

# Ghar Ghukhani Puja of the Rabhas

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## Abstract

The people belonging to the Rabha community living in the North East of India - an indigenous group belonging to the Bodo section of the Mongoloid race and they are one of the architects of the society and living in a social group from a great length of time and leading a systematic and methodical way of life in this society since time immemorial. Further, they are engaged in conducting and organizing various rituals and religious festivals and occasions in a community manner or within the family itself. In the Rabha society, the people pay worship and revered stones or trees as they consider it to be a form and symbol of specific Gods and female deities.

The tribal race and communities are much attached to the Mother Nature and their ideology and philosophy of life during the Pre-Vedic period was pertaining to nature. They have a close bond and establishing deep ties with the Mother Nature

and leading life pertaining to nature. This people invoke and worship various Gods and female deities in order to receive divine grace, blessings and strength in their bloody fight with various ferocious wild beasts, and even to receive protection from ghosts and spirits, misfortunes and adversities, natural calamities and so on. In this way, numerous Gods and female deities are worshipped in a traditional manners and conventions with definite customs and practices in the Rabha society since a great length of time.

'Risibai' is the chief and primeval worshipable deity. This deity's chief worshipable Goddess is 'Rauntak'. 'Rauntak' is worshipped as a household deity or 'Ghar Ghukhani' by the Pati Rabha community. They also venerate and worship "Rauntak" as "Bhagabati Buri Thakhurani" or "Burah Ghukhani". They have a set of belief system which is prevalent that the revered Goddess "Lakhi Devi" is the chief household deity. A few

people have a belief and even consider the Goddess "Lakhi Devi" as the presiding deity of the home. The Rabhas have been paying homage and worshipping this Goddess in the line of traditional customs and rites and within different clans and families, there is an attempt and process to analyze where lies its differences and distinctions.

**Key words-** Rauntak, a household deity of Pati Rabha, worshipping and rituals, Risibai, female deity

### **Introduction**

The rich Indian philosophy and religion have acknowledged and accepted the omnipresence of numerous Gods and female deities and in the same way, the Rabha community too acknowledge and recognize the omnipresence of Gods and other deities. Time and again, many learned scholars and well versed thinkers have given numerous and diverse views, opinions and perspectives regarding when and where the very process and systematic ordeal regarding the rituals of worshipping of numerous deities have begun and how it is spread and celebrated in a ritualistic manners and customs in the ancient Assam and likewise in pre-historic Kamrup.

Nilachal is a site of historical importance. Before the discovery of the holy site of Nilachal by the great Koch emperor Biswa Singha, where in the primeval times, the matrilineal Garos observed various rituals, invoked and worshipped by means of sacrificing various feathery and four-footed animals like pigs, hens etc. Dr. Nirmal Prabha Bordoloi, the eminent poet, lyricist and folklorist associated with Assamese literature, mentioned and made a reference to the era of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century written text " Kalika Purana" where it was written very lucidly the influence of Goddess Maa Kamakhya and her various forms and incarnations in the lives of the common people. In ancient times, people used to sacrifice various animals like buffaloes, goats, ducks, hen and even humans were too sacrificed as an offering and appeasing to God and other deities. At present and with the changing of times, this very practice

of human sacrifice has been ceased but in the tribal society, the very practice of sacrifice and slaughter of animals have been prevalent and persistent till date.

The Rabha community observes the rituals of worshipping "Lakhi Puja", "Langamara Puja", "Kamakhya Puja" and "Maroi Puja" in the family or in a social and community manner. The Pati Rabha worships "Goddess Lakhi" as a household deity. Again for some, "Ghardevati" is the house's presiding deity.<sup>1</sup> This ritual and worship are performed in a homely way. This Ritual of worshipping is observed during the festival time of Magh Bihu, Bhoag Bihu, Aamoti and Na-Khuwa.

### **Purpose of the Study**

There are a host of sources regarding the prevalence of the ritual and observance of worshipping "Ghar Ghukhani Puja" but there are no scientific research and study conducted yet regarding this custom and rites of worshipping the revered Goddess. It is seen that many clans and families observe the ritual of this "Puja" but there is a wide ranging differences regarding the customs and religious rites of conducting the "Ghar Ghukhani Puja" amongst many Rabha families and clans belonging to this tribe. In the context of the present day modernity and also people who are engaged in farming occupation and agricultural activities, there seems a declining trend amongst people of this community regarding the observance of this "Puja". An earnest attempt and sincere effort have been initiated in this research paper to decipher that all the customs, manners, elements, ethical practices and even folk songs and music composed for this ritual and even esoteric mystical and ritualistic traditions, folk-story, folk- belief etc. associated with this ritual are to be collected, put into research, act of preserving them. This very research paper has been put into deep research and prepared in this regard. There is a need for a broad based research and analysis and fact – findings in order to decipher how these ritualistic religious practices have been prevalent amongst

the people.

### Importance and Significance of the Research

The Rabha community has contributed immensely towards the multi-colored culture of Greater Assam and their contribution is beyond questionable and praiseworthy in this regard. There is a prevalence of the ritualistic religious practices in worshipping numerous Gods and female deities amongst this culturally and linguistically rich Rabha community. They engage in ritualistic religious worshipping of stones and trees in the traditional manner considering them to be the sacred symbols of God and other female deities. If any research is conducted and analyzed in this regard in a scientific manner and in a meaningful way, there are chances that the very research will open new horizons and doors of knowledge. The present research and study have been chosen to be conducted and analyzed in a broad based manner in order to determine the efficacy and importance in respect to observing this ritual of worshipping this revered female deity.

### Procedure of the Research

The proposed researched topic is put into deep research, examined and conducted after a thorough analysis and detailed examination and further enough importance is also given on field study.

### Major Findings

**Prevalence of the Ritual of "Ghar Ghukhani Puja":** A majority of Pati Rabha population resides particularly in the Kamrup and Goalpara district. There is a prevalence of the ritual of "Ghar Ghukhani Puja" amongst them even today and they do it by adhering to the customs and in ritualistic manners. This ritual is observed in a homely way. The altar for the observance of this "puja" is placed in the pillar that is existed in the east direction of "Dangghar" or in the house facing the North direction. The main pillar of "Dangghar" should not be tread with foot and should not be seen with bad motive and evil intention. The grandmother used to tell that eyes

would be impaired if the main pillar is stamped upon with foot and for this reason, we show great respect and deep reverence to this pillar.<sup>2</sup>

The Pati Rabha community observes this very ritual on the occasion and festivals of Bihu, Lakhi Puja, feast of Na-bhat and other occasions. At first, the main lady of the house pays homage and worships this female deity by being in the state of fasting. The entire house is being cleansed and cleaned on account of observing this very ritual or "Puja". After that an earthen lamp is lit and thereby placing the lamp nears the main pillar. Five plantain leaves are brought and placed near the earthen lamp for the purpose of observing this "Puja". Eatables offering to the Goddess on this very occasion consist of the mixture of the ingredients of rice, banana, sugar, salt etc and in five pieces of plantain leaves, these offerings are given along with small pieces of areca nut and betel leaves. The sacred and holy waters and even basil waters as sacramental waters are sprinkled at each households and then every members of the family pays worship to the revered Goddess. After that the offered food items paid to the Goddess are thrown away in the nook and corner of the backyard outside the house. One should not walk over this offered food items.<sup>3</sup>

The main purpose of observing this ritual or "Puja" at home is to curb all those negative energies, bad vibes from entering the home besides all the members of the family would be blessed with good health to lead his or her life in a healthy way.

There is another ritual observed called "Naturan Dhanore Aag Luwa" in the Rabha society. On an auspicious day in the month of the Assamese calendar "Aaghun". The main male member of the house goes to the paddy field in order to bring the tip of the paddy and he follows this practice by cleaning the house and by being in the state of fasting. He should not greet anyone on returning with the tip of the paddy. The main lady of the house when bringing "Lakhimi" should sprinkle basil water on a low stool and after that she should receive "Lakhimi" with civility and then she should

initiate the act of fastening "Lakhimi" in the ridge pillar situated in east of "Danghar". This very practice of receiving "Lakhimi" with civility from the paddy field is called "Aagluwa" by the Rabhas.<sup>4</sup>

Generally, observance of the ritual of "Ghar Ghukhani Puja" should be conducted on the occasion of "Nawa Khuwa" in the Rabha community. On this particular day, every corner of the house, courtyards and lanes leading to the house should be cleansed. The female head of the house pays homage and worship "Ghar Ghukhani" after taking bath. On this particular day, in addition to this process of worshipping of "Ghar Ghukhani", a culinary dish like "Memang Bhat" is cooked in respect to those who left or died. This rice is to be cooked in a cooking pot made for this purpose in "Danghar". All those food items such as rice, lentils, meat, leafy vegetables are fried along with the cooking of "Memang Bhat". Salt is sprinkled according to the taste. Turmeric is not served in this culinary item. On this particular day, two earthen lamps are lit. The Memang rice is divided into twelve portions and are placed in a plantain leaf called "Aaglata Kolor pat" and those twelve portions are dedicated in memory of those who left for heavenly abode.<sup>5</sup> After that, offerings given in this "Puja" are cast outside in the backyard of the house. When the rites for this "puja" are over then the female head of the house with full devotion cleanses a corner near the cooking pot in the kitchen where she places the altar dedicated to "Lakhimi" and thereby lets an earthen lamp and a handful amount of new rice which are meant for cooking "Na-bhat" are taken and the process of cooking "Na-bhat" begin to take place. The Rabhas observe this ritual of "Na-bhat" in one particular day in the month of the Assamese calendar "Aaghun". Generally, this "Na-khuwa" is observed on 9<sup>th</sup> of the Assamese calendar "Aaghun" in some places.<sup>6</sup>

The ritual "Tukuriya Puja" which is organized by Pati Rabhas is an ancient custom associated with the observance of "Ghar Ghukhani Puja". It is seen that numerous Gods and female deities

descended upon the earth in an incarnate form in view of time and circumstances. During "Tukuriya Puja", devotees worship and venerate "Ghar Ghukhani" as "Narayani Bhagawati". At first, a man named Tukura engaged in worshipping the revered female deity Goddess Narayani Bhagawati and on account of this very act on the part of this man, this "Puja" is called "Tukuriya Puja" based on his name. Since time immemorial to the present length of time, this very ritual has been observing and organizing in a ceremonious procedure and formality in Bongaon Than in the Boko region of Kamrup District. At present, this ritual is not being organized and prevalent in any place of worship in Assam saved this "Than" or place of worship. This puja starts from Saturday and Tuesday. In this holy ritual "Tukuriya Puja" only the people belonging to the Rabha community are permitted or can become "Deuri". People belonging to other communities residing there can't be made or become "Deuri".<sup>7</sup> This very custom is followed religiously by the Rabhas residing there. Generally, "Tukuriya Puja" is being organized during the month of the Assamese calendar "Jeth". The very custom of sacrificing of animals are ordained in order to appease the Goddess namely "Ghar Ghukhani", "Narayani", and "Aai Bhagawati" during this "Tukuriya Puja" so as to curb epidemics, negative vibes and energies and seek blessings from the Goddess to protect the agriculture from famine so that the agriculturist, peasants and cultivators should engage in hearty in agricultural activities.

There is a prevalence of the observance of the rituals of "Ghar Ghukhani Puja" amongst the Koch Rabha community too. They call this ritual "Rantak Puja". This holy ritual has been observing and prevalent amongst all the clans of the Rabha community from a great length of time in the past till the present. Rajen Rabha in his penned book "Rabha Janajati" has mentioned about the ritual called "Rantak" which is an ancient "Puja" observing since time immemorial As time passes, the sub-communities and families of the Rabha community have reckoned and imagined the

presence of numerous Gods and female deities and are seen and observed in worshipping them. The Koch Rabha's observance of the custom and rituals of "Rantak Puja" are mentioned below.

Like other families and clans, Koch Rabhas too construct their main house or "Danghar" in the North direction. The house is constructed in the east-west direction too. The house is constructed with two rooms. The room facing east is known as "Nu" and the room facing west is "Nautkhour". The very activities of cooking and serving are done in this west facing room. A bamboo stilt house of 3 feet length, 1 and half feet width and 2 feet height is constructed in the north west corner in the house and the people belonging to Koch Rabha place a pair of clay pot (Rantak) on hay and pour rice to the brim on the clay pots. The Rabhas recline ancient arms and weapons in the room in both sides of "Rantak".

They place a trident "Trishul" and "dikhol" above "Rantak". They tie a pair of "Manjira", a kind of taal in the staff of the trident. The divine slokas of "rantak Puja" are sang in accompaniment with "Kal" (a long flute made of Nal bamboo), Boukhi (flute), Hem (drum or dhak), Manjori (Minjora) etc. on this auspicious day. Generally, a hen egg and betel nut are placed on the rice called "Rantak Purna Chaul". Particularly, on that day of worshipping, this two "Rantak" are tied and fastened with a particular kind of grass and is constructed by preserving it with a local wild trees. The two "Rantak" is coiled with a string of corn's puffed rice.<sup>8</sup> The "Deuri" sprinkles rice powder on both sides of the wall of bamboo stilt house and he also sprinkles the very rice powder on the people playing musical instruments and upon himself too. The Koch Rabhas made an offering of wine to the deity "Rishi" and thereby worship him. This very ritual of "Rantak Puja" is observed continuously for three days. The act of sacrificing of animals takes place on those three days and people enjoy the merriment and feasting of rice and wine in those days.

### Conclusion

In this way, the Rabha agriculturist, peasants and

cultivators have been observing this ritual of "Ghar Ghukhani Puja" from a great length of time in succession according to tradition and custom. At present, the educated classes of modern era belonging to the Rabha community are seemed to have less interest and inclination from observing this very ritual. The village agriculturist and peasant class have been observing this ritual by following customs and moreover, they are observing this puja in order to receive divine grace and blessings from "Maa Lakhi" so that their agricultural lands should be abound with paddy, rich abundance in farming crops and moreover, the year may pass in peace and joyfulness. It is a humble attempt to enrich the glorious culture of the Rabha community in near future by collecting information on the elements, resources related to the observance of traditional Devi Puja and festival of the Rabha community.

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