



Research Paper

Sacred Serpent and Female Divinity - Story of Devi Manasa's Strength and Empowerment: An Anthropological Perspective

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Abstract: Snake worship, or Ophiolatry, has long been an integral part of the cultural and religious landscape of Northeast India, deeply embedded in the animistic beliefs of indigenous tribes that view snakes as divine entities symbolizing fertility, protection, and wisdom. Using textual analysis of historical literary sources and ethnographic accounts, this study investigates the intricacies of snake worship. This article examines the worship of Snake Goddess Manasa in North-East India with special attention to the unique ritualistic practices of Manasa worship and special offerings to goddess with traditional beliefs. Specially the article focuses on the diverse traditional practices of goddess Manasa and the social-cultural impact of this worship. This research aims to enrich the discourse surrounding snake worship by employing textual analysis as its primary methodology, highlighting the potential for future studies in this vital area.

Keywords: Snake Worship, Animistic beliefs, Devi Manasa, North-East India, Unique Rituals.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Snake worship, or Ophiolatry, has long been an integral part of the cultural and religious landscape of Northeast India, deeply embedded in the animistic beliefs of indigenous tribes that view snakes as divine entities symbolizing fertility, protection, and wisdom. The goddess Manasa of northeast India is known as the goddess of snakes, associated with snakebite poison and healing, the power to control snakes, and as a protective aid invoked against dangerous natural forces. Her worship extends across a vast geo-cultural area that effectively encompasses over one-third of the Indian sub-continent and surrounding regions. This vast geographic range in which Manasa is worshiped makes it challenging to analyze religious practices surrounding her within the confines of normative socioreligious categories. A significant population of religious actors venerating Manasa are situated along the border of Eastern India and Bangladesh, particularly a region referred to as the Bengal Delta. This delta contains Assam, Odisha, Bihar, and mainly the forest areas like Sundarban mangrove forest of West Bengal, a dense area of the region in which Manasa is worshipped by communities classified as belonging to Hindu, Adivasi, also Muslim or “syncretic” traditions.

Historically important and culturally rich Manasa legends have seldom had the chance to find their place in the world literature. This goddess of snakes, who is not revered as much as the other goddesses and considered to reside in a lower hierarchy has held her sway over Eastern India, particularly West Bengal and Bangladesh, for several centuries in the domestic sphere through the various texts known as the Mangalkavyas and the Puranas. The mangalkavyas which paid a lot of attention to social reality emerged in Bengal at a time of dramatic socio-political change. While the text narrates the victory of goddess Manasa over Chand Saudagar (an trader), who is a devotee of Shiva.

Moreover, country like India has the different religion as well as the indigenous ethnic community where the different indigenous ethnic people belong in different religion with different beliefs in various God, Goddess and supernatural powers. The present study has been made an effort to understanding the historical significance, religious beliefs and practices of Manasa puja among Hindu community of northeast India, specially in West Bengal, Assam, Bihar, Odisha and Jharkhand and impacts on socio-cultural aspects. Thus, this study attempt to identify the beliefs in snake goddess manasa and her worshipping or rituals practices to regulate the conflict between snake and human which maintain the harmonious relationship among themselves as well as

by knowing the *Manasamangal* kavya. The study may be simplified to recognize their religious views and beliefs and how they practice their religious worships.

II. Literature Reviews

1. Parikshit Chakraborty (2018), the author of the paper "Tribal Religious Beliefs and Practices: An Anthropological Study on Kora-Mudi Tribe" tried to demonstrate a prominent role in religious beliefs and practices and it's also provides cultural depth of *Kora* tribes of Purulia district of West Bengal, India. Therefore, the study indicates that most of the worships has been done for the material gain for him or for his family. However the study stated that the Kora of Naudiha village worshipping their own traditional religious along with worshipping of Hindu gods and goddess.
2. Mohammad Saeid Hassan Khan (2019) in his paper attempts to examine "The Triumph of the Snake Goddess" of Kaiser Haq as a filiation of the Mansa canon by considering the plot, narrative style and mode of the traditional Mansamangal Kavya and studying their replication in the translation. It also aims to critically analyze and comment on the freedom applied in the translation while explaining the possible reasons and purposes of the alterations from the source texts the translation has incorporated. Kaiser Haq's *The Triumph of the Snake Goddess* is the first attempt by any Bangladeshi translator to translate the Mansamangal Kavya into English.
3. Adrija Chakraborty's this paper (2022) is a humble attempt to articulate the nexus of the female body, snake worship and fertility practices in early modern Bengal through a reading of the two available versions of the Manasamangal. The first section gives an overview of the Mangalkavya literature specially intimate relations between the (female) body of the goddess, her social locus and the perception of the 'fringe' deity by the higher social classes. The final section of the paper explores the concept of fertility cults in folk practices and locates Goddess Manasa in a multitude of those that survive till date in Bengal and it's adjoining areas.
4. Animesh Manna (2025) in his Journal named "Snake Worship in North-East India: A Historical Overview" described that the Snake worship, or Ophiolatry, has long been an integral part of the cultural and religious landscape of Northeast India, deeply embedded in the animistic beliefs of indigenous tribes that view snakes as divine entities symbolizing fertility, protection, and wisdom. It illuminates the myths and historical narratives surrounding the practice. This research aims to enrich the discourse surrounding snake worship by employing textual analysis as its primary methodology, highlighting the potential for future studies in this vital area. The research findings reveal the intricate interplay between spirituality, nature, and community life, highlighting how such traditions contribute to the region's cultural diversity and resilience.
5. Hugh B. Urban (2018) his article "Dancing for the Snake: Possession, Gender, and Identity in the Worship of Manasa in Assam" examines the worship of the snake goddess Manasa in Assam, with special attention to the dynamics of gender, identity, and spirit possession. Specifically, the article focuses on two different forms of possession performance in honor of the goddess: the more ecstatic and bloody performance by male dancers at *Kamakhya* temple and the more folklorized and domesticated performance by female dancers on urban stages. Borrowing some ideas from Judith Butler, the article argues that both possession dances enact a kind of "subversion of identity." This includes not only a subversion of traditional gender identity, as male dancers are possessed by female deities and female dancers enact masculine roles.
6. Jaysagar Wary (2021) in the paper "Maroi Puja: A Religious Festival of the Koch Rajbanshi", discussed about The *Maroi Puja* of the Koch Rajbanshi people that is associated with the worship of snake popularly known as Manasa. In this discussion he revealed that Manasa puja is also called as Maroi puja because the serpent goddess is regarded as the main goddess among all the god and goddess. She is represented as a symbol of women power among them. Also discussed about the songs, dances, segments and episodes of Maroi puja which is performed during the time of Maroi puja.
7. Arabinda Singha Roy (2024) in his study "Tracing the Visual Aesthetics of Manjusa", assessed the *Manjusa* art as a folk art form of Bihar, particularly associated with the Bihula-Visahari cult worshipped in the region of Bhagalpur and adjoining districts. This paper is based on the Bhagalpur region, where snake worship is celebrated during the monsoon season. In this present study author Sarika Kumari highlights the snake cult and its association with art, ceremonial practices, and belief systems. This paper discusses different cultic practice's tangible and intangible aspects, iconography, form, and significance

III. Methodology

The present paper researcher select the topic about goddess Manasa of Northeast India to observe the diversity of rituals and beliefs present in different communities of people. This study is mainly descriptive, where many primary and secondary books, journals and articles were helpful. The researcher gathered information from her own community (from local people) and neighboring villages through interviewing using sampling method. I visit those particular houses who established manasa tree in their backyard and who

worships manasa goddess (because of short time). The researcher of this present paper also collected the information from the secondary resources like published articles, published journals, published chapters etc.

SNAKE GODDESS MANASA IN NORTH-EAST INDIA

Origin and Mythology: There are conflicting accounts of Manasa's origin in Hindu texts. Some Puranas state she is the "mind-born" daughter of the sage *Kashyapa*, which is where her name "*Manasa*" (mind-borne) comes from. Other traditions identify her as the daughter of Lord *Shiva* (being born out of his seed but not in anyone's womb). She is also called by other names, such as *Padmavati* – *Padma* in short or *Vishahara* (the mistress or destroyer of poison).

Manasamangal Kavya: The mangalkavyas which paid a lot of attention to social reality emerged in Bengal at a time of dramatic socio-political change. Beginning from the fifteenth century version written by one Kana Haridatta of Barisal, to Vijaya Gupta's *Manasamangal*, also known as *Padmapuran* (1494), and Vipradasa's *Manasa-vijaya* (1495).

Manasa Mangal, and the *Chandi Mangal* are the most popular texts in the Mangalkavya literature, devoted to the female deities, *Manasa* and *Chandi*, respectively. A popular story in Bengali folklore, the *Manasa Mangal*, recounts the manasa devi's efforts to get worship in the whole world as snake goddess and the mythic conflict between a merchant Chand Saudagar and the snake goddess Manasa is quite well known, wherein the goddess uses Behula and Lakhindar, his family members as a bait to subdue him.

The basic story in these vernacular accounts differs somewhat from one text to the next but largely centres on the conflict between Manasa and a powerful merchant named Chand Saudagar. Initially not recognised as a legitimate goddess, Manasa was determined to win devotees and become respected as a member of the Hindu pantheon. However, Chand Saudagar was a staunch devotee of Shiva and refused to worship the snake goddess. In her anger, Manasa proceeded to kill Chand's first six sons by snakebites, leaving only his last son, Lakhindar, still alive. Chand arranged a marriage for Lakhindar with a girl named Behula and then built an iron room for the couple on their wedding night, hoping to protect them from snakebite. Even so, Manasa found a tiny hole in the wall, through which she sent a snake to bite and kill Lakhindar. In her grief, Behula carried her husband's corpse to heaven in the hope of bringing Lakhindar back to life. Once there, she enchanted the gods with her beautiful, sensuous, yet otherworldly dancing. As a reward, the gods promised they would restore her husband's life—but only on the condition that Chand would recognise and worship Manasa. Finally, realising that this was the only means to restore his son's life, Chand agreed to worship Manasa with his left hand, while continuing to honour Shiva with his right. At last, Manasa was recognised as a true goddess in heaven and in turn brought all of Chand's dead sons back to life. At the end of the *Manasa mangal*, "Manasa merges into the larger Hindu pantheon as a deity".

The affluent merchant class is also shown as being powerful in the Sundarbans. The story further demonstrates how Manasa struggles to achieve social mobility and acceptance among Hindu devotees by entering the Hindu pantheon. Yet, because Chand worships her with his left hand, his acceptance simultaneously reveals and underlines her marginality. For inhabitants of the Sundarbans, folk deities such as Manasa are often depicted with strong human qualities, and engage directly with humans.

➤ Traditional Practices with Manasa Devi in Bengal:

Manasa Puja is the worship of Goddess Manasa, the Hindu Goddess of snakes, fertility, and prosperity, primarily revered in North Eastern India (including West Bengal, Assam, Odisha, and Bihar). The worship is often unique because it is closely tied to local customs, folklore (especially the *Manasamangal Kavya*), and the monsoon season.

Here are some special things that I observed in the worship of *Manasa Devi*:

1. Unique Objects of Worship

The *Sij* Plant (*Manasa Gachh*): In particular areas of Bengal she is identified with the *sij* manasa tree (*Euphorbia lingularia*), which is dressed and worshiped as one of this goddess's forms, with an elaborate clay pot, and with an "earthen heap". This plant is considered the living, emblematic form of the Goddess, often planted in the backyard or courtyard. Many people build a raised mound around this tree with soil or concrete, called *manasar than*.

I especially noticed that in tribal communities, every house has this manasa than. But not every house in the Hindu community has this tree in their backyard. Through interviewing them, it was revealed that they establish the *than* because they dreamed it. They believe that Goddess Manasa wants to come their home.

Another reason is revealed as one of my respondents (my local resident Kamala Sardar, age- 57 yrs) said :

"Three years ago, my son was on his deathbed due to a snakebite by a *Kalash* (Common Krait). I vowed to maa Manasa that if she saved him, I would worship her devotedly and make a permanent *than* for her in my home. Since then, every rainy season, I organize a puja of maa Manasa, and invite a local

jatra company to perform the Manasamangal ceremony, called *Bhashan gaan*. And also everyday in the morning after taking bath I worship her at her *thaan*."

The Earthen Pitcher (Ghat): In Northeast India especially in Bengal *Manasa* is primarily imaged as a benevolent and beautiful anthropomorphic goddess, and is sometimes worshiped in the form of an earthen pitcher. A decorated earthen pot (*Ghat*), sometimes covered with a representation of a hooded snake, is placed near the *Sij* plant or the altar. This pitcher symbolizes the Goddess.

Manasa's Earthen Image: The common image of Manasa statue is shown "seated on a lotus in *Lolitasana* pose, with the hoods of snakes (seven cobras) spread over her head, her left hand holding the eighth one and another a lotus flower or a conch (*Shankh*)". She is sometimes accompanied by her son Astika on her lap and her female companion, Neta (*Neto*).

In the popular Bengali tradition (as mentioned in the *Manasamangal Kavya*), she is depicted with only one eye (the other being damaged by her stepmother *Chandi/Parvati*). Her blinded or left eye is sometimes referred to as her "evil eye" or "poison eye" (*Bish Drishti*) It is believed to be the source of her malignant, destructive powers, capable of killing with a single glance. Her functional eye (the right eye) is considered her "nectar eye" (*Amrita Nayan*), representing her benevolent side and her power to restore life. The Nickname Due to this blinding, she is often derogatorily referred to in the epic as "*Chyang-muri Kaani*" by the merchant Chand Sadagar, which roughly translates to "the one-eyed wretch."

2. Traditional and Symbolic Offerings

Banana with Milk and Parched Grains: Since Manasa is the Snake Goddess, offerings of milk, honey, and parched grains (like *Khoi* or *Muri*) are essential, as they are traditionally offered to snakes (*Nagas*). As a snake goddess Manasa's favorite *bhog* is unboiled milk with banana (*dudhkola*), that's why offering milk and banana in a flat earthen pot at any *Manasa-badi* or *Manasa-tala* or *Manasa-thana* is essential.

Ranna Puja (Specific Bhog) & Arandhana (Non-cooking) : In Bengal, a key ritual is *Ranna Puja* (cooking worship), where a large variety of food (*Bhog*) is cooked on the night before the main puja, and the stove (associated with *Vastu Sarpa*) is allowed to rest on the puja day. Some people make anew earthen hearth and decorate with *alpona* (after cooking). The offerings often includes especially- *Panta Bhat* (fermented rice water/ stale rice), *Ilish* (Hilsa) Fish (in certain traditions), Thirteen varieties of fried vegetables (*Bhaja*), Taro stem curry and *Payesh* (rice pudding). On the puja day they offer some food next to the earthen stove.

The rites and rituals related to Manasa worship diverge in the different districts of Bengal, but certain basic and elemental practices also unify the religiosity surrounding her cult, like *arandhana* (*kamai*) or abstinence from cooked food on the day of *Naga-panchami* and the celebration of *Dasahara*. In hindu communities of Bengal people just cook *Panta Bhat* and any fried items on the night before the main puja and the stove is allowed to rest on the puja day or after completing worship they can cook.

Lotus Flower: The lotus (*Padma*) is considered her favorite flower, and the Goddess herself is known as *Padmavati* (one who resides on a lotus). In the form of her divine figure, Manasa is seen sitting on a lotus, and it is customary to also offer her with lotus flowers as part of her worship. For that reason offering Lotus Flower in her worship is very essential. In the Manasa mangal, the lotus symbolizes regeneration and rebirth and hence, many devotees worship Manasa for her "fertility giving powers" (Dimock 1962: 320, Jash 1986: 170).

3. Special Rituals and Practices

Worship with the Left Hand (Regional): According to the legend of Chand Saudagar in the *Manasamangal Kavya*, he eventually agreed to worship Manasa, but only by offering flowers with his left hand as a final act of defiance. Some families ritually adopt this left-hand worship during the Manasa Puja to honor the legend.

Fasting (upavas) : *Upavas* is a worship ritual that is considered a form of sacrifice or penance to honor the deity and acquire their blessings. In manasa puja those women who perform puja at Manasa Thaan or participate in the manasa puja observe this fasting ritual. They fast for a day or till the worship ending. After bathing women wears clean *saree* (clothe), then applies *Alta* (red liquid dye) to their feet and attend the manasa worship. During their fasting women usually performs worship by chanting mantras and offers prayers to the god. After the puja is complete, they can break their fast by consuming a small portion of the blessed food (*Prasad/Bhog*) that was offered to the deity.

Bhashaan Gaan / Manasa Panchali: A special and very important practice is the oral narration or singing of the *Manasamangal Kavya* (known as *Manasa-Panchali*), which tells the story of how *Manasa Devi* compelled the staunch Shiva devotee, Chand Saudagar, to worship her.

It is a form of musical drama or narrative singing based on a medieval Bengali epic poem. The word *Bhashaan* literally means "floating" or "immersion". The name of the performance directly relates to Behula's long, lonely journey floating on the river with her snake-bitten husband's body, Lakhindar. It is a form of *Pala Gaan/ Yatra Pala* (narrative performance) involving a lead singer (*Gayen*) and supporting chorus singers (*Dohars*). The performance include elements of acting, dancing, and music, making it a complete folk theater experience. This program begins in the evening and continue over all night and ends in the morning. Some examples of popular *Behula Bhashaan Gaan* :

"*Amai bhasaili re, Amai dubaili re, Akul dariyar bujhi kul naire..*"

(English Translation) "You have set me adrift, You have drowned me, This boundless ocean, it seems, has no shore."

"*Ghumaiyo naa aar Behula jaiga dekho re, Kal raite kalnagini dangshailo kindor re. Manasari apomaan keno koilo chande, O se keno koilo chande. Taar chela protishodh, Loilo basar ghare re.*"

(English Translation) "Don't sleep anymore, Behula, wake up and see, Last night, the evil serpent bit your beloved. Why did Chand (Saudagar) insult Manasa? Oh, why did he insult her? Her disciple took revenge, In the wedding chamber."

My local informer said that there are two types of groups for this *yatra pala*, *mohila bhashan* (all the artists perform by sitting on stage floor) and *purush/ modda bhashan* (perform by standing and acting on the stage like theater experience). Before starting their performance they make '*ashor*' where they decorate the place with date Palm leaf, Plumeria flower (*champa ful*) and placed a *Ghat* to worship.

Praying to Manasa for Seeking Protection, Fertility and Prosperity: Snakes are easily the most feared reptiles and have been portrayed negatively, and discriminated against. The worship is primarily performed to seek her blessing for protection from snakebites (especially in the monsoon season when snakes are more visible) and to cure venomous diseases also pray for fertility (blessings for children) and overall prosperity.

Manasa worship represents the snake and through folklore communicates an ethos of snake conservation. In Sundarban, locals believe that the "one who worships Manasa cannot ever kill a snake", and if they do, they have to face the wrath of the goddess that entail snakebites and infertility.

Jhapan Mela (Snake Festival): In some rural and tribal areas, particularly in West Bengal, Assam and Jharkhand, a festival called *Jhapan* is held where snake charmers and Bedia tribal members gather. They coax live snakes to coil around their bodies. The fact that they are not harmed is interpreted as a sign that the goddess Manasa is pleased by their worship and has graced their community with her protection.

Oracles (ভর হওয়া/ *manasar bhar howa*): It is very unique thing that is associated with Manasa Devine. Here are some individuals who were possessed by deity and spoke directly on behalf of a god. It is believed that God himself is present in them and is speaking. In local language people called it '*bhar howa*'. Specially this happens when the goddess is displeased during any ritualistic practices.

My observation- In my locality, here was an old age Muslim woman, who was a devotee of Manasa and used to worship regularly at her home's Manasa than, was an Oracle (a medium between human and deity). Once, she came to a bhashaan gaan ashor as a devine (oracles) and tells about some mistakes during their offerings to puja.

Treating Snake Poisoning by Shaman (Ojha/ Gunin) : In Bengali, a shaman or a healer who traditionally treats snake poisoning is called an '*ojha*' or sometimes a '*gunin*'. An *ojha* use a combination of rituals, chanting of mantras, herbal remedies, and other traditional methods to remove the poison. Historically, some would perform a ritual known as "*sarpabish jharano*".

4. Timing

Monsoon Months: Manasa Puja is generally observed on the last day of Bengali months *Ashad*, *Shravan* and *Bhadra* (during the monsoon months) July-August-September), as this is the season when snakes emerge due to flooding.

Naga Panchami: The worship is often done on the auspicious day of Naga Panchami (the last day of bengali month of *Shravan*, *Sankranti*) and also done on the 13th day of Sravana in Bengali Calendar (*Terur kamai in Bengal*), this day all members of specific community observe *kamai* or *arandhan* (in some communities).

Dasahara: On the tenth day of second month of *Jaistho* in the Bengali Calendar, the Goddess Manasa is worshipped (*ranna puja*) at some places in West Bengal.

➤ **Manasa Puja in Assam:**

Manasa Puja in Assam is a significant festival, particularly during the monsoon season (generally the fifth day of the new moon of the month of Sravan is considered as the most auspicious day for Manasa worship), when the risk of snakebites is highest. At the *Kamakhya* temple in Guwahati, Manasa also enjoys the worship in the context of *Kamakhya's* festival.

Manasa is also known by regional names in Assam, such as *Barmati* or *Mare/Maroi* (the Goddess of disease/serpents), reflecting local traditions. In Assam, particularly some indigenous communities such as Ahoms, Bodos, and Rabhas, deodha have some differences in the puja system. The **Deodhani Dance** (Shamanistic Ritual) is the most unique and distinctive element of Manasa Puja in Assam. Male *Deodhas* perform an ecstatic, shamanistic dance, often becoming possessed by the deity, which may involve animal (like goats or pigeons) sacrifice, consumption of raw meat/blood and jumping on the blades of swords. A female version of the dance, called *Deodhana*, is also performed. The possession is seen as the deity "taking the body" of the dancer. The dancers perform energetic and sometimes wild movements, often brandishing weapons like a sword (*Daa*) and shield as part of the ritual. In some areas, even Muslim community participate in this festival.

Also devotees offer *Anjali* (chanting *mantras*) to the Goddess, typically consisting of milk, banana, flowers, and rice. Similar to Bengal, devotional storytelling and the non-stop recitation of texts like the *Padma Purana* (a version of the *Manasamangal Kavya*) are common.

➤ **Manasa Worship in Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha :**

In Bihar, particularly in the Bhagalpur district major festival on manasa puja known as *Bishahari Puja* or *Bihula-Bishahari* Festival and the Goddess is sometimes known as *Nagmati* (Goddess of snakes).

A unique ritualistic and folk art form called **Manjusha Art** (also known as Scroll Painting or *Angika Art*) is central to the festival of Bhagalpur. The paintings depict the entire narrative of the *Bihula-Bishahari* cult story, along with local flora and fauna. *Amrita Kalasa* (nectar pot), *Jhapi* (box-shaped structure), *Bari* (vase), and painting are the main components of Manjusha art. A character of the legend, *Maniyar Naga* (*Panchmukhiya sarpa*), is one of the most significant characters in the painting and is depicted in the theriomorphic forms. Other vital motifs are the sun, moon, elephant, Champak flower, fish, and Ojha, the priest. They use natural pigments such as “Alta” for red, “turmeric” for yellow, and “green leaves” for green, as well as salt as a binder or to fix the color for painting. During the festival painting is not only created on paper but also done on walls, offering vases and other three-dimensional surfaces. Homes and temples are decorated with these paintings, which serve as the object of worship and visual storytelling.

Puja Object:- The Goddess is often worshipped in the form of a clay or metallic idol of the five sisters (*Mynah, Aditi, Maya, Padmavati, and Jaya*, known together as *Visahari*, Shiva's daughters) or a simple earthen pot (*Ghat*), but the *Manjusha* painting is the visual focus.

In Jharkhand, especially in the tribal belt, this puja rituals often integrates with the customs of indigenous communities and the practices found in neighboring West Bengal. Among communities like the Bedia (a nomadic or semi-nomadic group traditionally involved in snake charming), *Manasa Devi* is held in high reverence. Their rituals are a blend of their traditional practices and Hindu worship. Worship with *Ghat* (earthen pot) and the *Sij* plant is common that represent the goddess Manasa. The ritual also includes animal sacrifice to fulfill vows.

In Odisha, the exception of manasa puja is that it is women centric. It is commonly performed by women, often seeking the boon of motherhood or the well-being of their children. The ritual is often called *Manasar-Bari Puja* (Worship of the Manasa-House/Abode). Women worship the goddess with simple *Ghat* under the *sij* tree branch.

➤ **Manasa Puja among Muslims :**

Manasa is also worshiped by some Muslims in both Bengal and Assam, and Muslims are prominent participants in Manasa's performance traditions; in Bengal Muslim artists paint her story-scrolls (*pat*) and sing her narratives, and in Assam Muslim artisans design *Manasa's pith* (fibrous reed) paintings. This crossing of religious boundaries in the worship of Manasa may stand as an additional distinguishing feature from Tamil snake goddesses, because although officials at some Tamil *nagattamman* temples told that Muslims pray there.

My observation- In my locality, here was an old age Muslim woman, who was a devotee of Manasa and used to worship regularly at her home's Manasa *thaan*, was an Oracle (a medium between human and deity).

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, snake worship in Northeast India holds profound significance, representing a vital aspect of the region's rich cultural heritage and spiritual beliefs. This practice shows the community's reverence for snakes, often viewed as guardians or symbols of the core of fertility and, at the same time, reinforces social ties and local identity. The research findings reveal the intricate interplay between spirituality, nature, and community life, highlighting how such traditions contribute to the region's cultural diversity and resilience.

This paper highlights a diverse types of Manasa goddess or *Manasa puja*. There are many similarities and differences among traditional practices. The goddess Manasa is even worshiped by different name in different places in Northeast India. In West Bengal, the healer of snake poison is known as *Manasa Devi*, while *Manjusa* or *Bishahari* in Bihar and *Maroi puja* in Assam also. Even various rituals are shown here, such as *Deodhani* dance (where male dancers (Deodhas) are possessed by the deity) in Assam, earthen pitcher or *sij* or *fani-manasa* plant worship with or without of full idol (*murti*) of goddess, *Ranna Puja/ Arandhana* in West Bengal and *Bhashaan gaan* with *Mangalkavya* etc. In conclusion the puja is predominantly celebrated during the monsoon months of the Hindu calendar (*Ashad/ Shravan/ Bhadra*, typically July to September), corresponding to the time of highest risk for snake encounters. Furthermore, the paper concludes that religious formations surrounding Manasa are rooted in *Adivasi*, non-Hindu origins. Secondly, articulates the worship of Manasa by Hindu as well as Adivasis and Muslims. It also highlights the significance of Manasa puja in the culture and society.

The mythology, particularly the story of Behula's unwavering devotion to Manasa to resurrect her husband, highlights themes of divine power, devotion, and the conflict/assimilation between indigenous and

mainstream Hindu traditions. The celebration is a major cultural event that helps reinforce community bonds and cultural identity, especially through public rituals and folk performances.

As we reflect on these insights, we acknowledge the continued relevance of snake worship in contemporary times, where socio-cultural practices are often at risk of being overshadowed by rapid globalization. Immediate action is needed to safeguard and enhance our understanding of these invaluable traditions. It is essential to conduct future research that explores the sociocultural and ecological aspects of snake worship more deeply. This cooperation can lead to a broader understanding of snake worship and its implications for community well-being, environmental sustainability, and cultural preservation.

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