



Research Paper

The Mahamaya: A Shakti Peeth Temple of Bagribari in Assam

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Abstract

Mahamaya is one of the most revered manifestations of Shakti in the religious tradition of Assam, symbolizing the supreme creative power and divine illusion through which the universe is sustained. As an aspect of the Divine Mother, Mahamaya is closely associated with Devi Durga and represents both nurturing compassion and formidable strength. In the context of ancient Kamarupa, the worship of Mahamaya reflects the synthesis of indigenous beliefs with Brahmanical Shaktism. The cult of Mahamaya gained particular prominence in western Assam, especially in the Dhubri region, where devotion to the Goddess developed into an important religious tradition. The Maa Mahamaya Dham is regarded as a major Shakti pitha and continues to attract pilgrims from different parts of India. The worship of Mahamaya underscores the centrality of the feminine divine principle in Assamese religious life and highlights Assam's enduring role as a significant center of Shakta faith and practice.

Keywords: Mahamaya, Shaktism, Worship, Sacrifice and Shakti Peeth.

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I. Introduction

Shaktism means the cult of worshipping a female Goddess as the supreme deity and the Goddess has been conceived as the Shakti or the energy of Siva, the supreme Godhead. The Saktas or the worshippers of this deity would claim that the Goddess is the superior to even the supreme Godhead in so far as he has to remain inert without the inspiration drawn from the Goddess Shakti. The followers of Shaktism believe that the Great Goddess Shakti is the manifestation of the Hindu Pantheon. It is believed that the Goddess has conceived as Shakti or the energy of Siva (the supreme God- head)¹. In Hindu texts like the *Sruti* and *Smriti* are the main important sources to know and study about the historical framework of Shaktism. The book *Cultural History of Kamarupa* by B.K. Barua defines that the mother Goddess or the Sakti was not actually originated in Kamarupa, but it was worshipped here from the very beginning of pre - historic times in different places by different tribes with different methods of worshipping.²

In the Brahmanical and the Buddhist literature, Kamakhya is considered to be one of the most sacred pithas. According to Banikanta Kakati, the term 'Kamakhya' is an austic word that basically means the 'dead body' or the 'ghost'. Formerly Kamakhya meant to be a goddess of spirit or ghost that was mainly worshipped in a cremation ground 'Samsana'. From the Kalika purana it is known that the genital organ of Sati fell on the Nilachal hill, when the mother Goddess Sati gave up her life in the sacrificial ground, where her father Daksa

¹ Banikanta Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, Publication Board of Assam, Guwahati, 1989, p. 35

² B. K. Barua, *Cultural History of Assam*, Vol.I, K.K. Barooahh, Nowgong, Assam, 1951, p.223

held a great sacrifice.³ The Divine theory of the emergence of Shakti worship is based on two views Mythology and Tradition. According to one view, the various forms of Shakti originated from the body parts of Sati, wife of Siva, while the other point of view is that Shakti incarnated in different forms to protect the Deva society from the problems faced. However, the Yogini Tantra, Kalikapurana etc. are the supporters of the divine mythology theory. According to the sources Daksa, the father of Sati, arranged a Mahayajna and invited all the Devatas but ignored Siva and Sati. However, Sati came through the news and rushed to the father's house where she was thoroughly insulted by her father, Daksa. Being enraged of the behavior of her father Sati killed herself in the *Yajnasthali*. Siva heard the news of the death of Sati and in sorrow Siva carried the corpse of Sati on his shoulder. By seeing the drastic sorrow and anger behavior of Siva, Vishnu cut the Sat's body into pieces by his Chakra. Wherever Satis's body part had fallen that place turned into a Shakti Pitha. According to Brihadharma purana, the places where the Sati's body part fell turned into stone and the pithas came to be known as *Shakti Pithas*.⁴ In another point of view Shakti has been considered as an incarnation of Adya- Shakti, and is said to have been appeared due to the prayers of the Devatas to protect them from all the evil deeds. It has been accepted and acknowledged in the literature, myths that the Gods and Goddesses assumed different forms of Shakti for the protection of the Devotees from Asura and for the welfare of the universe. According to Kalika Purana, the different forms of Sakti perform different duties. The Yogini Tantra and the Kalika Purana refers Kamakhya as the ten Mahavidyas on the Nilachal hill and have been worshipped in a group of ten.⁵

The Goddess Mahamaya is believed to be another form of Shaktism and also gained a lot of popularity in and around the Dhubri District. It is said that the Goddess or Maa Mahamaya was traditionally worshipped and adorned by the local people like the Kacharies, Naths, and Koches, dwelling in Parvat- Jowar. It was also believed to be the presiding and main deity of the Zamindars of Parvat Jowar (Parbatjhora) and hence all the Hindus of Lower Assam worships Mother Goddess Mahamaya. In this Temple the tradition of animal sacrifice is seen especially at the time of Durga puja and other special occasions. Sacrifice of different animals was seen in Saktism for the satisfaction of the Devi, animals like buffalo, goat, pigeon, ducks were sacrificed and that was tend to be compulsory. Offerings of human sacrifice were also practiced in the earlier days. According to some local scholars, Banabasi of Hatogaon was known for the human sacrifice. It is situated at Thikuranijhar which is 7 (seven) K.M. away from Laksmipur of the Dhubri district. The offering of human was also seen in the earlier days to impress the deity.⁶

The MahamayaDham temple and its emergence in the land of Bagribari

The Maa Mahamaya Dham temple is situated at Bagribari, which is almost 30 km east from Dhubri town and 10 km from Bilasipara town. Mahamaya temple is popular as a center of pilgrimage and is regarded as the greatest Shakti Pithas in lower Assam, in and around the Dhubri district.⁷ The presiding deity of the temple is an enormous stone figure that is regarded as the mother Goddess Mahamaya and believed to be a popular form of Devi Durga. The whole complex of the Mahamaya Dham Temple consists of Kali temple, Siva temple, Durga temple and one temple each for Panca - Devata, Narasimha, Manasa and Batukeswar. The people of the locality have great beliefs and great regards to the establishment of the temple, and regular worship is performed in the temple, and animal sacrifice is also performed on special occasions, the temple is well known for the animal sacrificial acts, animals like pigeon, duck, goats were sacrificed, and every year in the month of January – February a *Maha Shakti yagna* is performed in the Maa Mahamaya Dham. Another place of worship is connected to the Mahamaya Dham temple and is known as the Mahamaya Snanghat temple, which is situated few kilometers away from the main Mahamaya Dham temple. The word “*Snanghat*” means the bathing spot and is believed that it is the place where the mother Goddess Mahamaya took her bath.

The land of Mount Jowar (Parvat Jowar) at the time was received by the powerful person of the region, Hathibar Chaudhary, in the time of the fortunate matriarch, Mahamaya (the mother who maintains the world) appeared. The place where the Mahamaya, the supreme personality of Godhead is today was surrounded by dense and thick forest and small hills surrounded the temple. The place was not inhabited by the humans, as the

³BanikantaKakati, *opcit.*, p. 36

⁴*Ibid*, p.38

⁵N. N. Bhattacharya, *History of Sakta Religion*, Published by MunshiramManoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1974, p.79

⁶ Interview with Harendra Krishna Prasad sarma, a priest of MaaMahamayaDham, Bogribari, age- 82

⁷Kabita Debi, *Temples and Shrines of Dhubri District: A critical study on socio- religious condition of the society since 12th cent. to 19th cent. A.D.*, PhD Thesis work submitted to Gauhati university, 2006

place was densely covered with trees and plants. People dwelling around the region didn't move out due to the fear of wild animals, the forest was an empire of animals like tiger, bear, elephants, wild cows, etc. It was almost impossible to see the sunlight even during the day as it was covered with huge trees. Being deserted area, there was no maintenance of roads. However, after the establishment of the Maa Mahamaya Dham temple, gradually the population started increasing in the nearby areas.

1. Belief behind the first appearance of the mother Goddess Mahamaya :

According to the story of the appearance, it is said and believed that a wood merchant of Tok Chandpur of Pavani district (present day Bangladesh) had received the privilege of seeing the mother Goddess. As a result, today the devotees have got the opportunity to worship *Jagdeshwari, Raj- Rajeshwari, Mahashakti Maa Mahamaya*.

In the remaining decade of the 16th century, a timber merchant of Tok Chandpur village in Pavana district came to the region of Parwat Jowar in connection of the timber business, often the movement of timber traders used to happen in this region. They used to supply woods from the water routes. For years the timber business continued at a steady pace, and the businessmen from Pavana, Dhaka, Rangpur, Maimansingh etc. were prominent in this region who kept coming and going for years. At that time in Parwat - Jowar of Goalpara district woods like Sal, Shishu, Chama, Bansoon, Lali, Parul, Ganiyari, Gamari etc. were found in valuable quantities in mount Jowar. The wood business was very convenient due to accessible facility of boats. At that time, the merchant of Tok Chandpur used to bring some essential items with Salt for exchanging it with Woods, mustard, oil, cotton, jaggery, tobacco, spices etc. However, the timber business was the predominant business of ParvatJowar and was looked by Tehsildar of Kathmahal of ParvatJ owar's Zamindars. The income of Kathmahal was the main source of income of the Zamindars during that period.

Before the rainy season, a wood trader resident of Tok Chandpur in Pavana district, brought woods from Bishnupur in Pargana of Parwat – Jowar. One night, after loading some woods on his boat the merchant was ready to set off for supplying his woods. The night was believed to be very dark and the river was flowing and was eagerly wishing to meet the Brahmaputra river passing through Madmati, Ithalati, Bogribari and Khoraghat regions towards the south. Unfortunately the merchants' boat started drifting with the force of the river, after some time the boat reached south of Bishnupur and North of Khoraghat with the flow of the river where the water was very deep. The night was believed to be the night of *Amavasya* (night of new moon), the nature was taking its terrible form due to the storm and heavy rainfall. On the one hand, the frantic stream of the river and on the other hand, the nature was dancing to the thunderstorm. Suddenly, the boat of the merchant sank at the place and the people on the boat started remembering Mother Goddess Dugi (the one who saves from calamity and destroyer of all the sorrow). However, the boat got sank due to the heavy storm and the merchant reached the shore and was devastated with the unfortunate situation. The merchant sat on the bank of the river, distressed by the impulse of his heart and in between he also thought that God's grace very beautiful is the treasure so, no one could do anything of the devastating incident.

Suddenly, on the southern bank of the river, the wood merchant saw a girl full of divine light and was adorned with all kinds of ornaments on a huge stone. The happiness that is felt by the presence of the presiding deity in front of the Yogi is similar to the happiness of the merchant, his stress was relieved as soon as he saw the divine girl, he started thinking that the appearance of a girl in a dense forest is a miracle. The merchant slowly moved forward and he saw that the girl was just of the age of eight to ten years old, wearing a red dress, her face was as bright as a moon, who had just taken a bath. The entire forest land was illuminated and enlightened with the girl's entire body's light. The merchant could not watch this scene for long, due to the devotional feeling the merchant closed his eyes and the merchant pithily prayed to the little girl. The divine child said to the merchant, “you have seen me at an untimely time, because of this your position on the earth is very poor and within a month you will be liberated, today you will find your boats, woods and your companions submerged in water and by tying the woods to the vines, you will be able to go back without any hindrance as you take my name, there will be no calamity of any kind on you and your descendants but you should propagate the story of divine appearance among the people. For a long time, I have been dwelling in the forest as the protector of the dynasty of the Zamindars of Parwat Jowar and their beautiful wealth. Except you no one else has got the privilege of seeing me. So, you need to propagate my story and my condition of emergence to everyone.” And the child told the merchant that “there is a huge vine tree adorned with Mahamaya in Mount Jowar, right under the tree there is a huge stone altar, that is my cornerstone (Devi Peeth) and you need to get a house built there in my name and spread my story all around ”. And pointed towards the Tipkai river and said “this is my bath place where I take my bath everyday”

After saying this all, the child disappeared from the place as the merchant's eyes were towards the bathing place (presently known as Snanghat) for a moment. The merchant could not understand the illusion of the mysterious child; a strange feeling arose in the mind of merchant. The merchant was very fortunate as he was able to see the Goddess Mahamaya, and as a devotee he was free from the attachment to the subject and he

got the taste of liberation on by contemplating it in any other way, it is believed that the wishful mother *Bhagwati* had appeared to the merchant on that day only, because by being calm to the Goddess child, she took her lap in calamity. This incident was created by the mother Goddess along with the merchant to expand her fame in the region, and the purpose could not be fulfilled by keeping oneself in secret that is why the divine child wished her image to be spread in the region through the merchant. After the incident, the merchant took off his boat along with his woods and companions, by the grace of Goddess Mahamaya, the merchant started his journey back to his home by tying the woods on his boat with the vines. When the merchant reached his home safely, he could not let his mind off from the incident that happened to him in the forest of Parwat Jowar. Before the incident no one in Parwat Jowar worshipped the mother Goddess Mahamaya, there was no custom of worshipping and also tying the woods with vines also was known after the incident. Due to the closure of trade routes, the merchant couldn't travel back to Parwat Jowar, within a month the merchant became bedridden after suffering from a difficult disease. He tried his best to let know everyone about the Maa Mahamaya but no one could understand him and one day, the merchant called his son Yadu and narrated him the story of Maa Mahamaya that dwelled in the mountains of Parwat Jowar. After listening to his father, Yadu gave his approvals to obey the orders of his father and after few days the merchant passed away from the worldly flames.⁸

2. Salvation of the Idol by the Zamindars :

Years passed by and the merchant's son Yadu became young and decided to fulfill the order of his father. So, he reached Bagribari port of Parwat Jowar, and he visited the Zamindars of Parwat Jowar where he narrated the incident that was told to him by his father, after which the zamindars of Parwat Jowar decided to visit the bathing ghat that was a dense thick forest area where a sunlight was also not visible even during the day time. The whole forest was terrified by the fierce noise of the wild animals. The Zamindars and the local dwellers proceeded in the rag of the stone and to the place as told by the divine child to the merchant. After clearing down the forest, finally a huge vine tree was seen and the local dwellers cleaned under the tree and to their surprise saw the stone idol that was believed to be of mother Goddess *Jagdamba*. The dwellers also saw a bright Sanyasi with a beam of light in Parwat Jowar, and they guessed that this was the *Digambar Veshi Mahakal*. There is an irreconcileable relationship between both *Mahakal* and *Mahakali* (Mahamaya). Mahakal is worshipped in the form of *Ardhanarishwar* where the Mahamaya resides Mahakal also resides along. After the salvation of the idol, everyone happily returned to their respective places.

3. Arrangements for Worshipping (Archana) the Idol :

After the salvation of the idol, the name and fame of Maa Mahamaya got spread all over the country. Kandarp Narayan Brahmachari and his principal assistant disciple Narnarayana Brahmachari came and visited the Mahamaya Dham while visiting various pilgrimages. They were believed to be the servants of Vishwanath Annapurna in Kashidham. In those days Vishwanath had ordered the Brahmachari in his dreams to visit Mahamaya Dham of Parwat Jowar under the KamrupRatnapeeth. The Zamindars handed over the responsibility of worshipping Maa Mahamaya in the hands of the Brahmacharis. It is estimated that while worshipping Mother Mahamaya through Tantric method, they dedicated themselves to the goddess Mahamaya. *Mahish Mardini* is another name given to Maa Mahamaya by the Brahmacharis. The Brahmacharis started the system of worshipping Maa Mahamaya in Tantric and Puranic way. The name of Mahamaya is found in Markandeya Chandi. In the Kalikapurana, Jagaddhatri, Dugi is the only Mahamaya that is mentioned. The system of Tantric worship started by the two Brahmacharis and is still continued till date. It is also known from the locals that after the salvation of the temple and before the arrival of the Brahmacharidwaya, there was a *Dev- Dasi* system in the temple.

The two Brahmacharis mentioned above belonged to the elite Brahmin lineage of Kuriha village in Kamrup district. The people of the religious, majestic landowners' clan had donated the property in the name of mother Goddess Maa Mahamaya. With the income earned from this vast expensive plot of land like Shalini, Shila, Bali etc. arrangements were made for the worship of the mother Goddess. It is reported from the elders of the Brahmachari that the privilege of worshipping Maa Mahamaya was permanently given to the Brahmacharis by the Zamindars. However the script (Danpatra) where the land donation was made permanent has been lost.

4. Operating Method (ParichaalanVidhi):

With the passage of time, the glory of mother has spread everywhere, people came from far away provinces and started offering prayers, people started coming by rail path, water routes to fulfill their wish. At that time there was no facility of motor vehicles like present days. Parwat Jowar estate had four shareholders at that time:

⁸ Interview with ShriHarendra Krishna Prasad Sarma, Pandit of MaaMahamayaDham, Bagribari, Age- 82

- (I) Bagribari Eight annas
- (II) Bagribari three annas
- (III) Rupsi
- (IV) Laxmipur

The zamindars were divided into Annas on the basis of the revenue collected by them. The zamindars of Bagribari were the oldest among these peoples. These people appointed a Tehsildar for the progress of the Mahamaya and for arranging the post- deity property. Tehsildar started the arrangements of worship, bhog etc. under the direction of the Zamindars. The post of Tehsildar was there till the govt. took over the charge of acquisition and operation of the Mahamaya's property. The remarkable thing is that the growth and progress of Maa Mahamaya temple was the main virtue and effort of Eight Anna Zamindar Mahasyas. On 15th march, 1951, the govt. acquired the Mahamaya's post- deity property which was worth several lakhs of rupees. In this way the govt. handed over the burden of worship to the committee as per the prevailing method. As soon as Mahamaya's post- deity property was acquired the administration went into the hands of the govt. The govt. constituted a steering committee for the people of the nearby area. This committee consists of secretary, a treasurer as well as a chairman. The treasurer attends the temple office everyday and keeps an account of the donations of gold, silver and animals that is dedicated by the devotees. Donation is taken from the devotees who come to perform Vivaha (marriage ceremony), Upanayana (sacred thread initiation), Chudakaran (shaving of head), Namkarana (name giving), Annaprasana (first feeding) etc.

Per year an amount was donated to the temple by the government. The arrangements were made for worshipping the Goddess only from the annual amount that is donated in the temple by the devotees. The progress and the development of the temple is looked up by the operational committee members and they make all the arrangements for the rites and rituals. The property acquired by the government is 145 bighas of Mahamaya temple land, which is a protected and huge property.

5. Construction of the Maa Mahamaya Dham Temple:

At the time of salvation, the son of the timber merchant, Yadu had built a small house out of a thatch for the mother Goddess Mahamaya. And after few days the thatch house was destroyed and then the Zamindar Mahasya got a house built of tin. After years Zamindar Hari Harendra Chaudhary Dev with the help of local people got the temple built in a new form in 1280 A.D. His son Shri Surendra Narayan Singh Choudhury did the growth and got the Nat Mandir built. And a few years later, Shri Jyotindra Narayan Singh Choudhury, son of Shri Surendra Narayan Singh Choudhury performed the rites of the Mahamaya temple in 1356 A.D. built a boundary wall around the temple complex from Mahamaya in Parwat Jowar. Before the acquisition of the temple by the government, the eagerness and contribution made by the Zamindars in the construction of the Maa Mahamaya Dham temple is commendable. However, at present also the committee of the temple is still working in the construction and developments of the temple.

6. Pond of the Maa MahamayaDham Temple:

In and around the year 1293, Eight Anna Zamindar Late Harendra Narayan Singh Choudhury Dev got a pond constructed, due to the beauty of the place of pilgrimage and the special need of water, but the pond got destructed due to the earthquake and at the bottom the pond got filled with mud. However, later on the pond got constructed and was cleaned by the grandson Jyodindra Narayan Singh Chaudhury Dev.

7. Well in the Maa Mahamaya Dham:

As a result of the spread and fame of Goddess Mahamaya the number of devotees increased day by day, thus to solve the problem of drinking water, Zamindar Surendra Narayan Singh Choudhury Dev built a paved well just in front of the temple and near the entrance on the right side.

8. Arrangements for Daily Puja and the Rituals:

The daily worship of the Goddess is completed according to the mythological method. There is always a "Dashopachar" puja of the Goddess, Amish or Niramish bhog is made with panch (five) dishes that include curd, kheer, ghee, fruits etc. that is dedicated to the Goddess. After the puja, bhog Prasad is distributed among the devotees. Devotees come from far off places offers bhog according to their wish. Many devotees also make sacrifices of animals like pigeon, duck, goat etc., when their desire or wish is fulfilled; the animals are also set free in the name of the Mother Goddess. After the bhog, the door of the temple remains open and then Aarti takes place.

At the same time, the devotees that came from far off places just to get a glimpse of MaaMahamaya is able to worship and do their puja. Even in the evening there is a worship and *aarti*. At the time of Sandhya (evening) Aarti, Panchachar puja is performed and bhog of milk, kheer, curd, sugar, puri etc. is offered to the

Goddess. In this way, along with every day and evening worship, a special puja was done on a special day or any festivals.

9. The Seven Odd Fair:

The seven odd fair is the main festival that is celebrated in the Maa Mahamaya Dham temple throughout the years. It starts from Chaitra Sankranti and takes place outside the Mahamaya courtyard and its premises till the 6th of Vaishakh. This is called the seven odd fair. At present the fair runs for 10- 12 days with the co-operation of the Mandir steering Committee and the general public. Thousands of Worshippers and devotees come from all around the country with the desire to perform pilgrimage and to see and enjoy the fair. At present due to the good road condition the passengers do not face any problem while travelling.

On the occasion of this fair, sacrifices are usually made daily for several days, especially on the 5th, 6th and 7th of Vaishakh, animals like goat, duck, pigeons are mainly sacrificed. Animals are also set free by the devotees in the name of the Goddess. During the fair the devotees that come from different places take rest and cook and stay in the temple ground. The entire area gets illuminated by the noise of the fair. In the fair many shops, dance shows, circus show, magic show are seen. Full facilities are provided to the worshippers, there is a provision of free medical treatment by the govt. doctors. The temple volunteers take care of the worshippers need especially the ones that come from far off places. Water facility, electricity facility, sanitization facility are also provided to the devotees.

10. Sharad Puja:

Shodashopachar puja is performed in Mahamaya temple during the Durga puja. The puja is arranged between the celebrations from Shasti Bodhan to Vijaya Dashami. Simultaneously, there is Angiya Chandipath, donating one thousand Velpatra daily, Dugimantra Chanting, Batuk worship and recitation and Yajna is performed. Along with other deities located in the Dham Pagalnath, Padma kali, Panch devatas are worshipped. Geetal Geet is prevalent in the Sharad puja, along with the puja, act of animal sacrifice is also seen.

One of the main special of the temple is that a turtle is also sacrificed in during the Durga puja. Adequate quantity of bhog is given every day but on Mahanavami 1 ½ or 2 quintal of rice is offered to the Goddess. At the time of the Durga puja, the devotees who come to worship the Maa Mahamaya also contributes in the sacrificial act.

11. Deities in the Mahamaya Dham Temple :

There are temples of many Gods and Goddesses in Maa Mahamaya Dham. The temple of Siva is the main one and in local it is known as Paglanath. It is worth keeping in mind the story of Sati's death when it comes to Siva or Paglanath. Umanand in Kamakhya, like Vishweshwar with Annapurna in Varanasi, the form of pair of Siva and Sati is elemental in 51 (Ekavan) shaktipeeths of entire India. In every Shaktipeeth, there is a pair of Siva and Sati. "Bhang" is basically given to the Siva or Pagla Baba at the time of worship and aarti. Along with Paglanath (Siva) temple, there is also a temple of Durga Devi, Padma Devi, Annapurna temple, Manasa temple and a Kali temple that is situated 3km away from the main Mahamaya Dham, and the temple is 29ft. tall.

There is also a huge cave known as Bagh Bandar in front of the main Mahamaya Dham and it is believed that a tiger used to come there every night that is why it was named as Bagh Bandar. The tiger is believed to be the Vahana (vehicle) of Goddess Bagheswari. In the days of sacrifice one head of a goat was given to the tiger as a Bhog.⁹

MAHAMAYA SNANGHAT:

Mahamaya Snanghat is the place where the wood merchant was given the first sight of Devi Mahamaya. This place is still very famous as the bath place of Maa Mahamaya. On the day of Ashoka Ashtami, devotees sanctify themselves by bathing in the ghat. On the river the sailors bow down while passing through the ghat and take a little water and sprinkle it on to themselves. At present there is a small temple in the ghat where daily worship and bhog is done. The bathing ghat is situated at a distance of about 2 miles north of main Maa Mahamaya Dham. After crossing NH31 from North Salmara towards Dhubri for about 66km, there is a paved bridge over the Tipkai River and on crossing the bridge we will reach Khoraghat, there is a south facing archway at the entrance of this Khoraghat there is a gate where Maa Mahamaya Snanghat temple is inscribed. The snanghat is located 1km north on the eastern edge of Parwat Jowar. The word "Snanghat" means the

⁹ Interview with Shri Sagana Adhikari, an accountant of Maa Mahamaya Dham, Age – 56 and Shri Harendra Krishna Prasad Sarma, Pandit of Maa Mahamaya Dham, Age - 82

bathing spot and is believed that it is the place where the mother Goddess Mahamaya took her bath. Earlier the Mahamaya Dham temple got destroyed by natural disasters and greedy Pagan kings also contributed in the destruction of the temple. In between 1548 A.D. and 1663 A.D. five strong earthquakes hit the land of Goalpara district and it was the same earthquake where the Mahamaya temple at Snanghat was shattered and the golden temple of Durga was taken underground or by some Pagan kings to an unknown place, hence the information is still not known exactly about the Pagan kings.

The first establishment of Maa Mahamaya temple was done in Mahamaya Snanghat and the main and important temple is the Mahamaya Snanghat temple. However the Maa Mahamaya Dham was built later on. Devotees from different parts of the country come to the Mahamaya Snanghat and there are also many small temples and shrines in the Snanghat:

- The Radhakrishna temple
- The Govind temple
- The Shiva temple
- MaaAdya temple
- MaaDigreshwari temple
- The Brahma temple
- The Navagraha temple
- Maa Manasa temple
- Hanuman temple

Many different types of ceremonies and rituals are performed every year for the world peace, this is a three day ritual in which sacrifice is offered on Maghi Purnima. Some of the important annual puja Archana that takes place in Mahamaya Snanghat are: Ganesh puja, Shiva puja, Basant Puja, Durga, Bathow puja in the month of jeth and Kherai puja is also practiced. It is believed that the Mahamaya of Snanghat blesses all the devotees of all the religions.¹⁰

II. CONCLUSION

Therefore, from the above discussion on the topic “The Mahamaya : A Sakti Peeth Temple of Bagribari ” we came to an end and we can conclude by saying that Shakti or Shaktism is the female principle that is worshipped by the Hindus and the female principle is known as Shakti or Devi. The believers of Shaktism or Shaktas nurture the divine mother Goddess. The mother Goddess has many different forms and variety of different names. Hindu texts like smriti and sruti are the main sources to study about the historical framework of Shaktism. The Shakti Goddess is very much popular in North – Eastern India mainly in Odisha, Tripura, Assam, West Bengal and Jharkhand. Kamarupa has been regarded as the principle place of Shaktism in ancient assam. The important and major aspect of Shaktism is the *Sapta – Matrika* (the seven Divine Mothers) and animal sacrifice is believed to be an important aspect and ritual to please the Mother Goddess. According to Brahmanical and Buddhist literature, Kamakhya is considered to be the most sacred pithas of Sakti in Assam, it is believed that the genital part of Sati fell on the Nilachal hill and that is where the Kamakhya temple emerged. The places where the Sati’s limbs fell down, the place became an important and auspicious pitha. The original number of pithas is said to be four, but later it came to be counted to 51 pithas. The Pragjyotisha - Kamarupa traditions testifies the evolution of the cult of the mother Goddess as the principle of the mother’s rights in the society.

Now, the Mahamaya Dham temple of Bagribari was earlier situated in Dhubri district, but currently it falls under Kokrajhar district. The emergence and appearance of the Goddess Mahamaya is different to that of the Sati. The local peoples believes that Maa Mahamaya is different and the temple did not appear with the falling of Sati’s limbs, the locals beliefs that Maa Mahamaya first appeared to a wood merchant that came in Parwat Jowar through Tipkai river in case of his wood supply business, And the divine deity first appeared in front of him and urge him to spread the name and fame of her in every corner and asked the merchant to build a temple in the name of Maa Mahamaya. And due to the spread of the fame of Maa Mahamaya the temple was built by the Zamindars with the help of the son of merchant and the local peoples that dwelled in and around the region. It is known that Maa Mahamaya has fulfilled the desire of many devotees and her *Mahima* (glory) is known to all that is why the devotees from far off places also comes and visits the Maa Mahamaya Dham and Mahamaya Snanghat temple. The first Maa Mahamaya temple was built in the Mahamaya Snanghat so, the origin of the temple is the Snanghat.

On the other hand, there are also Scholars that beliefs that the Maa Mahamaya Dham emerged due to the falling of a finger of Sati in the ParwatJowar, that is where the first temple of Mahamaya was established.

¹⁰ Interview with Mr. SaratBaruah, Secretary of MaaMahamaya Development committee, Age - 36

However the sources and the local dwellers beliefs in the story of the Merchants it has been circulated orally from the very beginning of the establishment of the Temple and hence there are no exact source to proof that the temple emerged from Sati's body parts.

The temple Maa Mahamaya Dham gets a huge amount of donation by the devotees but the donated money does not contribute anywhere in the local but it is used in the development and growth of the temple and now at present the government has stopped funding in the temple for which reason the amount of donation is used for giving salaries to the workers of the temple and the maintenance of the temple is looked up with the collected donations.



Fig. I. Stone Idol of Maa Mahamaya Dham, Bagribari.



Fig. II. Nagara from the days of Zamindar Surendra Narayan Singh Chaudhury.

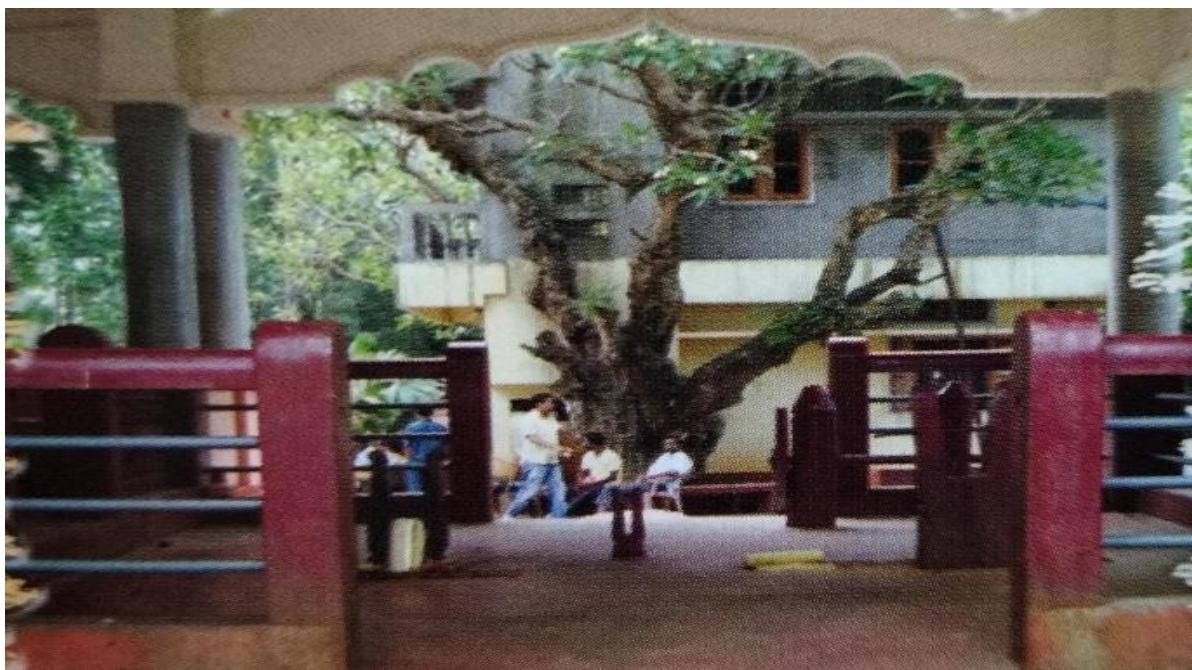


Fig. III. Sacrificial place (Bali shala).



Fig. IV. Snanghat, the river Tipkai where Maa Mahamaya took her bath.



Fig. V. Maa Mahamaya Snanghat main Mandir.



Fig. VI. Maha Sakti- Yagya Bhawan of Maa Mahamaya Dham.



Fig. VII. Shri Harendra Krishna Prasad Sarma, priest of Maa Mahamaya Dham.

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