



A study on Nagashankar temple as a part Shaivasim

Dr. Mitali Nath

PDF Scholar

Srinivas University

Mangaluru

&

Dr. Praveen B.M.

Research Guide cum Director

Research and Innovative Council

Srinivas University

Mangaluru

0.0 Introduction:

Every human being in the world wants to live a happy life and protect himself from natural disasters, fear of death, fear of kings and fear of enemies. In order to get rid of evil forces, they worship gods, believe rituals, visit monasteries, temples, and take recourse to other spiritual beliefs. God is the Ocean of Merciful Almighty. If one prays to God according to one's ability, one can get protection from impending danger and one can live a safe life in absolute peace. Philosophers have believed in the existence of God or Supreme Brahma or the Creator as the central power behind the creation of the world. As a result, various philosophers cast a spiritual eye and created the original theories of monotheism, ditheism, polytheism. In the middle of the human history, religion, worship, temples and monasteries have traditionally occupied an important place. Now a full-fledged society and a strong human race need a strong and strong religion. Religion is knowledge or intuition about truth.

It is on the basis of traditional beliefs and imaginary theories that the Elani Puja of Assam - Patal Devalaya, Temple, Satra has been specified. The three streams of Shaiva, Shakta and Vaishnava have been flowing in parallel in over the years.

One of the ancient and major deities in Hinduism is the 'Shiva God'. There is a lot of evidence about the prevalence of Saivism since the era of Mahabharata. Shiva who is known by different names can also be seen imagining different forms. Shiva idols and Shiva lingas scattered in different places in Assam are the ones who remember the antiquity of its practice.

0.1 Scope of the Study:

Our paper deals with the origin of the Shaiva religion in Assam, its spread and the Shaiva tradition. Also, the traditional rituals of Naimitri Shaiva Puja, Shivratri, Bolbam etc. in Nagashankar Temple are discussed and the lineage of the temple priests is discussed.

0.2 Objective of the study:

This discussion is expected to help the younger generation to learn about the history of Shaivism in Assam and also to learn about the heritage of the very faithful and popular Nagashankar Temple in Assam.

0.3 Method of the study:

Descriptive methodology has been adopted mainly but analytical methodology has been resorted to as required.

0.4 Sources of the study:

In preparing our discussion paper, data have been collected through interviews and other reference books, magazines, memoirs etc.

1.00 Discussion of the topic:

Although Shiva is one of the deities worshipped in Hinduism, Shaiva, Shakta and Vaishnavism have also a great influence on the people since ancient times. Shaivism and the tradition of worshipping Shiva are very ancient and popular in Assam. It is difficult to say when and from which century Shaivism settled in India and Assam, but there is evidence that it influenced people even before the Battle of Kurukshetra in the Mahabharata. This is especially evidenced by inscriptions, copperplates, and ancient architectural sculptures. In the Mahabharata, Bhagadatta, the king of Pragajyotishpur, is said to be a friend of Shiva. It is noteworthy that the Nidhanpur copperplate inscription shows that the mighty Bhaskar Varma, who ruled the Kamarupa in the seventh century, was a devotee of Shiva.²

According to the Chinese traveller Hiuen Chang, there were many temples of Hindu gods and goddesses in Pragjyotishpur during the Burmese days of the sculptors, along with the numbers of Shiva temples³.

Just like that, the Tezpur Tamrasana proves that the kings of ninth century Kamrup Harja Burma, Banmal Burma was a devotee of Shiva.⁴

According to the Kalika Purana, written in the tenth and eleventh centuries, the kingdom of Kamarupa was kept secret from Shiva until the arrival of Narakasura. Similarly, Ban, the king of Sonitpur, was a devotee of Shiva. He became an invincible and mighty hero by the boon of Shiva. Even Shiva, pleased with his devotion and accepted him as his son. This suggests that

the Shiva religious tradition is very ancient. The Shiva religion has been practised in Assam since the time of the Mahabharata and even after the reign of King Narakasura.⁵

There is a widespread worship of Shiva among the people of Aryan descent living in Assam as well as among various indigenous peoples. There are many different types of Shiva worship, especially among the indigenous tribes of Assam. The Bodo tribes worship Shiva under the name 'Batho'. Similarly, the Ravas worship Shiva under the names of Sigirisi, Rishi, Puja, etc. The Sonwal Kacharis worship Shiva under the name of Baitho. The Dimasas worship under the name of Shibra, the Tiwa under the name of Ma - Mahadeu, the Karbi, and the Hemphuk Tai Ahom under the name of Lankuri.

Shiva is the most beloved deity in the Assamese folk society. Being slightly pleased, Bez bezali also chants Lord Shiva's name to cure diseases and illnesses. To bless the newly married couple, said, ' Har Gauri bokhoni haonk' (May Har Gauri dwell there').

Shiva is the cause of creation, existence and destruction, Shiva is the greatest of all the gods. But in that Shiva, we find the image of a divinely powerful figure as well as an irresponsible, undisciplined, poor peasant folk deity.

Shiva is greatly wise but fragile. The God Kuber is his friend but he is a poor beggar. Being the guru(master) of the world, he is a skinned beggar. Digambar Shankar is popular for his oil-free hair, tied in braids, wearing a tiger skin, carrying a garland of snakes, riding on a bull-eaten back, and going from cemetery to cemetery with ghosts and go around the world.

It has already been mentioned that the tradition of Shiva puja is very ancient. Imagining the different forms of Shiva, devotees offer prayers at various Shiva statues and 'linga' scattered in different parts of Assam. In Assamese society, a Shiva temple is found in the house of every devotee. Where one worships Shiva in the morning and evening. It is worth mentioning that it is known from many Charit books of Assamese that Kusumbar Bhuyan got his son Shankar (later Sankardeva) to worship Shankara. It is known from Guru Charit that before Shankardeva preached Vaishnavism people in Kamarupa worshipped Bhairava Shiva with liquor and goat instead of worshipping Hari. Shiva is known by various names in the folk society. They are Shankar Bhairava, Maheshwar, Pashupati, Tripati, Nataraja, Gangadhar, Jaleshwar, Gourishwar, Burhagohsai, etc. Some of the famous Shaivapeeths or Shaiva temples located in different districts of Assam are Shukreshwar Devalaya, Kedarnath Temple, Madan-Kamadeva, Shivadaul, Mahabhairav Temple, Shingri Temple, Nagashankar Temple, etc.

One of the Shiva temples scattered in different parts of Assam is the Nagashankar temple. The temple is located about 58 kilometres north of Tezpur in Sonitpur district of Assam about 17 kilometers west of Biswanath town. The mouza centered around this temple is known as Nagashankar Mouza. Located on the south side at a distance of one and a half kilometers from the National Highway 15. The temple boundaries are:

East: Chatia Gaon, West: Gosaichuk Gaon, North: National Highway No. 15, South: Chamar Dalvi Gaon. The temple is located at $26^{\circ}43'29''$ North Latitude and $92^{\circ}59'40''$ East Longitude.⁷

1.02 Origin of the Nagashankar Temple:

There are many legends associated with the Nagashankar Temple. It is said that Mahadev came to see the establishment of the second Kashi in Bishwanath by the Banaraja. This is the place where Shiva's navel touches when he falls asleep in sorrow for missing a Shiva Linga. There erected a Shiva Linga and later a temple was built there.

Another legend says that after the death of Sati, Lord Mahadeva carried her body around. The navel of the body collapsed here. From this navel part, the Shiva Linga is placed on the spot and worshipped and the temple originates.⁸

Again according to another fact, Mahamuni Dhaumya, the priest of Panchapandava, is immersed in meditation considering this place where the navel of Lord Shankara, is the best place to enhance Shankara. Nagashankara who had the navelpeeth of Shankara started waking up in the penance of Mahamuni Dhaumya and later impressed with the scholarship of Mahamuni Dhaumya, the Pandavas made him their high priest.

1.03 Reconstruction and builders of temples:

Many legends are found about the timing and construction of the Nagashankara temple. The temple was rebuilt in the 4th century during the days of king Pratapsingha, the king of the Hitari dynasty, from the time Mahamuni Dhaumya left Nagashankara. Later at the end of the 4th century King Nagaksha built a temple and dug a pond next to the temple by digging the story of Navi Shankara hidden in the forest land. It was with his efforts that worship was introduced here.⁹

Again according to Harinath Sharma Doloi, this temple was established by the Nagamatta king and it is said that the nagamatta was named after Arimatta.¹⁰

In the late 14th century, when the temple split in 1480, Ahom Emperor Suchenfa rebuilt the temple and laid the foundation of the soil. The amount of land in this Devttor temple is 833

bikhas. However, in this context one says that Ahom Emperor Suchenpha repaired or rebuilt the Nagashankar temple instead of building it. It vanished at the crooked pace of time. Only the former hole remained intact. The idea of this comes from flat bricks lying in the vicinity of the campus.

However, until direct evidence is available, the Nagashankar Temple will remain known as the contribution of the Ahom Emperor Suchenpha and will continue to occupy an important place as the first Hindu temple during the Ahom period.

The brick temple built during the Ahom era collapsed and the Nagashankar Temple has been rebuilt. Its main idol is a huge snake or Naag. The square cave is 3 meters long, 6 meters wide and 6 meters deep. Inside the rock cave of the temple, there is a 30 cm high underwater Shivling and a stone staircase to reach it. Along with the Shivalinga, there are also Vishnumurti, Yonikund and Shalgram idols. There is a large pond next to the temple. The pond is filled with water in the rainy season and has a concrete drain connecting the pond to the west underground. In front of the temple there is a previously existing grave named 'Mohan' in the pond. There is a Devi Daul in front of the main temple. There, the wedding ceremony is held by a burnt offering. A small two-room house has been built next to the temple for storing tortoise eggs and hatchlings. The temple is also located along the highway and the archway with its large trident reveals the depth of the temple. The temple premises is currently home to a new Ganesh temple, a wedding hall, a tourist lodge and a cookhouse. These are built in modern architecture.

1.04 Patrons of the Temple:

The original male saint of the Borthakur family in the days of Ahom Emperor Sivasingha is known to have brought Brahma Achutyananda Giri from Kannauj to worship the goddess. After his death his son Devananda Giri stayed in the Ahom court as a priest and a sabhapandit. He was entrusted with the burden of Trustee Barua in the reign of Queen Phuleshwari Kunwari as he was sharp in his intellect profession. His son Ramananda Barua told the king that he did not like politics after being in the Ahom court for some time and expressed his desire to be engaged in the work of worship. Shalal Borgohain, who was the ruler from Biswanath to Bharali at that time, came to know that there was a navelpeeth of Nagashankar in the middle of the forest and informed the king and the king entrusted Ramananda with the responsibility of running the puja service in that temple. In order to run the puja work smoothly, the bar house gives the paik settlement and makes the barthakur a permanent settlement on the copper plate.¹²

1.05 List of Priests of the Temple:

The list of Priests of the Temple so far is as follows:

Amal Bhattacharya (Jamuguri)



Ganesh Barthakur (Nagshankar)



Ratna Bhagwati (Jamuguri)



Ghan Barthakur (Kusumtala)



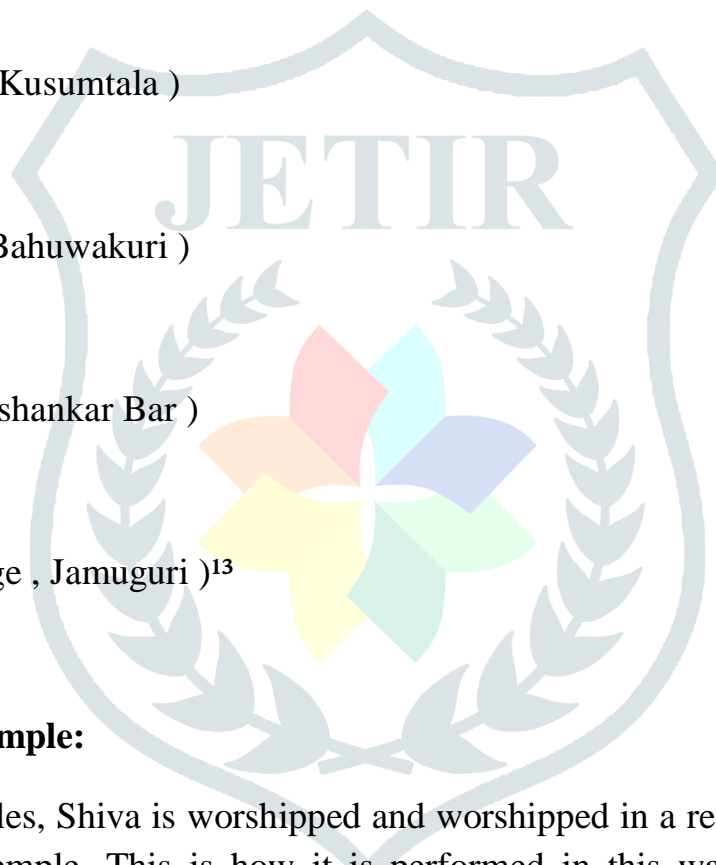
Atul Bhagwati (Bahuwakuri)



Putul Barua (Nagshankar Bar)



Tulsi Koch Village , Jamuguri)¹³



2.00 Worship of the temple:

Like other Shaiva temples, Shiva is worshipped and worshipped in a regular and casual manner in the Nagashankara temple. This is how it is performed in this way in the first place the particular priest of the temple takes two hands of water and puts tulsi leaves in it and makes gangaavahana. That is, take water in the well and take sandalwood, flowers , twothas and rice and offer to God Sun. He then takes a sandalwood, flower and chants mantras and touches the seat and purifies the asanas. He also chants the mantra of 'Om Namah Shivaya' for the sake of removing the dangers of all. Along with that there is also a worship of Lord Ganesha and others.

After the Ganesh Puja, the priest performs pranayama with the basic mantra of Shiva. After the pranayama, the priest takes baththe Shivalinga and worships the eight idols on the altar. Puja mantras...¹⁴

After the worship of the eight idols, the priest chants Om Namah Shivaya 108 times. After the chanting, the mantra 'Om Mahadeve Kshamanba' is chanted and this ends the daily worship services of the temple. Like other temples in Assam, Nagashankar Temple celebrates various festivals and pujas at different times of the year. Among the puja and rituals, the festivals celebrated in this temple are Shivratri and Bolbom.

Shivratri: Like other Shiva temples, the Nagashankar Temple celebrates Shivratri Puja with great pomp and ceremony. The priests of the Nagashankar temple eat satvik food on the day before Shiva Puja and fast on the day of the Puja. Shivratri Puja is performed in this temple four times in four phases. The Shivling is bathed with different substances every phases with milk, yogurt, butter, honey. Offerings, fragrant flowers, incense, lamps, bells, 'bel' leaves, cannabi etc. are used in worship. After the fourth phases of the puja, bhog, offerings are made. During this offering, it is worshipped by lighting lamps and incense are lit in front of Shiva.

After the puja, the devotees bow down to the Shivling and take blessings from the gods. The priest first chants mantras and sprinkles peace water on the devotees to wish them good luck and also sprinkles Durbaksha to bless them with a thousand years of life. The name of Sadashiv sung by the devotees in the temple is as follows:

Shiva shire joota kewole nautha

dug dug dambaru bai...¹⁵

In addition, Bolbom is one of the Shiva-centric pujas and festivals celebrated in the month of Shaon at the Nagashankar Temple. Countless devotees from Assam and other countries flock here to perform puja during the Bolbom festival. The temple is visited by 10,000-15,000 devotees from different places every Monday in the month of Shaon. The devotees participate in this festival with full faith and deep confidence. This Bolbom believes that if devotees visit various Shiva temples on barefoot, Lord Mahadev Shiva fulfills the wishes of the devotees. It is believed that Lord Shiva is especially pleased if the devotees worship him with the water of a cowar (bhar) rather than worshipping him with incense, lamps and offerings. It is believed that if devotees worship from temple to temple chanting Bolbom with a cowar on their shoulders, they receive the merit of an Ashwamedha sacrifice.

In addition to these two festivals, the Nagashankar Temple celebrates religious festivals like Fakuwa, Janmashtami and Ganesh Puja. They also celebrate social reform festivals like

Annaprasan , Churakaran , Upanayan , Marriage etc. in a very beautiful and sophisticated manner.

This grand pond near the heritage Shaiva temple is full of folk beliefs and many traditions has made the beauty of the temple more beautiful and the temple premises attractive. There are also many beliefs associated with the variety of tortoises in the pond. There is also a popular belief that if anyone do not return the tortoise, which finds in the road that has climbed , the evil of that house is certain. There has been a traditional belief that death is inevitable when someone killed tortoise of temple. In fact there is a popular belief that this tortoise of the temple in the pond is the companion of the Shiva God.

Devotees who come to seek the blessings of Lord Shiva to seek freedom from peace, harmony , fear of royal fear enemies and troubles offer various donations in this temple. Devotees also offer pigeons, goat , trient , belpat etc. at the feet of the Lord in an exclusive manner.

3.00 Conclusion:

The Nagashankar Temple is the oldest Shiva temple established in Assam. The temple was built in 1480 by Ahom Emperor Suchenpha and is the oldest example of Ahom architecture. There are many legends about the origin, date of construction and builder of this temple, but it is one of the contributions of the Ahom king Suchenpha. Along with Shivalinga the Bishnumurti, Yonikunda , Shalgram idol installed in the temple and the main idol of this temple is a huge snake or naag. Apart from the temple Devidaul near the temple is the center of attraction such as large sized ponds, different species of tortoises in the pond, houses meant for the conservation of tortoises eggs and hatchlings etc. Apart from performing the daily routine pujas Shivaratri, Fakuwa, Bolbom, Ganesh Puja etc. in this temple there is a facility to organize other reform activities such as the peaking of the marriage hall upanayana etc. Efforts have been made to make this temple attractive by setting up cooking house for specific marriages as well as many tourists to facilitate the accommodation of people coming from far and wide. Today it occupies a special place in the folk society as a religious tourist destination.

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