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**TEMPLE PERSONNEL IN ASSAM: STRUCTURE, ROLE AND
SOCIO-RELIGIOUS FUNCTIONS**

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Keywords

Multicultural, Socio-religious, Culture, Heritage, Religion, Temple personnel.

Abstract

North-East India is the abode of an almost bewildering variety of communities. Assam is a melting pot, where culture, heritage, lifestyle, tradition, faith and belief of the Aryans have formed a rich tapestry of multicultural yarns of distinct heritage. The land of Assam is with its beautiful temples beckons all those who want to be the part of supernatural environment. In Assam there are many important temples and sacred shrines belonging to different religion. These have made the Assam a sacred place and also exhibit the religious tolerance of the people. Most of these holy sites are situated amidst some breathtaking scenic places giving the pilgrims a peak into the natural beauty of Assam along with the opportunity to worship the gods and ask for their benedictions. The nature of specialization in various jobs at a place of pilgrimage is an important factor to be consideration for the classification of the sacred specialists. In this paper an attempt has been made to reflect the structure, role and socio-



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	religious functions of temple personnel of two Shiva temple of Assam viz. Sukreswara and Umananda temple located in the Guwahati City, Assam, India.
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INTRODUCTION

The temple personnel in Assam encompass a wide range of roles, including priests, assistants, cleaners, administrators and service providers. Together they ensure the effective functioning of the temple activities- ranging from the conduct of daily rituals to ceremonial practices to the maintenance and cleanliness of the temple complex. In many cases their roles are shaped by hereditary practices, customary obligations and community based systems of service reflecting the deeply socio-religious fabric of Assamese society. The nature of specialization in various jobs at a place of pilgrimage is an important factor to be considered for the classification of the sacred specialists. This can be done at the observational level (Vidyarthi, et.al, 1979). The temples have a body of personnel attached to them. These incumbents have their prescribed functions. The temple personnel are known as *sevait*, which are grouped into two distinct sections, the Brahmana personnel and the non-Brahmana personnel. The Brahmana personnel are mainly engaged in the daily and regular worship of the deities and the non-Brahmana personnel are engaged in assisting and guarding the temples and keeping the valuables of the temple safely.

The present study is conducted in the Sukreswara and the Umamanda temple in Guwahati City, Assam, India. The Sukreswara temple is situated on the Southern bank of the mighty river Brahmaputra by the side of Mahatma Gandhi Road in Panbazar of Guwahati. The presiding deity of the temple is Lord Shiva who is appeased there in its phallic form. The hillock on which the temple is located is known as Hastachal hillock. Again, The Umananda temple is located at the Peacock island in the middle of the river Brahmaputra just opposite to the office of the Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup District and the Kachari Ghat in Guwahati. The temple is situated on a hilly island named Bhasmachala in the midst of the river Brahmaputra of Guwahati city. Bhasmachala literally means “the hill of ashes” (*bhasma* means ash and *achala* means hill). The word *bhasma* is also sometimes used to mean misfortune and unsuccessful venture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In India the different castes and communities with their varied cultural patterns offer a rich field of research on religion. Before anthropology was formally taught in Indian Universities studies on religion was mainly made by the travelers, missionaries and self-made scholars, who made textual analysis or discussed the diverse religious beliefs and practices and queer customs on the basis of their empirical data (Dubois, 1928). Gradually elaborate ethnographic study of particular community or on religion was made on different tribal communities and often attempts were also made to correlate the religious beliefs and practices and social life. Roy’s study on *Changing Oraon Religion*



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(1928) and Bose's articles on '*Hindu Method of Tribal Absorption*' (1941) are worth mentioning in this respect.

Bhoiwmik (1960) studied four temples in the district of Midnapore, West Bengal, particularly the iconography, caste participation and service pattern, mode of offerings and purpose of worship. In two of his study temple, the priest belonged to the low social status, Manji- fisherman and Lodha and in another temple the priest belonged to the Utkal Bahmin caste. On the other hand in one of the temple offerings of low castes were not accepted. It was Vidyarthi (1961) who studied the '*Sacred Complex of Hindu Gaya*', located in the ancient cultural zone of Magadha. Several terms were used by Vidyarthi such as sacred cluster, sacred segment and sacred centers constituting the Sacred Geography of Gaya, local, regional, and universal to indicate the scope of some of the elements of sacred complex; and folk, sanskritic, feudalistic and proletarian to describe the nature of the priesthood. The main findings of Gaya are based on trichomatic inter-related phenomena, viz., the sacred geography, the sacred performances and the sacred specialists. Redfield's (1955) concept of civilization as complex structure of great and little traditions and his collaborator Milton Singer's (1955) definition of 'culture centre', 'cultural specialist', 'cultural performance', etc, which he attempted in his study of Madras and Mc. Kim Marriot (1955) and D. S. Cohn's (1958) concept of 'networks and centres in integration of Indian civilization offered useful guidelines to the study of field situation in Gaya. In the study of Gaya an attempt was also made for the first time to approach a Hindu place of pilgrimage as a dimension of Indian civilization. Jha (1971) studied the *Sacred Complex of Janakpur*, developing a concept and model spelt out by Vidyarthi, in his study of sacred complex of Gaya and then a sacred town Ratanpur (1973) in Chattisgarh, M.P. He also noted the pilgrims and their composition, fair and festivals of Ratanpur (1974) while studying the pilgrims and centre of pilgrimage at Chattisgarh, M.P. and observe that the sacred centre of Hindu place of pilgrimage in itself is an intricate combination of the great and little tradition.

In context of Assam there are only a few studies have been conducted on the socio-cultural and folkloristic aspect temple. Neog (1969) made a preliminary study on the sacred places of Assam and published a book entitled '*Pabitra Asam*' where he had discussed very briefly about the locations, history, myths and legends of many temples of Assam.

Das (1983) conducted his work on '*Punyabhumi Hajo: A Religio- Cultural Study of the Sacred Complex of Hajo*' in which he discussed about the about the various religious and cultural aspects associated with the different temples and shrines located in this area. Sarma (1988) worked on '*Architecture of Assam*' which dealt with the architectural aspect of the historical temple of Assam. He made an objective analysis of the ancient architectural tradition from artistic as well as structural point of view. Chaudhury (1999) studied '*Temples and Shrines in and around Guwahati: An Sociological and Folkloristic Exploration*' where she had discussed about the different aspects associated with temples and shrines such as myths, legends and history associated with them, rituals



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and festivals, the economic aspects, the religious specialists, changing pattern of Architecture and the social activities carried out by the temple authorities. In 2002 he had made another study on the “*Holy Shrine of Assam*” in which he discussed mainly about the history and locations of the different temples of Assam along with the description of many Buddhists, Christian and Islamic shrines. Adhikary (2001) studied the “*A History of the Temples of Kamrup and Their Management*” in which he has discussed about the history of the temples of Kamrup district of Assam along with the nature of management of the temples during the pre-independence and post independence periods of India.

METHODOLOGY

For this research work this researcher has adopted both the primary and secondary sources of data. For collection of data, the emphasis is given on contextual studies, while full advantages of the relevant historical and textual materials are also taken. Data are collected mainly in the form of field note and also by the methods and techniques advocated by various anthropologists. For the intended study both qualitative and quantitative data are collected depending on the methods like structured interview, observation method, case study method, genealogical method, etc. Since adequate research materials are not available in printed form, so the investigator had collected most of the data by applying observation method and interview method. Collection of the data on pilgrims, local shops, beggars, priest, and *sadhus* are collected by some preordained schedules. Data on the pilgrims are collected by random sampling. Besides the various methods mentioned above, informal chats with the local inhabitants and pilgrims will also made in order to gather more information about the religious life of the people and their attachments to the temple. The investigator is also depended on the secondary sources of data for this endeavour such as books, thesis, journals, papers, magazines, internet, etc.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Temple personnel of the Sukreswara temple

The personnel connected to the Sukreswara temple are also classified into Brahmanas and the non-Brahmana groups. In the temple the activities of worshipping of the deity is conducted under the supervision of *bardeuri* (main priest) and the *paiks* (non –Brahmana personals). In the earlier days there was a special category of personnels *dolois* who was appointed as the head of the temple. All the civil and the revenue matters of the temple were managed by the *doloi*. As per the ruling method of the Ahoms he was the custodian of all the properties, moveable and immoveable properties and the receiver of all donations from the royal house or from the commoners. In the post independence period referring to the notice of the Deputy Commissioner some of the *bar deuries* of number of temples attempted to replace the existing *doloi* became successful to continue his service in the temple purchasing the votes of the *bar deuries*. As a result the Government Policy to recover the arrear of the revenue was a failure. Under such circumstances the land of the temples of



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Sukreswara and Janardana brought under the attachment by the Deputy Commissioner in exercise of section 69B of The Assam Land and Revenue Regulations, 1886, and thus after keeping the *dolois* in suspension from collection of the land revenues leading those in arrear (Adhikary,2008).

The temple personnel from brahmana caste in the Sukreswara temple

(i) Bardeuries

Bardeuries are the priests of the temple. They are entrusted with the responsibility of daily and regular worship of the temple. They served the temple in *pala* (turn over) system. On the *pala* days they attended the temple and stayed in the temple complex till the end of the days of his *pala* period. In the Sukreswara temple all the *bardeuries* are from Chamata village of Nalbari district, Muktapura area of Kamrup district and Gaumura village of Kamrup district. At present there are thirteen(13) numbers of bar deuries are working in the temple; three (3) are from Chamata village of Nalbari District, eight (8) are from Muktapur area of Kamrup district and two (2) are from Gaumura village of Kamrup district, Assam For a proper management of *nitya* (daily) and *naimittika* (special) rituals there is a system of turn over duties popularly known as *pala*. As per this arrangement each of the three *bardeuri* families has the right to perform the worship ten days cycle in a month. The *pujari* (priest) also perform the *manani puja* (occasional rituals) in the temple as per *pala* (turn over duties) system as managed by the temple management committee.

The fuction of the bardeuri of the temple is the daily and regular worshiping the main deity of the temple. As per the rule and regulation of the temple management committee they works in the temple on *pala* (turn over duties) basis. During their pala days they reside within the temple complex till the end of the pala days. On taking a case of a bardeuri of the studied temple, Sri Ramesh Sarma (65years) an inhabitant of Muktapur village of Kamrup district Assam, he said that his pala days he generally comes in the month of Chot (March- April). During his pala days he reside in the temple complex till the end of his pala is over and in every morning he gets up very early and takes bath. After taking bath he always utters the Gayatri *mantra* which is believed to be the essence of the Vedas. In the *brahma muhurta* (usually between 4.00a.m-4.30a.m) he along with the *athparia* (guard of the temple) enters inside the temple for the regular worship of the deity. The *athparia* cleans the sanctum sanctorum and gives a ceremonial bath to the deity. After that he arranges all the ritual materials such as flowers, a pot containing water, a pot of milk, leaves of wood apple plant, incense stick, lamps, vermilion etc. needed for worshipping the deity. He lights the lamps and burn the incense stick and appeased the deity by offering *naivedya* (food offering to the deity consisting of mainly soaked gram and fruits). He remains inside the sanctum sanctorum and offers blessing to the pilgrims till the offerings of *anna bhoga* to the deity. At about 12.30 p.m-1.00 p.m he offers the *anna bhoga* to the deity and he also takes the *bhoga* along with the other priests of the temple. Again, in between 6.00p.m -6.30p.m he offers *sandhya arati* i.e the ritual performed in the evening by waving



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the incense stick and burning incense powder to the deity. After offering *sandhya arati* he again performs his duty in the temple till the closing of the main door of the temple at about 9p.m.

(ii) Bhoga Randhani

The duty of the *bhoga randhani* is to prepare meal for the deities. There are twelve (12) *bhoga randhani* in the temple; six (6) from Muktapur village of Kamrup district, four (4) from Chamata village of Nalbari district and two (2) from Gaumura village of Kamrup district Assam. The *bhog randhanis* of the temple belongs to the Brahmin Gotra and their occupation is hereditary. On taking a case of a *bhograndhani*, Sri Purna Sarma (65years) resides in the Muktapur village of Kamrup district Assam. He belongs to a Brahmin family of Gautam *gotra* (clan). His father Late Gopikanta Sarma was also a priest of the Sukreswara temple. He works in the temple as a *bhoga randhani* since 30 years back. He also performs his duty in the temple on *pala* (turn over duty) basis. His turn comes generally in the month of *Puh* (December-January) and *Magh* (January-February). His principal duty in the temple is to prepare the *anna bhoga* (cooked rice with pulse and vegetable curry) for the deity. Apart from this he also prepares the feast for the various occasional rituals such as *annaprassanna* (first solid food feeding ceremony), *upanayana* (initiation ceremony), marriage etc. He earn his livelihood only by performing this duty in the temple and earn Rs.15,000-20,000 per month from the *pranami* (cash received from the devotees for his service) received from the devotees. □

Temple personnels from non-brahmana caste

The temple personnel from the non-brahmana caste are collectively known as *paiks*. They also carry out their duties on turn over basis.

(i) Athparia

Athparia is the guard of the temple. His duty is to watch the deity throughout the eight *praharas* (one *prahara* means three hours) of the day. The ornaments and the other valuables inside the temple are under the custody of *athparia*. After taking bath the *athparia* enter to the temple early in the morning for the ceremonial cleansing of the *garbha griha* (sanctum sactorum) and the *shivalinga* (phallic form of Lord Shiva). After the ceremonial cleansing of the *garbhagriha* only the main priest worship the deity. There are four (4) *athparia* in the temple; one (1) from Muktapur village of Kamrup district three (3) are from Chamata village of Nalbari district.

On taking a case study of an *athparia* named Sri Haren Kalita (45 years) he said that he is an inhabitant of Chamata village of Nalbari district Assam. He belongs to Kashyap *gotra* (clan) of Kalita caste. Regarding his function in the temple, his principal duty in the temple is to assist the *bar deuri* in the time of worshipping the main deity. He works in the temple on *pala* basis as like the other temple personnel of the temple. During his *pala* days he resided within the temple complex and



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provides service to the temple. On his *pala* days, he gets up early in the morning and takes bath. After taking bath he opens the main door of the temple. Before opening the temple he first gives a symbolic clap for three times to awake the deity and after that he enters inside the sanctum sanctorum temple along with the main priest. He first cleans the sanctum sanctorum and gives a ceremonial bath to the *shivalinga* . After that the main priest arranges all the materials needed for the daily worship of the deity and he assist the priest throughout the whole day till the closing of the main door of the temple.

Table 1: Temple personals in the sukreswara temple

Sl. No	Name of the post	Sex	Caste	No. of personnels presently working	Duty assigned	Period of duty
1	<i>Bardeuri</i>	Male	Brahmin	13	Worshipping of the main deity	Two months
2.	<i>Bhaga-Randhani</i>	Male	Brahmin	12	Preparing the <i>anna-bhoga</i> for the deity and for the devotees	Two months
3.	<i>Athparia</i>	Male	Kalita	4	Guard of the temple and assist the principal priest	Two months

The life style of the specialists of the Sukreswara temple

It has been already discussed about the existing differentiation on the basis of caste, language, sect and functional role in the temple complex. Irrespective of all these differentiation, they are found to make a primary or secondary income by their participation in different services of the temple. During the *pala dinas* (days of their turn) they perform their hereditary sacred performances in the temple. The *bar deuries* of the Sukreswara temple are mainly from Chamata village of Nalbari district, Muktapur area of Kamrup district and Goumura village of Kamrup district. There are the provision of *pujari griha* (residence of the priest) inside the temple complex and the priest resides their on their *pala* days. These houses are made of brick and cement . On the basis of the pattern of residential location, the sacred specialists may be classified into three categories, those having residences around the boundary of the Sukreswara temple, those having their residences in their own locality, and those whose residences are scattered in multiethnic locality. The secretary of the temple resides in the close proximity of the temple i.e they belong to the first category of group. Most of the



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priests are fall under the second category who reside in their original habitat of their community dominance viz. in Chamata, Muktapur and Gaumura. In most cases the sacred specialists have retained their ancestral houses and among them are the Brahmins and the *Bharalis* of Chamata of Nalbari district. In the third category fall the sacred specialists who tie the sacred thread on the wrist of the devotees and the sellers of the integrated materials of performing rituals in the temple.

(i) Family life

The family life the sacred specialists of the Sukreswara temple are more and less homogeneous. All of them lead a patriarchal and patrilineal family life. The sacred specialists irrespective of their caste and language have preserved their traditional custom of inheritance of parental property. After the death of specialists the property is always divided among the sons. The father is the head of the family and after his death his eldest son succeeds him. In their original habitat the joint family system is more prevalent while the younger generation of the sacred specialists shows an inclination towards the nuclear family.

(ii) Food and drink

Despite differences in caste, language, occupation and economic status, a number of similarities are observed among the sacred specialists. Rice is the staple food of the sacred specialists which is generally taken with pulse and vegetable curries. The *bardeuries* of the temple previously strictly vegetarian, they are mostly vegetarian but now a days some of them started to take non-vegetarian food also such as fish and mutton, but avoid chicken. The younger generation of their family started to take chicken also along with the other non-vegetarian food items. The non-Brahmin group of the temple generally takes non-vegetarian food items such as fish, egg, mutton and chicken.

(iii) Dress and dialects

The sacred specialists of the Sukreswara temple make a distinction in their dress in the occasion of performing rituals and on non-performing rituals. The dresses which are used in general days are not use during the time of performing rituals. While performing rituals the main priest and the other assistant priests garbed by red coloured silken dhoti and red or yellow coloured silken or cotton *chadar* (wrapper cloth) on their shoulder where the symbol of 'OM' is printed all around the chadar. The *bhoga randhani* also wear a red coloured *dhoti* and take a *gamusa* (hand woven Assamese towel). Inside the temple complex none of them wear any footwear. In the day to day life the sacred specialists put on dress of their own choice. The older generation prefers to wear white coloured *dhoti* and *kurta* while some of them also wear trouser and shirts. The younger generation prefers to wear modern dresses like trousers, shirts and also put on shoes.

The sacred specialists of the temple belong to two linguistic categories, Assamese speaking and Hindi speaking group. The Hindi speaking group is mainly from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. They



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are not appointed by the Temple Management Committee. The Assamese speaking group is mainly from Nalbari and some other places of Kamrup district of Assam. Both the groups of sacred specialists are found in a compromising stage. The Assamese speaking group can speak Hindi language fluently while the Hindi speaking group have the ability to speak somehow communicate in Assamese language. Such compromising and international natures of sacred specialist are also mark in their use of language with the pilgrims and among themselves.

Temple specialists of the Umananda temple

The Umananda temple has a body of personnels attached to it and they have their own pristine functions. The personnels connected to Umananda temple can be grouped into two categories: Brahmanas and non-Brahmanas, who are collectively known as *sevayets*. There are several type of temple specialists who earn their livelihood partially and wholly by offering some kind of services to the temple. The Brahmanas are locally known as *purohit* and the outsiders address them as *pujari* and *pandit*. They are the personnels mainly involved in the priestly duties.

Temple specialists from the brahmana group

The priests of the Umananda temple can be classified into two groups *bar deuries* (main priest) and *deuries* (assistant priest).

(i) Bar deuries

The religious head of the temple who is attached with the function of worshipping the main deity of the temple is called *bar deuri*. They are locally known as *purohit* and outsiders address them as *pujari* or *pandit*. As like the Sukrewara temple the *bar deuries* of the Umananda temple are also entrusted with the responsibility of daily and regular worship of the temple. They served the temple in *pala* (turn over) system. On the *pala* days they attended the temple and stayed in the temple complex till the end of the days of his *pala* period. They are mainly from the Chepti village of Kamrup district, Helacha village of Nalbari district and Pacharia village of Kamrup district. The priests of the Chepti village have their turn (*pala*) from the month of Ahar (June-July) to Kati (October-Naovember) and again in the month of Fagun (February- March) to chot (March – April) , Helacha village has their turn from the month of Aghon (November-December) to Magha (January-February) and Pasaria village has their turn in the month of Bohag (April –May) and Jeth (May-June).

(ii) Deuri

The deuries are the temple personnel attached to the function of various priestly duties of the other adjacent shrines near the main temple, viz., Hara –Gauri temple, Chandrasekhar temple, Ganesha temple, Baidyanath temple and Hamuman temple. They also assist the main priest in rituals of worship. Sometimes in the absence of the *bardeuri* some of them also perform the rituals of the



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main temple. They are mainly involved in the various ritual activities of the temple and for a proper management of the *nitya puja* (daily worship) and *naimittika puja* (occasional worship) there is a system of turn of duties popularly known as *palla*.

(ii) Bhoga randhani

The personnel who prepare the *bhoga* (cooked rice offered to the deity) for the deities and the other personnels of the temple is known as *bhoga randhani*.

The non-brahmana personnel of the Umananda temple

The non-Brahmana temple specialists of the temple are collectively known as *paiks*. These *paiks* also carry out their duties on a *palla* (turn of duties) basis. The *athparia*, *bharali*, and *khataniar* help in different ways for management and carrying out the ritual in the temple.

(i) Athparia

An *athparia* look after the sacred performances of the temple throughout the day and night. According to the Hindues a day and a night consists of eight *prahara* or *par* (three hours) so four *pars* each in a day and in a night. The ornaments and the other valuables inside the temples are under the custody of *athparia*. The main duty of the *athparia* is the ceremonial cleansing of the main deity of the temple. After cleansing the deity he covers it with a yellow coloured cotton cloth and offers flower and vermilion to it. He also assists the priest in performing the daily rituals in the temple. At present there are only two *athparias* in the temple and they are from Raipat area of Sonapur village of Kamrup district, Assam.

(ii) Bharali

The *bharali* is the person who maintains the store house of the temple. He brings out *bhoga* and *naivedya* (sacred offering like gram, fruits, flowers, etc.,) from the store and offers these to the concerned people for the *puja* and to the *bhoga randhani*, who prepares *bhoga* for the deities. At present there are three *bharalis* in the temple. They are from the Chandapur village of Kamrup district Assam.

The specialists of the Umananda temple belonging to the Brahman caste are mainly from three clans, viz., Bharatdwaja, Parasara and Shandilya. The *bar deuris* and the *duries* of the temple consider themselves to be the descendents of the two main priests of the Umananda temple, namely Sudaman and Kamdeva, originally from Kaunaja, who were appointed by the Ahom king Shiva Singha during his ruling period. Shiva Singha appointed them to look after the various ritual activities of the temple. Sudaman and Kamdeva were also given some land in the Helacha village of Nalbari district and Chepti village near Changsari of Kamrup district, Assam, for their settlement and livelihood. At present all the Brahman personnel of the temple belonging to Parasara clan claim themselves to be the descendents of priest Sudamana. Recently, another new branch has observed within temple



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complex from Shandilya *gotra* of Pacharia, district Kamrup, Assam, who are also associated with the various priestly activities of the temple. Today the most of the younger generation are not much interested with the priestly duties and they are interested towards the modern type of occupations.

There exist a number of differentiations among the specialists of the Umananda temple on the basis of caste, language and functions. Irrespective of all these differentiation, they are found to make a primary and secondary income by participating directly or indirectly in various sacred performances of the temple. However, none of them live totally on their earnings made from the sacred performances. During the non-*palla dinas*, days when one does not have his turn of assignment, they earn their livelihood by pursuing some secondary occupations like cultivation, business, or by doing other services, which cut across the caste rigidity. During the *palla dinas* (turn of services) when they perform their hereditary sacred performances as the religious specialists of the temple, their lifestyle is basically molded by the institution of the temple in a specific manner. The cash accumulated inside the main temple and the other adjacent temples is shared among the respective personnels involved in the duties by leaving a nominal amount for the authorities.

Table 2: Temple personnels in the Umananda temple

Sl. no.	Name of the post	sex	caste	No of. Personnels working	Duty Assigning	Period of duty
1.	<i>Bardeurie</i>	Male	Brahmin	18	Worshipping of the main duty	Not fixed
2	Deuri	Male	Brahmin	Not fixed	Worshipping of the other deities located within the temple complex.	Depend on their turn on duties
3.	Bhoga Randhani	Male	Brahmin	2	Preparing of annabhoga for the deities and the devotees	Throughout the year
4	Athporia	Male	Kalita	2	Guard the temple and assist the principal priest	Throughout the year
5	Bharali	Male	Kalita	3	Maintains the store house of the temple	Throughout year

The life style of the temple specialists of the Umananda temple

The priests of the temple do not get any salary from the temple authority. In case of any big cash donation and donation of valuable materials like gold and silver ornaments or materials, etc. offered in the name of the temple deity is directly deposited with the temple authority. Sometimes



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the personnels of the temple also get *dakshina* (cash offering) for their services in the *naimittik puja* (special worship) on which the temple authority has no right. The temple specialists of Umananda temple make a distinction, in some way or the other, in the use of dress during the occasion of performing rituals and in day to day life. The dress which is used for day to day life is not put during the time of performing rituals in the temple. The main priests and the other priests of the Umananda temple wear mainly yellow or white coloured cotton *dhoti* , a cloth used to cover the lower part of the body by the males and keep a yellow or saffron colored *chadar*, a cloth use to cover the upper part of the body during the time of ritual performances. Sometimes they also take a *gamocha* (hand woven Assamese towel) on the shoulders. However , *athparia*, *khataniar*, *bharali*, *bhoga randhnai*, etc., do not follow any particular dress code that can be used only in the occasion of ritual performances. On the occasion of ritual performances they use to wear white or red coloured *dhoti* and take a *gamocha* (hand woven Assamese towel) on the shoulder that they can be used during the non-ritual purpose also. Now- a –days the impact of modernization has been observed among them, particularly among the youngsters, and as they use to wear modern dress like trousers, shirts, T-shirts, etc. when they are not involved in any ritualistic activities.

CONCLUSION

The specialists of both the temples are categorized into two groups- Brahmana and the Paiks who are belonging to different castes groups, other than Brahmanas. The remarkable feature of this arrangement is that various persons have specialized in ritualistic occupations and maintain more and less maintained their traditional caste boundary. However, the non-Brahmana groups are found to be more relax in case of their caste related occupations. In the Sukreswara temple it is observed that apart from temple personnels belonging to Assamese speaking linguistic group , one Hindi speaking group is also found there who used to tie sacred thread of red and yellow colour on the hands of the visitors. As like the temple personnel the pilgrims and the devotees are also from various castes, sects, status and linguistic groups. Although there are the differences in castes, sects and linguistic aspects, these differences do not make any complication in the temple as all are the worshippers of a particular deity in a particular sacred complex.

In the present study a contextual study of the level of transformation and modification in the life style of the sacred specialists is also made . It has been observed that in regard of the sacred centres, sacred symbols , sacred sacrifices and sacred performances , earlier customs and traditions are continued and strictly followed. The sacred beliefs greatly contribute in the continuity of these traditions. The sacred specialists have also not given up their hereditary involvement in the temples. But many members of the sacred specialists mainly the youngsters of these families have deviated from the involvement in the temple activities. Being affected by the modern source of income , limitation of income from the temple and the higher education of the sacred personnels mainly the younger generation are found to have engaged themselves in various government , semi- government



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and private services and business. In addition to this it is also observed that the youngsters have adopted modern dresses and education. Thus it has been observed that the larger universe of the Hindu civilization has also affected the style of the sacred specialists.

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