

## **‘Thān’ Institution of Assam: An Introduction with special references on Malinithān**

**Dr. Deepsikha Gogoi,**

*Assistant Professor (Contractual), Department of Assamese, Doomdooma College, Tinsukia, Assam, India*

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**ABSTRACT:** *There are many religious institutions in Assam which has a historical, mythological background and related with folk beliefs, they are worshiped by the people till today. ‘Thān’ Institution is one of them. This institution is also related to naturism. Natural objects like trees of variety such as bamboos, pipal, banyan, siju and some other objects like stones are considered sacred by them due to the strong belief that god resides in particular trees or in places around those trees or some secluded place generally some distance away from human habitation, has attracted people towards those places, and gradually, those places have turned into places of particular deities. Such places are popularly known as ‘Thān’. About the religious status of Assam and many religious institution of Assam, there are a few research works that has been carried on. But the ‘Thān’ has not got the basic importance among the researchers yet. In this research paper an attempt to give an introduction about Than Institution of Assam basically upper Assam with special reference on Maliithān and made to focus on the originality of Than.*

**KEYWORDS :** *Than, Hindu, religion, Malinithān, folk beliefs, institution*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Assam is one of the eastern most states of India. The people of Assam inhabit in a multi-ethnic, multi linguistic and multi-religious society. The process of social formation in Assam has been marked simultaneously by Sanskritization and Tribalization at different times. So, the religious beliefs are different that grows up at different times.

Assam was once upon a time the original home for tranticism in India. The Shakti temples like ‘Kamakhya’ in Guwahati and ‘Kechaikhati’ near Sadiya are proof to this. While veneration to Shiva largely prevailed in the early period, the mother goddess cult gained ground subsequently. In fact, at one time, Assam came to be identified with Tantrik, Shaktism, especially centering around the Kamakhya temple. Even today, Shiva and the mother goddess are venerated in various forms at the folk level in large sections of the Assamese society, both tribal and non-tribal. Vaishnavism is another form of Hinduism which was newly built up by Mahapurush Srimonta Sankardeva as Neo-Vaishnavite movement. This Bhakti Movement was the harbinger of renaissance with many sided ramifications-spiritual, social, humanistic, artistic and literary. However Shaktism, Vaishnavism and Shivasm all have a large impact upon the society of Assam. Thān is related to all of them. This institution is also related to naturism. Natural objects like trees of variety such as bamboos, pipal, banyan, siju and some other objects like stones are considered sacred by folk society due to the strong belief that god resides in particular trees or in that specific places. So, around those trees or some secluded place people maintain some distance away. Folk society attracted with religious beliefs towards those places, and gradually those places have turned into places of particular deities. Such places are popularly known as ‘Thān’. This institution has a valuable socio-cultural impact the society of Assam.

**Methodology:** This study used of descriptive method. In this study try to present a descriptive discussion about Thān institution of Assam and also give a brief introductory note on Malinithān with the help of Descriptive method.

### **II. ‘THĀN’ INSTITUTION OF ASSAM:**

‘Thān’ means a sacred place in society. Traditionally this word has been used to indicate a sacred place. It was derived from the Sanskrit word ‘Sthān’ meaning place. According to Hemkosha the meaning of Than is a place, a religious establishment of the vaisnavas of Assam. According to ‘Saraighat Abhidhan’, the meaning of ‘Thān’ is a place for religious prayer. It is also called ‘Dharmasthana’ and ‘Devasthana’. ‘Thān’ Institution is a Institution for worshipping Shakti, Shiva and Bishnu also. A large number of hindus and many other tribes and sub tribes of Assam consider the ‘Thān’ as their farourite sacred place to worship their favourite deity. With its religious activities ‘Thāns’ also serve as a common meeting place for discussing issues relating to social and cultural life of the people. So, ‘Thān’ also helped for the development of social integrity.

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In the society of Assam, there are many religious beliefs and ceremonies celebrated from the ancient ages. For example, Stone worship is an old religious practice throughout Assam and continues even today. The practice of tree worship can easily be traced to the Indus valley civilization. The Tulsi and Hiju plants are still worshiped by the Assamese. This is one of the reasons for the development of 'Thān' as a religious Institution. 'Thān' is a unique institution because of its many socio-religious merits. The people believe in the Divine powers of the 'Thān' Gods. These divine powers are related to the myths and folk-beliefs of Assam. So it has an extra social status in Assamese folk mind.

Assam has four administrative divisions, each comprising of several numbers of districts. These are North Assam, Lower Assam, Upper Assam, Hills and Barak Valley. The districts which come under Upper Assam are- Dibrugarh, Golaghat, Jorhat, Sivasagar and Tinsukia. The upper Assam region is rich in natural resources. There are various 'Thān' to worship different gods and goddesses in upper Assam. According to some specific data found in history that when the Ahom kingdom and Chutiya kingdom was ruling in upper Assam, many 'Thāns' established by them. Their religious beliefs are reflected in the temples and 'Thāns'. It is also evident that many 'Thāns' were build before the Ahom or Chutiya kingdom. 'Puranas' also say about 'Thāns'. It reflects their historic status. 'Thān' institution is an integral part of religious life of different sections of people. Here some popular Thans of Assam –

1. Sri Sri Batadrvā Thān : Batadrava Thān in Bordowa in the present nagaon district of Assam is one of the best known Thāns founded by srimanta Sankardeva. This is the first Thān or the first institution set up by Srimanta Sankardeva for propogration of EKA SARANA NAMA DHARMA founded by him.
2. Sri Sri Basudev Thān : Basudev Thān is located in Dhakuakhana, Lakhimpur, Assam. It was first established in the 14<sup>th</sup> century by the chutia king Satyanarayan. originally known as Laumura Satra. According to the local people Rukmini made the statue of Basudev for her desire to marry him.
3. Mahamaya Thān : Mahamaya Thān in western Assam, Dhubri district, is regarded as a greatest Shakti peethas for Hindu pilgrims in lower Assam. This temple has a 400 year-old tradition of animal sacrifice especially at the time of Durga puja.
4. Deohal aai Thān : Deohal aai Thān is situated at the bank of river tingrai, tinsukia district, Assam. It is constructed by ahom king Gadadhar Singha. This place is fully devoted to Hindu Goddess Maa Durga.
5. Kesai khati Thān : Kesai khati Thān is situated Sadiya, Tinsukia district, Assam. The temple was worshiped by Deories. It is the remains of an old temple built by the Chutias in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Kesai khati 'the goddess who eats alive'. In this temple human sacrifice was a traditional annual feature.
6. Padumoni aai Thān : Padumonbi aai Thān is most historical place in Lakimpur district. This temple was established in 1952. Local people are founded a statue of deity Sri Sri Durga devi in besides of Bordiju river. And they decided to establish the Hindu temple. Local people have great respect and religious value for this temple.

These are some popular and wel-known Thāns of Assam. Besides them there are so many Thāns in Assam which has rich historical background and strong religious beliefs.

Religious institution helps in the development of social integrity. 'Thān' has a special place in the society and culture as the oldest holy institution of Assam. Spiritual beliefs are passed from ancient ages in society. Science also accepts some point of spiritualities. There are so many causeless beliefs that are related to 'Thān'. Scientific mentality also can't overcome the beliefs related with 'Thān'. It has a great social impact. Assimilation was a part of Hindu social life in ancient time. 'Thān' emerged as a result of assimilation of different non-Aryan and Aryan religious faiths of Assam. 'Thāns' are followed by vast section of the people of Assam and the location of these places are treated and respected as holy places by the followers. The dedication of the communities or the host is commendable. They always try to preserve the religious value and worship traditions. 'Thān' is the most nearest place to nature. Generally it is located around natural atmosphere. Because of its religious value no one harm the natural wealth or flora and fauna of the area. 'Thāns' have a great contribution in preserving the natural wealth with the reference of religion. Another important thing is 'Thāns' are preserving the sculpture of ancient age. Ruins of old temple, architecture of historic temple etcetera are preserved in 'Thāns'. It works because of its religious perspective.

### **III. MALINITHĀN : A BRIEF INTRODUCTION**

The Malinithān is located in the foothills of Siang hills under the Likabali sub-division of the West Siang district at Assam and Arunachal Pradesh border. This place is associated with mythical Krishna legend. The legend goes that Krishna of Dwarka and Rukmini, the daughter of king Bhismak rested at Malinithān on their way back to Dwarka from Bhismaknagar, which is located near Roing in Lower Dibang Valley district of Arunachal Pradesh. Lord Sri Krishna and Rukmini were received and welcomed by Lord Shiva and Parvati as guests and were offered garlands at this place. Pleased by their reception, Krishna addresses Parvati as Malini and thereafter the place was known as Malinithān.

Earlier Malinithān was known as Ghagrathān as the temple was located in the bank of Ghagra River. From time immemorial the place was regarded as holly place by the local inhabitanace. The tribal hunters used to avoid this place for hunting. They used to worship in that place to make them free from any danger by evil spirits. Gradually the place became a center of pilgrimage.

Malinithān temple ruins came to the light during the construction of likabali in 1968. This work was under NEFA. The archaeological excavation had been under taken by Sri L. N. Chakraborty, former Deputy Director of Research. They discovered more than one hundred statue after excavation. In course of excavation and renovation of the Malinithān temple a good number of stone sculptures of different god and goddesses of the Hindu deities such as Surya, Kartikeya, Indra, Nandi bull, Ganesha, animal motives of lion, elephant etc. were retrieved. Malinithān is not a single it is of series of temples. This temple holds great significance due to which devotees from deforent corners come in large numbers every year. The devotees come to pray for their wish and even offer their gives to the goddess after the fulfillment of their wish.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION:**

In conclusion, the results of this study provide that 'Thān' is a religious institution emerged as a result of assimilation of different non-Aryan and Aryan religious faiths of Assam. Each 'Thān' has different origin, own system and own beliefs. The followers of 'Thān' maintain the age-old customs and traditions regarding the systems of worship. These customs are continued for hundreds of years. 'Thān' is a source of inspiration to develop the culture and society of Assam. Thāns have reflected all three forms of Hinduism like Vaishnavism, Shaktism and Shaivism. They carried not only religious tradition but also take a important role for religious unity and peace among all people of Assam. The Thāns which established by Srimanta Shankaradeva and other Vaishnav shepherd are worshiped by devotees as traditional religious way. Shakti Thāns also worshiped by devotees to offering animal or other things sacrificed before deity. Because of Malinithān situated in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh border area therefore it reflects both Assamese and tribal culture. This institution is valuable for not only its religious perspective but also its stone sculptures of different God and Goddesses. These are rich cultural and historical resources of India.

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