

## Some Problems Relating to Temple Management in Kamrup During the Post Independence Period

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With the declaration in 1951 that India is a Sovereign Democratic Republic, religion becomes a secular subject. Naturally, Assam as a part of India came under the obligation of the Indian Constitution. The State Government, therefore, did not pay any serious attention to the affairs by the temples which had been managed under schemes framed from time to time by the District Judge under the provision of the Assam Act V, 1908.<sup>1</sup> According to this arrangement, the priests of the temples known as *Bardeoris* secured the Zamindari right on the properties which belonged to the temples, and the *Daloi*, who was one of the *Bardeoris* but elected as manager, became responsible for the administration of the temples and its estates on behalf of the *Bardeoris*.<sup>2</sup> Taking the advantage of this arrangement, the *Dalois* and the *Bardeoris* tried to treat the temples as nothing but their moneyearning machinery.<sup>3</sup> As a result the regular worship of the deities in the temples, and the performance of the *seva-puja* suffered badly. There had been a lot of complaints from different persons against the *Dalois* and also the *Bardeoris*.

### 1). The problems arising out of the Daloi's power to dispossess the tenants at his own will :

A number of litigations took place due to the complaints made by tenants of the temples regarding the right of tilling the temple lands. A number of documents which we have collected from different temple-committees show that the poor and illiterate tenants suffered at the hands of the *Dalois*. For instance Loknath Bhattacharya and Kalicharan Sharma, the Joint Daloi, of the Umananda temple greatly oppressed the tenants.<sup>4</sup> The same was the case with Kamakhya and Hajo groups of temples. An almost the similar situation prevailed in other minor temples such as the Navagraha, Basistha, Sukreswar, Banesvar and Chandika. Although there

is no date in their printed leaflet, 8 persons from different temples in the district of Kamrup appealed to all the under-tenants of the temples to organise a revolt demanding introduction of democracy in the management and administration of the temples. Their slogan was "Sebaitis first, Sebaitis second, Sebaitis always".<sup>5</sup> The situation was so grave that in one of the reports submitted to the Deputy Commissioner in 1948, it was described as "dark", but not hopeless.

## 2). The Problems arising out of arbitrary action of the Daloi :

As the chief executive, the *Daloi* sometimes performed functions overstepping his power. So long he managed to pay the Government dues, he continued in his office and the revenue court was confined to securing the Government dues only. Taking the advantage of the situation the *Daloi* worked in arbitrary manner. In order to secure the support of majority of the *Bardeoris*, convened meetings at his own will when all the circumstances were in his favour. Some of the *Bardeoris* were deprived of their status and share of the temple property, while some non-*Bardeoris* were admitted in the temple management by the advocacy of the *Daloi*.<sup>6</sup> Thus the *Daloi* was the creator of the all the problems arose in the management of the temples in Kamrup.

## 3). The problems arising out of the misappropriation of the temple property by the Daloi :

A number of litigations took place due to complaints of tenants and the *Bardeoris* against the *Daloi*. In all the complaints, it was alleged by tenants that they had regularly paid the rents of the temple lands to the *Daloi* but the later on his part did not pay the rent to the Government for which the temple lands were put to auction causing great trouble to the tenants. In most of the cases the *Daloi*s, although they were obliged to submit accounts to the *Bardeoris*, did not do so for which the later had no way but to sue against them in the district court. This led to a friction among the *Bardeoris* and the daily *puja-seva* suffered. The office of the *Daloi* came too lucrative. Long before Independence, Hem Chandra Goswami. The Assistant Settlement Officer of Darrang noted "It is an open secret and a standing disgrace to the *Bardeoris* of Kamrup, that unscrupulous use of pecuniary and other influences are now the only determining factors in the election of a *Daloi*."<sup>7</sup> The practice of selling votes to the highest bidder was continued upto 1961 and so long this procedure of electing a *Daloi* remained

in vogue there was little hope of getting an honest and truly deserving man elected for the Daloiship.

4). **The Problems arising out of the neglect of daily worship by the priests and attendents :**

Due to the change of political as well as the economic conditions consequent upon Independence, most of the Brahmins originally attached to the temples left their traditional occupation and turned their attention to get higher education. As a result *Daloi* faced the problem of the want of priests for which they were compelled to appoint paid Brahmins and in some cases even from outside the *Bordeori* families which was not the custom earlier. The implementation of new settlement legislation, on the other hand, having freed the attendents of rendering their manual labour to the temples began to neglect their duties. It is in this situation that the temples were almost deserted by the priests and tenants for which the temple buildings faced a ruined state in one hand, and the daily *seva-puja* were not performed according to the actual *sastric* form on the other. The newly appointed paid attendents tried to get a share of the temple property for which another series of litigation took place.<sup>8</sup>

5). **The Problems arising, out of arrear of land revenue payable to the Government :**

On account of the disputes mentioned above regarding the management of the temples, there arose the problem of paying the Government dues for the temple lands. The *Sebaitis* questioned the *Daloi* as to why there was such heavy arrear of dues to the Govt. They asserted that they had been paying their rent to the *Daloi* regularly, and it was the *Daloi* who did not deposit the same to the Government. On the other hand the *Daloi*s made counter-complaints that the tenants did not pay the land revenue in time, for which the Government was losing income. To recover the revenue, the Government on its part suspended most of the *Daloi*s and appointed agents on commission.<sup>9</sup> A large amount of arrear of land revenue remained to be paid by some of the temples at the time of acquisition of their land.<sup>10</sup> The measure to collect land revenue through Revenue Agents was also a failure. So the Government had no alternative but to make an enquiry with Mr. S. K. Chakravarty as the Special-Officer.<sup>11</sup> In his report, submitted on 29 June, 1955, Mr. Chakravarty stated that in Kamrup barr-

ing one or two none of the *Dalois* kept regular accounts although all the big and important temples had got their managing committees formed mostly of *Bardeoris*. The Report continues, "majority of the *Dalois* may be said to have negligent, lethargic and inefficient, "According to this report the management of the Kamakhya Temple was most deplorable due to the existence of two groups among the *Bardeoris*" and that of the other temples were far from satisfactory. Most of the institutions were not serving public purpose for which they were created and there was a strong and insistent public opinion to take immediate step by the Government to control the trust properties.<sup>12</sup> Mr. Chakravorty therefore proposed for a new legislation through which the lands of the temples could be taken away by the Government.

Following the recommendations made by Mr. Chakravarty, the Government of Assam prepared a Bill which was subsequently passed in the Assam Legislative Assamembly and the assent of the President of India was received on 2 April, 1961 when the Assam state Acquisition of Land Belonging to Religious or Cheritable Institution of Public Nature Act 1959 (Assam Act IX, 1961) came into effect on the temple establishment.<sup>13</sup>

The Act consists of three chapters. The first chapter deals with its preamble, title and other definitions while the second chapter deals with the mode of acquisition of lands belonging to future management of the temples, The third chapter deals with miscellaneous subjects such as disputes and their settlement etc.

According to this arrangement the *Dalois* were asked to communicate with the Deputy commissioner of Kamrup regarding the calculation of the amount of annuity proposed to be paid to the temples. Most of the temples obliged with but the *Dalois* of Kamakhya did not co-operate with the Government officers. People connected with the temples were asked to form a managing committee in each temple with S. D. C. or S. D. O. whatever the case might be as the President of the Committee. The amount of annuity so fixed under the provision of the Act is to be paid to the committee and an officer from the Local Accounts is empowered to examine the accounts annually.

Apparently most of the problems relating to the management of the temples as stated earlier are solved, but the problems still remains in other forms. The amount of annuity so fixed is too small to meet the expenditure of the daily as well as regular worship of the temples. With the acquisition of the temple lands by the Govt. the priests and attendants lost all interests in the temple,

and hence in most cases, the temples became deserted. In practice, there is now none to look after them and hence the temple buildings too which are undoubtedly historical manuments are facing ruins.

### Notes & References

1. The Assam State Acquisition of Lands Belonging To Religious or Charitable Institution of Public Nature Act, 1959, Chapter I, p. 1.
2. Judgement of Judicial commissioner of Assam in Regular Appeal No. 1 of 1873 (Durgapresad and Krishna Vs. other Bardeoris of the Kamakhya temple).

This point has been discussed in detail in my paper entitled "Sale and Mortgage of Right of Worship By the Priest of Kamakhya Temple" which was read in the IXth session of the NEIHA, held in the Gauhati University in November, 1988.

3. W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Assam*, 1879, Vol. 1, p. 37.
4. Minute of the meeting of the pujaris of the Umananda temple dated 12/11/1962. General notice of convening a meeting by Hargovinda Bhattacharyya, the Secretary of the managing committee, Umananda Temple to be held in the Circuit House. Gauhati on 4-5-1980.
5. Memorandum submitted to the Revenue minister of Assam on 30th March, 1948, by the tenants of the Umananda temple. The temple enquiry, report submitted to the Deputy commissioner of Kamrup by G. Barua, Extra Assistant commissioner, dated 1.5.1948.
6. *Ibid.*
7. H. C. Goswami, "A note on the proposed Schemes for the management of the Hajo Temple in Kamrup, "Paper Book in Appeal From Original Decree No, 80 of 1909 (Rajshahye group , pp. 168-170.
8. Minute Bookes of the Bardeoris of Sukreswar temple from 1980-1985.
9. S. K. Chakravarty, *A Report on the Administration of the Temples in Assam and their Lands*, p. 12.

10. Name of temple Amount of arrear of land Revenue.

i) Jaydurga Temple	3000.00
ii) Pariharesvar Temple	14000.00
iii) Siddhesvar Temple	—
iv) Bhringesvar Temple	15,782.25
v) Asvakranta Temple	16,000.00
vi) Pigalesvar Temple	6,888.00

Source : Correspondence with learned and knowledgeable person//Institution asking their view, comments and Instructions on the land system of Assam conducted by the Law Research Institute under the High Court of Gauhati, File No. LRT/LS/30/1981.

11. Government letter No. RR. 69/54/21 dated 5th September, 1954. Order of the Deputy Minister (Revenue) dated 20th August, 1954 relating to temple exquiry in Assam.

12. S. K. Chakravarty, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

13. *Assam Gazette*, Extra ordinary, dated the 12th April, 1961. Government Notification No. LJL/58/39 dated the 11th April, 1961.