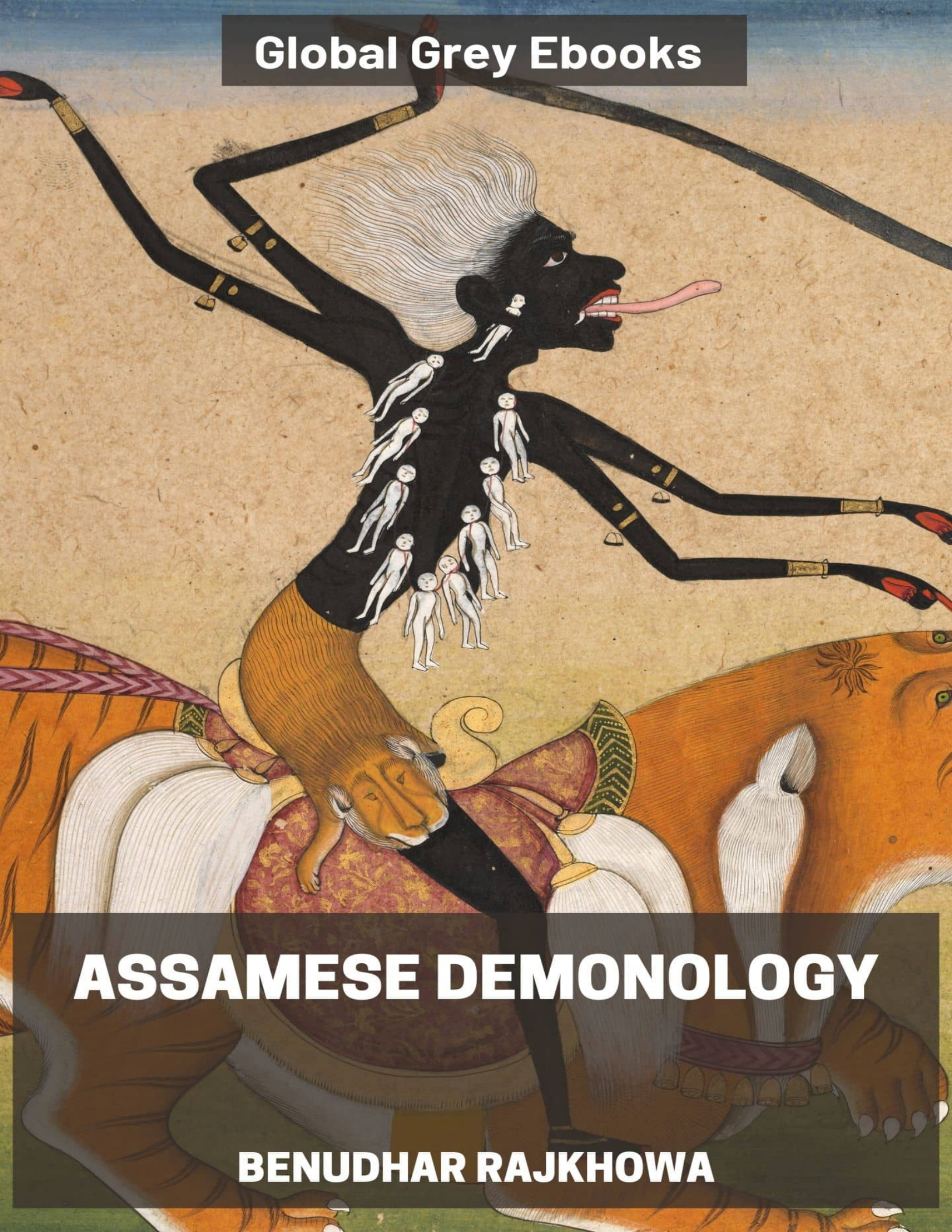


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**ASSAMESE DEMONOLOGY**

**BENUDHAR RAJKHOWA**

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*Assamese Demonology*  
by Benudhar Rajkhowa

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# Preface

Like all other countries under the heavens, Assam has *her* indigenous ghosts. These pages are an attempt to describe their ways and habits, according to popular belief, with a view that they may be profitably used by all seekers after truth—the spiritualist and the mystic. They are a faithful record of what has fallen from the lips of the populace, without the slightest varnish of my own.

The Assamese are a Hindu race and as such believe in the numerous Sanskrit deities of the heavens. Some of these deities have been however degraded to the position of hobgoblins. Others have been hurled from their proud unapproachable region and placed in the rank and file of the spirit-kingdom.

The pure celestial deities may be passed over in this treatise and those alone will be noticed who have anything to do in the arena of human life in their ordinary spheres. The astrological bodies again will not come under my review. There are both benign and malign spirits as well as indifferent ones. Some of the spirits exercise double functions, while others do not. It is a striking fact that the generality of the Assamese spirits are malignant.

B. R.

Sibsagar, October, 1904.

# Introduction

The author has asked me to write a brief introduction, for his little book, and I do so gladly. The subject is a most interesting one, and although the author does not claim to have dealt with it on scientific lines, his pages will repay perusal. The book is a faithful record of popular beliefs in Assam in all their original quaintness. And for such a task, it would not be easy to find any one better qualified than the author.

W. J. Reid.

Kohima, Assam.

September 27, 1904.

# 1. An Account Of Spirits

It is impossible to attempt any classification of spirits much less one based on natural history. I may, however, for the satisfaction of my readers, without entering into the niceties of distinction lay down broadly the following four territorial classes: —

I. Subterranean.

II. Terrestrial.

III. Aerial.

IV. Celestial.

Terrestrial includes; (A) Aqueous; (B) Sylvan; (C) Household.

By far the largest number of spirits known to the Assamese fall under head II.

I begin with this class.

(A) Aqueous spirits:—*bak, dot, jakh, datial* or *jankakhoria, jalshai* and *jalnarayan*.

(1) *Bak*: —

He is fond of fish. His body emits an offensive smell which is translated to the very water over which he wanders.

He catches fish by netting. He lives in a deserted tank. There is an Assamese proverb which runs thus: —

*Hahar oparat sial raja,*

*Pota pukhurit bak raja,*

A jackal is the lord of poultry.

A bak is supreme in a deserted tank.

(2) *Dot*; —

The word is derived from Sanskrit *daitya*, a demon. Of all the spirits, the *dot* is most heard of among the Assamese. He leads people by all manner of inducements to any out-of-the-way place and there deals

merciless blows on them. He however seldom kills a man. Sometimes he is known to visit a man at dawn in the form of familiar friend and leads him to the water-course, where he had set up his fishing trap the preceding evening, on the pretext of seeing if any fish have got in. But alas, the victim finds, when it is too late, that he has to deal with a most ungrateful wretch of a chum!

The *dot* is a slender but tall figure, measuring about 18 feet, with long fingers like spikes. He lives in channels, tanks, morasses, shaded out-of-the-way places overgrown with watery plants. He is jet-black in appearance, naked and has the several limbs of the body indistinguishable except the fingers which he exposes very prominently in order to frighten his victim. He lives also in the midst of a bamboo grove. His body is exceedingly glutinous and has thus an advantage over his victim in a wrestle. Of all things that which is most dreaded by the *dot* is mustard grain. It is for this fact that mustard plays so important a part in the ceremonies of exorcism. I presume, it is avoided by the spirit, himself a glutinous body, on account of its slippery qualities which elude all attempts at a fast hold.

The *dot* manifests himself first as an ordinary man, but gradually grows higher and higher till he vanishes altogether. The victim, at this sight, is frightened out of his wits, and the spirit taking advantage of his weakness of nerve at once possesses him. Sometimes he actually clasps the man in his arms and carries him off when he is solitary. The *dot's* hair hangs about his head neglected and disordered. The hair of the female *dot* is similarly dishevelled. She puts on tattered clothes. In the sight of his wife, the *dot* never dares to maltreat his victim. In her absence he beats him mercilessly and sometimes forces his head into mud in a deserted tank, keeping his legs suspended in air. The *dot* neighs like a horse. He is powerless to approach a righteous man, much less do him any injury. Like *bak*, the *dot* also is a lover of fish. He is afraid of a fish-hook and a reaping sickle. Of all the accompaniments of *dot* that are mentioned, the most curious is his spectral bag. This he always carries about under his armpit. It is by virtue of this bag that he exercises super-human powers. Without it he is but an ordinary mortal. It may be observed that a man sometimes succeeds in snatching this bag by force or inducement, and he thereupon places it for safety in a granary of mustard. Bereft of his wonderful talisman, the *dot* loses all powers and becomes a bound servant to the man. He works then like an ordinary human servant. He ploughs the

field of his master, and faithfully does all other works that may be entrusted to him. But all the time he is on the look-out for his spectral bag, and when by an ingenious trick played in the absence of his master on the good wife he manages to get it at once he regains his powers and departs, whistling merrily, to his home to the bewilderment of his out-witted mistress. The spectral bag is made of net cloth.

In every other respect it has the appearance of an ordinary bag used by the Assamese for keeping their betel-leaves and areca-nuts.

Little folks are seen here and there to wear about their necks a fishing hook to scare away the *dot*.

(3) *Jakh*:—

He is a terrible spirit. He kills his victim by gnawing into his vital parts. He assumes the form of a large buffalo and splashes the water with his horns. He is sometimes seen roaming about in the company of domestic buffaloes.

It is the buffalo-herds who generally have encounters with this spirit or devil. A man under his possession bellows like a buffalo. This spirit is named *mah-jakh* (*mah* means a buffalo) to distinguish it from an ordinary *jakh*. There is another kind of *jakh*, called *bioi-jakh* which possesses a woman in child-birth.

(4) *Datial* or *jankakharia*: —

*Datial* literally means “living on the beach” while *jan-kakharia* means “living on the bank of a channel”. This spirit lives near water-courses. He is a pagan spirit and is beyond the influence of incantations.

(5) *Jalshai* and *jalnarayan*: —

These two brother spirits preside over water as their names imply. Unlike a *datial* or *jan-kakharia* they are both Hindus by religion and do not murder a man though they may punish him for transgressions.

(B) Sylvan spirits:—*chaman* and *bura-dangaria*.

(1) *Chaman*:—

He is noted for taciturnity. For this peculiar trait in his character he is always associated with the appellation “dumb”. When possessed by him a man loses all power of speech. The name “*chamon*” is derived from the *cham* tree, his usual place of resort. He is also found in *nahor* or similar

big trees in a deep forest. When a man happens to cut a branch of the tree, or passes urine under it, he is at once possessed.

(2) *Bura-dangaria*: —

*Bura-dangaria* is a title of respect applied to an elderly Assamese gentleman. This spirit wears a magnificent turban like an Assamese gentleman and hence the name. Besides the turban he wears a wrapper. A *dhuti* hangs down below his waist. His clothes are white as marble. He is tall in stature, strongly built and looks like a full-blossomed rose. Of all the spirits it is *bura-dangaria* who is most religiously disposed. He attends at all religious assemblies among men. Nobody can with impunity fell a tree haunted by *bura-dangaria* without propitiating him. The offenders are scourged with bodily ailments. Sometimes it so happens that the tree which is cut without propitiating *bura-dangaria*, maintains its inertia and never moves no matter what amount of force is brought to bear on it.

(3) *Alakhani*: —

This is a female spirit. She lives in the midst of a bamboo grove under a plant like a mushroom. This plant is about 8 inches high, and is called in Assamese “*alakhani-bah*” or the cell of *alakhani*. She is a frolicsome imp. Out she goes trippingly on pleasure excursions and possesses any man whom she happens to come across. The female *alakhani* deals more frequently with men than the male one. The male imp, as might be expected, is more cruel and subjects his victim to extreme agony.

(4) *Pisach*:-

He lives in out-of-the-way filthy quarters.

(5) *Phisayani*: —

The word is a corruption of *pisachani* or female *pisach* but is really applicable to a different spirit in no way connected with her. The spirit to which the word refers is execrable. She secretes her spittle, a frothy liquid, upon the leaf of a plant. Her spittle is a nuisance and is carefully avoided by men. When it perchance touches any part of the body there starts up immediately a cluster of fulsome itches.

(6) *Daini*: —

The word is derived from the Sanskrit *dakini*, an attendant of the goddess Kali. She is a female spirit. Her chief characteristic is greediness. She is a

cannibal. Her greediness being at the highest tension her mouth waters-and the lower lip protrudes as soon as she happens to see a man in front.

(7) *Peret*: —

On the death of a man the soul wanders about aimlessly for some time before a permanent abode is allotted to it. During this period it is known as *peret*. A man under the possession of this spirit suffers from itches, boils etc. He bears a disfigured body and a dejected mind. Hence any slovenly or melancholiac person has come to be known by the word *peretia* (affected by *peret*.)

(8) *Bhoot*: —

It is worthy of notice that some times *bhoot* is used as a generic term and includes all kinds of spirits. But there is also a specific class named *bhoot*. They are skilled in changing shapes.

(9) *Khetar*: —

The word comes from the Sanskrit *khetra*, a field which again is an abbreviation of *khetrapala*, a presiding spirit of the field. This spirit lives in an open place. He deals particularly with little folks. A large number of children are annually carried off by him. There is another class of *khetar*, whose business is to take off a new-born calf and keep it concealed. If however as a precautionary measure a quantity of the milk of the cow thickened by heating be parcelled off, and bits put on the ears, neck and loins of the calf and of its mother, the *khetar* eats them, and being satisfied he desists from his mischievous designs.

(10) *Markuchia*:—

He spoils a child in the womb of its mother. This generally happens in the third or fourth month of pregnancy. The spirit possesses a girl if she happens to get her first menstruation in an inauspicious moment.

If the spirit fails to spoil the child in the womb he pursues it further, and torments it in numerous ways, when it is born.

(11) *Prasuta*: —

This is a female spirit. She possesses a pregnant woman.

(12) *Kandh*:—

He is a horrible demon with headless trunk and two furious eyes set upon the breast. He lives on the sea-shore. He wanders about in the country at night and: returns to his home at the approach of dawn. He makes frequent awful shrieks from his wind-pipe during his nightly wanderings. The word *kandh* is derived from the Sanskrit “kabandha,” an order of spiritual beings.

(13) *Bira*: —

*Biras* are said to be a class of *khetars*, but more dreadful. It is very hard to save a man from the grip of this monster.

(14) *Panimangali*: —

A person when possessed by this spirit is seized with fever which grows severe in the end. The spirit at this stage breaks some of his victim’s limbs and leaves him alone. The victim now finds to his chagrin that though his fever is no more he is a crippled man.

(15) *Parooa*: —

This is a sprightly female spirit. She amuses herself at the meeting of three roads, and leads wayfarers astray; if she happens to meet with any. She plays on a musical instrument called *taka* which the Assamese girls use, the sound being distinctly audible by men. The traveller losing his way mistakes her voice for that of a man in a distant place and follows it only to find himself forlorn and lost the more, there being none to welcome him. When she wishes to lead a man away she creates a thick mist all around him, which makes him see everything indistinct and lose his way. I fancy *parooa* is a corruption of the Sanskrit *pari* a nymph.

(c) Household spirit:—*Ghar-jeuti*,

(1) *Ghar-jeuti*: —

The word literally means “light of the house”. This is a benign female spirit who presides over a man’s house. She is heard to make ticking sounds in the house. When a man happens to sleep at night across the doorway she treads on his body on her way out of or into the house and the man feels the treading as that of a cat passing over him.

III Aerial spirit:—*Bardaichila*

(1) *Bardaichila*: —

She is a female spirit and lives with her husband in a far-off land. She visits her parents' home, which lies in this part of the country, once a year to enjoy the national festival of *Baihag Bihu*. She returns when the *Bihu* is ended. We have thus in Assam two strong gales, one just before and the other just after the *Bihu*, occasioned by the flight of the airy spirit on her journey to and from her parents' home. When she comes in, as can naturally be expected, she is serene and delightful, but on her return voyage she becomes turbulent. Thus the preceding gale is harmless, while the after-gale is destructive, overthrowing trees, razing houses and doing other mischief.

#### II. A. (b) [Continued]

*Jalkoar*: —

This is a spirit who presides over river. He corresponds to the Sanskrit god *Varunu*.

#### II. B (16)

*Khabis*: —

He is a Mahommedan spirit, but is found occasionally to possess a Hindu.

(17) *Thalgiri* or *Thalsai*:—

Every locality has a presiding spirit of its own called *Thalgiri* “master of land,” or *Thalsai*, “god of land.”

IV. Celestial spirits:— *Siva*, *Jam*, *Bihkaram*, *Durga*, *Kalika*, *Deo*, *Lakhimi*, *Bijuli*.

(1) *Siva*:—

He is the great Sanskrit god and worshipped as such. Besides exercising the functions assigned to him by the Vedas he is supposed by the Assamese to preside over elephants. The keepers have to propitiate him when these beasts are visited with any disaster. This belief may have taken root from the mythical Hindu tale that Ganesh, Siva's son, was a god with the head of an elephant, *Siva* and his wife are also regarded as nuptial deities.

(2) *Jam*:—

He is the Sanskrit god of death. He rides on a buffalo. His legs are believed by the Assamese to be heavy with elephantiasis.

(3) *Bihkaram*: —

The word is derived from the Sanskrit *Biswakarmi*, the heavenly architect. He is best known by Assamese women who show great reverence for him. He presides over the weaving looms which they hold so dear.

(4) *Durga*: —

She is the wife of *Siva*, and a familiar deity among the Assamese. She causes measles or small-pox. When a man is seized by her regular services are held by a number of women to propitiate her. There are numerous other names by which she is known among them, e.g. *Sitala*, *Mahamaya*, *Bhagawati*, *Ai*, etc. The vernacular name for small pox is *ai-olowa* (the visitation of the mother).

(5) *Kalika*: —

This is another name of the goddess *Kali*. But her function as *kalika* is of a different order. She resides in anything grand, a man or an animal or even an inanimate thing for the matter of that. A spotless righteous soul, an unusually tall portly individual, a grand beautiful-feathered peacock, a bearded majestic lion, an awful gigantic tusker, an overhanging huge stone, a turbulent river, the foremost fish in the shoal, travelling up-stream during the rains:—these and such like are the usual resorts of *kalika*.

(5) *Deo*:—

*Deo* is a vulgar term for the goddess *Kali*. Under her inspiration a man, who is then called a *deo*, is imbued with a high amount of enthusiasm. During this period, he is endowed with the power of presaging future events. Pigeons, ducks and goats are sacrificed to the *deo*, who actually drinks their blood.

(G) *Lakhimi*:—

She is the same as *Lakshmi*, the Sanskrit goddess of plenty. She resides in a house where peace and purity reign. She resides also in a rice-field. In fact she is identified with rice itself. The first chaff of the crop is carried and deposited in the granary with a ceremony befitting the goddess.

(7) *Apechari*: —

She is the Sanskrit *Apshari*, a celestial nymph. She sends punishment to a man for his transgressions. The person under the ban becomes weaker every

day until she is propitiated. Hence she is named “withering *apechari*”. It would be an offence to tread on the shadow, which falls, on the earth but cannot be seen by mortal eyes, of an *apechari* in the heaven, and the offender would be punished, as above for so doing.

(8) *Bijuli*:—

*Bijuli* is the goddess, Lightning. She is a passingly handsome maiden, and the lightning is the flash of her inimitable naked person.

I. Subterranean spirits:—*Goolai*

(1) *Goolai*:—

He is a spirit who presides over buried treasure. He comes out in the shape of an adjutant bird, and wanders about at night in search of food. In the beak of this bird there burns a fire which shows him the way.

IV. (11) [Continued].

It is said that a “shooting star” is a man who after his death lived in heaven in the good graces of an *apechari*, but who has now been hurled down by his sweet companion, his period of bliss having expired.

## 2. Incantation's And Expulsion Of Spirits

Let me at the beginning give an account of the symptoms of possession by some of the spirits.

*Peret:*—The victim is afflicted with itches, boils, etc., or has an attack of quartan fever.

*Chamon:*—The eyes of the victim turn yellow. His face is flushed.

*Alakhani:*—The victim has a painful aching sensation in his stomach.

*BuraDangaria*—The victim feels pain in the head, chest, waist and limbs. The pain is so acute that the man has not the power to stoop.

*Khetar:*—The victim who is a child is attacked with convulsive fits. A male *khetar* possesses even an adult man during sleep, causing him to groan and utter distressing-sounds.

*Prasuta:*—The victim who is a pregnant woman is seized with fever. She suffers from swelling of the limbs. She feels always drowsy, A woman possessed by *prasuta* is afflicted with other painful symptoms also.

*Datial* or *Jankakharia:*--The victim suffers from very high fever attended with aching pain in both temples. This may last for ten days or so.

*Panimangali:*—The eyes of the victim turn red. He behaves stupidly, grasps aimlessly with his hands and plays with sweepings, rags, dust, etc.

*Bhoot:*—The victim suffers from an acute attack of fever.

*Alakhani:*—The victim feels as if a stone were forcing its way up into his heart from his stomach, and is greatly pained. When possessed by a male *alakhani* he becomes almost unconscious with agony for a time.

The following books of incantations are used to expel spirits:—*Karsala Ban, Bishnu Ban, Sariah Ban, Kher Ban, Rudra Ban, Chakra Ban.*

Let me describe some of the methods of exorcism with the above books:—

(a) *Karsala Bam*—Karsala is a kind of grass. The possessed man is struck with this grass, duly enchanted. The spirit then makes his retreat.

(b) *Gubarua Ban*:—Literally a “beetle arrow.” Three beetles are killed and squeezed to powder, and are then mixed ceremonially with mustard oil and alkaline water. This mixture, sprinkled on the body; of the possessed man, expels the spirit.

(c) *Agni Ban*:—Literally “fire arrow.” A torch is prepared of *titabahak* twigs, the flame being held up. A of quantity mustard seed is thrown over the fire in such manner that sparks are let off and fall on the body of the possessed man, the usual incantations being repeated in the meantime.

(d) *Jal Ban*:—Literally ‘water arrow’. The rib of a dried plantain leaf is burnt, to ashes which are mixed with a quantity of hubble-bubble water. The mixture being sprinkled on the eyes of the possessed man with proper incantations makes the spirit retire.

(e) *Kharika Ban*:—Literally “arrow of thatching grass.” A quantity of thatching grass is enchanted and cast on the body of the possessed man, when the spirit runs away.

(f) *Bishnu Ban*:—Garlic, onion and certain other medicinal roots are pulverized, and mixed with mustard oil and water. The mixture is sprinkled on the body of the possessed man with proper incantations. The spirit then leaves the victim and repairs to his haunt.

(g) *Sariah Ban*: —Literally “mustard arrow.” The exorcist takes a quantity of mustard seeds in his mouth and blows them towards the possessed man through a sieve placed in front of him, uttering certain incantations meanwhile. The mustard falling on the possessed man causes a burning sensation. The spirit unable to bear the pain leaves his victim.

(h) *Kher Ban*:—Literally “straw arrow.” A quantity of straw duly enchanted is thrown at the possessed man. This, when it hits him, makes the spirit fly for life.

(i) *Rudra Ban*:—Mustard seeds, orris and certain other medicinal roots are pulverized and mixed diluted with mustard oil. The mixture when sprinkled on the man’s eyes makes the spirit depart to the place from which it came.

(j) *Chakra Ban*:—The mode of exorcism is much the same as the above.

In time of emergency the exorcist uses only short incantations called *dikhas*. The following *dikhas* are in use:

*Sani Dikha, Kal Dikha, Rudra Dikha, Nara Singha Dikhda and Brahma Dikha.*

The following are some of the principal books of incantations, used to expel spirits: —

*Adi Nara Singha, Chausasthi Nara Singha, Ajapa Nara Singha, Balia Nara Singha, Samudai, Pakshiraj, Garuri, Belahi Bejini, Garbha-Dharan, Kanchan, Kalap, Pani Bejini.*

To expel a *khetar* from the body of a woman the following medicine is used, proper incantations being repeated during the preparation:—

(a) Water drawn from seven different ghats.

(b) Oil collected from seven different shops.

(c) Bent-grass.

(d) Rice prepared from paddy dried in the sun.

These are mixed together. A mystic thread is prepared and is dipped in the mixture. The woman drinks the mixture and wears the mystic thread on her neck.

In the event of the exorcist having to deal with a formidable spirit he employs the following method.

He puts a quantity of chilli seeds and mustard grain inside a *jika* fruit and by blowing it with his mouth forces them out. This makes the possessed man sneeze. The spirit then says through the mouth of the possessed man that he is ready to go if a *puja* is offered. This is done, and the spirit true to his word, leaves the man. Let me observe *en passant* that sneezing by the person operated on is, in this mode of exorcism, considered to be a sure sign of possession. Another test of possession is that the man becomes restless when made to lie down on leaf of a *bar-kachu* plant duly enchanted. Possession is also indicated by a certain number of *bel* leaves pressed against the navel of the man engendering an amount of pain which he cannot bear.

Besides the Hindu spirits, *khaabish*, which is a Mussulman spirit, is also seen to possess a man, as said above. In that case, he is expelled by means

of the ordinary Hindu, incantation with only this exception, that instead of a Hindu god the name of the Muhammadan divinity Allah occurs at the end of each verse.

When the mystic thread is prepared there are certain signs by which it can be known whether the possessed man will survive or succumb. If the mixture of oil and water with which the mystic thread is anointed turn white the man will come round; Should it however turn black the man will die. If the upper end of the mystic thread be found shorter than the lower end the victim is almost sure to die.

Besides the books of incantations referred to in another place, there is another book called "sleeping arrow" (*Nidra-Bdn.*) No particular mode of exorcism is described in it. It contains incantations, which, when repeated causes the possessed man to fall into a slumber during which the exorcist gains sufficient time to prepare for the spectral warfare.

In the case of pregnant woman possessed by *markuchia* the victim gets fever, burning sensation and looseness of bowels. The embryo is then spoilt. She recovers however when proper incantations, are repeated or a mystic thread is used. This spirit has to be expelled in the third or fifth month of pregnancy or else it is hard to save the children born from his fatal grip.

A whip being enchanted is allowed freedom of movements, a man holding it in his hand. He is a mere tool subservient to the command of the whip. The whip then goes and strikes the victim mercilessly until the spirit makes a clean breast and says who is he, why he is there and what he wants. . Proper offerings being provided he goes off and the man is himself again. The exorcist asks the spirit to show a visible sign by which all may be sure of his departure. The spirit then breaks off a twig of the nearest tree or shows whatever sign the exorcist asks him to show.

When a spirit possesses a man a quantity of hair of his head is tied into a knot by any layman, who then addressing the spirit names the exorcist whom he intends to call. If the spirit knows him to be too powerful. for him, he turns tail, grows restless and asks to have the exorcist brought in at once.

### 3. Supplementary Notes

1. The spirit fears the rifle. Hence in a case of ghostly phenomenon we hear of volleys of fire. It is known to all that elephant-keepers when out in the forest fire their rifles to scare away spirits.

2. Instances of domesticated ghosts are not rare. These live in the shape of common rats. When the master seeks to punish an enemy he summons them, puts them inside an earthen pot, stealthily walks into his enemy's house, and lets the rats loose unnoticed by anybody. The rats entering into the belly of the man, of course mystically, set themselves to eat into his vitals, leading him eventually into death.

3. When a *dot* lives in a bamboo clump and wants to frighten a passer-by, he shakes the bamboo as a strong blast would. But curiously enough not a single bamboo is blown down.

4. The *khetar* has long teeth like spikes. Sometimes he assumes horrible shapes, when the poor child, his victim, gets frightened and weeps. Sometimes he bursts into laughter, when the child takes the infection and laughs with him.

5. A mystic takes a number of duck eggs to a graveyard and there lays them in a cavity dug upon a grave on a Saturday or a Tuesday. After a period of three days the eggs are brought back and kept inside a cotton bale, where they are hatched in due course. The offspring are however rats, not ducklings. These rats must always be satisfied with suitable offerings of food and drink, or else the master runs the risk of being himself destroyed by his own proteges.

6. The *kandh* has two eyes set upon the breast which sparkle like the eyes of a fierce tiger. He wanders about dancing a hideous dance. Sometimes he is seen to dart off at full speed with outbursts of horrible laughter and unearthly shrieks.

7. The spectral bag of the *dot* is a round little thing made of net cloth.

8. Besides incantations the *dot* is afraid of weapons of iron. The rest of the spirits can be conquered by incantations only.

9. The *dot* and *bak* do not generally kill a man. They belabour him mercilessly and leave him alone to shift for himself as best he can. The *bhoot* assumes different shapes and enters into the body of the victim after frightening him. It is the *khetar* who is most skilled in the art of changing his shape. The *chamon* and the *jakh* are not good at this, while *markuchia* is a moderate performer.

10. The spirits have dialect of their own, e.g., a *chdmom* has:

*Ban-bhungka-uka* for a dog.

*Jerjerua-uka* for a fowl.

*Hemai-ai-uka* for a pig.

When a *chamon* possessing a man is questioned by the exorcist as to what he means to do, he replies in his appropriate tongue.

11. The spirits have wives and children like men. They have no hierarchy of castes among them.

12. The *dot* and the *bak* visit stealthily the fishing traps set by men and eat the fish caught in them. They are sometimes seen to be so audacious as to eat silk cocoons out of a bag while it is being carried by a man. They also eat shells.

13. A *jakhini* dances and makes gestures. She does not sing.

14. Sometimes a male *khetar* visits a woman and a female *khetar* a man. They make illicit proposals. If the man or the woman as the case may be accepts the proposal, the spirit takes away in the act the life-blood of the victim who is led as a result into wreckage and ultimate death.

15. The spirits cast no shadow on the ground as men do.

16. A spirit has only one wife. A female spirit has only one husband. Adultery is not allowed.

17. In certain cases the spirit recites the very incantations which the exorcist is about to recite, and taunts, him in other ways.

18. A *dot* is sometimes seen to come to a market and make purchases in the shape of an ordinary man.

19. To propitiate the nymph *apechari* the women of the locality assemble and hold a service, offering a quantity of powdered rice and nine bunches of

plantains.

20. The spirit kills the exorcist when his ill-luck would so have it. All exorcists have to live under constant fear of devils, who seek opportunity to injure them. A spirit has been heard to say to his exorcist:

"I am here to kill this man. Surely you meddle in an evil hour!"

21. The spirit who takes a woman away does not keep her always but sends her back to her home. She is in this way restored after being kidnapped.

22. Mayang is a mouza, lying in the district of Nowgong. It has been noted for witchcraft for years. The people keep *daini* and other spirits in their houses. They send them to any man whom they want to injure. They bring good things from other houses by sending a *daini*. This emissary is offered a *pooja*, and is sent out on her mission with these words: "Back when I bid you. Away with my enemy unless he calls on me and satisfies my demand." The people have places reserved in the dark secluded part of their houses for *pooja* to the ghosts.

I note below some of the preternatural doings of the Mayang people.

(a) The half-burnt wooden pegs on which the cooking pot is rested take root, and the rice is never done although the fire is full-fed.

(b) A man's seat sticks to him, and does not drop off until the mystic recites counter-incantations.

(c) A tree stands although cut through, and falls only when the enemy whom the mystic wishes to injure comes up to it.

(d) A cooked pigeon when eaten becomes alive inside the stomach, and flapping its wings incessantly kills the man.

(e) When a man eats rice and milk this is never digested but takes root in the stomach. He dies within six months.

(f) A rib of a plantain leaf is turned into a snake.

(g) The leaves of the *sura* tree are turned into *khaluha* and *kawai* fishes.

The mystic keeps a number of ghosts; These are constantly coming in and going out on their errands by turns. The usual method of destruction by a *daini* is that the victim is subjected to an acute form of dysentery. The disease grows severer every day, and the man ultimately dies.



## 4. Stories

1. In Golaghat there is a family whose forefathers were reputed to be ghost-keepers. They are still known as the “house of ghosts.” The matron of the house had charge of them. The ghosts lived in a mango tree in the orchard, and when they came down from it, assumed the shape of rats or kindred small creatures, ate food offered by their mistress, all in a pell-mell fashion, and returned to their haunt.

2. Once a *daini* assuming the form of a woman met a traveller and bore him company, keeping behind him. She irresistibly felt the temptation of eating human flesh, so much so that her lips protruded. These however she advisedly reverted to their normal size by rubbing them against her arm. The man happened to look back and saw that it was a fiend that followed him. The *daini* perceiving that the cat was out of the bag disappeared.

3. A *chamon* was walking slowly in the shape of a Naga, heavily laden with a basket on his back. He accosted a man, and said:—“Tell my eldest brother his wife is dead.” He also gave the address of his brothers, said to be six in number, as a certain huge tree in a particular locality. The man could see no house in the place mentioned, but he shouted so as to be heard far and wide:—“The-wife of the eldest brother is dead. Know ye whomsoever it may concern.” Suddenly a blast shook the tree, and pitious wailings rent the sky. The traveller understood the import and hastened his way homeward.

4. There are twelve scores of *jakh* in the *Barpeta Bil* in Nowgong. A notable *bhakat* named Baloram Deori lived in the satra. For an offence against piety he became a *jakh* on his death, and proceeded to the *Barpeta Bil*. But the other *jakhs* dubbed him the blackest devil as having committed an offence against piety, and refused him admittance. Many *bhakats* seeing his pitiable position argued his cause, but to no purpose.

The *gossain* himself came to the scene. The newly arrived *jakh* recounted the facts, and added that he was sentenced to live with *jakhs* for one year. Out of compassion the good *gossain* reduced the sentence to six months, and ordered the resident *jakhs* to allow him a place in the *bil*.

5. A man was calling his brother Banmali by name when suddenly a ghost appeared before him and began to laugh aloud. After a while he paused and

said:—'Bandhamali! What a nice name! If this should ever reach the ear of my four brothers, whose names are

'the filth of a duck',

'the feather of a pigeton',

'the filth of an otter',

'a broken *jhampi*',

they will laugh and laugh till their sides split.'

6. A man once saw a *pisachani* sitting as a wretchedly-dressed gray-haired old woman absorbed in thought, with the palm of her hand pressed against her head.

7. A man once saw a *nautch* party held by five *alakhans*. Three of them clapped their hands and the other two danced to the music.

8. A man was sleeping one night across his doorway. A *gharjeuti* came near in the shape of a baby of about two years and tried to pass over him but suddenly paused. In this way there was a continual process of attempt and pause until after a time the man awoke. He removed his bed from the doorway.

9. Two brothers were out in a boat fishing in a river. The younger brother held the net at the bow, while the elder sat at the helm. A *dot* came, killed the elder brother, himself assumed his shape and steered the boat as before, the younger brother having no knowledge whatever of the ghostly interference. Many fishes were caught by the younger brother and deposited in the boat, but these the *dot* kept on eating secretly all the while. The younger brother noticed the low level of the fish, and realised that something had happened to his brother. But he very prudently went on as if nothing had happened. The *dot* was outwitted. He took the man for a simpleton, and putting confidence in him handed over his spectral bag to him for custody. Taking the bag in his hand the younger brother said to the *dot*, "You are at my mercy, you miserable wretch!" The man thought within himself that it would not be wise to give out the melancholy news of his brother's death, especially when he could manage to make the spirit pass for his brother. So he and the spirit went home together and lived peaceably as brothers, none else having the slightest inkling of what had taken place. The younger brother kept the spectral bag in a mustard barn.

Time passed, and the spirit kept on trying all sorts of means to obtain the bag if possible. At last it so happened that the younger brother attended a *mel*, at a distance. The *dot* also started for the *mel*, but hurried back to the home and said to his victim's mother: —“The bag! The bag! The bag in the mustard barn. Plenty of coins in the *mel*. Well, where's the place for them.” The simple mother took him at his word and gave him the bag. The *dot* took the bag, became himself again, and proceeded to the woods. The younger brother returned from the *mel*. His mother said, “Where is your brother? I gave him the bag that was in the mustard barn.” Her son sighed a deep sigh and said “Know, poor mother, your eldest son died the moment you gave up the bag.” So saying he recounted the sad incident of his brother's death from start to finish.

10. A *dot* visited a Brahmin girl in the form of her lover and eloped with her. In course of time she became the mother of two children by the *dot*. A little before the birth of the third child the woman asked him to procure her a fish from a certain distant place as she desired to eat one. The *dot* set out to get the fish, and meantime the woman with her sons, seizing this opportunity of her spirit-husband's absence, hastened to her parents' home. The *dot* returned with a fish but found no one in his house. He traced the woman to her parent's house, the fish still in his hand. He got on the roof, made an opening and dropped the fish through saying:—“Take it, inconstancy thy nature.” Then he retraced his steps homewards. The limbs of this woman's sons were sluggish and bore long streaks all over like those of a spirit.

11. The *dot* fears a fish-hook. Once as a *dot* was trying to eat a fish out of a bag carried by a man on his back he got entangled in the fishing line and the hook pierced his belly. The *dot* being thus enslaved obtained release by abject entreaties.

12. A ghost assumed the shape of an old man and visited his house in his absence. He stood on the courtyard and asked the wife to wash his feet. They were smooth, unlike those of her old husband which the wife knew to be rugged. She suspected something was wrong, looked up and saw a very tall figure. At once she entered the house on the pretext of bringing more water, bolted the door and screamed. The *dot* said:—“You are lucky, you are lucky; ” and vanished into thin air.

13. A ghost appeared to a man in a dream and said "Keep your young daughter on the grass upon a cloth spread out. I shall come and take her away, and in exchange will put on the cloth plenty of riches for you." The man did not comply with this request, as was to be expected. The girl died in less than a week.

14. There was a commotion recently in Golaghat owing to the appearance of a ghost in the house of one Dewai Tekela in village Khangia, *mauza* Naharani. The ghost stayed in the house for three years. People from distant places visited the house, and after due enquiry were satisfied with the genuineness of this incident. The visitation of the ghost had particular reference to a married girl of sixteen. Her husband was living with her. Clods of earth used to be thrown at her by the ghost. She could actually see him although no one else did. She was never kidnapped by him, and he never molested her while she stayed at her father's house. Her father-in-law died a year before this incident. The ghost said to her:—"I am your father-in-law. I come to see you out of love."

The ghost occasionally played pranks. He concealed cups and plates and even valuable ornaments. But he was sometimes useful. He looked to the comfort of the guests and provided them with seats, *pan*, etc. But when any guest insulted him he scattered *bhat* over him. When *bhat* was served to a member of the family the ghost ate it up before curry arrived. The cook took the hint, reserved a dish specially for the ghost, and then all annoyance ceased. The *bhat* disappeared from the reserved dish in the sight of all men.

15. The Hindu god Siva lived in mount Kailas with his wife Parvati. Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and the wife of Vishnu, paid a visit to Parvati when Siva was absent. During the course of conversation Lakshmi referred to Siva slightly, he being but a beggar after all. Parvati in reply expressed her contempt for Vishnu. Lakshmi came home and related to her husband what had happened. Vishnu who knew well that Siva's poverty was the result of his unparalleled piety and absolute indifference to temporal possessions, said to Lakshmi, 'Let me devise a means by which Parvati will be humiliated. At the same time there will be plenty of harvest for men to eat on earth.' He commanded four *Siddhas* to visit Siva's house during the absence of the latter, and on some pretext to ask for a quantity of rice. These immediately hurried to Kailas and asked Parvati for some rice, so that they might refresh themselves after so tiresome a journey. Parvati finding not a

grain of rice in her house gave them some fruits to eat. The guests departed, but Parvati felt humiliated. When Siva came home she asked him to procure the necessary implements of agriculture and to grow rice. She advised him to obtain a plot of land from Indra, a bag of rice seedlings from Kuvera, and a plough from Baloram. The rope of Varuna was to be his plough-rope, the Chakra of Vishnu his yoke, and the serpent Basuki his whip. He was instructed to get the buffalo of yama and yoke it with his own bullock. His trident was to be his plough-share. His son Kartik was to be his plough-boy. Parvati herself, was to cook the rice.

Siva was well pleased and accepted the suggestions of his wife. He collected all the implements of husbandry and began at cock-crow to cultivate his field. He was so absorbed in his new occupation that he ignored the calls of appetite. When it was past noon, Parvati created a body of mosquitoes and wasps and commanded them to invade the field so that Siva might leave the plough and come home. Siva seeing the fierce onset made a torch and whirled it violently so that the insects fled for their lives. Parvati finding that her object failed, created an army of earth-worms, leeches, rats, and crickets.

But Siva was too much engrossed in his business to mind such annoyances. Parvati now proceeded in person to find her husband. She found the field covered with all manner of crops in various stages of growth. But as soon as her indignant eyes fell upon the crops there came out from her mouth, a demon and a demoness named *Khob* and *Khubi*, who set the whole field in a blaze. Siva turned back, and seeing the couple of fiends wanted to kill them. They prayed for mercy, and added that as they were the offspring of his wife's mind it behoved him to spare their lives. Siva admitted this, but told them to leave the field at once and take up their residence in the Dhedheya Hills. With regard to the question of food he said. "Be in the mouths of men born in inauspicious moments and eat your food there." Siva and Parvati returned home.

Ages passed, and Kama's faithful attendant Hanuman took the Dhedheya Hills among others to bridge the sea. *Khob* and *Khubi* who were in the Hills went with them. They entreated Rama, to allow them a country to live in and suitable food to subsist on. Rama directed them to live among men and to eat the food assigned to them by Siva. He gave them also something more. He said:—"Live with the bridegroom till the third day of marriage,

when a service will take place in which eatables will be distributed among those assembled. Eat enough, and leave the couple to themselves.” The custom of holding the above service in which a Brahmin priest recounts the story of *Khob* and *Khubi* to the married couple is universal with the Assamese. The story of *Khob* and *Khubi* originally appeared in the Nandi Purana, from which it has been translated into Assamese. The crop, which was burnt by the appearance of *Khob* and *Khubi*, came to be known as *ahu*, the other being *sali* which is the staple crop of the Assamese.

16. There lived a king who had a beautiful wife named Kamala. His kingdom was visited by intense drought and many lives were lost. *Jalkoer* who was smitten with the beauty of the queen, appeared in a dream to the king, and said that he would send water if the king would part with his consort. The king at first refused, but when the drought continued and the people implored him to save their lives at any cost he yielded. The people excavated a tank and the queen proceeded to it in a magnificent procession, followed by the king and by immense crowds. The queen went down into the tank. The king stood on the bank, and as the water gradually rose the following conversation, ensued.

'How much water do you meet,  
Say Kamala, my consort sweet.'  
'Harken ye, my husband dear,  
Water is now ankle near.'  
'How much, water do you find,  
Say Kamala, ever kind.'  
'My beloved lord, list ye,  
Water kisses now my knee.'  
'How much water does now spring,  
Say unto me, my darling.'  
'My lord, on heart enthroned high.  
Water has now reached my thigh.'  
'My heart, Kamala, breaks for thee,  
O, say, how much water you see.'  
'My sweet master, shed not tear,  
Water is now loin near.'  
'Ah me! Hear my mournful lay,  
How much water rushes, say.'

'Is not fate supreme yet found?  
Water ties my breast around.'  
'Be not sad, my queen of spring,  
How much water does *jalkoer* bring.'  
'All is o'er, I bow to thee!  
Water encircles my neck, now see.'

Suddenly a golden barge appeared and the queen was taken on board and vanished from sight.

# Appendix 1. Song Of Alakhani

*Tick, tick titapat.*

It rains, there's mire.

Ah me! men will see.

But what may they say?

## Appendix 2. Incantation Used In Weaving Spectral Thread

I Salute Thee, O Krishna.

One, I bind the eleven.

Two, I bind the two directions.

Three, I bind the triangular earth.

Four, I bind the four cardinal points.

Five, I bind the five demons.

Six, I bind the sixty-four gipsies.

Seven, I bind the hundred stars.

Eight, I bind the eight ghats.

Nine, I bind the nine stars.

Ten, I bind the lord of ten directions.

Eleven, I bind the eleven mothers.

Twelve, I bind the motley crowd.

Thirteen, I bind the thirteen celestial nymphs.

Fourteen, I bind fourteen phases of the moon.

Fifteen, I bind the fifteen stars.

Sixteen, I bind the sixteen ghats.

Seventeen, I bind the seventeen moons.

Eighteen, I bind the eighteen pathways.

Nineteen, I bind the nineteen ghats.

Twenty, I bind the ten gates.

Should none these avail,

I bind by the sixty-four incantations.

Siva himself on the east rampart,

The sun on the west rampart,

Death himself, out of compassion, on the south Durga on the north rampart.

Should my words come to grief,

The purity of the goddess will be dashed off.

By my adjuration, and my preceptor's command, Remain where I bind.

## Appendix 3. Principal Haunted Places

### **Nowgong.**

1. Barpeta Bil.
2. Hahila Jalah.
3. Jamuna Jalah.
4. Silabandha Bil.
5. Malaha Bil.
6. Bamun Ghossain Than.
7. Barhampur, Pukhuri
8. Leli Bar.
9. Moamari Kurh

### **Jorhat.**

1. Padumani Bil.
2. Hekera Kurh.
3. Barbarua Korokani.
4. Hizalguri Pukhuri.
5. Jagdooar.
6. Kaliapani.
7. Rangapani Pathai.
8. Charaipani Jan.
9. Barbheta Dopani.
10. Adhakhana Barpukhuri.
11. Phatkar Chiga pool.
12. Malow Pathar.
13. Kaliani Pathar.
14. Barmukali Pathar.

**Mangaldai.**

1. Burinagar Pukhuri.
2. Barhampur Pukhuri.
3. Gorakata Pukhuri.
4. Jaypal Pukhuri.
5. Bhurar Garli.
6. Deomara Nai Jar.

**Gaukati.**

1. Sandhya Jar.
2. Changchaki Pabar.
3. Kohora Garh.
4. Balilecha Pukhuri.
5. Kalagarh Pukhuri.

**Barpeta.**

1. Sundari Bil.
2. Engar Pora Kurh.
3. Baghar Parbat.
4. Chakutal Joa.
5. Pithakatia Pukhuri.
6. Panisala Pukhuri.

**Golaghat.**

1. Khecheng Bar.
2. Semetia Bar.
3. Kaliapani Bar.
4. Na-Bil.
5. Malar Chiga Barghuli.
6. Rahdhala Pukhuri.
7. Naga pota Bar.

**Sibsagar.**

1. Singi Bil.
2. Mitangar Dalang.
3. Sing-Duar.
4. Kuji-Bali.
5. Gar Gaon.
6. Phulpani Chiga.
7. Talatali Ghar.
8. Jai Sagar.
9. Gauri Sagar.
10. Athai Sagar.
11. Na-Pukhuri.

**Dibrugarh.**

1. Tapi Pool.
2. Aithan.
3. Raja Bheta Jan.
4. Merbil.
5. Sissimukh.

**North Lakhimpur.**

1. Nata Kana Bari Pukhuri.
2. Pitani Pukhuri.
3. Rahdhala Pukhuri.
4. Garia Jan,
5. Gharmarar Chola.
6. Khana Pukhuri.
7. Kandali Pukhuri.

**Tezpur.**

1. Molan Pukhuri.

2. Kini Pukhuri.
3. Uhani.
4. Naharlaga Jarani.
5. Kuari Pukhuri.
7. Baralimara Bil.
8. Syam Narayan Pukhuri.

# Appendix 4. Notable Exorcists

## **North Lakhimpur.**

1. Jaduram Sarma.

## **Dibrugarh.**

1. Khora Bez.
2. Bihua Bez.
3. Bhadram Sarma.

## **Jorhat.**

1. Bapiram Sarma.
2. Dutiram Bardalai.
3. Bhabiram Barua.
4. Domai Koch.
5. Sambbu Nath Mahanta.
6. Ghana Kanta Sarma.
7. Sonaram Sarma.
8. Parapati Sarabjan.
9. Sonaram Mabari.
10. Bapiram Chutia.
11. Khetekeswar Sarma.

## **Barpeta.**

1. Sukkna Khora.
2. Narayan Bamun.
3. Ghosaram.
4. Mihiram.
5. Gobindram.

## **Golaghat.**

1. Bagidia Medhi.
2. Dutiram Gaonbura.
3. Katia Bez.
4. Mukund Chutia.
5. Barkathia Keot.
6. Datram Pandit.
7. Ramakanta Gagan
8. Bihua Sarma.
9. Gopinath Gohain.
10. Aniram Pandit.
11. Makara Bez.
12. Bharam Gaonbura.

**Sibsagar.**

1. Krishnaram Kalita.
2. Madharam Ganak.
3. Kathak Bez.
4. Poali Bez.
5. Mukti Kalita.
6. Arjun Deodhai.
7. Haribar Kohar.
8. Mani Charingia.

**Tezpur.**

1. Bilai Kalita.
2. Mim Garia.
3. Jogeswar Barua.
4. Mani Pandit.
5. Kerkan Mandal.
6. Gopi Satola.

7. Maria Kalita.

**Nowgong.**

1. Kirtinath Sarma.
2. Phaguna Koch.
3. Manika Sarma Tamuli.
4. Bhumidhar Sarma Barua.
5. Chenaram Sarma Tamuli,
6. Rameswar Koch,
7. Gerela Keot.
8. Doyaram Koch.

**Gauhati.**

1. Ganeswar Sarma.

# Glossary

Ahu.—A species of early rice which is reaped at the end of the rainy season.

Bar.—The Indian fig tree.

Bar Kachu.—A species of arum.

Bel.—A kind of fruit with valuable medicinal properties.

Bhakat.—A disciple of a religious preceptor.

Bhat.—Boiled rice.

Bihu.—There are three well known Assamese festivals called Bihu. These are distinguished by prefixing the name of the month in which they occur, Magh Bihu, Chait or Baihag Bihu, and Kati Bihu. The Baihag Bihu is the Assamese new year.

Bil.—A lake or swamp.

Chakra.—The wheel of Vishnu.

Chiga.—A breach.

Dalang.—A bridge.

Garh.—An embankment.

Ghat.—Step- to approach a river or a tank.

Ghuli.—A pool.

Gossain.—A religious preceptor.

Jalah.—A large pool of water.

Jar.—A grove.

Jhampi.—An Assamese umbrella made of woven palm leaves.

Jika.—The cornered gourd. (*Luffa acutangula*.)

Karsala.—A long slender grass abundant in Assam.

Kawai.—A kind of fish.

Khaliha.—A kind of fish.

Korokani.—Undulating ground.

Kuril.—A spring.

Mel.—A village assembly.

Naga—Savage tribes inhabiting one frontier of Assam.

Nahar.—A kind of tree. (*Mesua ferrea*.)

Nautch.—A dance.

Pahar.—A hill.

Pan.—Betel leaf.

Parbat.—A mountain.

Pool.—A culvert

Puja.—Worship. Also an offering to a god or spirit. Pukhuri.—A tank.

Sali.—A species of rice reaped in the winter. It is transplanted, and is the staple crop in Assam.

Sam.—A kind of tree. (*Artocarpus chaplasha*.)

Satra.—The place where the adherents of a particular Gos-sain reside. Some of these orders are celibate, and some are not.

Saura.—A kind of tree.

Siddha.—An order of spiritual beings.

Taka.—A musical instrument made of bamboo used by rustic girls when they dance.

Than.—The place where a holy man is buried.

Tita Bahak.—A medicinal plant. (*Justicia granderussa*.)

THE END

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**I'm Julie, the woman who runs [Global Grey](#) - the website where this ebook was published. These are my own formatted editions, and I hope you enjoyed reading this particular one.**

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