

Chapter-I Outline of the village

1. Religious aspects

a) From manuscripts

The sample village is one of the 51 sakta-pithas scattered all over the Indian subcontinent. The word "pitha" means "altar", or "seat".¹ The pithas in the various places are supposed to be the dwelling places of the Devi; these are, therefore, also called "devasthanas".² The sakta-pithas have a special significance as sacred places associated with the cult of Sakta. There is a popular myth called "daksha-jyogya" regarding the origins of these pithas, which says that the different limbs of the goddess Sati (one of the incarnations of the goddess Durga) fell in them after she had been cut by the discus (*cakra*) of Vishnu; the worshippers of sakti have made them centres for worshipping the goddess. Every place believed to have part of Sati's body became the centres for the worship of the sakti-cult afterwards. The worship of the mother goddess, which is often under the influence of the indigenous culture of the pre-Aryan races, is represented by the female principle called "sakti". The religious thought of an union between the female principle and the male principle, which is represented by the god Siva as a spouse deity accompanying the goddess, is mainly based on the religious texts of Tantrism.

In spite of popularity of the tradition of the sakta-pithas, the actual number and the location of each pitha are different according to various religious

1 D. C. Sircar, *The Sakta Pithas* (Delhi; MLBD 1973[1948]), p. 3. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford 1899), mentions the word as seat, chair, and "names of various temples erected on the 51 spots where the limbs of Parvati fell after she had been cut to pieces by the discus of Vishnu". P. 629.

2 S. G. Bagchi, *Eminent Indian Śakta Centres in Eastern India: An interdisciplinary study in the background of the pitha of Kalighata, Vakresvara and Kamakhya* (Calcutta; Punthi Pustak, 1980). pp. 1-3.

texts.³ Some of the early Tantric texts, such as, a Sahajiyana text entitled *Catuspithatantra*, and the famous tantric text in Bhuddhism, the *Hevajratantrak*, refer to four pithas. According to the *Kalika-purana*, which is a popular tantric text in the Durgapuja of Bengal, gives an account of seven pithas. Besides, the *Rudrayamala* mentions ten places as principal pithas, the *Jnanarnavatantra* lists eight important pithas, and the *Kularnavatantra* refer eighteen pithas. The *Kubjikatantra*, which is supposed to be a fairly early work discussed later, enumerates the forty-two places as *siddha-pithas*. We also find even a list of one hundred and eight places as pithas in the *Matya-purana*, although the number of the sakta-pithas accepted by the majority at present is fiftyone listed in the *Pithanirnaya*, or *Mahapithanirupana*.

According to Dr. D. C. Sircar, the *Mahapithanirupana* was composed about 1690-1720, which enlisted a number of places in the rural Bengal, and afterwards they became popular with the eminence of the tantric thought in eastern India.⁴ He presumed the fifty-one pithas in the original text of the *Mahapithanirupana* is partially followed the *Kubjikatantra* which is referring the name of forty-two as *siddha-pithas*. By the influence of another text the *Sivacarita*, the verses 48-55 of the *Mahapithanirupana* "were added to the original text at a later date".⁵ These verses included eight names of sakta-pithas later modified; as Nalahati, Kalighata (Kalipitha), Vakresvara, Yasora, Attahas, Nandipura, Lanka, and Virata. These places are mostly famous sakta-pithas of Bengal at present. The names of these pithas correspond to the present place names, namely Nalhati, Bakreshwar, Attahas, and Nandipur in the Birbhum District, Kalipitha near Katwa in the Nadia District, and Yasora near Jessore in the Bangladesh of today. As shown in the evolution of the temple Kalighat in Calcutta, Sircar thinks the Sakta-pithas in Bengal "rose to eminence in the medieval period and became a great rival of the

3 The following discussion is mainly quoted from D. C. Sircar, *The Sakta Pitha*. pp. 3-42.

4 D. C. Sircar, *The sakta Pitha*, p. 24.

5 D. C. Sircar, *The Sakta Pitha*, p. 39. See, also Niguranand, *Mahatiirth Ekannapither Sandhane*. 1978.

north western school” .⁶ Furthermore, it is noteworthy that through the name of the village Kshiragram is not included in this additional list, it is mentioned in the original text of the *Kubjikantra* as a *siddha-pitha*.

The oldest mentioning to the name of “Kshiragram” is supposed to trace back to the verses on the the manuscript; *Kubjikantra* preserved in Asiatic Society, Calcutta as follows:

Kshiragramang Baidyanathang Janiyadbamalocane
Kamarupang Mahapithang Sarbbakamaphalapradam

But, besides in the *Kubjikantra*, we also find references of the village and the goddess in the other Sanskrit literary compositions, such as, the *Niltantra*, the *Rudrayamalatantra*, the *Sivacarita*, the *Saktananda-tarangini*, and the *Mahapithanirupana*.⁷ In the *Tantracuramani*, the the names of the goddess Jugadya and Kshirkanthak as the Bhairabha of the goddess have been mentioned. Also in the *Mangalkabya*, a series of medieval Bengali folk composition, viz., the *Candi-mangal* by Mukundram Cakrabartti, the *Candi-mangal* by Ramanand Jatir, the *Shri-dharma-mangal* by Ghanaram Cakrabartti, the *Dharma-mangal* by Ruparam Cakrabartti, the *Kalika-mangal* by Balaram Cakrabartti, the *Abhaya-mangal* by Ramdas Adak, the *Manasa-mangal* by Ketakadas Kshemanand, the *Dharma-mangal* by Manik Ganguli, and the *Annada-mangal* by Bharatcandra Ray Gunakar references of both the village and the goddess occur.

According to Prof. Satya Narayan Mukhopadhyaye the *Kubjikantra*, discovered in Nepal by Dr. Haraprashad Shastri, was compiled in 6th century.⁸ It is difficult to infer the actual year of the manuscript; but we have discussed already that among

6 D. C. Sircar, *The Sakta Pitha*, p. 24. On the evolution of the temple Kalighat, and its relations with the development of the local trade and market, see Indrani Basu Roy, *Kalighat: Its Impact on Socio-Cultural Life of Hindus* (New Delhi; Gyan 1993).

7 Jageshwar Caudhuri, *Bardhaman; Itihas O Sanskriti*, Tiritiya Khanda (Bengali). Calcutta: Pustak Bipani, 1994. pp. 80-91.

8 Satya Narayan Mukhopadhyaye, ‘Kshiragramer Pracin Oitijjya’, in *Pashcimbanger Puja-Parban O Mela*, Pancham Khandu (Bengali); ed. Ashok Mitra, Govt. West Bengal, 1961.

the popular names of fiftyone of sakta-pithas in the *Mahapithanirupana*, forty-two of the pithas are believed to have originated from the *Kubjikatantra* and eight have been added later in the other version by the influence of the *Sivacaritra*. In the original text of the *Mahapithanirupana*, the names of sakta-pithas corresponding to the present pithas in Bengal are Kalighat (Calcutta), Cattala (Candrasedkhara in Cattagram), Vibhasa (Tamluk), and Kshiragram.⁹ The other seven pithas of Bengal are mentioned after in the later text and the *Sivacaritra*, notwithstanding their present popularity in rural Bengal. It would be, therefore, misleading to make an assumption such as by Dr. S.G. Bagchi that Mukundaram mentioned nine pithas in his *Candi-mangal* even the names of "less known Bengal pithas" such as Kshiragram, "probably because he happened to be a man of place".¹⁰ All what have been said make it clear that the name Kshiragram inherits at least the older tradition along with Kalighat and Tamluk and had acquired more popularity since the medieval period than the other seven names of the pithas, in spite of their present popularity in Bengal.

b) The history of the temple

The most popular epical poem of the goddess Jogadya is the *Jogadyabandana*, which tells that the goddess Sati's toe of right foot fell on to the place where the Jogadya temple (*Jogdya-mandir*) of today is located. The temple was rebuilt around 1730 under the rule of Kirticand, the Maharaja of Bardhaman. According to Shri Jogeshwar Caudhuri, the construction of the temple Jogadya is the first main achievement in the temple making venture of the Maharaja Kirticand during his rule.¹¹ The succeeding monarches followed the zealous aspiration as shown in Appendix-2. In 1732, the Maharaja Kirticand built the temple of Gopeshwar Siva in

9 D. C. Sircar, *The Sakta Pitha*, pp. 35-7. It is very difficult to conclude that the names on manuscripts have to be related with the places which are believed currently as actual sakta pithas such as a case of Kanci (No. 28),

10 S. G. Bagchi, *Eminent Indian Sakta Centres...* p. 7.

11 Jogeshwar Caudhuri, *Bardhamna: Itihas O Sanskriti*. Dbitiya Khanda. pp. 213-4.

the village Baikunthapur, which is the original place of the Raj family in Bardhaman and the temple of Sarbamangala near the Raj palace in Bardhaman town. It is said, however, that the broken pieces of bricks of the former temple which are now buried beneath the present temple can be traced back to 11th or 12th century.¹²

The Jogadya temple building consists of the three main structures, viz., the stepped designed tower (*ratna*), the main temple (*ardhamandap*), and the dance hall (*natmandir*).¹³ The altar of the goddess Jogadya is enshrined inside the tower, which has two stores of the steeple. The main temple, attached to the tower, is covered with a big dome and people worship the goddess inside the domed hall. The Natmandir (dance hall) is a stage built in wellhole style, which is designed for various ritual performances. In the temple ground, there are many other constructions around the temple as shown in Map-3. The Bhogmandir (kitchen for offerings) is the temple kitchen for every day service to the goddess and the worshippers. The Shyamsundar-mandir is the temple for the god Krishna and his spouse Radha. The Kachari-bari (office of the Raja) is the former office of the Maharaja for the temple management. The *Rajkachari* ("daroga-babu" in colloquial) used to supervise the temple rituals and members of the service castes from this office. The Kshideshwari-mandir is the temple for the god Ksirkantha (another name of the god Siva) as the spouse of the goddess Jogadya.

According to the myth regarding the goddess Jogadya (the *Jogadya-bandana*), when Hanuman saved Rama from the under ground in the country of Srilanka, he returned carrying the goddess Durga on his back and reached the village of Kshiragram.¹⁴ In another version of the *Jogadya-bandana* of the famous poet Krittibas Ojha, it is described that Hanuman went around the whole world with the goddess on

12 Principal, N. B. Sanyal, 'A Tale of a Pilgrimage.' *Kalna college magazine*, 1961. This article is reprinted in *Kshiragram Sri Jogadya-banipitha Patrika, Platinam Jayanti Sankhya*. 1969. pp. 41-46.

13 David J. McCarrison classified the Jogadya temple into the Stepped designs (M(1).) in the outside regular classification of late mediaeval temples of Bengal (1972). But, he didn't refer to the date of the temple's foundation.

14 *Jogadya-bandana*, Sri Bancharam Bidyaratna Bhattacharyya (compiled).

his back to find a suitable place to perform the *puja* and at last found the place where now the Jogadya temple is situated.¹⁵ The same story is recorded also in the *Candi-mangal* (folk-literature of Bengal). It is interesting to note that a popular belief in the village is that the village Kshiragram is the centre of the world and Hanuman selected the village for its central position.

c) The village customs

As the inhabitants of the sakta-pithas (the abode of the goddess), the villagers observe certain special customs in addition to the usual ones followed by the Hindu in general. These particular customs mainly consist of various kinds of taboos observed during the Bengali lunar month of Baishakh, the period of the biggest ritual occasion of Jogadyapuja in the village. There were some other taboos observed permanently such as not allowing the castes, viz., Karmakar, Kumbhakar, Tody and the Muslim to stay in the village; not making brick houses (*pakka-bari*) more than second flour, and so on. It is very difficult to observe these customs in these days of modernization, transportation facilities, and cement houses in rural area. But, still in the lunar month of Baishakh, many villagers try to observe the special village customs prescribed for this period. The following is a list of these customs:¹⁶

- 1) Useing sandals and umbrellas when walking in the village,
- 2) Grinding turmeric with mortar,
- 3) Useing wooden spatulas in cooking of boiled rice,
- 4) Twisting wicks for lights,
- 5) Useing potter's wheel and the wringer for mustard oil,

15 *Jogadya-bandana*, attributed to Sri Krittibas Ojha. This bandana is compiled by Sri Sanat Kumar Cakrabartty (resident in Kshiragram) from the manuscripts in the Punthi-Bibhag, Visva-Bharati University. See, Jogeshwar Caudhuri, *Bardhaman: Itihas o Sanskriti*, Dbitiya Khanda. pp.443-448.

16 These customs are described on every *Jogadya-Bandana* or *Jogadya-akhyan*, though there are some differences in the selection among them. In this respect, see also, Jogeshwar Caudhuri[1994: 80-91].

- 6) Threshing rice,
- 7) Tilling the agricultural fields with plough before the ritual of *Hal-nagal* (on the 29th day of Baishakh),
- 8) Staying of the pregnant women in the village,
- 9) Sexual intercourse between husband and wife in the village,
- 10) Holding any marriage ceremony before the ritual of *Lagna-utsab* (on the 15 day of Baishakh),
- 11) Living in rooms having doors on the north,
- 12) Writing with pens during the first five days, the last five days as well as on the fifteenth of Baishakh; and on the other days of Baishakh, writing in any colours of ink except in red ink,

Let us now consider these taboos in the light of the following three points: The first point to be discussed is that some items such as No.1) are basically observed to show their respect for the goddess Jogadya. People usually do not enter inside the temple with shoes on or visit sacred places of the great tradition with open umbrella. The shoes would bring the pollution to the temple and it is only over the seat of the deity that umbrella is put up inside the temple. It may be assumed that the whole area of the village becomes a sacred place just like a temporary temple ground during the month of Baishakh. According to the analysis of M. Bloch, on the concept of perfectness and imperfectness embodied by a ritual ideology, the emphasis is on the imperfectness as humanbody in contrast to perfectness and the uniqueness of the deity through ritual contexts[Bloch 1989]. It is, therefore, possible to assume that it enables to show their respects to the goddess through restriction to build brick house or to put umbrella on their heads in the village.

The second point to notice is the item connected with agricultural affairs such as No.6) and No.7). The month of Baishakh is the preliminary season for the cultivation of Aman rice. It is a vital question in rural area to decide the suitable time to start the step for cultivation in fields. It was, therefore, very

popular in rural Bengal to perform the various agricultural rituals such as Halakarshan and Bikalapan and to hand down the oral traditions regards with agricultural affairs such as Khanar-bachan, although most of all are outdated now. The ritual of Hal-nagal in the 29th of Baishakh includes the typical characters of this ritual for cultivation. The ritual of traction of plough and making a round the village admits to interpret as a ritual of fertility, which shall be discussed in detail in chapter-IV. The items of No.7) also provide the distinctive time to start the use of their ploughs in the fields after this ritual. In the village, there is another occasion prescribed to start the cultivation which is the ritual of Makari-saptami on the seventh of the bright fortnight in the lunar month of Magh. The day after the ritual of Makari-saptami is the beginning day of traction of ploughs for the rice. Similar examples are numerous to show the connection between the religious customs and the agricultural affairs in the village. It could be supposed that these ritual taboos consisted an element of traditional culture regarding the agricultural affair of Bengal along with the oral traditions and the ritual systems, most of which are nowadays lost in rural area.

The third point to notice in this connection is the taboo prescribed on sexuality and reproduction on the human activity such as No.8), No.9), No.10). It is very popular among the general Hindu to restrict on the suitable month and day for their marriage ceremony according to the ritual almanac. The month of Phalgun, for example, is the suitable month for the marriage but Caitra is an unsuitable month.¹⁷ Usually, it is the concept of auspicious (shubha) and inauspicious (ashubha) to decide the day for the marriage prescribed on the almanacs. In case of Kshiragram, the restriction on the day of marriage ceremony in the month of Bashakh is not only for this concept. The villagers say that the ritual of Jogadyapuja of Baishakh means the occasion of marriage of the goddess and so they never allow their marriage ceremony to occur before the goddess's marriage. It

¹⁷ It is a custom for the Hindu to have marriage ceremonies in the lunar month of Baishakh, Jyaistha, Asar, Sraban, Agrahayan, Magh, and Phalgun. It is inauspicious to have marriage ceremonies in the months of Bhadra, Aswin, Karttik, Paus, and Caitra.

could be assumed the people show their respect to the goddess through restriction on their observance of marriage ceremony.

There is another reason which might be more important. That is the ritual of sexuality is always connected with the ritual of fertility. It goes without saying on the rich works by J. Frazer that the cultures in many countries prescribe restrictions on their sexuality with the rituals of agricultural affairs [Frazer 1911-36]. It is supposed that the control over sexuality would mean fertility of their field. In the agricultural societies it enables to obtain blessing of the goddess of crops, whom they try to propitiate through their practice of asceticism. This kind of the rituals are categorized generally as "imitative magic" in cultural anthropology. It can, therefore, be explained that the restriction on sexuality prescribed in items (No.9) and (No.10) correspond to the sexuality of the goddess in a symmetrical relationship. To use the technical terms of Levi=strauss, it could be supposed that the reproduction in the human activity would bring the fertility metaphorically in the fields [Levi=strauss 1967].

In this way, we can notice that these three points form not necessarily the separated factors but rather consist the metaphorical structure of meanings with regard to goddess, the human activity, and the agricultural affairs in the village.

d) The rituals in the village

On the altar inside the temple, there is only a small hole which is, according to the villagers, for connection with the under world, from where Hanuman rescued the goddess. The people worship the altar without any idol. Only in the month of Baishakh, they put the copper pot on the altar, which is filled up with water of a pond called "Kshirdighi". The stone image of the goddess Jogadya is usually kept at the bottom of the Kshirdighi on the western side of the village. It is only once in a year that the image is pulled up from the bottom of the pond and is placed on the special altar called "Utthan-mandir" so as to open the image to the public. Except on that day, the village people are prohibited from having access

to the stone image directly. There are many anecdotes telling how one fell sick or some even died as a result of their unintentional approach to the image under the water.

On the occasions of the temple rituals, many caste groups in the village occupy various posts in the ritual organization and play diverse roles. The Brahman-sebaitis who are divided into nine families naturally play important roles. But, not only the Brahman-sebait, the general as well as the Scheduled Castes also have their own roles and posts in the temple rituals severally. The village dominant caste, the Ugra-Kshatriya (*Aguri*), is assigned the role to fetch a pot of water of Kshirdighi on his head to purify the altar and to perform the ritual dance called "*mayurnac*". A lineage of the Bagdi caste assumes the role as the holder of the Maharaja's flags in the processions in front of the altar and also the role for preparing the buffalo for sacrifice. The representation from the Dom caste is to offer a few drops of the blood from his own finger by slicing it in front of the image of the goddess before dawn of the final day of Baishakh. Besides, the Malakar, the Karmakar, and the Baiti also have definite roles in the ritual system. It would, therefore, be possible to suppose that the social structure as well as the ritual organization of the village is based on the system of the roles and the practices of the temple ritual.

Various castes of the village are organized centering the ritual system of the Jogadya temple, especially, the ritual for sacrifices forms the nucleus of the ritual system of the Jogadyapuja. On the last day of Baishakh, the buffalo sacrifice is held in front of the image of the goddess at the Utthan-mandir by the people of the Bagdi caste. In palmy days of the Maharaja, it is known that human sacrifices were performed every year in stead of buffalo sacrifice.

2. Social background

The population of the village, according to the 1991 Census, is 4,263

(Male=2,191, Female=2,072), and the number of households is 729. The population of the Scheduled Castes is 1,930 (Male=990, Female=940), and the Scheduled Tribe is 28 (Male=10, Female=18). All the Scheduled Tribes belong to the Santal community who migrated to the village mainly after Independence, and even have few roles in the temple ritual. In its geographical lay out, the village is constituted centering the Jogadya temple in order as is shown in Map-2. The Brahman caste occupies the central part of the village. The other castes occupy concentric circles around the temple, the Ugra-Kshatriya, the Goera, the other service castes, and the Bagdi caste located in this order. The Bauri, the Dom, and the Santal occupy the outer fringe of the village. Thus, the higher is the socio-ritual position of a group, the closer is its location to the temple.

Table-1 shows the population composition of the village with respect of caste. This indicates that the largest group in the village is the Ugra-Kshatriya. The second largest group is the Bagdi, and the third largest is the Brahman. The number of households of these three groups counts 480; that is 73 % of the village total. These caste groups have important social function too. The Ugra-Kshatriya possess relatively the greater part of the agricultural land of the village. They claim to be the Kshatriya of Bengal. They are divided into two sub-castes, namely "*jana-aguri*" and "*suta-aguri*", and also into 9 lineages which are distinguished by their titles: viz., Datta, Samant, Malla, Sani, Ray, Bara-ray, Josh, Chota-samant, and Caudhuri. Each lineage send a representative to participate in the temple ritual. Thus, the Ugra-Kshatriya can be considered as the dominant caste of the village with respect to population, landholdings, and ritual status.¹⁸

¹⁸ The term of "dominant caste" is defined first by M.N. Srinivas. See, Srinivas [1987].

Table-1. Caste Composition of Kshiragram

Caste/Sub-Caste	No. of Households
Ugra-Kshatriya	217
Jana Aguri	84
Suta Aguri	133
Bagdi	178
Brahman	85
Muci	71
Gaera	50
Bauri	11
Tanti	7
Dom	6
Santal	6
Sutradhar	4
Kayastha	3
Bene	3
Hari	3
Napit	3
Baiti	3
Maera	2
Malakar	2
Sunri	1
total	655

The Bagdi caste is the largest Scheduled Caste in Bardhaman District. They are mostly landless and mainly engaged in agricultural labour in rural area. In the village Kshiragram, the Bagdi live for the most part in poverty. Nevertheless, they have been entrusted with important ritual roles in the temple and are regarded of relatively higher rank in the caste hierarchy of the village than the other lower ranked castes, i. e., the Bauri and the Dom. They are divided into two endogamous sub-castes, namely, the Kusmethi-Bagdi and the Tetuliya-Bagdi.

The Brahman occupy in the highest rank of the village as elsewhere in the country. But, they also can be divided into three hierarchical groups as is generally observed in rural Bengal. The highest status group is called "Kulin-Brahman" (*kaulinna-pratha Brahman* in literary) who never serve as priests for other castes. The number of the Kulin-Brahman in the village is relatively less and they have only few role in the temple service. It is said, they migrated over here later. The second highest are the Brahman-sebait, who are mainly engaged in religious services for the Jogadya temple as well as the family priests of their *jajmans* of the Ugra-kshatriya caste.¹⁹ They are divided into two lineages which have the titles of Cakrabartti and Bhattacharyya: The lineage of Cakrabartti is the priests (*pujari*), who serves various temple rituals. They are divided into nine families and share the daily shifts for the temple services through the year as will be discussed in chapter-III. Only a clan of the *Sabha-pandit* granted the title of Bhattacharyya by the Maharaja. The lineage of Bhattacharyya is the priests for the *Caidipathak*. They are divided into two families. The third highest is the so called "Varna-Brahman", who have the *jajman* of the Scheduled Caste in the village. They sometimes engage themselves in minor works for the Brahman-sebait. They are called "Bhatraj-Brahman" in the village. Some priests come from other villages for the family ritual of the lower castes in the village. They perform the ritual services for their *jajmans* which they inherited for generations.

19 In the village, they are called *sebait*, but usually the word of "*sebait*" means temple servants including the other service castes in Bengali. So that, the Brahman priests for the temple ritual services are referred as Brahman-sebait in this thesis.

These three caste groups have distinctive features, and are closely interdependent. The Brahman and the Ugra-Kshatriya are linked by the so called "jajmani relation" and the Bagdi serve for the landlords as agricultural labourers. The Ugra-Kshatriya is the main patron for the village rituals. In particular, Durgapuja is the biggest function in the localities of the Ugra-Kshatriya. The Bagdi caste has their own priest (*deyasjn*) for their temple of the goddess Manasa. Manasapuja is the biggest festival for the Bagdi caste.