

Chapter-IV Jogadyapuja in the lunar month of Baishakh

Jogadyapuja is the biggest occasion among various village rituals during the whole year. It is not only important as a cultural function of the village but an essential occasion to integrate the village society through the ritual organization. In this regard it is important to look carefully into the ritual process including the ritual positions and roles of the caste groups and lineages of the village. The following discussions incorporate the ritual sequence from the last day of the lunar month of Caitra to the fourth day of Jaisth. A series of the rituals associated with the Jogadyapuja are observed for more than one month. With the sacrifice of buffalo on the last day of Baishakh, the people's excitement reaches its peak.

1. The Process of Jogadyapuja

a) The 31st of the lunar month of Caitra; *Kshirkalas*

Kshirkalas is the first step of the ritual of Jogadyapuja observed on the last day of the lunar month of Caitra. This is a ritual of invocation of the goddess through a copper pot (in the narrow sense "*kshirkalas*" means the pot itself) to the alter. Consequently, we can call it a *ghatastapan* to use a common phrase in Hindu ritual context. It involves all rituals observed on this day generally, though the pot is used continuously in the Jogadya temple over the whole month from this day till the 30th of the lunar month of Baishakh. The entire process of Jogadyapuja begins with this. In addition to it, the rituals at the end of every month, which is called Vedic *homa* (*Vaidik-hom*) and *guyadaks* as mentioned earlier, are held on

this day. The lunar month of Caitra is the last month of a year in the Bengali calendar. Thus, the Jogadyapuja of Baishakh is the first occasion of the Bengali new year in the village life as well as the biggest function ever.

The ritual starts on the ritual platform designed for Vedic *homa*, called Jogyakund, at the fair (*mela*) ground located in the western side of the village. On this occasion, the members to assemble around the altar are shown in Table-12. The *Sabha-pandit* functions as the assistant to the priest who supervises the organization of all the temple priests and other persons involved. The *Pradhan-purohit* (chief priest) performs the *puja* for the goddess's pot. A Malakar brings the goddess's pot and a basket with materials of the ritual in it. The positions assigned to caste groups are ranked and collectively organized for an execution of sacrifice. The table demonstrates the mutual relationships of them.

All members must observe a regular fast (*upas*) from morning and come after ablution from their respective houses. It is the period of strict abstinence and discipline for priests, the Malakar, and representatives of the lineages of Datta and Samant. Only they are allowed to ascend the platform of the altar (Jogyakund). The relationship of the *Pradhan-purohit* and the *Sabha-pandit* can be understood as the same relationship between a priest (*pujari*) who invokes deities through unglazed pot by the various steps of ritual procedure (*upacarapuja*) and a assistant priest (*tantradharak*) who supports him by incantation of sacred verses (*mantra*) in the ritual courses. Only the *Pradhan-purohit* can approach to the goddess's pot (*kshirkalas*) during the Jogadyapuja, just as only the priest (*pujari*) can approach the pot on the altar directly during the steps of *upacarapuja*.

The priest who belongs to "Bhattacharyya" lineage in the village Nigan can exclusively perform Vedic *homa* on the Jogyakund. None of the priests in Kshiragram can perform the rituals of the *homa* conforming with Vedic style (*Vaidik-hom*) since they know only the Tantric style (*tantra-hom*). For that reason, the Bardhaman Maharaja endowed cakran lands to the lineage of Bhattacharyya in the village Nigan, specifically for this duty. On the last day of every lunar month (*sankranti*), a priest of the lineage comes to the Jogadya temple in Kshiragram to perform the Vedic

Table-12 Role assignment in *Kshirkalas*

Post	Role
<i>Sabha-pandit</i>	Assistant for the priest
<i>Vaidik-purohit</i>	Priest for the Vedic <i>homa</i>
<i>Pradhan-purohit</i>	Chief priest of the rituals to the pot
Brahman-sobait	Priests
Malakar	Preparing for the goddess's pot and the basket
Ugra-Kshatriya	Representatives of the nine lineages of the Ugra-Kshatriyas
<i>Patakadhari</i>	Holding of the Maharaja's flags
<i>Badyakar</i>	Drummers for the sacrifice
<i>Paik</i>	Guardians of the sacrifice
Karmakar	Sacrificer

homa and then bestows sacred marks (*phonta*) on foreheads of every member of the village Ugra-Kshatriya. The *homa* of Caitra on the platform of Jogyakund is also considered a part of the monthly rites on the days of *sankranti*.

On the platform of the Jagyakund, representatives of two lineages, namely Datta and Samant have to put on sacred threads (*paita*) around their body, which is usually considered as an exclusive possession of the Brahman. This thread is a little smaller in diameter than those used by ordinary Brahmans. However, just as with the Brahman while they wear it, they are prohibited from ploughing the agricultural fields and must keep their purity by observing regular abstinence. It used to be customary for the Ugra-Kshatriya in the village to put on the sacred thread even in their daily life. Because of strict associated practices, most of

them deviate from the custom now. Nevertheless, they still wear it on the specified occasions such as, marriage ceremony of themselves or their children. This sacred thread is put on during all days of Jogadyapuja of Baishakh in particular around the bodies of the representatives of the Ugra-Kshatriya.

The Malakar is in charge of preparation for all utensils for the ritual and is the only rather low caste admitted to ascend the platform among the various service castes such as the Bagdi and the Dom. The *mulapaik* Bagdi prepares animals for sacrifice and they are admitted to stand in front of the image of the goddess at the bank of the pond during every *ugalpuja*. The *patakadhari* Bagdi holds the red flags of the Maharaja around the platform during the sacrifice. The villagers regard these flags as the symbol of the sovereign (*rajatba*) of Bardhaman. All of the members are organized under the supervision of the *Sabha-pandit*.

Now let us have a look at the sequence of the ritual at the Jogyakund. At first, a Malakar brings the goddess's copper pot filled with water of Kshirdighi to the altar. At the beginning of the ritual, all the members who are assigned duties of the ritual receive a garland from the Malakar and wears it around their neck. These garlands are made of special flowers (*togal-phul*) and mango leaves. The chief priest put the goddess's pot on a base which is made of earth and unhulled rices. After the ritual purification for himself, the priest utters the name of the patron of the ritual; that is the Maharaja of Bardhaman, and his *gotra* (legendary originator of the lineage) at the first ritual stage (that is called *sankalpa*). The present patron is Sri Pranay Cand Mahatab Tratri Barman, and his *gotra* is Kashyap. Then, the priest starts to perform a ritual invitation for the deity to the pot as the same context in ordinary *puja*.¹

After that, the Bagdi *paiks* drag a male goat to the platform of altar after taking it for ablution to a pond. The priest purifies the goat and the sword for

¹ In Bengal, the basic system of *upacarapuja* is composed of the five steps to receive the deity, which is called *pancopacarapuja*. In the formal procedure of *upacarapuja*, priests adopt the sixteen steps for the reception, which is called *sadasopacarapuja*. In the *upacarapuja* for the goddess Jogadya, the chief priest naturally follows the latter formality.

sacrifice with sacred water on the platform. Then, the *paiks* bring it again in front of the platform. The Bagdi *paiks* hold the head and feet of the goat both in front and rear firmly. The Baiti beats a drum hard. The Karmakar holds the sword up. And, with the deep sound of a drum, the Karmakar decapitates the goat. The *paiks* bring the body of the goat to the altar immediately. Spouting blood from the beheaded body is poured on to a peeled banana on an earthen plate. They think this blooded banana means the goddess accepts the animal of sacrifice. In a moment, the *Vaidik-purohit* prepares a *homa* ritual on the fireplace of the platform, and lights a fire. He throws *ghi* (clarified butter) and mango leaves repeatedly into the fire with sacred verses. The ashes of *homa* are then gathered and mixed with melting *ghi*. In the end, the priest gives ash mark (*phonta*) on foreheads of all around in regular order standing on the platform.

The priest calls each title to offer *phonta* by turn. The first title is the Brahman-sebait and the other Brahmans. Next comes the Ugra-Kshatriya. The priest calls nine titles of the Ugra-Kshatriya lineages in the village. The order of the nine titles is Datta, Samant, Malla, Sani, Josh, Bara-Ray, Chota-Ray, Chota-Samant, and Caudhuri. The priest first offers *phonta* to the Datta and the Samant who are sitting on the platform. Then, addressing each title in this order, the priest gives *phonta* to the representatives of other lineages who are fasting for this ritual and waiting around the Jogyakund.

The other service castes such as the Malakar, the Bagdi *paiks* and the flag holders, the Baiti, and the Karmakar also receive *phontas*. As no Brahman priest can offer *phonta* directly by his hand to the foreheads of Untouchables (that is called usually "*chota-lok*" in Bengali), he gives the vessel to the Malakar on the platform to perform the job.

The Malakar is not included among Untouchables, but a so-called "*sudra*" in the village. Strictly speaking it belongs to one of the *naba-shakh* of Bengal.² After receiving the *phonta* from the priest and the vessel, the Malakar puts on

2 *The tribes and Castes of Bengal.* H. H. Risley. Calcutta: 1891.

phonta on the foreheads of the other service castes by his hand. This example of *phonta*-giving in the *homa* ritual makes it clear that the order of the *phonta* indicates the ritual status of caste groups itself.

The status groups are first divided here into two categories, namely *phonta*-giver and *phonta*-receiver, and secondly the order among the *phonta* receiver. The priest performs the *upacarapuja* and the *homa* ritual. But Vedic *homa* (*Vaidik-hom*) is monopolised by the *Vaidik-purohit* of the village Nigan. They give *phontas* to the Ugra-Kshatriya exclusively. The Malakar gives it to the other service castes. The Ugra-Kshatriya and the other service castes are, therefore, precisely distinguished by the *phonta*-giver. In the *phonta*-giving order, the Datta is the highest rank and the Samant is the next among the Ugra-Kshatriya castes of the village. The other Ugra-Kshatriyas are also ranked in the order of *phonta*-giving. Among the other service castes, except for the Malakar all are separated from direct connection with the Brahman. They are mutually ranked in this *phonta*-giving by Malakar.

After the *homa*, a ritual procession of *kshirkalas* sets out from the Jogyakund to the Jogadya temple. The first day of Jogadyapuja as already stated, is in the last day of the lunar month of Caitra. This day is also the final day of Gajan (i.e., *carakpuja*, a folk ritual of rural Bengal observed in the end of the month of Caitra). Then, *sanyasins* of the Gajan ritual lead this procession dancing in particular step. This is called "*caraknac*" (dance of the ritual; *carak*). The Bagdi *paiks* hoist their flags and follow them. The Baiti plays his drum in the procession. The Karmakar lifts his bloody sword up in the line. The priest puts the goddess's pot on the head of the Datta's representative. The goddess's pot on the head of the Datta occupies the central position of the procession. The *Pradhan-purohit*, the Sabha-pandit, and the other Brahman-sebaitis follow it. The representatives of the Ugra-Kshatriya, the other service castes and all other participants accompany them.

The procession proceeds along the southern side of the temple and enters through the eastern gate. The Datta lays the pot on a stone plinth (*ganesmund*), which is at the foot of the eastern wall of the temple. The goddess's pot on the

plinth is surrounded by the *Sabha-pandit*, the *Pradhan-purohit*, and other attendants. At this time, the *Sabha-pandit* proclaims to the assemblage the commencement of the Jogadyapuja of Baishakh; "The goddess's Mahapuja has come. Perform all rituals according to the custom, and accomplish the puja of Sri Devi Jogadya !" Then, the Datta brings the pot inside the temple and enshrines it on the goddess's throne (*sinmhasana*).

In the evening, that is "*sandhyasamay*", a Brahman-sebait performs the *sandhyarati* as usual inside the temple. After that he pours water from the pot into another copper pot used in the temple. The representative of the Datta puts the empty pot on his head and brings it again to the Jogyakund with a Brahman-sebait and a Baiti beating a drum. On the platform of the Jagyakundu, the Brahman-sebait performs his *puja* to the pot. They return to the temple again soon. Then they start a ritual at a stone protuberant plinth (*guyabedi*) in the ground of the temple, that is *guyadak*. Finally, the pot filled with water of Kshirdighi is left on the throne inside the temple for a whole month of Baishakh. Brahman-sebait performs the *puja* to the pot twice a day (i.e., *nityaseba* and *sandhyarati*). Except for the month of Baishakh, there is nothing else to symbolize the goddess on the altar inside the temple.

b) The 14th of Baishakh; *Jal-ana*

On the day before *Lagna-utsab* (the 15th of Baishakh), people go to the ablution bank of the Ganga river (that is the Hugli river) at the town of Katwa to draw sacred water of the Ganga. It is 22 km distance from the village to Katwa. People start from the village at midnight. In former days, people used to go to Katwa by foot, draw water, and return early in the next morning. Nowadays, they go by bus

but return on foot. However, it takes still a whole night to return from Katwa. Accordingly, they think it still a hard penance not suitable for everyone but the young people.

People carry a pole on their shoulder suspending small pots at both ends. During the course of their walking, they are forbidden to put down the pots filled with the sacred water of the Ganga on the ground even for a moment. They must walk all the way by foot and never take rest anywhere. If they need to urinate, they must put the pole on branches of tree and after urination they must take ablution in a pond before carrying it again on their shoulder. During the whole night, they all abstain from having food and water. Because of the severity of this practice, it is the younger generation at present that participates in it for the most part. Recently, the participants count around twenty. People say that women and the elderly generation, used to do this practice and the number of such devotees counted more than one hundred from the village. At that time, the date to draw the water of the Ganga was the 27th and the 30th of Baishakh as well as the 14th of Baishakh. The Ganga water brought by people is used for every ritual in the Jogadya temple during the lunar month of Baishakh by the temple priests.

c) The 15th of Baishakh; *Lagna-utsab*

The word "*lagna*" means "auspicious moment" or "time", and astrologically it means "the time of the sun's transition to a zodiacal sign". The ritual called *Lagna-utsab*, therefore, means the "ritual of time". An almanac of the Bengal lunar calendar for the new year (*panjika*) plays an important role in the ritual. After the *Lagna-utsab*, people start to read new calendars in their houses. In this manner, "time" is a main theme actually in this ritual.

On the day of *Lagna-utsab*, the Baitis play a pair of *madal*, which is a small cylindrical drum just like "*mridangam*", in the place of the ordinary drum of

sandhyarati in everyday use. The special artisans who belong to the Muci caste in the village Baici and the village Gobardanpur make the *madals* for this ritual once a year. The Maharaja of Bardhaman granted them cakran lands for this duty. A few days before *Lagna-utsab*, they come and stay at the small cottage called "gajantala" situated at the square in front of the Jogadya temple and sit on seats of *kejur* leaves.

It continues for two weeks from the day of *Lagna-utsab* to the thirtieth day of Baishakh to use the *madals* in the temple. After the sacrifice of buffalo in the Mahapuja, the Baitis bring the *madals* to the special place in the northwest fringe of the village (that is called *madal-bhanga-mathi*), and break the *madals* into pieces. During two weeks, the Baitis play them on particular occasions such as *sandhyarati* every evening in the Natmandir, and they have specified rhythms to play on them.

In the early morning of *Lagna-utsab*, a Baiti walks slowly from his residence to the temple playing a drum to inform the beginning of the ritual for all the villagers. That is called "tengai". A Baiti performs it five times during the day between the residence and the temple, and the last *tengai* in the afternoon is actually the beginning of *Lagna-utsab*. The Dom caste of the village makes a bamboo basket (*jhuri*) and dedicates it to the altar of the temple in the morning. Basket making once a year by the Dom caste is one of their duties. For this duty, they are also granted cakran lands by the Maharaja. The Brahman-sebaitis put sweets (*manda*) and *murki* donated by the Maharaja in the basket. Bangles of conch-shell and *sindur* donated by the lineage of Sureswar Cakrabartti are also in it. They also offer a mango and its leaf, pigment of red (*aruta*), a floral wreath, turmeric, and a piece of silk sari with the basket on the altar. A piece of cloth (*gamca*) coated with turmeric covers them.

In the ground of the temple the representative of the Datta's lineage put a bamboo basket on his head. The other participants form a procession before and behind him. The composition of the procession is given in Table-13.

Table-13 Role assignment in *Lagna-utsab*

Post	Role
Samant	Sprinkling water for purification
Brahman-sebait (Sureswar Cakrabartti)	Scattering <i>atop-caul</i>
Datta	Carrying the bamboo basket
Malakar	Blowing conch-shell
Baiti	Playing <i>madal</i>
<i>Patakadhari</i>	Holding seven Maharaja's flags

The head of the line is the representative of Samant's lineage who sprinkles sacred water for purification with a twig of a mango tree from a small vessel (*kasakusi*) in his hand. The second is the scattering of *atop-caul* (sun dried rice) by the Brahman-sebait belonging to the lineage of Sureswar Cakrabartti. The third is the Datta's representative with the basket. Then, a Malakar moves blowing a conch-shell and Baitis play their *madals*. In the last of the line, seven *paiks* of the Bagdi caste holding seven red flags follow them. The procession goes round the main temple anti-clockwise seven times. That is called "*pradhakshin*". After this procession, all members sit inside the temple and there the new calendar is proclaimed by the *Grahacarya*.

In the interior of the main temple, the *Sabha-pandit*, the *Grahacarya*, and the Malakar take a seat in the line on the left side to the altar. The Brahman-sebait belonging to the lineage of Sureswar Cakrabartti, the Datta's representative, and the Samant's representative sit on the right hand side. Both

sides of members face one another. Baitis and *madal* makers wait in the Natmandir outside the main temple. The Bagdi *paiks* holding the raja's flags remain standing in the ground of the temple.

The sequence of the ritual inside the temple is as follows. The Brahman-sebait performs puja in an ordinary way to the goddess's pot on the altar. Then, the *Grahacarya* (astrologer) starts to chant sacred verses (*mantra*) holding an almanac of the new year calendar.

Grahacarya comes from the Brahman family in the village Jobagram and the village Nigan in order to proclaim a new calendar at the Jogadya temple once a year. For this duty, the Maharaja granted cakran lands for them. After announcement of the calendar by the *Grahacarya*, all members present bow down to the almanac in his hand three times. Then, the *Grahacarya* announces auspicious times written in the new calendar before the members inside the temple. He gives blessing also by holding the almanac up to the foreheads of each member. The Brahman-sebait then, gives *phontas* on each forehead with paste of turmeric which is an auspicious symbol. The Datta's representative puts the basket again on his head and comes out from the interior of the temple accompanying the other members. With the sound of *madals* playing, all members assemble at the *guyabedi* at the southwestern corner of the ground of the temple. Many villagers awaiting there surround them. The *Grahacarya* stands in front of *guyabedi* and proclaims again the auspicious time prescribed in the new year calendar twice in front of the villagers. This is the first occasion in a year to show the new calendar to the public. Formerly, the calendar was written on many pages of palm leaves, which was sent from the deb-seba-office of the court of Raj of Bardhaman every year. At the end of the ritual, the *Grahacarya* used to distribute the copies of this palm-leaf-almanac to the villagers. Every villager around him rushed to get the palm leaves.

Nowadays, the *Grahacarya* merely reads a new calendar at the *guabedi*. The Datta carries the basket on his head and the Brahman-sebait stands beside him. Then, the seven *paiks* of Bagdi, who are standing in a line opposite the Datta, dedicate their

flags to the basket on the head of the Datta with the particular rhythm of the *madal*. The new calendar which the *Grahacarya* proclaims before people is still sent from the deb-seba-office of the court of Raj in a printed almanac (the *Gupta Press Dairektari Panjika*). Every social function of the village was performed according to the times as being "auspicious" or "inauspicious" in the almanac of the court of Raj. After the popularization of the printed almanacs from Calcutta, anyone can get and refer to their ritual times readily. People in the village, however, keep up the old custom even now and before the day of *Lagna-utsab* they never open the almanacs of the new year. Although a new year actually begins on the first day of the lunar month of Baishakh (*Bangla-San*), people can read their new almanac only after the proclamation of the new year by the *Grahacarya* in the ritual of *Lagna-utsab* on the fifteenth of Baishakh.

d) The 27th of Baishakh; Jagyakundu

After the *homa* ritual of the first day of Jogadyapuja on the *sankranti* of Caitra, The *Vaidik-purohit* performs the *homa* for the second time on the 27th of Baishakh at the Jagyakundu. The participants at the altar are the same as before. The *Pradhan-purohit* invites the deity to the goddess's pot and burns fire on the altar. The representatives of the nine lineages of the Ugra-Kshatriya and the other participants receive *phonta* of *homa* on their foreheads in the same order. The difference from the previous *home* is that the bamboo-basket, which the Dom made and dedicated on the day of *Lagna-utsab* is offered in front of the altar. Besides, Baitis play the *madals* in the place of ordinary drum, and *tengai* from the Baiti's house to the Jagyakund walking across the village seven times on this day. Previously, the Karmakar used to practice a sacrifice to a goat (*pantha-bali*) on this day also, which has gone into disuse since 1954.

In the procession from the Jagyakundu to the goddess's temple, the

representative of the Datta puts the basket on his head which is covered with a cloth (*gamca*). The representative of the Samant puts the pot this time on his head. The followers such as priests, Baitis, and Bagdis are the same as before. But, in place of the *sanyasins* dance of the Gajan, the holders of the Maharaja's flags of the Bagdi pay respects to the Maharaja with their flags by means of dedication to the basket on the Datta's head on their way. This is the same gesture with the dedication of the flags on the day of *Lagna-utsab*. The procession stops to dedicate the flags seven times at the specified places on the passage to the temple. Baitis play *madals* to the dedication of the flags by the Bagdis.

Thus we see that the ritual of the first day and of the 27th's have the common basic pattern in procession, *pradhakshin*, sacrifice, and *homa*. Although there are minor differences in details according to the ritual processes of each day. The course of the processions from the Jogyakundu to the temple is quite the same as on the first day. In the procession on this day, they perform "*mayurnac*" at the same place of the dedication of the flags on the first day.

When the procession arrives before the southern wall of the temple, the reciter of the *Ramayana* (*ramayanapath*) comes out from the temple and dedicates his small brush (*camar*) to the basket. At the foot of the southern wall, a small hole was made to look into the interior alter of the goddess's temple from outside wall. The Datta's representative and priests stand here at the back of the hole in the wall. Towards the basket on the Datta's head the Bagdis dedicate the flags again, and the reciter of the *Ramayana* chants a stanza of the *Ramayana*. At night, he begins the recitation of the *Ramayana* at the Natmandir of the temple. The *Ramayana* which he sings with his performances and drum playing is a famous version translated by Krittibas Ojha into Bengali. During the four evenings from the 27th to the 30th of Baishakh, he recites the part of killing of Mohiraban of the *Ramayana* at the Natmandir.

After the chanting by the reciter of the *Ramayana*, the procession enters through the eastern gate of the temple and proceeds to the foot of the eastern wall of the temple (*ganesmund*). The Samant lays the pot down there. It is the second

assembly (*paramarsa*) by the members of the *homa* at the Jagyakundu. The *Sabha-pandit* proclaims here; "The Mahapuja has come. Let's prepare carefully and receive visitors warmly!" The Datta pours water of the pot into another copper pot on the throne inside the temple.

After the *sandhyarati* of the temple, the reciter of the *Ramayana* reads the *Jogadyabandana* at first and then begins to recite the *Ramayana* of Krittibas at the Natmandir. Incense, lights, and the sword for animal sacrifice are offered before him. He recites the *Ramayana* here with the gesture and the accompaniment of a drum. It takes approximately three hours every night.

After the recitation, every member of the *homa* ritual gather again in front of the Jagyakundu. They make a procession again and perform "*mayurnac*" on the way to the temple. Many villagers think it as a part of entertainment for the goddess's amusement. This performance, however, has no relation with on appearance of the peacock, and is really not so entertaining. Rather its gestures are a little odd and eccentric. The Datta puts on a crown made of *sara* grass and stands up in front of the flag holders of the Bagdis. According to the *madals* playing by Baĩtis and the dedication of the flags by the Bagdis, he raises his right hand and foot sideways, and shakes them in a strange way. Then, he makes an upright position again, and then raises the left hand and foot in the same manner. He repeats this movement three times, and finally jumps up straight.

In this strange dance, some villagers found vestiges of an ancient custom of human sacrifice. They think the movements of Datta indicate the manners of a man struggling from a stake of sacrifice. Datta performs *mayurnac* from the 27th to the last day of the Mahapuja four times on various occasions. They accordingly suppose that a man to be sacrificed was captured and detained on a stake for four days and taken about on the street of the village every night in the same course of "*mayurnac*". The field covered with bushes on the northwestern side of the village is called "*nara-bandha-math*" still now. On the last day of Baishakh, the sacrifice used to take place, which is substituted by a buffalo now.

e) The 28th of Baishakh: *Ramayanpath*

On the 28th of Baishakh, the recitation of the *Ramayana* is from the chapter about the killing of the demon Raban and return of Rama. From the 28th to the 30th the offering of boiled rice (*annabhog*) to the goddess at noon time is stopped and *luci* (baked wheat) is offered instead of rice. It is called *pukkannabhog*. People think that the goddess observes her fast during the three days. As the killing of Raban is in recitation for these days, out of the grief of the goddess from the death of the demon Raban, she abstains from eating rice for three days. After the *Ramayanpath*, the same members as on the 27th perform *mayurnac* from the Jogyakund to the temple again.

f) The 29th of Baishakh: *Pat-naran*

The ritual of *Pat-naran* is one of the *ugalpujas* for pulling up the image of the goddess Jogadya from a pond of Kshirdighi on the western side of the village, and a preliminary ritual for the Mahapuja on the day after as well. The Mahapuja is the only occasion for ordinary people of the village to see the image of the goddess Jogadya. In this *Pat-naran*, the Brahman-sebaitis cleanse the image, worship, and sink it again to the bottom of the pond to a near by place to facilitate pulling out of it easily on the day of the Mahapuja.

In the morning of the *Pat-naran*, a lineage member of Cakrabartti of the village Narashana brings offerings to the temple like, rice, mango, fish, a kind of herb (*gulanca*), leaves of *bel*, and a garland of *joba* flowers. At noon, a lineage member of Ray dedicates a male goat for sacrifice and straw rope for the ritual. They get the offering at the temple after the *annabhog* at noon time at the Bhogmandir but never attend the ritual in the night. In the same way as on the

28th of Baishakh, the recitation of the *Ramayana* is performed after *sandhyarati* at the Natmandir. The villagers offer huge piles of rice and vegetables on the floor of the Natmandir. These offerings are dedicated for Lakshman, because the recitation of the *Ramayanapath* falls on the chapter of Lakshman's banquet in this night.

After the recitation, the *paiks* of the Bagdi call the names of the main three lineages in a loud voice from the eastern stage of the temple. He calls: "*Datta mahasayera go, Samant mahasayera go, Domera go.*" This addressing for three titles is called "*ahaban*", and this ritual calling is performed over again in the other *ugalpujas*. The member for the *pat-naran* is the representative of the Datta, the Samant, and the other lineages of the Ugra-Kshatriya, the lineage of the Dom, the *paik* and guardians of the Bagdi (*mulapaik*), the *Sabha-pandit*, and the other Brahman-sebaitis. After the calling by the Bagdi, they assemble at the bank of the pond.

The image of the goddess is pulled out by the new straw ropes and then rests on the platform by the side of the bank. At this time, the Datta, the Samant, and the Brahman-sebaitis pull the ropes of the image. The Bagdi *paiks* hold the Raja's flags, but after the installation of the image, they must leave the place of worship. Only the Bagdi guardians of the sacrifice (*mula-paik*) can remain there. The Brahman-sebaitis cleanse it and purify it with turmeric and refined butter (*ghi*) and dedicate a floral garland. The *Sabha-pandit* himself worships it. The Datta and the Samant keep incenses and votive lights ready for the image. The Dom burns the straw torch (it is called "*mahagni*") during the ritual. It takes nearly one hour to finish all the ritual. In the end, the goats dedicated by the Ray and the Maharaja are sacrificed in front of the image and then they sink the image again at the bottom of the pond attached with ropes. The Datta subsequently performs *mayurnac* for the third time from the Jogyakund to the temple.

g) The 30th of Baishakh; *Hal-nagal*

On the day before the Mahapuja on the last day of Baishakh, the *homa* ritual on the Jogyakund was performed for the third time and a pair of bulls cultivate fields of the village with a traction plough. This ritual ploughing makes a round of the village. A Baiti plays his drum as *tengai*, the notification of the ritual for villagers nine times from the early morning to the afternoon. Then, the members of the *homa* ritual assemble around the Jogyakund and practice the ritual in the same manner as before. They sacrifice a male goat in the name of Maharaja, and the priests give ashes of *homa* to the foreheads of all the members in order. On this day, a Bagdi *paik* belonging to the lineage Khara newly joins the members and gets a garland around his neck. He has the duty to drive the bulls with a traction plough. There is a goddess's pot on the altar instead of the Dom's basket as on the 27th.

After the *homa*, they form a procession to the temple again. The Datta's representative carries the pot on his head and puts it down on the *ganesmund* of the temple. Here, the *Sabha-pandit* proclaims the Mahapuja on the next day for the third time. Then the Datta brings the pot inside the temple and pours water into the pot enshrined on the altar. The foregoing is nearly the same procedure as the previous two, but this time the ritual ploughing is performed after that. The Datta returns once to his house to take rest for a while. At this time, a Bagdi *paik* carries him on his shoulders and two *paiks* flying Maharaja's flags lead him to the house. A Baiti playing his *madal* also follows them. In the courtyard of the Datta's house, many villagers already gathered. While he takes rest, his family serve *cola* beans soaked in water, fruits, and vegetables to everyone gathered there as *prasad*. He puts on a piece of cloth (*gamca*) coated with turmeric and returns to the temple on the *paik*'s shoulder again.

In the temple ground, a crowd of people is massing. A Brahman-sebait belonging to the lineage of Kailas Cakrabartti brings the pot enshrined in the temple to the veranda of the Bhogmandir. He stands on the veranda and sprinkles water from the

pot with a twig of mango over the crowd of people. Then he hands over the pot to the Datta when he returns to the temple. The Datta himself starts to sprinkle water over the villagers. It causes an excited atmosphere among the people in the temple ground. Soon, a pair of bulls arrive at the temple led by a few Bagdi *paiks* belonging to the lineage Khara. The bulls have a relationship of maternal uncle and cousin. Most of the Bagdi boys are drunk with local liquor. They begin to go around the building of the temple seven times (*pradhakshin*). The drummers beat their drums vigorously, and follow them. Finally, they set out from the temple through the eastern gate.

The Datta sprinkling water from the pot takes the lead of the procession. The Bagdis holding the flags and the Baitis with drums follow him. A few Bagdi boys drag a pair of bulls. The head of the Bagdi lineage Khara brings a plough on his shoulders. This plough is made of a *bel* tree. In the morning, the Karmakar in the village Jabagram made it in the ground of the temple from a specified *bel* tree. The procession marches along the main street of the village to the Utthanmandir. In front of the house of the Ugra-Kshatriya belonging to the lineage of Josh, the pair of bulls stand and wait on the street. The Brahman-sebait puts garlands around the bulls' necks and *sindur* on their foreheads. The Bagdi head of Khara lineage joins the plough to the bulls. Then, the ritual tillage starts from this place.

They go round the exterior of the village tracing the old road of which some parts are now turned into agricultural fields. Map-4 shows the route of the procession of *Hal-nagal*. The procession goes ahead to the Utthanmandir and passes by it to the locality of Moarpukur-para, and Das-para. On both sides of the street, village women are dressed in fine sari and make a deep bow on the ground (*pranam*) to the procession. The Datta sprinkles the sacred water from the goddess's pot over them. The Bagdi *paiks* come later with the bulls and the plough. They think, even barren women could become pregnant by purification and blessing of the sacred water.

In each locality (*para*) of the village people rush to the plough and the

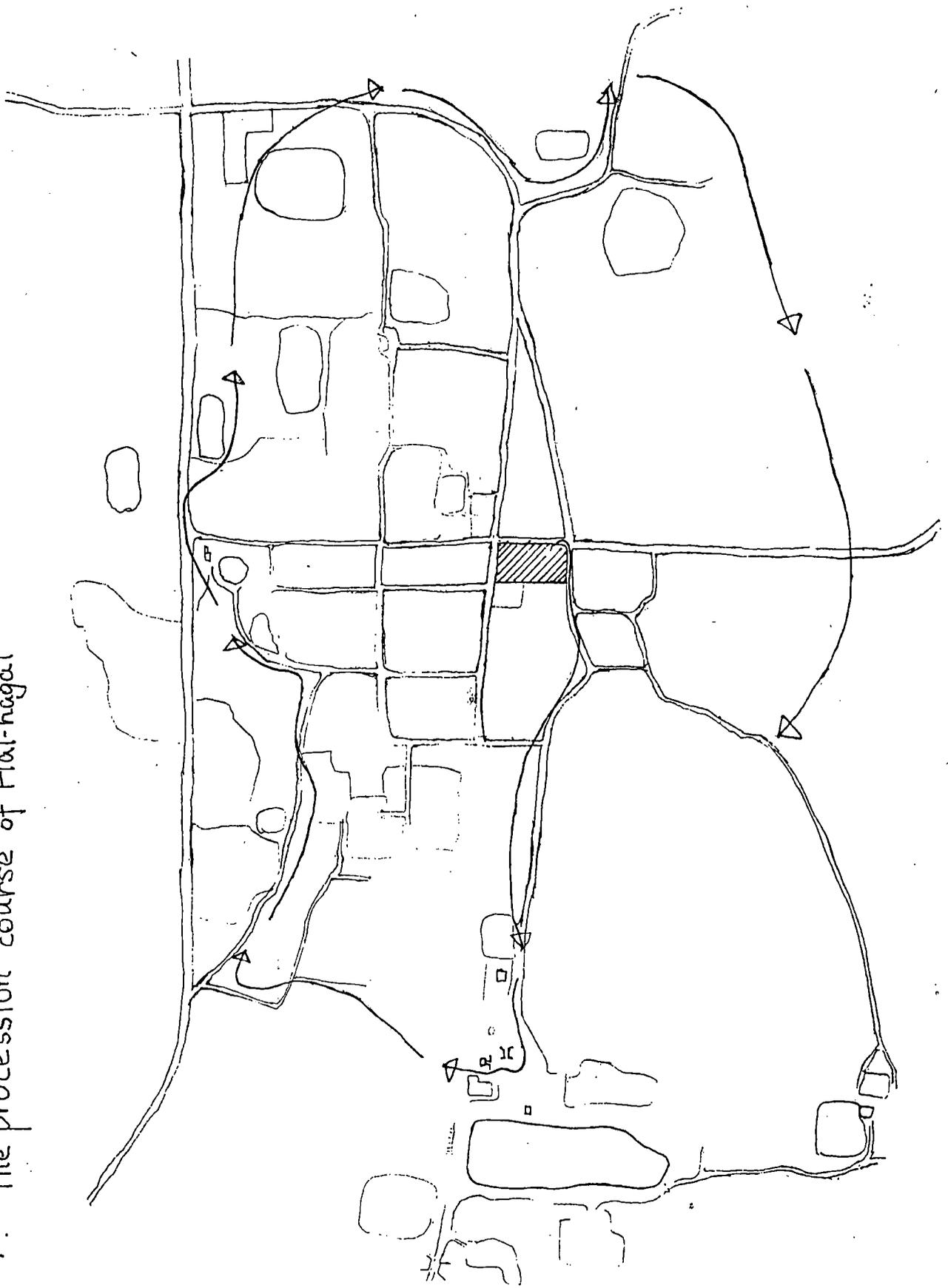
bulls to touch them. Women make a deep bow to the bulls on the village street. The route of the pot and the plough is a round of the village perimeter. Therefore, it includes many localities of the lower castes such as the Bagdi, the Muci, and the Dom as shown in Map-4. From the house of Josh-para, they pass by Utthanmandir, and Moarpukur-para, and then, the western and the eastern part of Das-para. The residents of them are mostly the Muci. Then, they pass by the side of a pond of Pudipshaher next to Manasa-para, Durgodighi of the Bagal-para and the locality of Purba-para. Most of them are the Kusmethi Bagdi's residence. On the street of Purba-para, the Bagdi *paiks* fly their flags in the presence of the representatives of the families of Bandyopadyay and Raycaudhuri from the village Ittya. They used to be present on the back of elephants sent from the court of Raj at the town of Bardhaman. A lineage of Caudhuri in the village Ittya sends the offerings to the Bhogmandir.

The procession goes ahead to the southern part of the village and cut through Dakshin-para, where Tetuliya Bagdi and Dom live. Finally, they reach the side of the south road from Datta-para to Damacpukur-para. This place is called "*halchuti-para*". This means the place to unfasten the plough from the bulls. The procession ends here. The Datta throws the pot to the ground. Then, he picks it up again and gives it back to the storekeeper of the temple. Formerly it was the duty of a lineage of bhandari. In the evening, the recitation of the *Ramayana* is performed at the Natmandir. It is the final day of the *Ramayanapath*.

h) The 31st of Baishakh; the Mahapuja of the goddess Jogadya

Before dawn on the last day (*sankranti*) of Baishakh, the Mahapuja of the goddess Jogadya starts at the bank of the Kshirdighi pond and it continues for 24 hours until dawn on the next day. The specified castes who are assigned the duty of pulling out the stone image from the pond. There are seven times to pull out

Map-4. The procession course of Hal-nagal



the image (*ugalpuja*) on the bank in a year. But except on the day of the Mahapuja, ordinary people are not allowed to approach the image of Jogadya. It is the only occasion in a year for showing the image to the village people.

Before the dawn in the *sankranti*, A Baiti beats a drum to inform the beginning of ritual to the villagers and the Bagdi *paiks* make a calling (*ahaban*) to assemble for the representatives of the Datta, Samant, and Dom in the same way as in the other *ugalpujas*. But actually this time all the representatives of the nine lineages of the Ugra-Kshatriya in the village gather in front of the Bhogmandir of the temple. In the poor light before daybreak, they light ten torches which are made by the Hari caste of the village the day before. It is up to the representatives of the six lineages of the Ugra-Kshatriya, namely the Datta, the Samant, the Malla, the Sani, the Josh, and the Caudhuri to hold flaming torches in their hands. The beat of drums by Baitis get the people in the ground of the temple and drives them to a level of excitement. In this course of excitement, the *Pradhan-purohit* stands on the stage of the Bhogmandir, purifies them by sacred water, and refers to the titles of each Ugra-Kshatriya. The order of calling the titles is the same as on the occasion of *homa* ritual at the Jogyakund. That is Datta, Samant, Malla, Sani, Ray, Josh, Chota Ray, Chota Samant, and Caudhuri. Then, he gives red marks of *sindur* (*phonta*) to their foreheads after calling each of the titles in this order. Then, everyone set out for the bank of Kshirdighi where the image of the goddess is pulled out. The Karmakar holds the sword, the Bagdi *paiks* fly the flags and drag goats, and the Dom carries torches of straw. They follow the Ugra-Kshatriya and the Brahman-sebaitis in a procession. The spectacle filled with excitement is like a scene of soldiers marching to battle through the fields.

Those who haul the ropes of the cart on, which the image of the goddess is placed, are the Datta, the Samant, the Malla, the Sani, the Josh, and the Caudhuri. At the bank of the Kshirdighi pond, the image on the cart rests for a while. During this time, a Brahman-sebait sacrifices the goats by his hand, which the Datta and the Caudhuri dedicated to the goddess. The Datta brings the decapitated

bodies of the goats and pours the blood onto the image with sugar, sweets, and a little wine. The Brahman-sebaitis sit on the cart with the image. The cart is pulled by the people until it reaches the Utthanmandir. The image is then enshrined on the altar of the Utthanmandir and unveiled to everyone. The Villagers rush to the altar of the Utthanmandir to worship the goddess and women in particular dedicate bangles of iron, conch-shell, and *sindur*. The Utthanmandir is situated at a little higher place, and someone brings water of the pond and pours it onto a slope of earth in front of the Utthanmandir. Those who are deeply touched throw themselves on the slippery, muddy slope. This way of showing devotion to the goddess is called "*satyarangada*".

In the mean time, the Brahman-sebaitis, the Datta, and the Bagdi *paiks* perform *mayurnac* from the Jogyakund to the temple again. Then, they perform *domacoyarikhera* in the temple.

i) *Domacoyarikhera*

Domacoyarikhera is a ritual to perform the mock fight between the Brahman and the Dom and between the Brahman and the Ugra-Kshatriya. At the daybreak of the Mahapuja, the Brahman-sebait, the Datta, the Samant, and the Dom assemble in the ground of the temple. At first, the Dom's representative raises bamboo sticks in both hands over the *Pradhan-purohit*'s head standing in front of the door of the main temple. The Purohit receives them by iron swords crossed in both hands. In the playing of *madal*, the Dom raises his sticks again and again over the Purohit. They step back from the door to the eastern gate of the temple in the course of the fight and return to the front of the door again. Finally, the Dom puts down his sticks on the ground and makes a deep bow (*pranam*) to the foot of the Brahman standing in front of the door of the temple. It is supposed by villagers that the *pranam* means the surrender of the fighter Dom to the Brahman. Then the Dom brings

out a fan made of *khejur* leaf by himself and uses it for the Brahman. In this way, they take rest for a while.

Next is the Datta and the Brahman. He holds bamboo sticks in both hands and get ready to attack the Brahman. In the slow rhythm of a madal, he slashes over the Brahman's head, and the Brahman receives it by his iron sword. Finally, Brahman defeats the Datta. He puts down the sticks and makes a deep bow to the Brahman's foot. The third is the Samant and the Brahman. He performs mock fight with the Brahman in the same way, and makes a deep bow to the Brahman. In the end, the Dom serves his fans for the Datta and the Samant also. It is said that this mock fight is portraying the battle between the Brahman and the Dom, and the Brahman and the Ugra-Kshatriya.

j) The Mahapuja

In the early afternoon, the sacrifice of buffalo is carried out at the front space of the Utthanmandir. A crowd of people surrounds it and holds their breath. It is on this day that the excitement of people reaches the peak in a series of rituals in the lunar month of Baishakh.

In the temple of Jogadya, the *Vaidik-purohit* practices the vedic *homa* in the morning. This is one of the rituals appointed at the last day of every month (*sankranti*). Immediately after the burning *homa* inside the main temple, the Brahman-sebait and the Karmakar begin the sacrifice of goats in the ground. This time, the goats are offered by a family of the *Rajkachari*, a family of *Sabha-pandit*, a zamindar of the village in previous times known as "Bajarer Mallik" and a lineage of the Baiti. Usually a few personal offers follow subsequently but the first four are always in this order.

The Bagdis of *mulapaik* family lead a buffalo to the temple. They enter into the ground of the temple with the buffalo where crowds of people are waiting. The Baitis begin playing their drums furiously and the *paiks* start to jump up and down

and into a dance with the beat of drums. At the same time, the other Bagdi *paik* brings a basket of ritual utensils on his head. He goes ahead to the Utthanmandir in advance attended by the flags of the Maharaja with the drums playing. In the meantime, the *paiks* use their sticks on the buffalo to lead it around the main temple. The head in this procession is the Maharaja's buffalo, and the next is the other buffalos of personal offerings. The third is the goddess's pot on a *paik's* head. The fourth is the Maharaja's sword for the buffalo sacrifice held up by the Karmakar who executes the sacrifice. Then the Baitis play their drums and the Bagdi *paiks* fly the Maharaja's flags. This procession goes around the main temple seven times and people surrounding the courtyard of the temple reach a state of excitement.

After the procession, they assemble in front of the Bhogmandir. The *Pradhan-purohit* stands on the stage, and gives red marks of *sindur* on their foreheads one by one. At one time, the *Pradhan-purohit* gives *sindur* on the foreheads of the member of the Ugra-Kshatriya. The lower castes receive *sindur* from the hand of the Malakar. After the procession, the buffalo is made to enter the temple and receives a mark of *sindur* on its forehead. Then, they start for the Utthanmandir.

In the place around the Utthanmandir, crowds of people are waiting for the arrival of the buffalo. At the muddy ground in front of the Utthanmandir, the uproarious youth are gathering. Most of them are the lower castes such as the Bagdi and the Muci. They are half-naked and put on merely a waistcloth (*gamca*). On a muddy place like morass, they are found shoving and pushing one another. From the morning, many devotees bring and sprinkle a pot of water from Kshirdighi over the muddy slope. They sprinkle water before the goddess one after another.

With the arrival of the buffalo at the Utthanmandir, devotees reach the peak of their excitement. The half-naked youths jump up and down, grapple with one another, and pull each other down onto the ground of morass. Rows of spectators surround the muddy square. Into the tumultuous crowd, the Maharaja's buffalo enters into the place for the sacrifice. A thick wall of youths of the Bagdi and the Muci close around the buffalo. They jostle and scuffle with each other and

drag the animal to the block of sacrifice. The spectators are waiting for the moment with breathless interest. Among the throng of the naked youths, a small circle of men forms around the buffalo. At the centre of the circle, the Karmakar holds high up a sword of the Maharaja and swings it downward at one stretch. Instantly, the youth shout out, shake their hands, and begin to dance boisterously. The spectators also chant and cry out the name of the goddess Jogadya in an uproarious atmosphere. It throws the whole square into a state of feverish excitement.

The youths compete for the carcass of the buffalo and scramble. The man getting the freshly severed head begins to dance putting it on his own head. The body is dragged around the muddy ground. Everyone struggles for the penis of the buffalo especially, tear off a little piece, and eat it immediately. Youths of the lineage *mulapaik* take away the head and the carcass finally to their residences. At one time, the Dom used to receive the carcass at the end and dispose it off. Nowadays, the migrated families of Santal tribe receive it.

After the sacrifice, devout spectators begin to throw themselves onto the muddy road, stretching out their hands and legs. Even a woman wearing the finest sari for formal occasions expresses her deep faith to the goddess by throwing herself on a veritable sea of mud. It expresses their deep faith for the goddess. On this occasion, they follow the long rout from Kshirdighi or the Jogadya temple to the image of goddess at the Utthanmandir. The way of the most pious is to advance every step by throwing their body on the ground. So that it is necessary to guide the steps by an attendant who has a stick to mark the ground. The devotee must throw themselves from the position where their heads were laid down. The way of expression of faith in such a pious manner is very unusual except in the Mahapuja. However, we can see a long queue of devotee on the muddy road till the Utthanmandir on this day.

All through the 24 hours when the image is enshrined on the Utthanmandir for all the people, the Brahman-sebaitis and the Bagdi *paiks* guard the image in rotation. The Brahman-sebaitis stand in front of the image and receive the dedications from the villagers. They return a part of the offerings to the

villagers as *prasad* of the goddess and give a *phonta* of *sindur* on the image and onto their foreheads. The Bagdi *paiks* watch and regulate the thronging people. They stand at the gate of the Utthanmandir both at the entrance and the exit.

k) *Merya-katha*

People's worship and dedications of flowers, sweets, iron bangles, and *sindur* in particular by women continue all day long until after midnight. They form a long queue to the image of the goddess at the Utthanmandir. A little while before dawn, the image is sent to the bottom of the pond again.

At first, in front of the image they lit up two torches of straw, which are about three meters long. The torches are then dedicated by the lineages of Josh and Ray (Caudhuri), but used to be the donation by the Maharaja Krishnacandra from the court of Krishnanagar of the Nadia District every year. Hence, it is still called "*nadermasha*", which means "torch from the Nadia". In the light of the torches, they load the image very slowly onto the cart made of *sai* tree. People gather around the Utthanmandir, and drag the ropes connected to the cart of the goddess.

At the bank of Kshirdighi, the Brahman-sebaitis prepare for the altar of the sacrifice. In front of them, the head of a lineage of the Dom caste is waiting for the arrival of the goddess holding a sword in his hand. He brings a goat to dedicate. In the light of torches, many villagers bring the cart to the bank, and set up the image of the goddess in the altar of the sacrifice. At this time, the sacrifice is performed without purification by sacred water or *mantra* (sacred verses recited by priests). They use also no sacrificial block (*tasla*) but only with a rope hang up the animal. The head of the Dom executes the sacrifice by his hand. The blood spouting out from the decapitated body is poured onto the image of the goddess at the altar. At that moment, the Dom shouts, "*Ma! Nara Rakta Khao!*"

This means "The Goddess! Drink the blood of human!" This ritual is called "*merya khata*". Before Independence, the Dom used to cut the own finger of his own right hand and dedicate the blood to the goddess.

Watched by a crowd of people around the bank, the Brahman-sebaitis slowly sink the image of the goddess in to the water. The Bagdi *paiks* stand around the slope of the bank holding the raja's flags in their hands. During this time, people used to sing a song in praise of the goddess in the rhythm of the drum by the Baiti as follows; "*Shyama Digambari Ranamajhe Naco Go Ma !*" This means "The Goddess! The figure of the goddess Shyama. Dance in the battle field!" Having sunk the image under the water, the water of the pond is splashed over the surrounding people on the bank. The Brahman-sebaitis then return to the temple.

1) The forth of the lunar month of Jaistha; *Abhisekh*

Three days after the *merya katha*, that means the fourth of Jaisth, the image of the goddess is drawn up onto the bank for about one hour for one of the *ugalpujas* again. The image is cleaned up and worshipped. Then, they send it again to the deeper place at the bottom of the pond to keep it there until the next year.