERITANCE OF CULTURAL RITES AND RITUALS**

The rural life of Barak Valley is an extension to Sylhet, which is full of rites and rituals. The rites and rituals, that is performed into the urban and rural milieu with due devotion is basically centered towards Sylhet ethos. Though partition has separated the two countries geographically, yet it could not do so culturally. Today's Barak Valley is a separated part of Surma Valley and Surma Valley is another name of Sylhet.

We have to know a fair amount of the history of anthropological, social, cultural, intellectual and the performance with food habits, rural rites and folk culture to have a complete picture of Barak Valley and its cultural life as today's Hindu Bengali of Barak Valley belongs to that Sylhet Legacy.

The traditional history of Sylhet is not clear. Many think that Sylhet was a part of Pragjyotishpur kingdom into the greater Mahabharat. Few historian is on the opinion that Sylhet is

another name of Horical. A few thinks that Horical is another part of Sylhet. Again a few thinks Sylhet was the Central Part of Horical kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

We have to search for the identity of Bengali Society in Barak Valley to know the texts held from time to time with Sylhet. It is proved by the population research that Bengali is a mixed race. To know the identity of the Bengali race with population theories one has to depend upon their Anthropology, history and language.

As Bengali was not transformed from any single human race, the Bengalis of Barak Valley, too were not the resultant factor to any single human race. Bengali community is a mixed one with bloods of many races. Acknowledging the form of Bengali physique, Nihar Ranjan Roy has said that the physique of Bengali is medium, but a little short, hair black, the eyes light brown, the colour of body alike, face a little longer, nose medium, to tell it a little differently. It is Austrloid or Kolio long head, nose extended. Missor Asian or Mongolian's a long and half nose, with circular heads - that have been approved to know the Bengali race the blood of which is mixed with

Negrobotu, Mongolian and ancient Nordik or the pure Indideed as a catalyst.<sup>2</sup> Here lies the beginning of history of the Bengali. The inhabitants of Sylhet are Bengali, their blood too is entailed with many amalgamation of human races. But according to Suniti Kumar Chatterjee there are more Mongolian blood in the Sylhet-Cacharies. Though after that there were amalgamation of Austric-Dravid, Mongolian and Alopio, yet mainly there are Mongolian blood among the Mongolian inhabitant (the then Cachar, now Barak Valley).

Later into the Bengali Culture, Hindus and Muslims both have been mixed into one in to the culture of Sylhet and Barak Valley. The locale consciousness of Bengali and the ethos of Austric Mongoloid Alopio and later Brahmin and Muslims convention have brought fundamental changes in accordance with the ancient Sanatan religion that have given rise to Bengali Sylhet culture that is still intact though in later years, one can see the prevalence of Brahmins thereof. It can be proved that Bengalis are administered mainly with the culture culled from rituals of Bengali. With the non-classical gods and goddess, feast and festivities into the cultural rites and rituals, the usage of vermilion, turmeric, betel nut leaves (*paan*),



corns and the performance of many rites and rituals it can be granted that Bengali race though a mixed one, yet, they have retained their indigenous characters.

Basically Hindu Bengalis have built up their religion and culture. In consequences Bengali Hindu race is still alive with cultural rites and rituals specially with *matripuja*. *Lingopuja*, River trees-woods-stone-worship. *Mantra-tantro*, brata-several magical rites and belief, faith in the existence of soul, Satyapeer. Satyanarayan, Olai bibi, Olai chandi, as devotional element, too are prevalent among Muslims. The language and rituals of Literature and Culture of Hindus and Muslims have tied the knot of unity, that is prevalent in Sufis and *Bauls*. This have taken place with the flows of historical consciousness. The political battle could not break this united knot, between the Hindus and Muslims. It is closely associated with the souls at large. The conventions of classical idioms the administration of Soriot, could not derail the Bengaliness of the Bengali community.

Like the other inhabitants of Bengal the Sylhet and Barak Valley, the Muslims and Hindus formed the greater portion of

Bengali race. The roots of Hindus and Muslims behavioural life are there, with the Austrik, Dravid and Mongoloid race. Nihar Ranjan Roy has clearly defined, that the epicenter of Brahmin culture were centered around Borendri, Raardesh and later years Bikrompur locale. Brahminic religion came to be thinly existent also in Mymensingh-Chattogram-Tripura and Sylhet.<sup>3</sup> That is why Brahmanism is and was less dominant in today's Bikrampur, Mymensingh, Tripura, Chattogram, Sylhet and Barak Valley. In the light of population theories, it can be surmised that – they are Aryan, Non-aryan and semiotic blood, with the Bengali physique. From the religious point of view, there are Hindus Muslims and Buddhist. Besides a few hilly tribes, there are Bengali sects. These are *Kamar, Kumor, Kushiari, Kahar, Koiborto, Kopali, Gandapal, Gandhabanik, Ganak, Goala, Chamar, Bhuimali, Chunar, Choolie, Teli, Thati, Das, Dhapa, Dum, Patni, Namasudra, (Chandal) Napit, Moira, Mahara, Malo, Yogi, Lohaitkuri, Baroi, Shakhari, Guri* etc. All of them were given lower status. Their blood is related to Austrik, Dravid and a few with Mongoloid blood. Some of them are *Jolchool* (touchable) and some of them are not *Jolchool* (not touchable). Boidya, Kayastha, Saha, relatively belongs to little

higher status. Though the Brahmins as a higher caste lived in Sylhet from ancient times yet the original inhabitants of that time were the lower-class strata, they were the main inhabitants of Sylhet-Cachar (the then Cachar = Barak Valley).

Like every other countries culture, the culture of Sylhet and Barak Valley is divided into three segments – urban culture, folk culture and primitive culture. Folk culture could be seen, also as a rural culture. The village folks inhabited with *mudwalls*, straw roofs straw fencing. Among other ordinary things. There are clay pitcher, metal utensil, the Wooden Box, Bed, *Knatha*, *Chika*, *Paati*, *Moora*, *Piddi*, *Kalki-hukka*, *Kural*, *Kudal Hata*, *Khunti*, Sickle, Spade. Like the plains of Bengal the inhabitants of Barak Valley, majority belongs to Fisherman, Farmer and Chutar (Carpenter). The *Langool*, *Joal*, *Kaste*, *Paachni*, *Hese*, *Moi* (Ladder), the thread. Cows and Buffalos – cattle and Bullock Carts. The Fishermen have Boats, *Nowar*, *Gunn*, *Logi*, *Shewti*, *Daan*, *Pal*, *Haal* and *Mastul*. The element required by the fishermen are Net, Cooch, *Polui*, *Binti-Cheep*, *Tekathi*, *Pochka*, *Bana* & *Hocha* and the Blacksmiths have *Haafor* and *Haturi*. The clay workers had *Chaka-Chilka* and *Benda*. The Carpenter (*Chutor*) had *Korat*,

*Batalee* etc. These Blacksmiths, Clay workers, Fishermen and the farmer have formed the greater part of the inhabitants of Sylhet-Barak Valley. And among them Hindus and Muslims constituted the main part. These structure were kept intact even during the British period. Though little anomalies were seen in 13<sup>th</sup> century into the behavioural life of the spatial inhabitants, little invaded by Muslims, yet it was meagre and left a little water mark into the life-style of Bengalis.

Though there are changes in the life and livelihood during the British era in Sylhet Cachar, yet the main social structure was not damaged. The Sylheti and Cachari Hindus and Muslims have tried to maintain their livelihood, profession, and religious rites on their own. Specially, the inhabitants of the Sylhet-Cachar (the then Cachar now Barak Valley), have taken the classical ethos in respect of their religious and cultural lives. Our present studies is desired to examine the Brata-Parvan; related herewith.

In respect of food-habit, the Bengalis of Barak Valley, are akin to the Bengalis, of other part. Informations are given in regard to the food habits of Bengal in medieval Bengali literature, rice,



leaves and small fishes were their staple food. Vegetables grow in large number into the fertile land, in Sylhet and Barak Valley. Among the vegetables there are Brinjal, *Mula*, *Kachurmukhi*, *Kachur Mura*, *Mankochu*, *Ol Kochu*, Several types of bean, sweet pumpkin, water-gourd pumpkin, *korola*, *kajura*, *pural*, *chichinga* and *jhinga* and among the vegetable leaves, there were *Nalishak*. *Denga Shakh*, *Lai Shakh*, *Paloi Shakh*, *Salpha Shakh*, *Gaudhi data*, *Ramkolar thor* and *Koril* were taken by the Bengali from times ancient. After that these were added with potato, cauliflower, beat, carrot. These types of food are the contribution of Austrik-blood. Into the Sylhet-masala, there are *Tezpata*, (scented leaves) betel leaves, chilly, *labango*, zinger, turmeric, *dhania*, *zeera* etc. The *haritoki boira*, *amloki* and *chalmugra* were common there. The habit of Fish-eating were there in Sylhet and Barak Valley from times ancient. Among the fishes, the *Kui*, *Bau*, *Chitol*, *Boal*, *Ghatad*, *Shoul*, *Palan*, *Ghania*, *Gagat*, *Kangla*, *Pabia*, *Bacha*, *Bain*, *Magur*, *Koi*, *Cheng*, *Icha*, *Rani*, *Tengra*, *Puti*, were popular fishes of Sylhet-Barak Valley specially. The dry fishes were popular food of Sylhet-Barak Valley. Among the fruits Mango, Taal, Jackfruits, Coconut, Sugarcane and Banana were the daily

food of the inhabitants of Sylhet-Barak Valley. In fact, Fish and Meat were common to the inhabitants. The habit of eating Rice, Leaves and Meats grow as common food in the line of Australian Race, the Fruits and Vegetables which they take, till date is an extension with this known race.

Both Hindus and Muslims, strictly observe their taboos, rites and rituals in societal system. Almost every muslim belonged to the ancient Hindus, *Koiborto*, *Maal*, *Dum*, *Charal* came to be known as 'Maji' as they were indoctrinated to Islam, the Shekh Muslims and other Muslims used to work as farmer and other works. The upper class muslims and kayasthas used to work as businessmen. The subaltern Hindus and Muslims people were not permitted to use Shoes, and also could not use *Nohobot Khana*, and their wives were not permitted to use nose-ring and ornament, but marriage and other ceremony took place with pomp and splendour.

In times of marriage, the groom has to wear *kundal* in ear, *Manibandha*, *Bajubandha*, necklace and *Shola tierra* into their head. Boat worship and *Durgotsob* took place in rich and respectable houses of the Bengali Hindus. Into the marriage

and ceremonials, there were *puran* path and *Lachari* songs in performance.

All classes of Bengali Hindu conventional worship and rhymes chanting of *Padmapuran* path into the month of *Sharabana*, *pnachali* path of *Shani* and *Satyanarayan*, *Chaityanamangal* path are in vogue, in the line of worship. The Vaishnavite used to Chant with other devotees the *Chaitanya* Charitamrita, with basil leaves and *dhup dhuna*.

The Vaishnavite religion attracted the common folks in this locale. Rich treasure were built up here, under the influence of Vaishnavite religion, the Dhamail, Choupara *Kirtan*, the song, dance and music of Gopal and Gobinda is precious treasure of Sylhet and Barak Valley. Crowed used to assemble in large number in the Jhulan jatra and Ratha yatra. Boat worship and Govinda Kirtan is two significant religious festivals. <sup>4</sup>

This locale have become the hub of *Baul*, *Vatialis mariphoti* songs under the influence of *Vaishnavite* and Islamic Sufi religion. Beside *Mangal Kabya*, *Anubad Kabya*, *Vaishnapada Sahitya* and *Charit Sahitya*, there were ancient book of Islam and Romantic love-tales.<sup>5</sup> Gurusadoy Dutta's words here are to

be remembered, *Goudio*, *Vaishnabtatta* and *Sariot badi* pure-Islamic religion, both came to augment *baul* theories into the halls of *Vaishnab* poet and *sufi* poet.<sup>6</sup> Among the folk-songs of Sylhet-Barak Valley there are *Palagaan*, *kobi gaan*, Theater *gaan*, *Chandi o monosamangoler gaan*, *Shani-Satyanarayan* and several *paachali gaan*, *Maghbrata*, *Thakurbrata* as the songs of *Bratas*, and *Padakirtan*, *govind keerton*, *Nagarkirton*, *Sankrinton*. *Baramoshi* (of *Durga Monosa* and *Nimai*), *Thaatchoutal gaan*, *Yatragaan*, *Dhopgaan*, *Sari and Bratachari gaan*, *Bhatiali gaan* and other songs by women. The *Auaal-Baul-Vishnab-sufi Moromia* songs, the songs of *Bhat* and Poetry, *Dhamail* songs and dance and *Bounach gaan* need to be mentioned.

Many folk songs, folk tales and *Bratakatha* were composed in times of several performance of rites in Sylhet and Barak Valley. Examples can be mentioned of *Durga Puja*, *Kalipuja*, *Jhulan Yatra*, *Dol yatra*, *Tinnather Seva*, *Shani*, *Satyanarayan Seva*, *Thunki Pirer Seva*, *Gostho Bihar of Rashpurnima*, *Gabindo bhog*, *Charak puja*, *Gazoner gaan* and *Baramashe tero parvaner gaan*.



The legacy that is being inherited from Sylhet to Barak Valley is an indispensable part of Indian history. This Sylhet-Sribhumi is the parental motherland of Srichaitanya Mahaprabhu. The compatriot of *Chaitanya*, *Adwaito Prabhu* and the associates *Murari Gupta*, *Sribas Pandit*, *Madhab Das*, *Krishna Das* of *Lauria* were born in the Sylhet-Sribhumi. Speech by Professor Haripada Chakraborty is to be reckoned here with. It seems Mahaprabhus devotional Bhakti-movement did not originate from Navadwip. Mahaprabhu himself (in the line of family legacy) and everybody as Chaitanya's associates *Adwdita Acharya*, *Sribas*, *Murari*, *Mukunda*, *Vidyadhar*, *Gadadhar* all of them beside *Nityananda* and *Haridas*, came from Sylhet-Chattogram.

*Nayashastris Shrestho Raghunath Siromoni* is the son of *Sribhumi*. This land is the land of *Sadhak Sreshto Bani Nath*, *Param Vaishnav Banchit Ghosh*, *Thakur Dayananda* and many devotees- too, were brought up in this land. *Nilambar Chakraborty* the great unparallal *Pandit* of astrology too, was the son of Sylhet, who was the maternal ancestor of Chaitayna Mahaprabhu. The pious peer of Islamic world, *Sahajalal* is

known to have taken this land as his own homeland Sylhet along with his 360 *Auliaa* (saint).

Glimpses of history is to be seen with the beginning of fifteenth century which became the abode of the lover of literature and culture. The Hindus and Muslims of Sylhet have excelled in poems-*puran*, *padmapuran*, *sant-sadhak jiboni*, historical narration, *pnachali*, *padavali* and the composition of other musicals.

It is surmised that celebrated poet, Bhubaneswar *Bachaspati* of medieval Cachar, (at present Barak Valley) was in his early abode, in Sylhet *Eta Pargona*. Kings at the patronage of Hirimbha Barman king with the instruction of Rajmata Chandraprabha, the poet has composed 'Srinaradiya-Rashamrita' (the publication year 1652 to 1730).

The political picture always alters with the changes in history. For example, the greater part of Sylhet, is included within the present day Bangladesh, the other parts are now in Barak Valley namely Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts of the southern part of Assam state.

Due to the administrative reason Sylhet-Cachar was included in Surma Valley in the 1874, and Sylhet became the life-hub of the valley. Due to the partition in 1905 East Bengal and Assam state were renovated but in 1911 though Bengal partition was withdrawn temporarily, Sylhet-Cachar, remained within the jurisdiction of Assam.

The pangs of Rabindranath, could be cited here.

Momotabihin Kalosrote

Banglar Rastrasheema hote

Nirvasita tumi

Sundari Shribhumi

Sylhet was separated due to the partition, once again which left permanent scar into the dream of Bengalis. Purba Bangla (East Bengal) went outside the India and East Bengal became another land with its inclusion in Pakistan with the referendum. But this referendum was not free and peaceful only with a margin of 55,578 numbers of vote were caste in favour of Pakistan. In an ill-fated condition, three lakhs tea-garden employees were barred from voting. On the other hand surprisingly though the greater portion of voters from South

Sylhet (Moulavi Bazar) turned out and casted their votes against the encroachment. Yet this land was separated from Assam only due to political conspiracy. This land was partial for the benefaction of Pakistan where lived the greater portion of Bengal is in Sylhet. It was a political ploy of partition which snatched Sylhet Sribhumi of which the victim was the *saare* teen Thana (three and half outpost) which is now a part of Barak Valley.

Barak Valley basically is the separated part Surma Valley formed pre-independence period. With the birth of Independence the greater part of Sylhet, went outside India. The separated East Bengal, known in present status as Barak Valley is the then Sylhet, banished from Bangladesh. In the later years of Independence, there were four mahakuma in Cachar district – Silchar, Hailakandi, Karimganj and Haflong. Haflong mahakuma, in 1953 was annexed to Mikir and Karbi hills. This land came to be known as Barak Valley from when Karimganj and Hailakandi had won the status of separate district each in the year 1984 and 1989 consecutively. In consequences a portion of Surma Valley is included as present



day Bangladesh and the other part is now Barak Valley, the then Cachar.

The partition of Sylhet-Barak Valley (the then Surma Valley) is political and administrative. The cultural legacy of these two is intact and the language is Bengali. We get this information from the analysis of population index, in the year 1951 long back. In 1834 another governmental report speaks that in regard to the physique, culture and language, the Sylhet and Barak Valley people are same and they are the part and parcel of Bengali community. These too is proved by the historical research, anthropological surveys and linguistics, and archaeological. That is why, it can be said that the life-force of Sylhet-Cachar (the then Cachar now Barak Valley), should be conjectured within the periphery of Bengali history and culture. There are certain fundamentals that can be noticed.

The folk-culture of Sylhet Barak Valley with their originalities is the indispensable part of greater Bengali community. In to the analysis of racial, cultural perspective, that the main cycle of Bengali globe belong to Brahmin Austric, here too, it is not perturbed in to the folk cycle then due to Austric influence.

The mongoloid culture is too, could be seen in Sylhet-Barak Valley. But it could be seen that though mongoloid mixture is there among the Sylhetis in large number, yet Sylheti Bengali culture as a whole is a dominant factor in the present study at large.

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### CHAPTER – III

#### **WOMEN BRATA PARVAN OF BARAK VALLEY AS SYLHET LEGACY: AN INTENSIVE STUDY**

The studies that is taken up of the female brata and their rites and rituals are collected from the field research of Barak Valley, along with the rhymes and rhythms with the *brata* tales and *brata* lyrics prevalent in Barak Valley, the *brata parvan* under studies are – *Sidal Natai brata*, *Aat AAanaz brata*, *Karmapurush brata*, *Bipadnashini brata*, *Savitri brata*, *Bana brata*, *Sankatrani brata*, *Sankata brata*, *Lakshmi brata*, *Sasthi brata*, *Ambubachi brata*, *Rupasi brata*, *Kartik brata*, *Mangalchandi and Phulkar Thakur brata*, *Aaachambit Thakurer brata*, *Jhatpat Thakurer brata*, *Surjya Brata*, *Maghmandal brata*, *Shitali brata and Basantara Brata*. Findings on the *bratas* above-mentioned are discussed textually and analytically, which are based on the following field research:

#### ***Sidal Natai brata***

*Sidal Natai brata* is remarkable among the rites of harvest festival influenced by Sylhet, upon Barak Valley. As the main segment of rites and rituals are rites tale and rhyming poetry,



the tales behind the rites, are reflective of daily life of the Locale. It reflects the hopes, desire, aspiration, happiness and wellbeing and the prayer for goodness of this marginalized culture.

Though *Sidal Natai* brata has no familiarities with *Natai Mangalchandi* brata, yet it has close similarities with *Aleri* brata and *Siddheswari* brata. Like *Aleri* brata and *Sidheswari* brata<sup>1</sup>, *Sidal Natai* brata is performed in Sunday, Thursday and Friday in the month of 'Bhadra' (Bengali month). This rite is performed by the women. Its purpose is peace and happiness, superfluous harvest, craving for child, desire to work and to have riches. But though *Sidal Natai* brata and *Aleri* brata are close to each other as a catalyst, yet it differs in characteristics with nomadic East Bengalees under Sylhet influence.

Segment of *Sidal Natai brata* :

Flowers, grass (*durba*), vermillion, *Natai ghat*, Banana, Banana leaves, branches of banana leaves, leaves of mangoes and rice (*dhan*). *Khula Pitha* (which is made of crushed rice) and *Sidal* (dry fish) has to be there as 'Noibedya', a 'Kula' (a flat bucket to thrash corn, made of bamboo) is required to cover the 'Noibedya'.

These rituals are performed by the maiden of farmer, on any Thursday, Sunday or Friday, in the month of *Bhadro*. The performer need not go on fasting like *Aleri brata*. Only the performer has to go under bath before the rites. The idol of *Natai Devi* is drawn by vermillion upon a pillar of *grinary*. *Natai* earthen pitcher is set in front of the pillar with rice (*dhan*) upon the banana leaves, the leaves of mangoes and grass (*durba*). Again the idol is drawn upon the body of the earthen pot, with this a few tiny seven number *khula pitha* (which is made of crushed rice) is made and arranged *Nobideya* with ripe banana and burnt out *sidal* upon the leaves of banana plant. After that the performer's mother and daughter listen to the brata *kotha*. At the end of Brata, the mother and daughter bowed at the idol of *Natai Devi* and covering the *Noibedya* with Kula, it is stricken seven times and utter rhymes —

‘*Saat Chorer Saat Baat*

*Amar Rajar Sab Baat*’.<sup>2</sup>

*Brata Kotha* (tale of Brata) of *Sidal Natai*:

Once upon a time, there lived a poor widow and her daughter in a village. They survived by their livelihood earned from their

work in *Zamindar's* house. One day a *Sidal Natai* brata was arranged in the *Zamindar* house. The mother and the daughter made crushed rice for the preparation of the *pitha* in *Sidal Natai brata*.

After the dusk, the daughter told her mother, "Oh mother, *Sidal Natai* Brata is performed in the *Zamindar's* house. We too shall perform this rite". The mother told "we are poor, where from we will have crushed rice and the necessary ingredients". The daughter told "perhaps there is the remains of crushed rice under the '*Dheki*' (i.e. the wooden instrument took crush rice) and *sidal* here too, in our house. They brought a few crushed rice from under the *Dheki*, with which they made seven tiny *khola pitha* and arranged the '*naibedya*' with burnt *sidal* and ripe banana that is offered to *Natai* Devi. Mother and the daughter set in front of the *Natai ghat* with flower and grass (*durba*) and bowed at the *Natai* Devi and uttered rhymes- *Saat Chorer, Saat baat / Amar Rajar Sab baat*.

At the same time seven thieves were stealing treasury from the king's palace into the dark night. Those thieves brought the treasury and they were seating adjacent behind the widow's house. They went on distributing the treasure, among them. But they got afraid as they listened to the rhymes of the

mother and the daughter '*Saat chorer Saat baat. Aami chorer sob baat*', they thought they have been apprehended. They escaped leaving behind the treasury. And as the mother and daughter went beside the house to wash out their hand, they saw the riches and treasury, gold ornaments, silver and diamonds. Throughout the entire night the mother and daughter bore the treasury into their house.

The mother and daughter went to sleep at the dawn after their hard work. They slept long, on the other hand the man from *Zamindari* house came and saw that both mother and daughter were sleeping closing the door, they woke up at the call of the people. The zamindar was informed. The zamindar came to their house in person and asked them how all these treasury reached their house. The widow divulged everything. The zamindar took back all the riches and rewarded her. The bad days by the way was gone from the life of the widow and her daughter.

Into the conclusion *Sidal Natai* Brata performer says, what moral is there from the rites - 'The poor becomes rich, the hut constructed, the cut away heads knotted together, the mother gets son and the desire is fulfilled'.



In the conclusion, we get the rhymes, striking mild *Noibedya* covered by the '*kula*'. From the Marxian view point it can be said that this is a protest, a voice of the movement by the oppressed. Besides this there are signs of seeking justice and equal distribution of the riches.

### ***Aat Aanaz Brata***

In *Aat Aanaz Brata*, there is a striking variety in seeking the abundances of harvest, the protection of rice, happiness and wellbeing in family that was influenced by Sylhet, this rite is also called '*Garva sankranti*'. The rite is performed in the *Aashwin Sankranti*. And there are also rites of eating rice and vegetables on the first day of the month *Kartik*, which is cooked on the last day of the month of *Aashwin*.

There are references of *Aat Aanaz Brata* and *Garva Sankranti Brata* in the book '*Banglar Brata Parban*' by Dr. Sila Basak and '*Banglar Lok Sahitya Charchar Itihas*' by Dr. Barun Kumar Chakrabarty. The *Aat Aanaz Brata* is aimed at devotion to the Goddess Lakshmi. Like *Aat Aanaz Brata*; *Garoi Brata* too is performed in the month of *Aswin* in its last day. There are similarities between *Garoi Brata* (there are three Brata common to as three *Bratakotha* and a few rites) and *Aat Aanaz*

Brata. Though there are performances of the *Garoi* brata to give water to the belated mother-in-law's soul, there is no such purpose of *Aat Aanaz* Brata in Barak Valley. A few similarities could be seen in performance, also of *Garoi* Brata. The main purpose is harvest.

Dr. Sheela Basak has cited a rhyme belonging to *Aat Aanaz* Brata in her book 'Banglar Brata Parban'.

*'Aashwine Raindha Kartikae Khay*

*Je bor mange, shei bor paay'*<sup>3</sup>

(The cooked rice in *Aashwin* is eaten in *Kartik* who begs alms, it is given)

According to *Aat Aanaz* brata, there are provisions of eating ceremony on the month of *Kartik* after it is cooked in the month of *Aashwin*. Common saying is there, if anyone eats rice in the month of *Kartik*, after it is cooked in the month of *Aashwin*, the Goddess Lakshmi blesses them. Dr. Barun Kumar Chakrabarty has cited a rhyme as to how the rite is seen in *Aat Aanaz brata* included in the book.

*Aswin Jai Kartik Ashe,*

*Maa Lakshmi gobbe boshe,*

*Saad khao bor dao hay*

*Aparer dhan nati nati*

*Amar dhan bahanno poti*

*Maa Lakshmi saad khao hay.*<sup>4</sup>

Dr. Barun Kumar Chakraborty also wrote "Into the *Agrahayana* issue of '*Nabya Bharat*' (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 18<sup>th</sup> Issue) in to the second proposal of '*Sundar Boner Proja*', how the peasant worship the corn field as Goddess being in her womb into the last day of the month of *Aashwin*. Though this area known as *Sundarban* was not clear but this *Sundarban* spans along *Saatkhira* and *Khulna* of that *Sundarban* and the other outskirts of *Sundarban*.<sup>5</sup>

'*Aat Aanaz*' and *Garva Sankranti*' rituals are influenced by the *Sylhet* and *Sundarban* locale. These are still performed in great devotion into the locale of *Saatkhira* and *Khulna* among the Hindu Bengali, by the peasantry. But more rhymes could be seen into the *Barak Valley* influenced by *Sylhet*.

A few common rites and their ingredients of *Aat Aanaz Brata* performance in the *Ashwin Sankranti*.

Eight types of cooked plants and vegetables are offered to the Goddess *Maa Lakshmi*. This is performed by the maiden of the

farmer. *Toga* of *chalta* leaves is given upon the paddy field with fruits of the house.

The ingredients of *Toga* preparation: *Chalta* leaves the branch of *kash* flower, basil leaves, *atap* rice, raw *tetul*, *teel*, sandalwood, vermillion, *methi* and *sunda* (the scented roots of tree).

*Toga* is prepared by the burnt out *sunda* with sandalwood, basil leaves, raw *tetul*, *atap* rice, *teel*, *methi* etc. And above, the vermillion has to be placed. With this a few *togas* are prepared. According to popular belief, if *toga* is given into the day of *Aashwin Sankranti* more rice could be produced. At the stroke of *toga* the farmer who utter the rhymes is –

*Aswin Jaite Kartik aite,*

*Maa Lakshmi Pathaise moore*

*Chailta patai deeto Karar*

*Dhan hoito ashi bharar.*<sup>6</sup>

(As *Ashwin* goes and *Kartik* comes / Mother Lakshmi has sent me / Protection was given by *Chalta* leave / More rice is to be in the grinery).

But behind every stroke of *Toga* upon the paddy field, which is prepared by *chalta* leaves, there are agricultural science.



Because today's scientists advise the farmer to sow *chalta*, *Nisunda* and like other medicinal trees leave to protect paddy field from the insects and other damaging source against the harvest. Into the stroke of *chalta* leaves, these too are seen as to protect from insects.

There are eight vegetables and plant into the *Aat Aanaz brata* rituals. Here, these must be *Maan Kochu*, *ol*, *chalta* and *Lo-gaatu* (a tree with thorn).

*Brata Katha* (tale of *Brata*) of *Aashwin Sankranti* (*Aat Aanaz Brata*):

A farmer went to spread *Toga* in his paddy field. A taboo is there, one is that everyone is prohibited to look after spreading *Toga* and no one is allowed to talk to anyone in crossing the ways. Other taboo is that one has to return home before evening after the *toga* is done. If any one looks back then the Goddess Lakshmi becomes enraged. But a farmer looked back while returning home after spreading the *toga*. He saw that a beautiful woman was crying beside the paddy field. The farmer became kind and asked her the reason of crying such. The woman told that she has none to take care of her that is why she is crying. If anyone, out of kindness wants to take her to

anyone's home than she is ready to accompany him. The farmer took this woman to his home. The beautiful woman drove out her wife from the home. The farmer's wife came to dwell in a separate hut.

Besides this, the woman asked her not to sprinkle cow-dung into the courtyard and ordered her to eat before her husband. But this wife of farmer went on sprinkling cow-dung and stealthily wash away the dirt and never took meal before her husband. The farmer's wife could understand, the woman who has arrived their home newly is basically a ghost or a miser. One year passed; gradually scarcity of food and other belonging came to be damaged into the family of the farmers. Again, when *Aashwin* arrived the farmer's wife arranged *Aat Aanaz Brata* with the ingredients of *Aat Aanaz* – *Kochu*, *OL*, *Chalta* and *Lo-gaatu*. The farmer's wife went on worshipping the Goddess Lakshmi. And after the rites were done the farmer's wife gave away the *prosad* to the farmer and took this herself also. As soon as the farmer's wife took her own attire and the new woman drove and ran towards, the farmer's wife bites the *OL* then hairs of the witch dropped, again the farmer's wife bites the *maan kochu*, then the two ears of the witch fell down. The witch *Alakshmi* came forward screaming. The farmer's wife

again had bitten the *Lo-gaatu* and then the two knees of the witch broke down and she disappeared. The farmer came to understand all these, and could understand his fault. The farmer family's bad days came to be over and the house of the farmers came to be filled with peace and riches. In this rites there are reference of *Mann kochu OL* and *Lo-gaatu*, which the farmer's wife had bitten.

*Phan (maan kochu) Khale Kaan Pore*

*Ul. (Ol) Khaile Chul Pore*

*Gaatu Khale Hatu Bhange?*

(On eating *maan kachu*, the ear drops / On eating *OL*, the hairs drop / On eating *gaatu* the knees are broken.)

### **Karmapurush Brata**

The *Karmapurush* brata is a remarkable rites among other bratas in Barak Valley rooted in Sylhet locale. *Karmapurush* basically is a fortune-giver deity. He is only a surrogate one of Narayan. It is surmised that the *Karmapurush* is age-old, so the *Noibedy* is prepared with crushed rice seeds. Bean seeds, gourd seeds, *teel* seeds, Jackfruit juice, mango juice etc. Like eight kind of grains elements fried and crushed, it is called the '*gura pera*' of *Karmapurush*. *Chida*, *khoi*, curd and milk are

also required. The juice of Jackfruits and mangoes are the main elements with 'gura pera' as the *Noibadya*. There also must be *Noibadya* of *Chida*, *Khoi* and Fruits.

This brata is performed in the Bengali month in the last day of *Jaistha*. This brata is performed only once in a year. Though it is performed mainly by the women, yet sometimes the male of the family also take part in it. The performer goes under fasting during the performance in pious heart. *Karmapurush* has no common idol. It is placed in front of the grinery of rice by water-full pitcher with mango leaves, with the signs of vermilion with colours swastika. The *Noibadya* is arranged with *chida*, *khoi*, curd and the crust of grain seeds, banana, *gud* and juice of mangoes and jackfruits. The *Karmapurush* Bratees believe that *Karmapurush* becomes satisfied if he is worshiped with yellow and white colour flowers.<sup>8</sup> The main subject of the brata is the chanting of brata-tales as representation, by any old women performer. The others listen the tale with proper devotion that are mentioned below.

Once there was a poor Brahmin and his two daughters. The Brahman along with his daughter survived upon begging. Once the Brahmin went out to begging and told his daughter to keep the grains into the sunlight. Accordingly, the two



daughters kept vigilance upon the grains. In the meantime the daughters went into slumber. A few hours later they rose up and saw the grains have been eaten by the sparrows. Both the daughters burst into tears.

By this time a yogi in the cloak of a beggar begged alms to them and asked why they are crying. The two sisters told that all their grain have been eaten by the sparrows. Their father will kill them, because no more grains are there in the house. The yogi in the cloak of a beggar came to become kind to them. He told them not to cry and search out the nook and corner of the courtyards in search of a few grains. Two sisters found three grains. The yogi told them, 'Give me one grain and the remaining two, you take and keep one into the grinnery' and another one keep into the rice pot, and tell with the blessing of *Karmapurush*, the graineries become full and after taking the rice from the grains tell 'The pitchers of rice becomes full with the blessing of *Karmapurush*. Both the daughters did this. They gave the yogi one sack of grains and kept one grain into the grinnery, and uttered, with the blessings of *Karmapurush* the clay pot become full. Two sisters came hurriedly to the yogi and asked him who is he? The Brahmin in the cloak of yogis replied 'I am *Karmapurush*, perform my rites in the *Sankranti*

of the month *Jaisthwa* tomorrow. If you perform the rites than you need not get worried. If the rites is performed the lost creature is found, the cut away heed is joined together the poor becomes rich, one's minds wishes are fulfilled. With this the *Karmapurush* in the cloak of a beggar yogi went out of their sight. The Brahmin returned from begging and listened everything from his daughters and became glad. The next day of *Jaisthwa Sankranti* both the sisters performed the rites of *Karmapurush*. After that the Brahmins family became rich. Every year in the month of *Jaisthwa Sanskriti* the sisters went on performing this rites. The bad days of the family passed. Now two daughters told the father, the Brahmin to get married once again. The Brahmin too kept the words of his daughters and got married again. But after the marriage the stepmother planned to drive away the daughters from their home the step mother told the Brahmin, drive away your daughters, otherwise I shall commit suicide.

The Brahmin was at a loss. He took his daughters in the pretext to go their maternal uncle's house as a lie. On the way they crossed the forest, the dusk was setting. The daughter told their father to take rest under the banyan tree. After a while the two daughters went on deep slumber. The Brahmin

left his sleeping daughters under a banyan tree. It is already dusk. The animals begun roaring. At the sleep-break the daughters nowhere found their father. They were at a loss. They kept the banyan tree as a witness and told the Banyan tree. 'Split down and take us into your own attire. They passed their night without any mess. Next day the two sisters climbed upon a branch and went sleeping. In the meantime the son of king and the son of minister came to hunting and take rest into the jungle. Suddenly they saw a long hair, they thought wherefrom this has come. Here the king's son and the minister's son looked upward and found that two beautiful girl was seating above the branches of the tree. They asked are you any angel or a demon. The two sisters replied 'we are neither angel nor demon. We are humans. Our father have banished us from his home'. The king's son and the minister's son replied 'will you go with us and get married whom you like?' The two sisters replied 'certainly'. The elder daughter got married to the king's son and the younger one to the minister's son and returned their kingdom.

With the blessings of *Karmapurush* their miseries came to an end. It is long since the two daughters got children who went to the throne of the kingdom and the family of two sisters



became full of a fun and mirth, they got two boy-child. Now there is no more misery in their house. Like every year *Jaisthwa Sankranti* arrived, they have to perform the rites of *Karmapurush*. Once the younger sister arranged the brata and called on the elder sister. The elder sister told, I am the queen I can't go on fasting. I want to eat fish and other valuable food. I shall not take '*guda peda*' so with this she didn't go to her younger sister's house, and did not perform the brata. With the curse of *Karmapurush* all miseries set foot into the palace of the king. Tamed elephant, tamed horses went on death. On the other hand, the younger daughter sent *prasad* through her son to the elder sister, the *guda* and *peda* after the performance of *Karmapurush* rites - But in the middle of the road, once old Sadhu snatched all the *prasad* from the boy telling that he is not allowed to take all the *prasad*, the boy came home empty handed. When the boy returned home, and narrated the things, the minister's wife could understand everything. The *prasad* that has been snatched in the middle of the road from her son, he was none other the *Karmapurush* in the cloak of a yogi. The younger sister sent messages that if the elder sister perform *Karmapurush* rites there everything will be back to normalcy. The elder sister went on praying to



the *Karmapurush* and performed the rite. 'Elephants came to alive and horses too', 'every evil omen went back'.

On the other hand the Brahmin went under the curse of *Karmapurush* and became poor as he had driven his two daughters. It is long since they did not receive any whereabouts of their father. The two daughters together decided to dig big ponds and announced that in lieu of one *Tukri* (kind of bamboo bucket) soil, the digger will have one *Tukri* coins as their remuneration. The wife of Brahmin told her husband. You go the kings palace and earn money from as the digger. The old Brahmin went to dig the soil. Two daughters identified the Brahmin but the Brahmin could not identified them. Because Brahmin thought that perhaps, two banished daughters were eaten by the tigers or bear. Having seen their father, the two daughters ordered their worker to take the old father after his bathing, to the palace with proper clothing. Brahmin became terrified, as the kingsmen took the Brahmin to the palace, the two sisters divulged their identity, that he is their father and the elder daughter became the queen of the prince, the younger daughter the minister's wife. The Brahmin was terror-stricken and repented for the things done to them. The daughters told "Father you will no longer

remain in miseries, you take our step mother to our palaces and go for a wealthy life, along with us. In this way the bad days of the Brahmin came to an end with blessings of *Karmapurush* their family become happy. By this way, the greatness of *Karmapurush* became widely in vogue into the nook and corner of the countries. At the end of the tale, the narrator chanted with the blessings of *Karmapurush* the grinnery becomes full. With the blessing of *Karmapurush* the clay pot full of rice boiled become full.<sup>9</sup>

### **Bipadnashini Brata**

Besides, the *Bipadnashini* brata with thirteen fruits in the Bengali month of *Ashar* which is in vogue with the Bengali almanac; the *Bipadnashini* brata on Saturday or Tuesday is performed in every week or in every month and one goes under the devotion to the *Bipadnashini* in order to fulfil the desire as committed by the Bratee in expectation of the wellbeing of her family. This Brata is widely known as '*Bipadnashinir Paan*' (the betel nut leaves worship with *Bipadnashini*), under the influence of Barak Valley by Sylheti culture with Barak Valley.

The Hindu Bengali women, as Sylhet legacy perform this rite to come out of the danger, which is aimed at the well-being of

their families, in the locale of Barak Valley. This Brata is known as women rites, and there is no discrimination among maiden, widow and the virgin. Every woman is allowed to perform this rites. As a committed ritual, this rites is performed somewhere with clay idol and some where only with the installation of a pitcher. There is no bar among the Bratees in this brata, both the priest and without priest this rites can be performed. As it is committed otherwise there is no place of Brahmin priest into the performance of this Brata which takes place once in a week or once in every month. This Brata has its roots, not belonging to Non-aryan culture only in few occasions, there has been the presence of Brahminical culture, afterwards.

The main elements of this Brata, seven full betel leaves, betel nuts, vermilion, oil, *durba* grass, mango leaves, rice, a clay pitcher along with *Noibedyā*. But there are also, in times of committed worship along with *Noibaidya*, rice ceremony has to be observed. The *Bipadnashini* brata (*Bipadnashinir paan*) without the Brahmin *purohit* is aimed in times of performance. In general this Brata is performed in Tuesday and Saturday. As because this Brata is performed by the women more or less

five to seven bratee are required. One has to go under fasting till the end of the Brata-rituals.

Though in certain day the *Paan Brata* of *Bipadnashini* is arranged where there has to be mango leaves, *durba* grass and flowers at the top of a pitcher. *Swastik* symbol has to be drawn in the pitcher and the pitcher has to be placed upon banana leaves and rice with seven unhurt betel leaves with betel nuts and *noibadya* with fruits is placed in front of the *Bipadnashini's* pitcher. There are convention of placing oil and vermilion as a part of the rites. The women performer perform this rites with utter respect and devotion along with *dhup dhuna*. The Brata comes to an end with telling the Brata-*kotha*. But the listeners Brateenes and those other present there have to keep *durba* grass into their hands. And any women be it who knows the tales present it in befitting manner, the women from Sylhet legacy call it '*Parasthap*'. At the end of this brata tale told, the Brateenes give *uludhwani* and utter words to commemorate the *Bipadnashini*. They smear oil, vermilion into their foreheads and then take *prasad*.<sup>10</sup> Below is given the tale of this Brata.

Once in a village, a poor Brahmin and his wife lived. The family has to survive upon begging. One day the Brahmin went out to



the village for begging. At the afternoon, then a middle aged women arrived into the hut of the Brahmin. She told the maiden Brahmin, that he has come from a far. She by relation is the aunt of the maiden Brahmin. *Brahminee* became thoughtful because she could not remember whether there was any one as his relative erstwhile.

Then who is she, the women? The guest could not be returned. But there is nothing in the hut, to take care of her. No pulse no rice. By the way a fisher woman came to sell fishes to the hut of the maiden Brahmin. The maiden told her that she can't purchase the fishes because she has no any money. The guest aunt told the maiden that there are money in her pitcher in the worshipping house. Brahmin women went out and saw there are two coins. The *brahminee* purchased fishes from the fisherwomen with these two coins. The guest aunt told her to take bath and cook. After that the maiden women told her that she had no other cloth beside this that she is wearing how she will take bath and wear clothes. The guest aunt told there are clothes into a rack of their home. As and when he went to her home saw that there are new cloths placed into the rack. The maiden Brahmin became happy and after the bath, wore the new dress and waited for her husband to return. The guest

aunt told the maiden to cook. The maiden women told her that there is no rice into the house, she will cook when the Brahmin will arrive with rice. The guest aunt again told her that she will have rice from the grinery. The maiden went and saw that the grinery is full of rice.

Then the maiden Brahmin made rice, soup of vegetables and fishes and fed the guest aunty and herself took this. After eating these the guest aunty took *paan* and betel nuts and told her that she will have to have nap in the afternoon which means sleeping at noon. The maiden Brahmin told her that she has no such sleeping bed so, she will not be able to provide her any sleeping cot. Then the guest aunt told her that there are sleeping beds into the sleeping room. The Brahmin went aback and found a well-furnished bed into the room. Both the maiden Brahmin and the guest went to sleep. Both of them had undergone sound sleep. The dusk sets. The guest aunty told the maiden to rise. Now I have to return. But the maiden Brahmin didn't want to rise up. The maiden Brahmin told the guest now you may go. The *Bipadnashini* as guest aunty told the maiden before her departure, the niece, Here I have kept for you the pious pitcher you will worship in every Saturday or Tuesday, the idol of *Bipadnashini*; then you will

not be fallen into any trouble, there will not be any more scarcity. Telling this the *Bipadnashini* disappeared. The Maiden Brahmin listened everything in dizziness.

The dusk arrived. The beggar Brahmin got nothing out of begging at the end of the day and returned empty hand. Arriving in front of his hut he saw new house in another shape, it is a palace, a big palace. Scared he entered into it and listened everything from his wife. After that the Brahmin became rich and all there weal and owe went away. The maiden Brahmin after that begun to perform the *Bipadanashini* rites with pomp and splendour either in every Tuesday or in Saturday. Their days by the way are passed. By this time they got a boy child. The boy were growing up under the blessing of *Bipadanashini*.

The couple Brahmin, passed there days in happiness, one day the Brahmin told her wife. It is long you have not visited your father's house. Come let us go to their home, the Brahmin went to his father-in-laws house taking his son and wife. But the maiden didn't forget to take the (*Bipadnashini ghot*) pitcher, so that she might not fall into any trouble.

The care of the Brahmin and his son and wife knew no limit from the side of his father-in-laws house on the other hand. By this time, the brother-in-laws of the Brahmin told, let us go big-brother, let us show you the house's courtyard. The brothers-in-laws took their big-brother and his son to southwards. As they were late, in arrival, the maiden Brahmin told her mother, the brothers have taken your son-in-law and my son to walking. It is high time, they are not returning. Let me go mother in search of them. The mother of the maiden Brahmin told her, 'you are permitted to go to the East to the West, go to the North, but never go to the South.'

The maiden Brahmin was suspicious and so she went southward home. But saw that the home is full of arms and ammunition, and brothers as dacoities have beheaded the Brahmin and his son and stolen all the ornaments from their bodies. Having seen this the maiden Brahmin, remembered and called on *Bipadanashini* and sprinkled water from the holy pitcher into the beheaded heads of the Brahmin and the son. With this both, the son and father woke up alive Brahmin, rose up and told her why she had broken their sweet sleep. The wife told them that his brothers-in-law had become dacoit and stole all the ornaments from their body and beheaded them.



You have returned to life and no longer we should stay here telling this the Brahmin and her wife set out for their home.

To reach home, there is a way through the jungle. Suddenly there arrived a tiger. Though the Brahmin and his wife became scared they remembered *Bipadnashini* and sprinkled water from the holy pitcher into the body of the tiger. The tiger stood in front of them. The tiger told them, 'who are you, I wanted to eat you, but I am unable. Are you any god or demon?' Brahmin and his wife told we are neither god nor demon. We are the disciple of Mother *Bipadnashini*. Mother *Bipadnashini* has saved us, if any one perform the rites of mother *Bipadnashini* than everybody remains perfect. The lost riches are found, the barren women gives birth to the child, the cut away heads once again gets its early shape. The tiger told, My Tigress and the child has been lost for long twelve years. Till I am searching them, I too shall perform the rites of *Bipadnashini* if I get them back. A few yards away the tiger found his tigress and his child.

The next day was Saturday. The tiger and tigress arrived into the market with their child. Everybody flew out of fear, leaving open the market. With the opportunity, the tiger and the tigress collected the elements of worship and arrived at the

house of the Brahmins. The Brahmin, arranged *Bipadnashini* rites and invited the villagers and the market shopkeepers of the market. The rite was performed with pomp and splendour. Everybody was afraid having seen the tiger and the tigress and was aback at the knowledge of everything. Everybody took *prasad* of mother *Bipadnashini*'s blessings they smeared the oil and vermillion upon their foreheads. From that day everywhere the *Bipadnashini* rite begun to be performed and widely populated.<sup>11</sup>

After the end of the Brata tale, the women who tells the story is of *Bipadnashini*, chants the word, 'what is achieved at this Brata? The barren women gets a child, the poor becomes rich, the beheaded head come into his early shape, everybody's wishes are fulfilled with the *Bipadnashin*'s blessings.<sup>12</sup>

### **Savitri Brata**

The Shadhava womens perform this rite in the Krishna *Chaturdashi tithi* in the month of *Jaistha* (Bengali month). The performer has to observe this rite, with *Habishya* on the day before the brata, in an esoteric way. To perform this rites the things required are *Noibedyā*, vermillion, *pancha shashya*, *ghat*, *Amrapallab*, *pituli*, 108 *durba* grass, the branches of

*Aswath* or banyan. The cloths of *Dharmaraja*, *Asanangurio*, etc. There, a pedestal made of mud where *alpana* is drawn with *pituli*. The *ghat* (pitcher) is placed in the middle of the *Alpana*. A thread is Knot around the row bamboo stick in the pedestal, the picture of Savitri and dead husband are drawn under the *Aswatha*, and banyan tree with *pituli*. A branch of *Aswatha* or the banyan trees are placed in front of the pedestal.

The Bratinee takes vegetables in the day when, the brata is performed. After the rite is over, the bratinee has to feed the *shadhava* and the Brahmins. There are provision of giving vermillion, and *alta*, to the *shadhava* women. At the end of the brata, the Bratee, has to bow and touch the feet of their husband, and wipe away the feet of her husband with her *anachal*. In a few local the Brateenee, drink water washing away the feet of their husband.

Among the bratas, performed by the *Shadhava* women *Shib Chaturdashi*, is significant. *Savitri* the daughter of king *Aswapati* has arranged this brata to bring back her husband *Satyabaan* into life from the evil women of *Jamraj*. *Jamraj*, too, was defeated at the love and devotion of *Savitri*. *Savitri* is recognized as an ideal women to all the *Shadhava* women.

With the performance of this rite, one can find deep devotion by the Brateene to the husband. This brata is aimed at the well-being of her husband.<sup>13</sup> Below, is the tale of the brata.

### **Tale of Savitri brata**

In an ancient time, there was a devotional king *Aswapati* in the *Madradesh*. Arriving there, into the king's court. Debarshi Narad, enquiring about the king's worry, sought to know the reason. The king replied that his daughter went to travel, but now she is missing. No information of her where about is there. When Narad enquired about the marriage of Savitri, the king said that though many princes have seen Savitri yet, no one dared to take her as their wife. Information came that Savitri has returned back and choose the son of blind king Dhymat Sen as her own husband. With this information he became worried and told the king that longevity of Satyaban is little, and if Savitri is married to him, his wife Savitri will become widow, if she gets married to him. Savitri did not obey king's advice.

Savitri was married to Satyaban, she was counting the days. Before the completion of the years in marriage. Savitri begun fasting for three days. One day Savitri and Satyaban went to



the forest where Satyaban had begun to cut the branches of woods and Savitri picked them one by one, and begun to fill her bouquet. Suddenly Satyaban screamed loudly and told that he is undergoing dizziness and then he had fallen from the tree and got dead.

Savitri went on crying; taking the dead body on her lap. Then Jamraj came to take Satyaban. Jamraj started journey taking the soul of Satyaban. A few yards back he saw that Savitri was following him. Jamraj told her to go back but Savitri denied. Then Jamraj wanted Savitri to choose another groom besides Satyaban. Jamraj listened Savitri's plea to give father-in-laws the kingdom. He agreed and went on. Jamraj looking back a few yards after and saw Savitri is following him. Jamraj told her to go back but Savitri did not agree. When Jamraj sought Savitri to lodge another demand leaving Satyaban, Savitri comply with hundred sons to her father, Jamraj agreed. Jamraj moved forward, but a little yard after, he looked back, and saw that Savitri is following him. When Jamraj told her to seek another way beside the life of Satyaban Savitri sought to become the mother of hundred sons and Jamraj agreed.

Jamraj went on moving ahead and reached the southern door, looked back and saw that Savitri is again following him. When

Jamraj asked her the reason of her coming long way, Savitri told him "I have come here to tell you only a single word. I know that your words are kept. But you have given me blessing to become the mother of hundred sons, and yet taking back my husband. Did Dharmaraj himself has forgotten the religion? Dharmaraj listened and got happy and told 'Savitri'; you yourself have defeated so-called religion and gave lesson of religion to Dharmaraj, you are *Sati-Saddhi* (pure women) I am now giving your husband the life and soul back. Go mother; your Satyaban will remain alive and let your words and ideals be known to the world with the performance of *Savitri Chaturdarshi mahabrata*. Every woman from now on who will go on fasting to perform the brata with devotion, she will never receive burnt of widowhood. From then on *Savitri brata* became popular everywhere.<sup>14</sup>

### **Bana Brata**

*Bana brata*, mainly is an extended version of *Savitri brata*, which is performed only by the Hindu Bengali married women of Barak Valley as legacy to Sylhet roots. *Savitri brata* starts from the month of *Jaistha Krishna, Chaturdashi* and to complete it in *Amabashya*, keeping pace with the *Bana brata* which also starts from *Jaistha, Krishna Thirodashi* and

complete it in *Amabashya*. In the three days, (*Thirodashi* to *Amabashya*) the devotees take vegetable food only. There is a rite that the devotees are not allowed to take any corn coming out of plough, mainly the bratees take foods as corn from *Jum* cultivation. In the days of *puja*, the *bratee* keep 108 corn and 108 seeds, in water. The seeds are sprouted on a definite time. 108 *Kharika* (branch) has to be tied with cloth for the purification of teeth. Along with it, a pack of *Durba* grass has to be placed. The *Brahmin* priest draws *Alpana* with *Abir* and also the holy picture of *Dharmaraj* (*Jamraj*) is drawn and placed upon the *Alpana*. The ingredients of *bratas* are vermilion, *panchaguri*, flowers, *durba* grass and five kinds of banyan leaves with branches and *belpata* (leaves of wood apple).

*Hoom yogya* also is arranged for performing this rite. On the third day of performing *Bana brata* *brateenes* wash away the feet of bull with *langal* with utter devotion and *uludhani*. After worshipping of *langool*, the *purohit* utter brata tale that *brateenes* listen with utter devotion.

The *brateenes* sprinkle water, setting their husband upon a *pidi* with traditional handmade bamboo fan (*taal pakha*). The *brateenee* wash away the feet of the husband with their hair.

After that the *brateenees* serve their husbands with soaked rice along with the cream of milk. The mother-in-law offer new cloths to the groom after bamboo *kharika* touched away by the teeth. Like *Savitri brata* in *Bana brata* too, the longevities of the husband is prayed. That is why in Barak Valley the *Savitri brata* and *Bana brata* is a unified one.<sup>15</sup>

### **Sankatrani brata**

Though the *Sankat Raani* and *Sankata* rituals are different in performances yet these are mainly in same purpose. Both the *bratas* are female in nature. These two *brata*'s are deeply rooted in Sylhet culture. This *Sankatrani brata* is performed in any Sunday of any month in Barak Valley. The main elements of *Sankatrani brata* are '*khola pitha*' and '*payesa*' as *noibidya*. Women from any age, maiden widow or Virgin any one can perform this rite. This *brata* is also aimed to protect the performer out of danger. The *bratees* prepare *noibadya* in any Sunday with '*khola pitha*' and '*payesa*' after the holy bath, *Sankatrani* pitcher is decorated with mango leaves, flowers, *durbagrass*, vermillion are set in a proper place. The *bratees* offer '*khola pitha*' and '*payesa*' to *Sankatarani* and utter tales of the *brata* which is listened by the attendants present there. At the end of *Bratakatha* the narrator chants the hymns of



*Sankatarani* brata for her benevolence what happens if the *Sankatrani* brata is performed, the poor becomes rich, the beheaded head returns to proper shape, everybody's wish is fulfilled. The women utter *uludhani* at the end of the bratas and everybody take *Prasad*.<sup>16</sup>

### **The brata tale of *Sankatrani brata***

Once upon time there lived seven merchant brothers along with their wives and they had one compassionate sister name Baroda, she was the loveable sister of her seven elder brother. Baroda was like a lucky sister of the seven brother. It is long that the merchant brothers did not sail for business so they decided to make their mind to go for sailing in business purpose. But they were distraught where to keep their sister when they will be out of home, as their parents died long ago. The elder brothers now are her mother and parents. So they told their wives to take care of their only sister. When they will be out of home they should keep her in joy and happiness.

The brothers set sail for merchandise to the foreign country. As the brothers left from home all the six wives began abusing Baroda leaving the youngest one. They forced her to do all the household works along with cutting away the woods from the

jungle, keeping in the goats care and in lieu of which used to feed little, sometimes they kept her in hunger. They forced to bound her to spend night outside their home for slumber only the wife of youngest elder brother used to take care of her and fed her with foodings. Some time she used to give her good foods. Likewise the life of the sister, used to be pass in utter distress. But Baroda used to keep *mumb* at the ill-treatment by the wives of her elder brother yet she performed *Sankatrani* brata with utter devotion.

After many years, it was time for the merchant brothers to return to their home. Six wives of elder brother make confirmation to give bath to her into the river and fell down her into the water. The youngest sister in law (wife of youngest elder brother) knew all this things early and so she kept a pillow to the afloat sister *Baroda*. Thus the life which was at stake came to alive and the sister Baroda was set free as she came floating to another stepping stone of the river bank. Afterwards entered into the dense forest and remembered the mother *Sankatrani* and took shelter into the jungle.

Dusk set in. The animals begun roarings but Baroda came alive with blessing of *Maa Sankatrani*. The following day Baroda remembered that the day is the worship day of Maa

Sankatrani, She thought that what else was to be done. She plucked a few fruits and prepared tiny *khola pitha* with sand and gave it as offerings to the *Sankatrani*. After that she put an end to the brata with *Uludhani*. At that the merchant brothers was crossing the river and listened *Uludhani* as they were passing near the jungles. They entered into the jungle and saw their sister is there. *Baroda* cried at the sight of her brothers. The brothers came to know things done to her. The brothers returned to their home and banished away all their criminal six wives, those who treated her in bad manner. They came with flying colours with the jewelers as they were in their merchandise.

Now the family of merchant brothers came to live in joy and happiness with their sister. And *Baroda* came to worship *Maa Sanakatrani* in regular intervals as they were full of happiness and joy. Time went on and marriage of *Baroda* was settled with the son of a rich *Zamindar* in a nearby village. The marriage of *Baroda* was done with pomp and splendor. And before going to slumber the *Baroda* remembered that day which was the devotees days of *Sankatrani*. And she arranged the brata with *khola pitha* and *payash* and placed it into the pedestal of deity *Sankatrani*, having learnt all this, the *groom* was taken aback



and learnt that every danger goes out from any one if the devotee perform the rites of *Sankatrani* and the family become full of joy and happiness. Day after the journey *Baroda*, into her father-in-laws house, her husband kept all her ornaments in a pack and fell it into the water of the river. *Baroda* remembered *Maa Sankatrani* to keep safe all her ornaments.

*Baroda* entered into the father-in-laws house, as a maiden. The *Boubhat* (ending marriage ceremony) is to be arranged after two days. The *Zamindar* (father-in-laws) brought fishes from the other village far and near. Among these fishes, there was a big *boal* fish. After the dictate of the *Zamindar*, *Baroda* came to cut away the belly of the *boal* fish and found the pack of ornaments into its belly when *Baroda* arrived in front of the invitees she was found with full of ornaments decorated into her body. Having seen all these came to the husband believe upon the *Sankatrani*.

After the days of happiness, *Baroda* gave birth to a boy child with the blessing of mother *Sankatrani*. After a few days there was a crisis of water in *Zamindar's* village. Her father-in-laws arranged to dig a pond in his house to eradicate water crisis but water was not found anywhere. At night *Baroda's* father-in-laws saw in dream that water would be there if the blood of



Boroda's new born baby is kept at the pond. With the dream the father-in-laws come out to be in utter distress. Baroda could understand all these about her father-in-laws and requested him to cut off her son and give blood to the pond. Accordingly the rites was arranged and villagers from far and near came to observe the ceremony. The ceremony of segregation was done and the pond was back with full of water and everybody came to give oil and vermilion to the water-goddess Ganga. And by this time Baroda jumped into the pond, remembering mother Goddess *Sankatrani*. Everybody thought that perhaps Baroda committed suicide at the love and compassion to her son. But after a few minutes *Baroda* came out from pond water with the son alive on her lap. Everybody came to be joyous with the greatness of Maa *Sankatrani* and spread her message far and wide.<sup>17</sup>

### **Sankata Brata**

*Sankata brata* is also aimed to protect the performer and her family out of danger. The women from Sylhet origin in Barak Valley performs this rites in any Monday or Friday of any month. The main elements of *Sankata brata* is '*Khichuri*' and five types of fried vegetables as a *noibadya*. The brateenees placed a pitcher of *Sankata* with vermilion, flowers,

*durbagrass*, mango leaves, that is offered to *Sankata* with proper devotion along with '*kichuri*' and fried vegetables are offered to *Sankata*. There are no brata tale, in black and white. After that the brata ends with *uludhani* and everybody takes Prasad.<sup>18</sup>

### **Lakshmi Brata**

Lakshmi brata is the abode of treasury and abundance. Her rites is performed in pretext of riches and abundance with proper conventional ways. But in the Barak Valley Lakshmi Devi is performed mainly as the festivities of corn. Here in the Barak Valley, the rites of Lakshmi Devi is mainly known as the rice-giver, Lakshmi *brata* is performed in the Lakshmi-bar, like Thursday and *Kojagori Purnima*. From the very beginning of harvest till its end, the Lakshmi *brata* is performed as the symbol of fertility with utter devotion. This brata is aimed at grinneries full of corn, cow-treasure and fishes full of pond.

The Hindu Bengali women of Barak Valley perform this rites in everyday with *noibadya*, sweets and betel nut leave and betel nuts with the Brata tales or *panchali* recited by the performer. The day upon which this rite is performed is Thursday. According to the almanac of *Kajagori* Lakshmi puja, this rite is

performed in autumn *purnima tithi* which is performed with proper devotion. But as because, it is believed in agro-based Barak Valley that Lakshmi Devi, mother goddess is an emblem of grain treasure. She is performed here accordingly from the very beginning of harvest till its end goddess he rites of Lakshmi. Lakshmi Devi is performed in equal status with devotion and rites. But there is no requirement of Brahmin priest for the performance. According to the convention of harvest of *Aamon*, *Aaus* and *Buro* grain, the women of the valley, perform this rites. The day while the farmer go to the field to sow the seeds, the farmer's wife performs this rites. Women here, draw *alpana* to honour her presence, with the signs of her footsteps and when harvests are taken to the grinery till its end. The women of the valley perform this rites with the sack of grain, leaves corn, into their huts. *Nabanna* the festival of harvest, takes place during this day of Bengali *Agrohayan*. The women performer does not take rice before the rites. Rice, along with five types of fried vegetables and pulse are offered to the Devi. This is known as *Nabanna* of Barak Valley. Beside this, the farmer's wife perform this rites too, also in *Aashwin Sankranti* and *Aat Aanaz brata* which is basically

the rites to protect the corn. Besides this, the farmer's wife also perform this rite of Lakshmi puja in *Choitro* Sankranti.

Like every other brata in Lakshmi Devi is pitcher as *ghat* is placed before the idol of Lakshmi *Swastik* signs, corn, *durba* grass, flowers are required with water-full pot. The rice and banana *noibadya*, betel nuts leaves, *tambul* and fruits are offered as devotional element to the goddess. Beside this cooked foods are also fed there, at the end.<sup>19</sup>

Over and above there are ploughing, seeds sowing, corn till the end of the grain as ripens there is no brata-tale without the chanted traditional *panchali* of Lakshmi Devi.

### **Sasthi Brata**

Like other places of Bengal, *Sasthi* brata is performed by the mothers of Barak Valley too. The desire for the wellbeing of their children, here, is expected by the women folk. As *Sasthi* is giver of life and saviour of children, so the women folks perform the rites with utter devotion. In this context it is said that, the Bengali women are born to dedicate themselves to the goddess *Sasthi*. In fact the rural women are reluctant to undermine *Sasthi* as they believe that if *Sasthi* is enraged then evil omen occupy the family, it is believed that *Sasthi* is the



protector of children, both boys and girls. If any child falls down into the ground then *Sasthi* comes to this rescue. She plays with them when they go to sleep. The mother of the children perform this rite throughout the life time. At the end of *Sasthi* worship the brata-tale is listened by the brateenees with control diet with fasting. After that they listen the brata tale. As such, they are not reluctant to perform the rites all along their lives with proper ritual.<sup>20</sup>

There are numerous tales about the benevolence of *Sasthi* Devi. Worship of *Sasthi* is twelve name in the twelve month in a year, with only a piece of cloth along with turmeric, attached to the idol of *Sasthi* in her symbol.<sup>21</sup>

In the rites of *Jamai Sasthi*, the mothers or elderly mothers like women offers rituals to have blessings for the children, son-in-laws and daughter-in-laws with packs of *durba* grass. This pack of *durba* grass is the main ingredients of *Sasthi* puja. It is performed in the month of *Jaistha* by the mother-women, of Barak Valley. Mother makes pack of *durba* grass according to the number of the persons. This *durba* grass is adorned with the seeds of corn, the budding twigs of betel nut and myriad colourfull flowers.

Along with the *durba* grass the ripe mangoes, pineapple and banana too is offered to the Devi *Sasthi*. The *Purohit* perform the rites and utter rhymes. In a definite place the mother placed the persons and knock gently on the ground with knife around them. The mother also sprinkle water from traditional hand fan which is made by *Taal* leaves and bamboo and offer compassion to the persons. After that they touch the pack of *Durba* grass upon the heads of the persons. Mango, *Jam*, Pineapple, Jackfruits, Banana, *Chidda*, *Khoi*, Curd is provided to the recipient. In the next day of *Sasthi* brata, the mother knot the sacred thread to the arms of their children as blessings of goddess *Sasthi*.<sup>22</sup>

### **Ambubachi brata**

Ambubachi is a remarkable brata of Barak Valley. This rite is performed by widow women. When *Surjya* enters into Mithun zodiac in the seventh day after the sixth day of the month of *Ashar* (Bengali month). Saying goes that when the mother *Basumati* becomes fertile in the three days of *Ambubachi*, she remains impure. According to the scripture there is a prohibition of digging the earth, that is why at that time the farmer does not plough land, no puja-worship takes place at that time. The widow women at that time goes under fasting.

They do not touch ground with their feet. Even they don't eat the cooked rice. During these three days the Bratees take row milk and fruits. According to the popular belief that if any one drink milk the fear of Snake biting go out and the Ants and Reptiles, too don't dig ground. In which these three days are crossed, every houses are cleaned, wiping and all the clothes too are washed with. In fact everything gets under pious way.<sup>23</sup>

A heavy shower is there at that time, in the eastern part of India. Due to mother Basumati who is drenched with shower, at that time corns and fruits seeds are sprouted. Due to the heavy shower, plants are not required to be observed. It seems that perhaps Ambubachi basically was related to the cultivation and harvest festival. Because, till today, in a small pitcher the seeds of corn are kept to get sprouted in a few places of Barak Valley. If and when the seeds are sprouted than the pitcher is flowed in to any river.<sup>24</sup>

### **Rupasi brata**

Before every rituals the women perform this rites under the hope at the betterment of the wellbeing of their siblings and the marriage ceremony. Both Brahmins and non - Brahmins perform this rites, either as a single one or five to seven

persons more. The women perform this rite, after the twenty days of the birth of the son and at the thirty first days of the birth of the girl child, these women perform these rites. The main element required for this brata is a banana tree. The devotees women after the bath make *verua* with the inside elements (bark) of banana plants. It takes seven parts of the banana plants & with seven sticks after opening the bark one after another, four sticks are conjoined together and dartsed inside the *verua* so that these are not broken. Flowers are kept at the head of the *verua* (banana boat).

Banana *chida*, *khoi*, milk and sugar coated are kept into the *verua* which is made by banana trees, these are given as signs of worship to the Rupasi Goddess. The priest worships the *verua* as god. After the puja, the mother of the children or the mother of the groom sings along with the other *bratee*, and goes under the *sheora* tree.

In *Rupasi* brata, *sheora* tree is worshiped as the Goddess *Rupasi*. The women mop the yard belonging to the outskirts of *sheora*. The women bring down the *verua* under the *sheora* tree with water and milk and soaks the roots of the *sheora* tree, they worship the *sheora* tree with oil and vermilion. Along with the other fruits and *noibedya*, two betel nut leaves



(*paan*) were kept upon the leaves of the banana, keeping eggs and wheat coat. The mother of the child will embrace the tree with the thread of ropes, tied around the tree, befriending it. The mother will return to her home, taking two betel nuts and leaves tied to her *Anachal* knot. After that with the words of wellbeing of her child, the mother smear the forehead with vermillion.<sup>25</sup>

The small (*verua*) boat made out of banana plant is worshiped as Goddess Rupasi's carrier and Rupasi Devi herself is another form of Durga. On the other hand the married women perform rites taking the *sheora* tree as Rupasi Durga. The worship of trees is an ancient rite of Austrik race. The religious ceremony of *sheora* tree by the Sylheti women is remembered as a legacy to the ancient Austrik race. On the other hand women perform Rupasi brata with the Priest chanting the religious hymns imagining the *verua* (banana boat) as the emblem of a chariot of Devi Rupasi. That is why this brata can be taken both in the arena of classical and non-classical Hindu religion.

### **Kartik Brata**

Whatever may be there of any explanation in '*Skanda Purana*' about Kartik deity. *Kartik* is worshiped in Barak Valley with

fervour as a folk deity in Sylheti roots. But the mother hailing from Sylhet consider this *bratas* as their own. Though *Kartik* is regarded as harvest deity yet he is considered as a son to the mother *brateenees*. The mother perform this rites in expectation to the birth of a son. Generally, the *brateenees* perform the rites as a mother having son and the mother expecting to get a son. And she perform this rites if she bears a son.

*Kartik* brata is observed in the last day of the month of *Kartik* in the Bengali year. But in the performance of brata, before fortnight, the mother sows *Jala* of *Kartik* and this *Jala* is sprouted in any clay pot, or basil plant with seeds like corn seeds, *dhan* seeds, *kolai* seeds, *pie* seeds, *chola* seeds etc.

Little bow and arrows (as toys) out of bamboo-branches is prepared in the *puja* day around these *Jala*. And a few clay birds is made by mother women to decorate the *Jala* in myriad colour. Beside this, the *brateenee*, filling the seven clay pot with rice along with raw turmeric offer the *Kartik* deity and some other offer to the deity with pot full of *chida*, *khoi* and sweets.<sup>26</sup>

There are definite idol for *Kartik*, deity. Beside the beautiful *Kartik* idol, there are also an *Usha* idol are there it is believed among the devotees that when *Kartik* went to get married to *Usha* he learnt that his mother *Durga* is taking food, with ten hand on the pretext that perhaps daughter in law *Usha* will not give her food after the son's marriage. Getting the news *Kartik* came back to his home without getting married. But as *Usha* took *Kartik* as her groom she accompanied following him. The main element of *Kartik* puja is sprouting corn seeds *Jala*. It is placed before the *Kartik* idol at the time of worshipping. The Brahmin *Purohit* performs the puja following the conventional structure, in the devotion and prayer. Flower, *belpata*, *dhaan*, *durba*, *teel*, Basil leaves, leaves of mangoes, pitcher and cloths are required worshipping *Kartik* deity and *noibadya*, fruits and sweets are also offered to the *Kartik* deity. But the mother doesn't bow down (*pranaama*) at the idol of *Kartik*, as because *Kartik* deity is like a son of mother *brateenee*.<sup>27</sup> The mother perform this rites in utter compassion.

### **Mangalchandi and Phulkar Thakur Brata**

*Mangalchandi* Brata is performed by every pious Hindu women in Barak Valley in proper religious fervour. But this is now on

the verge of extinction. Like every other women rites, it is too performed by the women of Barak Valley that is aimed at the well-being of children and their family. Beside the story of '*Dhanapati Swadagor* and *Khullona* related *Mangalchandi* brata there is another conventional *Mangalchandi* brata performed in Barak Valley. Both *Phulkar* Thakur and *Mangalchandi* brata is performed together in Barak Valley. It is performed in any Tuesday in Bengali month of *Agrahayana* by the devotees who belong to the peasant community. Though, *Mangalchandi* Brata has different signification yet the coalesced amalgamation of these rites between *Mangalchandi* brata and *Phulkar* Thakur has achieved a different status. It is the treasury of Sylhet based mother, which is performed by them at a time together with the *Phulkar* brata and *Mangalchandi* brata. The mother brotees perform this rite as a component of harvest festival in Tuesday of the month of *Agrahayana*. Brahmin priest is required here in the performance of this rites. Priest chant Durga Mantra in the performance of *Mangalchandi* brata. The main elements of Puja's are flower. *Belpata*, Paddy, *Durba* grass vermilion *Agaru*, *Camphore*, *Horitoki*, Twigs of mangoes, banyan leaves *Noibadya* betel nut (*tambul paan*) and fruits. But the main



attraction of this brata is the rites of khili which is made out of bamboo sticks, darts by the mangoes twigs, with vermilion placed upon the *khilli*. More than 100 *khillis* are arranged which is sacred and give life to the festivities. This *khilli* of *Mangalchandi* is thought to be pious. One of the mother keeps the *khilli* in a saved corner of the prayer house throughout the whole year in a pure pot. This *khilli* is touched to the forehead upon their children and relatives who goes to outside their house and the *khillis* are given them for their well-being during their quest. This *khillis* are taken by the women performer as a sacred element and also women devotee consider it as a pious object.<sup>28</sup>

As because *Fulkar Thakur* brata is performed in the month of harvest festival that is why the women performer perform this rites therewith in the day which this *Mangalchandi* brata is slated to be performed. On the same day the mothers draw *alpana* as square size upon which flowers and the petals of flower are spread before the cow-shed in the twilight zone. A few farmer's wives offer sweet *naru* to the goddess and when the women perform, they bow in front of the *Fulkar alapana*, the boys of the house go to take this sweets behind the cow-sheds and eat these in a happy mood. After that the cows are

taken to their shed, over the *phulkar alpna* in proper manner, this women & devotees believe that with the touch of cow-feets the *phulkar thakur* rise up and at that time they chant rhymes.

*Utho Utho Phulkar Thakur Kathe Muro Diya / Tumare Puji  
Sashya Phool Diya / Utho Utho Phulkar Thakur Kathe Muro  
Diya / Tumare Puji Ami Genda Phool Diya*<sup>29</sup>

(Rise up, rise up *Phulkar thakur* with blanket upon your head/ I pray you with flowers by the seeds of corn / Rise up rise up *Phulkar thakur* with blanket upon your head / I pray you with flower by marigold.)

### **Aaachambit Thakurer brata**

*Aaachambit Thakur Brata*, in the Barak Valley among others is an endangered rite. The mother on the pretext of the long lasting physical ailment of their children, performs this rites. The mother performs, it in any Tuesday or Saturday of any month to goes her neighbours house, where she never visited. Before the rites devotee mother takes bath under fasting in Tuesday or Saturday with one pot full water and the front-is-piece of a banana leaves reaches the neighbour's house where however, she never talks to anyone of that household which she visited. The house keeper is informed beforehand there

with. Because she can't speak to none of the household, the house keeper greets the new comer without talking to her, the *Brateenees* are offered with rice-vegetables etc. Here the *Brateenee* offers *Aaachambit Thakur* as *Noibadya* and take *prasad* with proper ways. After taking the *Prasad* the *Brateenee* helping a little activities the household keeper. With *uludhwani* breaks the silence of *Brateenee* and thereby puts an end of the *Aaachambit brata* rites.<sup>30</sup>

### **Jhatpat Thakurer brata**

Like other rites of Barak Valley, *Jhatpat Thakur brata* is performed by Hindu Bengali mother women in proper religious fervor.

*Jhatpat* means to rapid recovery. *Jhatpat Thakur's brata* is one kind of mental brata. This brata is one kind of mental brata in psychic term related to the problems of daughter's marriage, the legal solution to a broil. This brata is aimed at the solution of various problems, the family women offer rice, banana, fruits and burning scented sticks to the *Thakur*. After that the *Bratakatha* (tale) is told of the greatness of *Jhatpat Thakur*. This tale goes like this. In a certain family, there were many daughters in marriageable age. The parents were worried

due to their marriage undone. At that time, Jhatpat Thakur came in the cloak of a beggar and told them, to worship him. Then Thakur was worshiped and the marriage of the daughters realized. This Jhatpat brata from then on, came to be performed and realized in the family. Following them, the other devotees too, came to worship the brata and were rewarded. There in this locality a rich and educated *zaminder* lived. He showed little respect and faith to the devotees. He came to caricature the tales of Jhatpata brata. By the way the *zaminder* came to face problems. Than with the advice of the locale people, the *zaminder* begun worshiping and performed rites of Jhatpat which brought his wealth and riches back. From then on the worship of Jhatpath brata came to be recognized and performed in to the Zaminder's house and was propagated throughout the country.<sup>31</sup>

### **Surjya Brata**

Like the other locales of Bengali, the women of Barak Valley, too perform these rites and bratas to bring happiness and wellbeing of their people as individuals, families and their own groups in their own locale ways of performance. The words and accents of these are spelt in their locale dialect.



The brata here have taken shape in the attire of admixture among *sashtriya* brata. *Naribrata* and *Kumari* brata are performances of rites and ritual by the women of the respective locale.

Among all the bratas, *Surjyabrata* or *Kalathakurer brata* is reckoned as an unparalleled one and special among all the bratas, which are performed for wellbeing of their child and other family member.

These brata is performed, worshiping to the Sun-God (*Surjya Debota*) to get children and their wellbeing, as the women with fertility as against the barren backlog. This brata is more difficult than other bratas. Of this brata, Dr. Ashutosh Bhattacharjee has said, Sun is the essence of fertility because the power of sunlight regulates the cultivation. The primitive society has believed that the fertility of the land gives ways to the fertility of women. They the women are blessed with the children and they too become barren at the curse of the *Surjya Debota*, that is why the female society has laid effort to satiate the sun.<sup>32</sup> The priest performs devotional rites in the *Surjya brata*. As the female are required for the performance, so it is called women brata. The women perform this rite with a number of other women. The *Surjya brata* perform in any

Sunday of *Magha mash* (Bengali month). In this connection the devotee woman stands on their feet from the sun rise to the sun-set. No one is directed to seat while performing the pujas. The Bratees take bath at dawn followed by the lighting of the lamp and 'Arati' offered to the *Surjya Debota*. After that the lamp is kept where somewhere it is safe and does not extinguish. The number of lamps are equal to the number of Bratees. As the extinguished lamp will bring evil so it has to be kept in a safe corner, Raw banana plant and marigold flowers are the main ingredients of *bratas*. Similarly two tiny ponds, one is of four corners and another with a small circular. Turmeric juice are dug in the pond along with raw milk, poured there. Taking marigold flower as the symbol of sun, it is kept at the attire of banana leaves. The priest worships seating before their banana trees and the ponds. It is followed by the ritual songs with cymbal by the Bratees. As the Bratees are not supposed to seat before the days are over so they sing songs throughout the days. Then they dance *dhamaile* with clapping hands with rhythmic foots. The subject of their song is *Krishnalilla*. Before the narration of *Krishnalilla* the Bratees sing the songs of creation of the earth. After that they sing songs in praise of the *Debota* in ten directions. After that one

by one the Bratees perform the songs and *dhamalie* (dance) with subjects of creation, the birth of *Doibaki*, the prayer of *Doibaki* to get Krishna as his own son, the *Balyalila* of Krishna, *Gostolila*, *Nandautsav*, *Putonabadh*, *Bokasurbadh*, *Gopolila*, *Subalmilon*, *Kalikrishnarupdharan*, *Noukabilash*, *Kangsabadh* etc.<sup>33</sup>

According to the religious rites the devotees of *Surjyabrata* perform the bratas, standing all day long so they forget their toil and labour through songs and dance. The *purohit* (priest) worships and perform *yogyahoom*, praying to *Surjya*. The devotees offer floral tributes to the banana tree. Every bratees offer tributes in the *yogyahoom* with teel, wheat, ghee and pure *Durba* grass in succession of eight times, twenty times or hundred eight times. At noon time, again, the bratees take bath behind close shed and worship the *Surjya debata* (sun) with the lighting lamp by *ghee*.

The women and bratees again sing and dance *dhamile* with the concluding part of *Krishnalila*, after the *yogyahoom* and deliverance. They sing and dance *dhamile* up to the dusk with devotion to the sun, by lighting lamp with ghee. The women after that keeps the lamp in a protected area either in the worshipping home or somewhere else. After the pujas, the

devotees take 'Noibedyā' & fruits themselves and others also are fed. The women devotees are supposed to take *prasad* only once and take *payas* (sweet rice with milk) at night. The banana trees are then planted beside the pond which yields banana trees to grow. The women perform these rites over a few years.<sup>34</sup>

This brata of Sylhet-Barak Valley is significant. The significance here is hidden in the name of the brata itself. The name of the brata is Surjya brata and *Kalathakurer* brata too. The name *Kalalathakur* is the name of Krishna himself who can be regarded as the ancient mythical God. *Surjya bandana* and to the *Surjya Debota* Puja were introduced here by the Aryan race. From this it can be taken as a synthesis between the Pre-Hindu and Post-Hindu culture. So, their songs could be sung with prayer song of *Kalathakur* and song of *Krishnalila*.

On the women brata, Abanindranath Thakur has said if seen from distance this women *bratas* seem to be Pre-Purana and where the two era of Hindu Religion, pre and post history, could be read.<sup>35</sup> The *Surjya brata* or *Kalathakurer* brata reminds us of the correspondence between the different sects



of pre and post Hinduttva; that is why Surjya and *Kalathakur* has gained equal status.

### **Maghmandal brata**

In the entire gamut of Brata *Parvan* in Sylhet is *Maghmandal* brata performed to train the girl child to equip them in the household activities with discipline. It is performed when the age of the girl child from five to nine years.

Right from the beginning of *Poush Sankranti* throughout the entire *magh* month this brata is performed by the little girl child. They take bath at dawn in the pond with songs sung by them in praise of *Surjya Devota*. Beside the pond, a banana tree is placed with mango leaves and it is changed every day with new mango leaves replaced there, with purified water in the pitcher. This rite is worshiped by the *Purohit*, beside the pond in the open space at *magh* month. The *bratee* takes bath in utter coolness of the winter season, acquire blessing of the *Surjya Devota*, there are competition among the bratees to step down in the pond with chanting rhymes to satiate the *Surjya Devota*.

This brata is performed as a linear process upto three year, the brata takes place after the completion of three year in a mode of festivity.<sup>36</sup>

*Maghmandal* brata is basically is *Surjya* puja. The parasite get place at the end of *Maghmondal*.

### ***Shitali brata***

*Shitala* Devi is called *Shitali* as a folk goddess of Barak Valley extended from Sylhet to Barak Valley. She cures the skin disease. With this belief the women perform this rite in order to protect their children and the other in the family. This brata is performed in the month of *Chaitro* of the Bengali year on any Saturday or Tuesday. The brateenes arrange this *bratas* out of residential home basically bank of pond or river, beside a temple in the village. The mother women performs this rite with utter devotion under fasting. The rice crush, banana, *guur*, and milk are arranged as offerings, the fruits are offered. But in *Shitali* brata the Brahmin *purohit* is required. The brata can be performed by the women or a *purohit* with pitcher set in proper place. *Shitali* Devi worship can be performed either with the clay idol or without clay idol but pitcher of the *Shatali* Devi is essential. The clay idol of *Shitali* Devi is with white cloak,

she is two handed, in one hand a traditional bamboo fan and in the other hand the holy pitcher of water, on her head a bamboo 'kola', in her idol with black spot of pox, Shitali Devi is seen ascending upon a horse, of horse as the eradication of all fear and danger. Shitali Devi brata is performed as a surrogate Durga by the performer. The main elements of this rites are Pitcher, Mango leaves, flower, *durbagrass*, *belpata*, teel, *haritaki* etc. At the end of the puja a decorated *arghya* (tair offering) is afloat in the pond or a river.

As because Shitali Devi is the goddess of Skin disease and Pox, so this is performed with utmost care so that the goddess does not become angry. After the end of the puja the Brateene takes Prasad made of rice-crush, the bratees are not allowed to take any other food beside the crushed rice *noibadya*, offered to Shitali Devi.<sup>37</sup>

### **Basantara Brata**

Basantara brata has to be performed within a few days of the completion of *Shitalee* brata. The mother women of Barak Valley from the Sylhet origin believe that *Basantara* goddess aimed at is the eradication of Pox disease and as Folk-deity, this brata is performed in a holy place outside the house. The main element of this brata are *Khoi*, *Chidda*, Banana, Milk,

*Guur*, fruits ingredients as *Noibadya*. The prime requirements of this *bratas* are Flower, Rice, *Durba* grass, Mango leaves, Vermillion and Pitcher etc. but this brata does not require any priest. The mother women perform this brata which is aimed at well-being of their children and family. No tales are found of this brata.<sup>38</sup>

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## CHAPTER – IV

### REFLECTION OF MALE *BRATA* PARVAN OF BARAK VALLEY AS SYLHET LEGACY

Though women are the forerunners in *brata* rites yet sometimes the male too performs these rites in Barak Valley, though women also take part in such ritual that belongs to the valley, the *bratas* performed by male are *Kalkinarayan brata*, Babahar Thakurer *brata*, *Tinnath Thakurer brata*, *Aii Mangal brata* and *Baghai brata*.

#### **Kalkinarayan brata**

*Kalkinarayan brata* is a remarkable *brata* in the line of agricultural lives of the Hindu Bengali of Barak Valley, influenced by Sylhet. Dr. Sila Basak in her '*Banglar Brataparban*' has written—

This *brata* which is aimed at retrieving the lost goods, is in vogue of Tripura beside East Bengal. Basically, this *brata* is performed by the pious male. There are two basic *brata* tales presented at variance in the different locale. Performing to the *brata*, five aged male bratee take *ganza* and narcotics.<sup>1</sup>



Though this brata is aimed at retrieving the goods in the locale of the remote corner of East Bengal and Tripura, yet it is also present into the mind and locale of Barak Valley. It is not limited in the craving for retrieving of goods, like the Sylhet mindset. Into the agro-based society this brata is aimed at caring the cow-treasure, the protection of cows and the safe delivery of a calf.

Cow treasure as conducive to the agro-work, is to be mentioned here. This brata is performed in Barak Valley by the fishermen, yet it is also in vogue among the farmer and other Bengali Hindu Sects. This brata is performed exclusively by the male bratee; though the role of women in this brata too is immense who arrange this brata. There is little variance of Kalkinarayan brata tales based upon the tales of brata *parvan* in Barak Valley, West Bengal and Tripura. A Bengali *Panchali* written by Surjyakanta Sen of Barak Valley with words of *Kalkinarayan* brata are there. Into the *Kalkinarayan Panchali* the idol is *Kalkinarayan* Thakur who is double armed. He has good physique with knotted hair, with cloth of a yogi. His right hand holding *Trishul* and left hand *Kalki*. In his face crores of *Indro (Debota)* fervour blooming. Nose as teal flower. This brata can be performed in any day of any month of the year. It is performed with the elements of Bratas mainly such as *naibedya* of rice, banana, and fruits along with

flower and pure *durba* grass for worship. Into the pitcher full of water, vermilion is drawn with *swastik* symbol. Leaves of mango are placed in the *Ghat* in a pure corner. The main elements of this rites are *Hukka*, (made of timber with coconut shell for tobacco users), *Tiki* (mixture of cow dung and ashes, small pieces) and a *Kalki*. The burning tobacco is placed in front of the *Kalkinarayan* idol and only a single *bratee* among the five numbers, recites the words of *bratas*, which is listened by the other. At the end of this *brata* those five *bratees* takes tobacco. At that time no one is permitted to talk. This *Kalki* moves from hand to hand in a cyclic manner from the southward circle. It starts from the south. Tobacco *Kalki* rotates one time in one movement, two times in the twice movement; three times in thrice movement, four times in fourth movement and five times in five movement and six times in sixth movement and seven times in seventh movement. After seven movement alternately followed by installation of *Kalki* in front of *Kalkinarayan* idol.<sup>2</sup>

After that the *bratees* utter song of praise to the *Kalkis* greatness and breaks the silence. The ashes of tobacco is taken as holy element. This is drawn into the forehead of the cow, so that the cow treasure may remain well-protected. In fact, this desire for the well-being of cow is related to the abundance of agro-life. Though

a few critics have mentioned the inhaling of Tobacco with *gnaza* in other occasion, but it is not seen in the worship of *Kalkinarayan* in the Sylhet locale. Though the worship of *Babahar* or *Trinath*, are in vogue with *gnaza* yet in *Kalkinarayan* brata, there is provision of only smoking *tambacoo* (*tamak*) in the *Kalkinarayan* bratas.

The narration of *Kalkinarayan* bratas by Surjyakanta Sen, goes thus. "Once *Devraj Indra* called on *Maharshi Narad* to arrange Dance and Song. *Narad* invited one by one, every one invited. In proper time there appeared *Brahma*, *Bishnu*, *Shiva*, *Agni*, *Barun*, *Aswini*, *Satyanarayan*, *Lakshmi*, *Saraswati* and *Durga*, *Kalkinarayan* too went there. The dance by *Menoka*, *Urbashi* and *Usha* took place. But beside everyone's pleasure *Kalkinarayan* became sad while *Padmajoni* *Brahma* asked the reason, *Kalki* told that though there are worship of all *Debata's* in the earth. Only he is not worshiped. Listening this, *Debaraj Indra* told that *Kalki* may go to the earth and begun persuasion to get devotion. At the advice of *Indra*, *Kalkinarayan* came to the earth – then the tale of the earth song begun.

There are two sons of *Lambodor* in Earth, *Shumbha* and *Nishumbha*. The elder son *Shambhu* is handicapped. But the younger son *Nishumbha* is handsome. In proper time *Nishumbha*

was got married. The duties of his family was above his shoulder. Nishumbha catches fishes with the fishing net. He passes his time in boat. One day invalid *Shumbha* called on his brother Nishumbha to take him in his boat –

*“Jatna kori boro bhai ke naye bosailo.*

*Bichana pati bhai ke suaai dilo”.*<sup>3</sup>

In the afternoon the echo of a voice came floating to *Shumbha*. ‘Ohe Beta *Shambhunath Paarkoro toroni*<sup>4</sup>, *Shambhu* told he is invalid. In the night, the stranger again called him, ‘*Uthibaar chestta koro paribe bosite*<sup>5</sup> listening *Shambhu* stood up and placed the boat in the bank. The stranger took to the boat-man. *Shambhu* now wanted to know his identity, ‘*ke tumi mahajan, bolo amar thai*’, then

*“Shambhunather kotha suni bolilo bachan*

*Ami Kalkinarayan korohe shraban.”*<sup>6</sup>

This *Kalkinarayan debata* belongs to the worker, farmer, fisherman, and cow keeper as subaltern deity. But in to the perspective there are confrontation between Brahmanism and non-Brahminism.

A time came in the history of *Bongodesh*, where the lower class Hindu ceased to obey the dictate of Brahmins. The ideologies of