

ASPECTS OF SACRED BELIEF ON MATERIAL OBJECTS AND BEADED ORNAMENTS AMONG THE DIMASA TRIBE IN ‘LUNGMAILAM DAIKHO’ A SACRED GROVE

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Abstract: Dimasa community of Assam is loyal towards twelve sacred groves of ancestor deities. The Lungmailam daikho (sacred grove) of Dimasa in Dijuahaphai belief to be one of the powerful and oldest deities resides under a banyan tree which they annually devote and propitiate. This sacred grove has a deep cultural and religious significance since from the past centuries. The sacred material objects as an indigenous symbolism is belief to be worship annually through performing rituals by particular religious hakthangsa male clan member. These forest fragment area is being taboo for the female member to enter. In this paper the author seeks to understand the devoted sacred deities in Lungmailam daikho for their success and prosperity and explore the transformation and maintenance of sacred material objects through basic anthropological field methods.

Keywords: Lungmailam daikho, hakthangsa clan, material objects, ancestor deities.

Introduction

From centuries the human and nature had a deep relationship, plays a significant role among indigenous people of India as a sacred grove. Sacred groves are religious fragment forest area where community deities reside. It is an outcome of religious beliefs, traditional values, taboos and socio-cultural practises. All around the world the highest concentration of sacred groves found in India. Variant colourful ethnic tribes of Northeast India particularly from the Meghalaya, Manipur and Assam have devoted to their own sacred grove where ancestor deities reside since time immemorial (Tripathi 2001). The fragment sacred grove is protected and preserved which is very unique traditions of the tribes. In Assam region some of the ethnic tribes among Bodo, Rabha and Dimasa uphold sacred grove as cultural heritage. The Bodo and Rabha tribes dwelling in plains area devote sacred grove called as “Than”. It has been reported in Karbi Anglong about 40 sacred groves in which Dimasa also maintain sacred groves called as “Madaico” (Malhotra et. al.2001).

Presently, Dimasa community is known to be a hills tribe in two districts of Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao of Assam, Northeast India under sixth schedule of Indian constitution. They are also concentrated in other parts of Assam in Cachar district, Nagaon district, Hojai district and a small population in Nagaland state. These dominated areas were called as ‘Haphai’ (Longmailai, M.2017). Linguistically, they belong to Tibeto-Burman language family and racially Indo-Mongoloid. (Barpujari 1997:6) The Dimasa community trace a double descent through mother and father line i.e. they have two fold clan system. They are the strong believer in ancestor deities as ‘Madai’(God or Goddesses). The conception of creation of life in Dimasa myth as the descendants of gods in the form of human being i.e. the myth of the Great birth Arikhidima and his companion Bangla Raja had lay out seven suitable divine eggs out of which the seventh one could not hatched naturally and break in ugly shape that it became evil spirit as malevolent who spread woes. The successful six eggs as benevolent gods were Sibrai, Alu raja, Naiku raja, Wa raja, Guniyang-Braiung and hamiadao considered among Dimasa community as ancestral deities who are responsible for every well being of the society as area deities. It is believed that the ancestor deities reside in 12 territorial areas as sacred in Dimasa population in order to control over their social and religious life and that sacred areas is known as ‘Daikhos’. (Danda, Dipali . 1977).

Objectives

1. To identify the deity worshipped in sacred grove (Lungmailam daikho)
2. To document the heir of material objects

Methodology

The undertaken research work is concentrated in one daikho only i.e. Lungmailam daikho. For the present study the collection of required data is gathered through the basic anthropological knowledge accepting the methods of observation and interview. Non-participant observation method is used while counting the sacred beaded ornaments in its ritualistic manner. The interview method is conducted both in open and close. The priest was asked frequently on the adopted topic that had deep rooted information of Lungmailam daikho. Along with the priest the villager is also interviewed. For fulfilling the research topic photography have been taken whenever required in the field and recorded.

Findings and Discussion

Lungmailam daikho in Dijua Haphai

As the Dimasa territory is under the jurisdiction of ancestor deities and the people residing in Dijua Haphai (Karbi Anglong area) are subjected to propitiate in Lungmailam daikho and Damadi daikho. The research work concentrated particularly in Lungmailam daikho of Dijua haphai(Karbi Anglong area) which is believed to be one of the eldest and strongest daikho (sacred grove) among the 12 daikho system in Dimasa population of Assam. The Lungmailam daikho is situated in the sacred forest area of Upper Mohendijua of Manja sub-division of Karbi Anglong district. The area is being sacred for the people of Dijua haphai(Karbi Anglong area). It is believed that the ancestor worship to respective deities shower blessings in each and every wellbeing and success of their life. For pleasing the respective deities, the rituals and propitiation is performed annually in the beginning of the year of Hindu calendar in the month of April and predict the future. The deities reside under a big and very old banyan tree where the deities associated material objects and beaded ornaments is kept as sacred. The following are the material objects and beaded ornaments:

1. a trisul, which is an iron material called as Zungbra
2. a earthen pot called as dihu
3. traditional cloth of Goddess called as Rajamphai
4. beaded necklace (Lu), armllets (Yaoche)r, gold beads (guli thai)

The Sacred grove (Lungmailam daikho) of Dijua Haphai is named after the son of God Du Raja and Goddess Dilaoju. The oral history reveals the son Lungmailam of Du Raja and Dilaoju was sent to look over the Dijua Haphai. The area of Dijua haphai was already under the command of Goddess Baminju. The Lungmailam Raja when his father sent him to look the Dijua haphai he met the Goddess and got married with her. It is belief that the Lungmailam Raja's clan belong to Hakthangsa male clan and Goddess Baminju was tharuju female clan. From the above history the Dimasas of Dijua haphai (Karbi Anglong) worshiped this respective God Lungmailam and Goddess Baminju as their area God and Goddess. Since, then the hakthangsa male clan and tharuju female clan have got the supreme authority to work for the God and Goddess in this sacred grove as Lungmailam daikho.

In Lungmailam daikho, the priest perform the functions of the deity worship like every daikho had of their own priest. As from the time immemorial the clan member hakthangsa clan became priest to look over matter the sacred grove (Lungmailam daikho). The hakthangsa male clan member plays an important role in performing the deity worship and beside male clan; a female clans 'tharuju' and 'thirimju' also plays a significant role during the rituals. The head priest is called Jonthaima along with two assistant Singgao and Asinggao who help the Jonthaima during performing the rituals as cleaning and arranging the sacred material objects and beaded ornaments.

'Bisulahaba' rituals in Lungmailam Daikho

When the date of ritual is finalised by the priest members and village headman of the particular village, the ritual is under taken in the sacred grove (Lungmailam daikho). After date is finalise all the villagers were known through their own village headman of each of the village. On that day the villager were not allow to go for any agriculture work, fishing, hunting and any other leisure work which is the first ritual of deity worshiped in Lungmailam daikho called as "Bisu lahaba". The Hagthangsa clan perform the rituals. In this ritual all the accessories of ancestor deities were clean through water and rearrange. They count and check whether any damage or missing of the beaded ornaments, armllets and the cloth Rajamphai of Goddess is cleaned and safely kept back in a traditional box called as 'khoujep'. Along with the accessories of Goddess a water pot is again filled with water and kept back safely under the tree. But, while going to keep the water pot the clan member firstly check the previous year water quantity. The clan members and other villager kept the accessories associated with the rituals in cherishly through playing traditional drum and flute called as Kharam and Muri.

Significance of the rituals

As the ancestor deities had their jurisdiction over the matter in social or religious of the people, it is believe that the material objects and water pot which is associated with the rituals related to deities were clean and display in front of the clan members whether the material objects kept were fine as it was kept like the previous year. If it is found any missing or sudden changes it is believe that the ancestor deities is not satisfied and may send miseries to the people of Dijua haphai and if it is found no changes then it is belief that the deities is satisfied.

The ancestor deities predict the future of the nature fruitful to Dimasas of Dijua haphai could be seen through associated with the earthen pot fill with water which is kept under the sacred banyan tree. Before filling the earthen water pot they check the water pot of the previous year. If the earthen pot is found empty or changes of quantity of water then according to the priest the problem of harvest may arise within the Dimasa community of Dijua haphai like drought, lightning, earthquake, heavy rainfall i.e., the anger of the deities may cause natural calamities.

The Sacred material objects in lungmailam Daikho is communal heirlooming, the Hakthangsa male clan assume the supreme authority to look over this sacred objects depicts. Though it is taboo to enter the sacred grove for the female member but particular a two female clan; tharuju and thirimju is significance. Here tharuju is the main figurines of goddesses and

therimju plays her assistant. When the Goddess beaded ornaments and cloth is display in front of the clan members both from male and female clans and the villagers also participate in this ritual because the material objects and beaded ornaments were kept in the priest house not in the sacred grove which was kept before under the banyan tree. During this ritual a feast is organised in which a separate sacred food is kept aside for the deity female clan. This food kept separately is taken to the female clan belong to deity the next day with playing traditional drum and flute. Here, the female clan imitate the Goddess clan so in respect this ritual is being done.

Conclusion

Thus, a unique and deep significance of belief system in sacred grove of Lungmailam Daikho is found to be a rare religious functioning among Dimasa community. It is noteworthy to analyse the sacred material objects and beaded ornaments of ancestor deities as community heirloom in which the male clan played a supreme authority to look on the matter of daikho. No doubt the Dimasas still had a strong belief on sacred groves 'Daikhos' but a patches of changes is remarkable during performing rituals with the impact of modernisation i.e, piping traditional flute and playing drum is no more seen and on the otherhand the sacred beaded ornaments and sacred cloth is being kept in safe in priest house which was kept before under the banyan tree. The changes also noticeable during the rituals 'Bisulahaba' i.e, the urban people hardly follow the taboo related to 'Bisulahaba' rituals with the changes of time.

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Photos



Fig. 1 Sacred Grove 'Lungmailam Daikho'



Fig.2 Priest members during 'Bisulahaba'



Fig. 3 Counting sacred beaded ornaments



Fig. 4 beaded ornaments in Priest house

