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Representation Of Vaishnavism In The KālikāPurāṇA : An Insight

(Dr.Rituparna Manikyal,Assistant Professor,Department of History,D.K.D.College,Dergaon.)

Abstract

The Kālikāpurāṇa, a religious text written in Sanskrit is of much historical and cultural value for studying the history of ancient Assam. It is considered as the most important document of Kamarupa for writing the history of the region. Therefore many historians and scholars referred Kālikāpurāṇa while discussing the various aspects of ancient Assam. The present study is an attempt to study how Vaisnavism, being a contemporary religious sect with Saktisim and Saivism was presented in the Kālikāpurāṇa. Further it will also try to discuss and develop a clear understanding about the rites and rituals mentioned in the text which were practiced while worshipping Vishnu.

Keywords: Kālikāpurāṇa, Vaisnavism, Sanskrit, Ancient.

INTRODUCTION:

The Kālikāpurāṇa, a religious text written in Sanskrit is of much historical and cultural value for studying the history of ancient Assam. It is placed in the 9th and 12th position among the list of different Upa-Purana provided by the Pauranic sources. Brahmadharma Purana placed it in the 9th position (Brahmadharma Purana, Ch-I, p-25-26.). While the Kurma Purana placed it in the 12th position. (Kurma Purana, Ch-I, p-17-20).The Upa Puranas are regarded as the subordinate or supplements of the Mahapuranas by the Puranic authorities. R.C.Hazra, in his Studies in the Upapurāṇas (Vol-I,p-214) forwarded a theoretical assumption regarding the origin of the Upapuranas. He states that originally the Puranas were meant for preserving the traditional myths, legends and ancient lore along with the genealogies of historical figures. But in course of time the aforesaid characteristics have been changed by the Smarta Sectaries, who undertook it for successfully propagating their own ideas among the people who were gradually losing respect for the Vedas and the Brahmanical rules of life and conduct under the influence of the followers of heretical sects, like the Buddhist,

Jains and Ajivikas. Hazra further states that considering the influence of the Puranic literature over the masses, the Smarta Sectaries took up the work of writing Puranas, which resulted in an increase in the numbers of Puranas. The new compositions failed to maintain the orthodox norms of the Puranas and to give the character of a Purana, the authors of the new composition included in their writings topics like creation, recreation and cosmic cycle etc. They did not attempt to include such important matters like genealogy and also tried to glorify local deities to introduce the local rites and rituals, customs and manners and to advocate for their respective religious faiths. The orthodox followers of the Puranic tradition were not in favour of giving equal status to these newly composed Puranas with the established works. On the other hand, these new Puranas were gradually increasing in number and therefore they came to be considered as the supplements to the established eighteen Maha Puranas. These later Puranas were brought under one common category and were canonized as the Upapuranas. Dharmeswar Chutia also believes that the Upapuranas were composed for the purpose of fulfilling the needs of the local religious sects. (D.Chutia, Kālikāpurāṇa: A Socio-Cultural Study,p-19) Hence the Kālikāpurāṇa, is a valuable text that contains the historical origin of the name Pragjyotisha and Kamarupa, glory of the Goddess Kāmākhya along with the political, cultural and local topographical details.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Many historians and scholars have referred to Kālikāpurāṇa while discussing the various aspects of ancient Assam. B.K. Kakati in his book **The Mother Goddess Kāmākhya** highlighted the religious sects prevalent in Kamarupa. His work is an introduction towards the study of assimilation of brahmanical and non-brahmanical practices under Saktism. Another text **The Social History of Kamarupa** Vol-I, II, III by N.N. Vasu, 1998, is a relevant work. He has tried to discuss the historical value of Kālikāpurāṇa and Yoginītantra while giving an account of the society of Kamarupa. **A Cultural History of Assam**, by B.K. Barua is another book which deals with the cultural history of early Assam with references to the various sources. **The Comprehensive History of Assam** Vol-I, edited by H.K. Barpujari is of much value in rewriting the various aspects of early Assam. **Pre-Ahom Assam** by Nayanjot Lahiri (1991) throws adequate light on the history of Assam during the pre-Ahom era. The literary and epigraphic records have been consulted in writing the text, though the book is primarily based on the inscriptions prior to 13th century C.E.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

The present study is an attempt to study how Vaisnavism, being a contemporary religious sect with Saktisim was presented in the Kalikapurana. Further it will also discuss about the rites and rituals mentioned in the text which were practiced while worshipping Vishnu.

METHODOLOGY:

The Kalikapurana is a vast religious-ritualistic text comprising 90 chapters. It contains a detailed account of Saktism, Vaishnavism and Saivism as popular faiths prevalent among the people of early Assam. This study will concentrate only on Vaishnavism and will try to interpret the subject both from literary and archeological perspective. For the study both primary and secondary sources have been consulted. In case of primary sources it is difficult to explore the original manuscripts of the text, therefore the edited and translated volume of Kalikapurana by Prof. B.N.Shastri has been utilized as primary source for the study. Secondary sources have been collected through different books, journals etc. Historical method has been followed for the study.

DISCUSSION:

Vaisnavism, one of the popular cults of Hinduism refers to the worship of Vishnu in any of his several forms as the chief deity. The different textual evidences and temple sculptures indicate that Vaisnava cult gained equal popularity along with the other cults in Kamarupa. The epigraphic evidences such as the Umachal rock inscription of Surendravarman provides the earliest evidence of Vaisnavism in Kamarupa.

Being a Sakta Upa-purana Kalikapurana contains many rites and rituals related to Vaishnavism. The Naraka legend of Kālikāpurāṇa mentions that it was none other than Vishnu who installed Naraka to the throne of Kamarupa and enjoined him to worship the goddess Kāmākhya who dwelt on the Nilachala hills. Thus Vaishnavism appears to have emerged in the region along with Saktism.

The Upapurana mentions the worship of Vishnu in his different forms such as Hayagriva Mādhava, Matsya-Madhana, Pāṇḍunātha, Varāha-Mādhava and Vāsudeva. It also prescribes the eight-syllabled, twelve-syllabled and eighteen-syllabled mantras of the Pāncarātra rituals (where mantra, yantra and other tantric procedures were employed) for worshipping Vishnu. In the Seventy-eighth chapter of the Kālikāpurāṇa various manifestations of Vishnu has been mentioned while describing the holy places of Kamarupa. Here Vishnu is described in the form of Hayagriva, who resides in the Mani-Kuta hills, which is identified as present Hajo and there Hayagriva killed the fever demon Jarāsura. Moreover it mentions that to the east of the hill called Rakshakuta, Mahadeva and Vishnu, resides there in the form of Bhairava and he is celebrated as Pandunath. Further in the hills of Citrahara, Vishnu resides in the form of a Boar (Varāha) and then on the eastern bank of the river Lalita, he resides in the form of a linga (phallus) and lastly in the region of Dikkaravasini he was worshipped in the form of Vasudeva.

A complete chapter has been dedicated to the worship of Vishnu in his Vasudeva form. The Upa-Purana while describing the sacred places of Kamarupa also refers to the holy places of the Vaishnava cult. It indicates that Vishnu is superior to Siva and Kāmākhya is none but Vishnu's Yoga-maya. So, R.C. Hazra in his book Studies in the Upa purana mentions that in the Kalikapurana(Chapter 62, p-904ff) "Vishnu has been

given a superior position by an identification of the primordial Kalika with his yoga-nidra and Maya". The early and contemporary epigraphic records also indicate the existence of Vishnu worship in the Brahmaputra Valley. The early rulers of Kamarupa were the followers of Shiva though they claimed their origin from Vishnu in his different incarnations. In the Barganga Rock Inscription, King Bhutivarman is described as a 'Paramabhāgavata', which implies that he was a great worshipper of Vishnu. In the Doobi and Nidhanpur Copper-plates of Bhaskarvarman, there is a reference to Vishnu as the holder of the chakra (wheel) in his Varāha (boar) incarnation. Even the donees of the Nidhanpur grant also signifies the popularity of the Vaishnava faith as they bear the names of different forms of Vishnu, for e.g. Narayanasvamin Vishnusvamin, Janardansvamin etc. Apart from literature and epigraphs, the architectural and sculptural remains also bear witness to the existence of the Vaishnava faith. Among the contemporary sculptural remains are ninth century C.E. images of Vishnu found near Deopāni at Golaghat. Another bell-metal image of Vishnu, belonging to 11th - 12th century C.E. has been recovered from an old temple near Dibrugarh. The 12th cen. image of Vishnu in his eternal sleep also has been found in the Aśvagrānta temple.

Kalikapurana also refers to the various methods and practices adopted for worshipping Vishnu. According to Kalikapurana, Pāncarātra method was adopted for worshipping Vishnu where Mantra, Vijā, Yantra Nyāsa, Mudrā were the different ways of offering worship to the god. Kālikāpurāna explains three kinds of mantras for worshipping the god. These are the bija mantra, anga mantra and pratyanga mantra. The bijamantra states - Om' namo nārāyana, the anga mantra states - Om. namo bhagavate Vasudevāya and the pratyangamantra - Om' namo Vais ' hnave surapataye mahābalaya sv-ahā. It is noteworthy that the Kālikāpurāna also mentions the nārada pañcārātra mantrā and purusā sukta stuti for worshipping Vasudeva. It is doubtful to what extent such mantras were practiced for worshipping the god in the latter phases. It may be the growth of Neo-Vaisnavite movement that reduced the practice of such mantras. The worship of Vishnu in Vasudeva form was relatively popular. As stated in the previous discussion, three kinds of mantras were popularly uttered while offering worship to Vasudeva. In these mantras Vasudeva has been stated as white as the full moon, syama (dark) as Nilotpala and Dadhivamana (milky) as the full moon. The bija-mantra states that Vasudeva is as white as the full moon, he is seated on the king of birds (garuda) having four arms, his body is wrapped with three pieces of yellow cloth, he holds a mace in his upper right hand; a fully blossomed lotus in the upper left hand, a sharp discus and a conch in the two lower hands. He wears a very bright crown on his head and a pair of earrings of variegated colour. He is flanked by the goddess of wealth (Lakshmi) on his right and Saraswati to his left. The Anga-mantra reflects Vasudeva as syama as Nilotpala, he has four arms holding a lotus in the right upper hand and a mace in the lower one, an unique discus in the lower left hand and a conch in the upper left hand. On the other hand, the pratyanga-mantra describes Dadhivamana form of Vasudeva which is white as the full moon. He holds a pot full of nectar in his left hand and in his right hand a gold plate containing cooked rice with curd. He is seated on a lotus in the midst of the realm of the moon. Hayagriva Madhava is another form of Vishnu. A legend associated with the origin of Hayagriva-Madhava is

described in the Kālikāpurāṇa, according to which Vishnu in the form of Hayagriva resides in the hills of Manikuta, which is located at present Hajo. Vishnu assumed this form (Hayagriva Madhava) after killing the demon Jarasura and started to reside there for the benefit of gods, men, and demons. But in other literary texts like Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa, Mahābhārata, Harivaṃśa and the Vāmana Purāṇa, legends related to the origin of Hayagriva incarnation are marked certain dissimilarities. The Harivaṃśa states that Krishna, after killing Naraka, Nisunda and Hayagriva went to Manikuta or Mani Parvata. Again the Kālikāpurāṇa in its chapter 41 refers to Hayagriva while explaining the Naraka legend. It can be observed from these legends that the Tantra writers have tried to display the legends of Hayagriva according to the Puranas. Dr. B.K. Kakati states that 'this form of Hayagriva was traced from the Buddhist Tantras as in the Buddhist tantras a god named 'Hayagriva' finds special mention and at some places he was also addressed as 'Tārā'. But Maheswar Neog denied the Buddhist origin of Hayagriva on the grounds that in the Kalikapurana Hayagriva has been exhibited as white as camphor and the kunda flower, seated on a white lotus and has four arms, his two left hands are in the posture of granting boons, in one of his right hands he holds a white lotus in the other hand a book. Thus this form of Vishnu was completely dissimilar to the Mahayana Hayagriva of Buddhism. Though it might be possible that the increased influence of tantric Buddhism over the prevalent religion resulted in the emergence of 'Hayagriva' in the Buddhist Tantras and even in the temple of Hayagriva Madhava at Hajo, no traces of Buddhist influence has been noticed. It is believed that the temple has been found in a jungle and in 1550 A.D. it was renovated by Naranarayan by granting lands, pujari, gayanbayan and nati. The Darrang Raj Vamsavalis and the temple inscription described that in 1583, Raghudeva Narayana reconstructed the temple of Hayagriva-Madhava. Therefore it was certain that, at the time of the composition of Kalikapurana a temple name Hayagriva existed. Thus, the worship of the 'Hayagriva' form of Vishnu has been patronized and popularized by the Koch rulers in Kamarupa, which is still in practice today. In the Kalikapurana various mantras have been prescribed for the worship of Hayagriva. The **Kalikapurana** states that Hayagriva was worshipped by uttering the bija mantra. i.e. Om namo nārāyaṇa. According to Yoginītantra Purushasukta mantra, Krishna bija mantra and other Vaishnava mantras are also to be uttered while worshipping Vishnu. Kālikāpurāṇa again mentions that to obtain siddhi one should chant the Hayagriva mantra. By offering wheat cooked with milk and performing oblation with ghee one should carry on purascarnava.

Thus Vaisnavism in the ancient Assam became intricately linked with Saktism and Tantricism. Finally, this study shows that the existing religious cults, rites and practices in lieu of becoming a force of social change became a ritual centric and complex institution. Animal sacrifice, tantras and mantras became the primary method of worship. Conservatism, exploitation and brahmanical orthodoxy became the regular characteristics of the religious practices. Besides, at that time the prevalence of political instability was also one of the reasons behind the growth of such faiths. So its ability to stimulate social progress also dwindled and the process of framing a broad-based society in the region faced a serious crisis.

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