

## CONTEMPORARY MANASA TEMPLE IN TRIPURA

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Figure 1. Manasa temple, Swapan Malakar & Sukuti Malakar, Noapatan, Kailashahar. (left) Figure 2. Subodh & Mira Malakar, Petchardhor, Kailashahar, North Tripura (right)



Figure 3. Manasa Temple, Ananda Sarkar, Putul Rani Chowdhury, Echamua, Lalmatia, R.K.Nagar, Agartala, West (left). Figure 4. Manasa temple in Shipra cabinet, Rakhi Banik, Kanchanpur, North Tripura.(right)

**Abstract :** Goddess Manasa, a medieval snake goddess of Bengal are enormously popular in the present Bengali tradition. Among the diverse folk art tradition of Bengal the art of Manasa established a huge treasure. The current genre of Manasa includes diverse styles of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic forms. Scholars have been identified the present tradition of medieval snake goddess Manasa is a derivative forms of ancient snake goddess Sungai, Suvamgai or Sungai Bhattarik of Bengal. Above hundreds of snake goddess of a particular genre made in stone and bronze have been discovered and preserved in various museums of Eastern India and some are in abroad dated from eighth to twelfth Century AD. This artistic tradition of snake goddess has been revived to the earthen idol worship of the goddess along with the influence of medieval Bengali literary tradition of Manasamangal Kavya. Since then the folk tradition of earthen idols, scroll painting (Pattachitra tradition), symbolic forms of the goddess are in vogue among the Bengali community. Importantly there are no record of Manasa temple found in Bengal so far from ancient time. In contemporary time there are considerable Manasa temple found in Bengal and particularly in Tripura. The Northeastern region of Tripura and South Assam are predominantly distinguished by Bengali culture which includes a large number of Manasa idol worship within Manasa temple. The Manasa temples of Tripura are evidential contemporary phenomenon which is the main concern of this paper.

**Keywords :** Goddess Manasa, Manasa Temple, Tripura, Bengali Tradition, Cultural Expression.

### Introduction:

In contemporary period several small and large temples of Manasa have been built in various places of West Bengal, South Assam and Tripura. Any discussion or information on Manasa temples of Bengal has not been found so far. However, S.K. Makbul Islam has mentioned in his essay "Serpent in Cultural Configuration" about various kinds of ritualistic places and structures like 'Manasa Bari,' 'Manasa than,' 'Manasa mandir,' 'Manasa Atchala'-related to the worship of Manasa.

Manasa worship is very much popular in both the rural and urban areas of Tripura. There are many devotees who worship the goddess on a regular basis throughout the year. Therefore, they build temples inside their house and establish the idol there. Some of them build temples solely for establishing the snake goddess. Some people establish idols of other god and goddess too with that of Manasa within the same

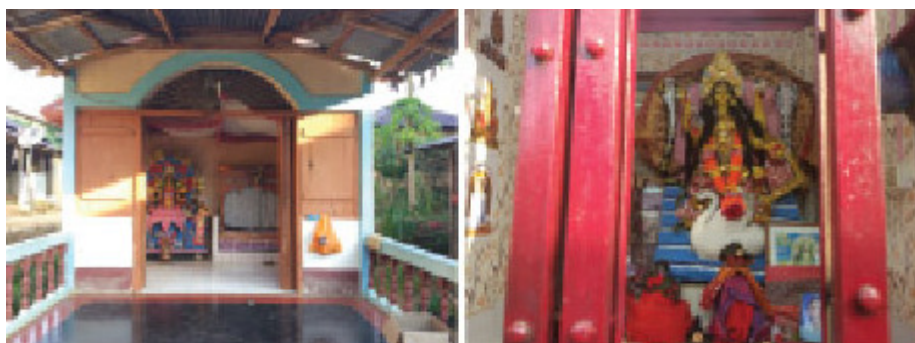


Figure 5. Manasa Temple, Jagadish Roy, Sajal Roy, Kajol Roy, Santipara Road, Petcharthal, Unakoti Tripura.(left) Figure 6. Manasa Temple, South Nayapara, Dharmanagar, North Tripura. (right)

temple, and worship them together while paying more importance to Manasa.

A variety can be noticed in the Manasa temples built within home. It is natural to find some saints, in almost every place in Tripura, who claim to make divine connection with the snake goddess through their regular worship, or on special occasions. In local language this is explained as possession of the goddess (the goddess has possessed them). During that special moment these saints are found to solve the problems of the devotees and they also prescribe medicines (mainly Ayurveda, Herbalism, Paraherbalism) for curing various diseases. In rural areas this type of temples are specified by people. These temples are mainly known as 'Manasa Bari' (House of Manasa).

Apart from this variety, another kind of Manasa temple is noticed in villages. These temples are usually situated outside houses, far from populated area. These temples differ from temples within houses in terms of architecture. Somehow a roof is made from one or two pieces of tin for the worship of the goddess. These are known as 'Manasa Akhrah' or 'Manasatala'.

In this way, three kinds of Manasa temples are noticed in Tripura, namely,

- i. Manasa Mandir (Manasa Temple)
- ii. Manasa Bari (House of Manasa)
- iii. Manasa Tala.

Information of minimum one hundred of Manasa temples have been collected from survey of a very few districts. Among them one or two examples of these varieties will be discussed in this paper.

#### **Manasa Mandir:**

The Manasa temples seen in the houses of both rural and urban areas are mainly of three types-(i) entirely clay built, (ii) made of tin, wood and bamboo and (iii) built of cement and brick. The temples in the urban areas are mostly built of cement. Temples made of clay, wood and bamboo are mostly seen in villages. The roof in this kind of temple is made of tin. The temple room is usually six to ten square Ft. in size. The architectural style clearly bears the traces of local influences.

The architecture of Manasa Mandir is exactly same as the small sized rooms meant for people to live. These rooms with one door and two windows on its both side, are excessively decorated and painted. Verandah (corridor) is compulsory for this structure. In some cases the temple, verandah and a mandapa outside the temple are built as connected to each other.

I will now discuss some of the examples of Manasa Mandir built within houses.

#### **Noapatan Manasa Mandir:**

There is a small Manasa temple in the residence of Swapan Malakar and Sukuti Malakar in Noapatan, a village situated near Kailashahar. In lower middle class families, temples are usually built of bamboo and

wood. Built of bamboo fences, this is one of the examples of temporary temples in Tripura. Since the materials are not permanent, the temples too do not exist permanently. Such temples are repaired or rebuilt one in five, seven or ten years. (Fig. 1)

The temple with a verandah is built on a clay base which is almost two and half Ft. high. The lower portion of the house is covered by a bamboo fence (without any whole in it). The upper portion is made of diamond shaped bamboo fences. This kind of diamond shaped bamboo fence without any whole is a special example of bamboo craft in eastern region. This type of decoration in bamboo is often found to be used in temples, gardens and also in making gates of social programs.

A tin sheet is placed on the bamboo fences. In this way these temples are built in very simplistic manner. This type of Manasa temple is very common in the villages of Tripura.

### **Penchardor Manasa Temple :**

Penchardor village is situated on the bank of Manu River in Unakoti district, between Kailashahar and Kumarghat. There is a Manasa temple in Subodh Malakar and, Meera Malakar's house. The temple is made of clay, however because of the painting and decoration it appears as cement built. (Fig. 2)

The temple, placed on one corner of the yard is basically a small hut with a verandah connected to it. Situated among trees this temple draws attention towards it due to the decoration on its walls. Two coloured pots are placed in two front pillars of the verandah. The wall is full of drawings of flowers, leaves, etc. The door is decorated with various kinds of flower. Both sides of the door is decorated with plastic flowers, and the upper portion of the door is decorated with flower garland and hand drawn flowers. Painted relief sculptures of two large snakes facing the door, on both the walls and both sides of the door seem to draw attention. On the upper and lower portions of the reliefs, drawings of large flowers, leaves, etc., seem to increase the beauty of the temple.

On the two walls on both sides of the door reside two small windows. Two diamond-shaped decorated bamboo fences are placed in the windows, so that sunlight can easily enter inside the temple. Most of the temples are built following this way. Sometimes decorative elements are emphasised in temples, and sometimes simple architecture dominates the temples, for example, the temple in the house of Mayarani Das in south Ganganagar, Dharmanagar. The temple in the house of Nanigopal and Purnima Malakar in Rajnagar colony Fatikray is also important in this regard.

### **Lal Maitta Manasa Temple :**

There is a cement built proper temple in the house of Ananda Sarkar and Putulrani Choudhuri in Ichchhamua, R.K. Nagar, Lalmaitta, Agartala. This rectangular temple with one door, has been built in 2003. (Fig. 3)

Another exceptional temple is found in Sipra Cabinet house near Kanchanpur. (Fig. 4) There is another one in a house near Pencharthol market. (Fig. 5) Both the temples in Sipra Cabinet house and in Pencharthol market are connected with wide verandah. In the Pencharthol temple, a half-circular (half sun in shape) ventilator has been built along with a large door and two windows.

Apart from these Manasa temples in the houses of people in villages and towns of Tripura, there are many temples built in public places for common people so that they can worship the goddess. Example of such a temple is the South Noyapara Manasa temple in Dharmanagar. (Fig. 6) Important among the Manasa temples which include other gods and goddesses as well, is the temple of Panchadevata (five gods) in Panisagar.

### **Temple of Panchadevata :**

The newly built architecture of the temple of Panchadevata near Panisagar Market in North Tripura





Figure 7. Pancha Devatar Mandir including Manasa, Panisagar, North Tripura.

was inaugurated on 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 2012, by Sri Sri Panchadevata Mandir Kalyan Samiti. The history of the temple is interrelated with the changing scenario in post-partition Tripura. When huge number of people migrated to Tripura from East Pakistan or present Bangladesh, this place (where the temple stands now) used to be known as 'Badsha Mallik Bari'. Later with the growing Hindu population in this area, the bat-tala (under banyan tree) was first turned into a Manasa tala (place for worshipping Manasa) due to people's immense fear of snake. Later on it also became a place for worshipping the Goddess Shitala (Shitala-tala) who according to Hindu mythology cures diseases like pox, sore, etc. In this way this bat tala became the conjoined worshipping place for Manasa, Shitala, Kali, Mahadev and Shanidev. The temple authority published a yearly magazine titled as 'Panchajanya' in 2012. The magazine includes the history of the temple's gradual development from a bamboo structure to a room made of wood and tin, and finally a cement-built proper temple. The temple architecture includes five parallel built rectangular rooms with the elements of Hindu temple architecture of mandapa, garbhagriya, sikhara, amalaka and kalasa, etc., on them, and a huge verandah connected to the entire structure. The presence and worshipping of five gods and goddesses together (including Manasa) in one temple is not found in any other place apart from Panisagar. (Fig. 7)

#### **Manasa Bari (House of Manasa) :**

Usually these structures are like the Manasa temples in the houses of rural and urban areas in Tripura. The only difference between Manasa Mandir and Manasa Bari is that there is a special servant in Manasa Bari who gives solutions to various problems in people's lives on special days like nag-panchami, Thursday, Saturday, Tuesday, Monday, etc. This person, a great devotee of the goddess Manasa, is considered to be specially blessed by the goddess and to be her representative on earth.

Manasa Bari is found in every district of Tripura. Apart from the architectural style of two-three Manasa temples, most of the Manasa houses are built using three main materials-clay, bamboo (wood) and bricks.

I will discuss about some special Manasa Bari temples. There are some other important Manasa Bari, for example-

- i. Bimal Das' Manasa Bari, Malaynagar, Ravipara, Anandanagar 8, Agartala.
- ii. Hiru Malakar's Manasa Bari, Shantipara, Araliya, Agartala.

#### **Rajnagar Manasa Temple :**

Rajnagar village is situated 5.2 km. away from Kumarghat, in Unkoti district. It is a small village in the Fatikray panchayat. There is a temple in the house of Premananda Malakar and Niyati Malakar. Malakar's house is a few minutes' walk from Rajnagar market. The huge structure of the temple is clearly visible from



Figure 8: Manasa temple, Premananda & Niyoti Malakar, Rajnagar, Fatikroy, Kumarghat, Unakoti Tripura.



Figure 9. Paschim Panisagar Manasa Bari, Lt. Haramani Nath, Mitarani Nath, Panisagar, North Tripura. (left) Figure 10. Haripur Manasa Temple, Jotirmoy Nath, Laljhuri, Kanchanpur (right)

outside, since it is situated almost 6 or 7 Ft. up from the road. The gateway or torana of the temple is reached through 4-5 stairs. After crossing the huge arch or portal, comes the mandapa of the temple, followed by the 'garbhagriha' or sanctum sanctorum. (Fig. 8)

Built in brick and cement, this temple is more than fifty years old. It is due to the huge corpus of the temple, the mandapa had to be built huge in size. Open on four sides, the mandapa is roofed with tin and iron. Two arches on the entrance of the temple have resulted into the shikhara or deul after being conjoined together. This shikhara seems to suggest an influence of neo-classical architectural style. The frontal part of the temple has been built in a way that seems to combine both the style of Christian Church and Hindu temple architectural style. The upper part of the arch goes up straight like sikhara. The upward portion includes first hoods of pancha-nag (five hooded snake) on small pitcher (ghot), amalaka, and finally a pitcher (kalash) and trishul on the topmost part.

There are two main arches on the entrance way. There are two more behind them. The torana of the mandapa resides on these four pillars/arches. Pitchers or kalasha have been placed on the four pillars of the shikhara, and on the main pillar in the middle. Three pitchers with trishul on them have been placed on the pillar in the middle. Comparatively smaller pitchers with iron rod on them have been placed on the rest of the pillars. Just behind the four pillars attached to the entrance of the mandapa, there are four pillars inside the entrance (two on both sides). There are five more pillars placed parallel on the both sides of the entrance. So, there are total eighteen pillars on which the roof of the mandapa is made with tin. The sanctum has been built separately in the shape of garbhagriya. The sanctum resembles the architecture of 'deul' in Bengal-a flat shikhara with Kalash and Trishul on top.

In the absence of Premananda and Niyati Malakar, I talked to their daughter Nirupama Malakar, and was informed that this temple had been built by her father, approximately fifty years ago. An artist (Acharjee) from Rajnagar sculpted the idol of the goddess, and the same idol is repainted and decorated every year for worshipping. It is important to note that the age of the temple can be assumed easily after taking a look at it, the huge temple with its mandapa and the temple inside, stands in the middle of the house campus among the stairs, main gate, the yard. The plaster of the mandapa and the stairs has been removed many years ago. The paint on the walls has been faded revealing the bricks underneath.

The idol of Manasa draws special attention here. Though the gorgeousness of the attire and decoration of the idol have been dimmed with time, the strangely beautiful smile on the goddess' face has added a sense of liveliness in the idol. The lively characteristic of the idol becomes more surprising because the idol does not reveal any idea of being a work by a skilled artist. The idol does not appear to be realistic but like a doll. This becomes prominent especially in case of the female figures accompanying the goddess and standing on her two sides.

The four-armed goddess seated on a lotus is placed on a swan which has opened its wings. The



Figure 11. Laljhuri Manasa Bari, Nagendra Debnath, Laljhuri, Kanchanpur, North Tripura.



Figure 12. Tivracheera Manasa Temple, Pecharthal, Unakoti Tripura. (left) Figure 13. Dhanichara Manasa Temple, Suniti Ranjan Chakma, Dhanichara, Machhmara Radhamohanpur, North Tripura. (right)

lower hands are posed in 'abhaymudra' (suggesting fearlessness), and two upper hands are holding snakes. The armlets of four arms of the goddess are also snakes. There are two snakes on two sides of the crown on Manasa's head, and one on the top. The crown appears as being made of thousands of small snake-hoods. A paper-made halo / prabhamandal is placed behind the crown. On both sides of the goddess reside two snakes and two female companions. Two snakes on the wings of the swan seem to hold the entire composition together.

This house is famous in this area as Manasa Bari because of Niyati Malakar's worshipping of the snake goddess from fifty years, and also because of her act of giving solution to the problems of people who come to solve their crisis in this temple. There are many such Manasa houses (bari) in Tripura. However, in terms of architectural style and time period of building, this temple functions as a crucial example.

#### **Paschim Panisagar Manasa Bari :**

In north Tripura, between Dharmanagar and Pencharthol, a Manasa Bari known as Haramani Nather Manasa Bari is situated in a remote village, which is almost 10 km away on west from Panisagar. This is mainly famous in the name Manasa Bari. (Fig. 9)

There is nothing much to say about the architectural style, because it is a very simple temple structure with a square shaped room built in brick and cement. There is a big mandapa adjacent to the temple, and in front of the sanctum there is a smaller one where Hormoni used to sit. Hormoni has passed away. Her daughter-in-law Mitarani Nath now worships in the temple. However, gathering of people from various places does not happen now. Even five years ago, everyday minimum fifteen to twenty people from different places used to visit the temple to meet Haramani and to get solutions of various problems in their lives. Haramani Nath regularly used to sit in meditation, facing the goddess, and give solutions to people's problems one by one, without seeing them. The greatness of her divine power, spreaded all over Tripura. I too have experienced her process of worshipping (sadhana) from the perspective of an observer (truth-seeker).

Though specially is meant for the goddess Manasa, this temple also consists of idols of Mahadev and Laxmi-Narayan. In the sanctum, Mahahev resides in the middle with Manasa on his right, and Laxmi-Narayan on his left, on the altar (bedi) made of marble stone. Accompanied by two female figures, Manasa is found to be seated in the posture of lalitasana on a swan. All the idols are made of cement. According to the assumption of Mitarani Nath, the temple and the idols have been worshipped for last forty years.

#### **Haripur Manasa Bari :**

Laljhuri is a remote place in Kanchanpur. Haripur is a small village situated in dense forest, even far from Laljhuri. Jyotirmoy Nath lives in this village. There are two residential houses and one temple which have been built after cleaning a huge area in the garden of shegun trees (Teak or Tectona grandis of Lamiaceae family). In this area, almost all the financially weak people build clay-made houses.

The white clay-built temple stands on one side of the yard. The temple consists of a single-roofed





Figure 14. Joypur Manasa Temple, Petcharthal, Unakoti Tripura.(left) Figure 15. Sripur Manasa Than, Dharmanagar, North Tripura. (right)

room with wooden doors, windows and walls made of clay. The roof is made of tin. Floral patterns have been carved on the door of the temple. Inside the temple, the idols of Manasa and Mahadeva are placed on high wooden pedestal. Here the goddess is seen in the 'nagrath' form-that is the lotus inside the nag patch, and the meditating goddess sitting in padmasana on the lotus. There are two swans on two sides of the nagpatch. (Fig. 10) I have got to know from conversation with Jyotirmoy that he has been living in Tripura for last forty years. He is born in Pathaira, Khuripar in sylhet. This house has been built recently. Before building this house, he used to live in Laljhuri. He has been worshipping Manasa for last eight years. He has embraced the life of a saint long ago. This becomes prominent in his appearance-red attire, matted hair and Rudraksha beads in neck.

At being asked about the form of the idol, he describes how one day he had seen a woman (who he believes was the goddess Manasa). When he touched her feet, the goddess held him. After this incident Jyotirmoy Nath started worshipping the goddess. First he used to worship the standing figure of the goddess, but now he worships the figure seated on lotus. He also mentions that he has seen several places in meditation, however since he could not avoid the illusion of human life (songsar), he has established the goddess in temple. It is important to mention in this regard that many scholars have researched or are researching on the yoga-philosophy of the saints of the Nath community. Such saints are still active in Tripura.

#### **Laljhuri Manasa Bari :**

I came across the information about a Manasa temple near Laljhuri block in Kanchnapur from many people of that area. Following the procedure of documentation I went to that house too with the similar set of questions which I carried while documenting in other Manasa temples as well. Since many people mentioned about this temple, I entered in the temple with excessive curiosity and expectations. One has to walk up the clay-made stairs on a high mound to reach the temple. On side of the house, the small temple has been built of clay, wood, bamboo and tin shade. Manasa is seated on lotus which resides on 'nagrath'. On the opposite of the temple, there are residential rooms made of clay. (Fig. 11)

The owner of the house introduced himself as Nagendra Debnath. Interestingly the name means the lord of snakes, and also elephant. His wife worships the goddess, and after being possessed by Manasa, tells ways of finding solution to problems brought to her by many people.

Following my set questionnaire, when I started questioning Nagendra Debnath about the source of the idols in the temple in his house, time period of and the reason behind worshipping the snake goddess , etc., his wife suddenly came out and started asking me counter questions in front of the camera. She asked me to tell them why people worship 'the mother' (Manasa). Before that she wanted to know whether it is right to write about the worshipping of 'the mother'. While answering the first question I said that, there are many who follow the tradition of Manasa worship initiated by their forefathers in past, some people worship



Figure 16. Balehor Manasa Than, Jalai-Kailashahar Road, Unakoti North Tripura.(left)  
Figure 17. Manasa Akhrah, Birchandrapur, Vaidyanath Sarani, Unkoti Tripura.(right)

to keep words they have given in past for their wish fulfillments, and there are also some people who start worshipping the snake goddess after they see the goddess in their dreams or they get order of worshipping the goddess in their dreams. Then I asked her the reason behind her act of worshipping the goddess.

This question created a huge trouble for me. This woman who was standing in front of me, suddenly fell backwards, and within few seconds, started asking random questions like-who has come to the house, why has he come here, does he knows with whom he is arguing , etc.,-one after another. Before asking these questions, this woman was frantically moving her limbs and making strange noise-which I captured in my camera. While I was observing the strange gestures of the woman, and listening to her questions patiently, Nagendra Debnath enquired whether I would delete these photos and videos. To this I replied that, the Mother knows very well the reason behind capturing these photos and videos. After listening to this, the woman changed her tone, burst out in loud laughter, and asked me to leave. Within a few moments she got up after rolling herself a bit and entered inside the temple. I left the temple after offering little money as pronami. Still now whenever I remember that incident I become silent. These aspects are not part of my research, still while researching about the artistic form of the goddess, various such aspects came out which seem to indicate significant ways for my research. These aspects shed light on the procedures of worshipping of the snake goddess by her devotees to various communities.

### **Tipracheera Manasa Temple :**

Tipracheera, a hilly village near Machhmara is situated on the Pencharthol-Baghaichhora Road. The village is mainly inhabited by Tripuri, Riyang and Chakma communities. The name Tipracheera has probably been based on this. The Tipracheera Manasa temple is actually a Manasa Bari, because various kinds of diseases are cured here.

The specificity of this Manasa Bari is that the worshippers of Manasa in this temple belong to the Chakma community. The Chakma community is mainly Buddhist community. However, due to the majority of Bengali people in this area, the influence of Bengali tradition is clearly visible in the lives of the tribes. Tipracheera Manasa Bari or Temple is one of the important instances of this influence.

There are two single-roofed big rooms made of tin and bamboo. The temple is built as connected to these two rooms. On the pedestal of the temple are placed idols of Goutam Buddha, Goddess Manasa, Shibli Buddha and Banabanta (other forms of Buddha). Soothing natural scenarios have been painted on the backdrop or the wall behind the idols. Interestingly both Goutam Buddha and Goddess Manasa are placed on Sarpasana (seat made of snakes). Five hooded snakes are placed above both of their heads. The juxta position of Buddha idol with that of the Manasa can be found only in houses of some of the worshippers belonging to the hilly communities of Tripura. (Fig. 12)

The rooms of the temple contain clay pitchers placed in a row, and bedding. The priest of the temple



informs me that people with many diseases from rural areas sometimes stay here and leave only after being cured. During the period of collecting information, I have seen at least five to seven people (both men and women) staying in these rooms. This number can easily reach up to twenty or twenty-five. It is important to mention that those who are in the charge of curing diseases of people in this Manasa Bari, use both Ayurvedic medicines-medicinal leaves, plants, etc., and charms, spells, etc., to relieve the infected patients. This Manasa temple in Tipracheera has been established in 2010.

#### **Dhanichara Manasa Bari:**

There is a Manasa Bari in the house of Sunitiranjan Chakma who lives in southern Dhanichara near Machhmara Radhamohanpur. The half-built Manasa temple with cement built walls and tin roof resembles the structure of Buddhist monastery. Outside the temple there is a tin-roofed mandapa. The mandapa is meant for singing or reading Buddhist hymns. The mandapa is also used for serving the patients.

There are two cement made idols of Goutam Buddha and Manasa, with images of various god and goddesses. Iconographically these Manasa idols are not different from the Manasa idols worshipped by Bengalis. However a crucial difference is noticed in the attire of the goddess. Like Goutam Buddha, Manasa too is found to wear a saffron cloth. Therefore apparently the idol of Manasa appears as one of the female deities of Buddhism. (Fig. 13) According to Sunitiranjan Chakma, he saw Buddha and Manasa coming together to him, in his dream. After this incident, he started worshipping them together. In this way he has been worshipping Manasa and serving the devotees for last thirty-four years.

#### **Manasatala or Manasar Akhrah:**

This kind of structure is mainly built in one corner of the village. In most cases Manasa is worshipped in secluded places under trees like banyan (*Ficus* of *Moraceae* family), neem (*Azadirachta Indica*), bel (*Aegle Marmelos*), fonimanasa (*Cactus*), etc. In many such places Manasa temples are built where Manasa is worshipped annually. In some places the goddess is worshipped normally under a single roof. Sometimes, idols of the goddesses which have been worshipped before are placed in a line, and after that the place gradually becomes known as Puja Sthana or Akhrah. Villagers collectively arrange for the worship. Sometimes individually people organise Manasa puja after they get order of doing so in their dreams, or to fulfil any promise kept before (*manas*). In this way gradually the place becomes famous as a place where the goddess is lively (*jagrot*). It is important to mention that in the temples or single roofed structure at Manasatala, the goddess is worshipped only once in a year. On special occasions, people light candles and incense sticks. However, regular worshipping happens only in the Manasa temple inside residential houses.

The Manasa temple in Pencharthol Manasa tala is known as Joypur Manasa Temple. In a secluded place of the village, under the long shadow of two banyan trees, the temple has been built in brick and cement by the inhabitants of the village Joypur. Probably initially this place was like other Manasa talas. The cement built temple has been built later on with the collection of funds from devotees. However, the interior of the temple and the condition of the idol make it prominent that the temple is used only once in a year for worshipping the goddess. (Fig. 14)

There is another than (holy place) of Manasa in Sripur, Dharmanagar. Under the bel (*Aegle Marmelos*), tree, on the red altar, there is a shiva linga on top of which there is a snake. A trishul is kept besides. The people of this area give offering in the name of Mahadeva and Manasa. However it is known as Manasatala. (Fig. 15)

It is worth-noting that both the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms of the goddess are found in Tripura. In some cases only a Seej tree (*cactus*) or a few pieces of stone are kept and worshipped as Manasa. For example, a row of some trees-mango, banyan, bel (*Aegle Marmelos*), tomal (*Diospyros Montana*) on the bank of a pond in a village named Bolehor in Kailashahar, is known as the Akhrah of goddess. Like many

villagers Kanchanbala Das too offers prayers there. A piece of red cloth is tied around the tree, which is worshipped as goddess Manasa on every Monday and panchami (5<sup>th</sup> day in any month of Bengali calendar).

Apart from that, in Bolehor village, on Jolai Road, there are places for worshipping Manasa and Kali, beside the road. All these places are situated in a secluded/solitary area, far away from the village. Open on four sides, there is only a small shed above the idol. (Fig. 16) There is an akhrah of Manasa and Bipattariini (the goddess who keeps all dangers away from her devotees) in a field near Birchandrapur village panchayat, Vaidyanath Sarani, in Unkoti district. The idols worshipped both in Jolai Road and in this place have been placed here after being worshipped in the Manasa temples at residential houses. In this way these places are gradually taking the shape of Manasatala. (Fig. 17)

There are many such places in the villages and cities of Tripura. Important among them are Bhagalpur Dhanabilash Panchayat, Fatikray Rajnagar, Unkoti, etc. However this tradition of Manasa temple making in Tripura is a current cultural expression which defines the complete configuration of Manasa idol worship in Tripura. It is a living tradition, which represents the snake culture through the worship of goddess Manasa requires the idols, temples, texts--Manasamangal, and music/performance based on the text. Some noted examples of Manasa temples in Tripura are attached below which were primarily collected in pursuance of my research on "Goddess Manasa in Bengali Tradition".

#### Notes :

1. Sen, Anjan & Sk. Makbul Islam, *Sarpa Sanskriti O Manasa*, A collection of essays on Serpent-cult and Manasa, Bangiya Sahitya Samsad, Kolkata, 2012, p. 49-55.
2. H. Bhuiyan, Mokamal, *Studies in south Asian heritage, Essays in memory of M. Harunur Rashid*, Bangla Academy Dhaka, Bangladesh, p. 99-100.
3. H. Bhuiyan, Mokammal, *Iconography of Goddess Manasa: Origin, Development and Concept*, Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 54 (2): 71-99.
4. Yoga- is a group of physical, mental, and spiritual practices or disciplines which originated in ancient India.
5. Akhrah-literal meaning is meeting place. Monastery of Vaishnavite monks.
6. Than-derivative form of the word 'Sthan'-here means holy place.
7. Shalu-a particular kind of red piece of cloth which is usually used in religious works.
8. Pronami-Offerings given while bowing to an idol.
9. Ek-chala-single roofed house.
10. Bat-tala-under the banyan tree.
11. Sadhana-Worship/perseverance/prayer.

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