



## SITOLA PUJA

# (SPECIAL REFERENCE TO AAI SOKAM OF ASSAM)

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### Introduction:

The role of nature is important in the marvelous culture of Assam. The beauty of the natural world and the fear and amazement that surrounds it have ensnared human beings in the web of mysteries for ages. Due to fear and amazement a belief accused God of being ill had developed in the assamese society. On the pages of history of Assam, there is evidence on how small pox turned into a pandemic and how it affected the assamese society. On the basic of the adverse affect of this disease a new concept of Goddess Sitola emerged in the mindset of assamese people. Goddess Sitola is known by various names like 'Vashanta Devi' 'Shyamadevi' 'Mundimali' 'Mahamaya'. For the cure of this disease Sitola Puja is celebrated in assamese society. An attempt has been made to analyse the effect of folk beliefs in assamese society through the Sitola puja or Aai Sokam.

### Methodology:

This article is based on both primary and secondary sources. All the data have collected from different books, edited books, etc.

### Discussion:

The goddess Sitola has been worshipped in Assam since ancient times. In the conventional belief that no medicine can cure small pox. If anyone deals with the medicine the people believe that it become more adverse. In the name of Goddess Sitola the assamese women offer prayer to satisfy her and to get rid from this disease. The rules of Sitola Puja are mentioned in Skanda Purana.

In the local folklore of Assam the affect of small pox is considered to the pervasiveness and dynamics of Goddess Sitola. When a person of a house get infected by small pox the whole house been cleaned by the other person and incense sticks are used everyday for the fragrance. The infected person's bed is covered with a clean white cloth and a bunch of Indian lilac (neem Or Azadirachta indica) are kept under the clothes. And also white flowers, water, areca nut, betel leaf and various elements are put beside the patient's bed in a pool of offering and worship is performed in it regularly.

On the first day of the disease, the main lady of the house after taking bath, wearing a white cloth, go to the temple of the house and worship Goddess Sitola by lighting diya and incense sticks. This puja is also performed at home or in Durga and Kali temples.

There are some restrictions when someone get infected by this disease. In this time noise,entertainment, dance, weaving are not allowed in the house. The infected person don't wear red clothes and not eat non-vegetarian food. Generally the infected person easily gets angry during this disease time. By feeding catfish and bamboo shoots, curd, flattened rice, jaggery etc. after the recovery of the patient reduces his anger.

In Assam this worship is performed in three ways- Shastric, domestic and tribal. This ritual has no figure of the goddess. The women devotionally worship the goddess. As a gift white cloth, white pigeon, white flowers are offering to the goddess. Banana, coconut, papaya, sugarcane, green grams and black chickpeas, rice, rice flour are given in offering tray.

This puja is performed in different ways in different places. Difference are also find in the offering tray between lower and upper Assam. In lower Assam joha rice, banana, cow milk and sugar are used in the worship. In some places of upper Assam especially among the Chutiya community of Golaghat there is a ritual called 'Ashon Pota Sobah' . The Ahoms of Assam generally used banana trunk on this worship.

The tradition of Sitola Puja or Aai Sokam also prevail among the tribal society. The Bodo and Kachari tribes worship goddess Sitola to rescue from small pox. The Lalung tribe celebrate this puja by offering red flower, hen, ducks, pigeons to the goddess. Goddess Sitola is famous as 'Vasanta Devi' among Jaintia tribe. They consider the spots of small pox as "Kiss of Goddess".

A little glimpse of this tradition also found among the Muslims of Assam. The Muslims of Darrang and Kamrup follow this tradition of worship. But they take the name of Allah in place of Goddess Sitola.

Aai naam (aai songs) is one of the integral parts of this worship. These songs reflects the identity of goddess Sitola. In the time of smallpox the assamese women sing these songs to offering prayer to goddess Sitola. These songs also denotes the various principles relating to this worship. Differences are found among these songs in different places. The poetic beauty of these songs are stunning.The songs sings in puja is like-

*Chaki dhup dhori dhori ashon borhai disu*

*Agbarhi borha aai*

*Tamul pan agbarhai disu*

*Agbarhi borha aai*

*Mathar kesh pari disu*

*Agbarhi borha aai*

*Jal phul dhori ashon borhai disu*

*Agbarhi borha aai*

*Noibaad parhad dhori ashon borhai disu*

*Agbarhi borha aai*

(Meaning: By arranging the seat, by lighting diya and incense sticks, offering areca nut, flowers, prashad and water welcoming goddess Sitola for offering prayers to her)

The importance of Sitola puja are still there in the modern society. Even in this age of science and technology it is observed that some people maintain distance from the modern medicine for this disease.

**Conclusion:**

The rituals, worship and ceremonies are a testament to the role of folk belief in modern society. Though in the age of science and learning some superstitious beliefs erased but some folk beliefs are still prevails in modern society. There is no doubt that some folk beliefs are related to some superstitious beliefs. But it can't deny this folk beliefs reflect various aspects of society. The role of aai songs used in this worship are remarkable for strengthening the incredible culture of Assam. The presence of this rituals or folk beliefs still in age of modern medicine to combat the disease like smallpox are phenomenal. And the contribution of women to continue this tradition in society are also amazeballs.

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