

The online visit for February 2022 was proposed with the following program.

Awareness Campaign at

1. Visit to Majuli, the largest river island in the world in Brahmaputra river, Satras and Ras festivities

2. Molai forest is a forest on Majuli Island in the Brahmaputra River near Kokilamukh, Jorhat district, Assam, India. It is named after Jadav Payeng, Indian environmental activist and forestry worker

This was aimed to study and know of the biggest river island Majuli and its rich culture. It is a Promotional Tour and this visit (Online /offline) is expected to enhance Tourist Awareness campaign, School students awareness campaign , Tourist Stakeholder Awareness workshop.

Majuli, The Geo-Cultural Heritage Of Assam

Majuli is one of the largest inhabited river island of the world and the first island district of the country. Majuli has been the cultural hub and the cradle of Assamese civilization for the past 550 years. Majuli with its sublime and serene atmosphere provided the proper backdrop for the historic “Moni-Kanchan Sanyog” between Assam’s great saint, poet, litterateur and social reformer Srimanta Sankardeva and his famous disciple Madhabdeva in the 15th century. Ever since that meeting of the great minds and the subsequent establishment of Satra, Majuli emerged as the crowning glory of vaishnavite culture of Assam. Majuli, a unique creation of the mighty river Brahmaputra, further enhances the beauty and gaiety of the river. It is situated within the river Brahmaputra in Upper Assam and bounded by the coordinates 26°56’ N-27°10’ N Latitudes and 93°35’ E-94°35’ E Longitudes. Majuli, at present is one of the most attractive eco-tourism destinations in India and abroad. The river’s rivulets, channels, streams, vegetation, bio diversity, different communities and Satra make this region a heaven for eco and cultural tourism. It is recognized by the Guinness Book of World Records as World’s Largest River Island. It has an area of 650sq. km and population of 1.68000 as per 2011 census. Majuli is accessible by ferries from the city of Jorhat. The island is about 350 kms East from the state’s largest city- Guwahati. On the north bank is the river Subansiri and on the south bank, the mighty Brahmaputra has excluded the island from the mainland. Lakhimpur town is to the north and Golaghat is to its southwest. The town of Sivasagar is on the southeast and Jorhat is to the south, On the extreme east is Dibrugarh District.

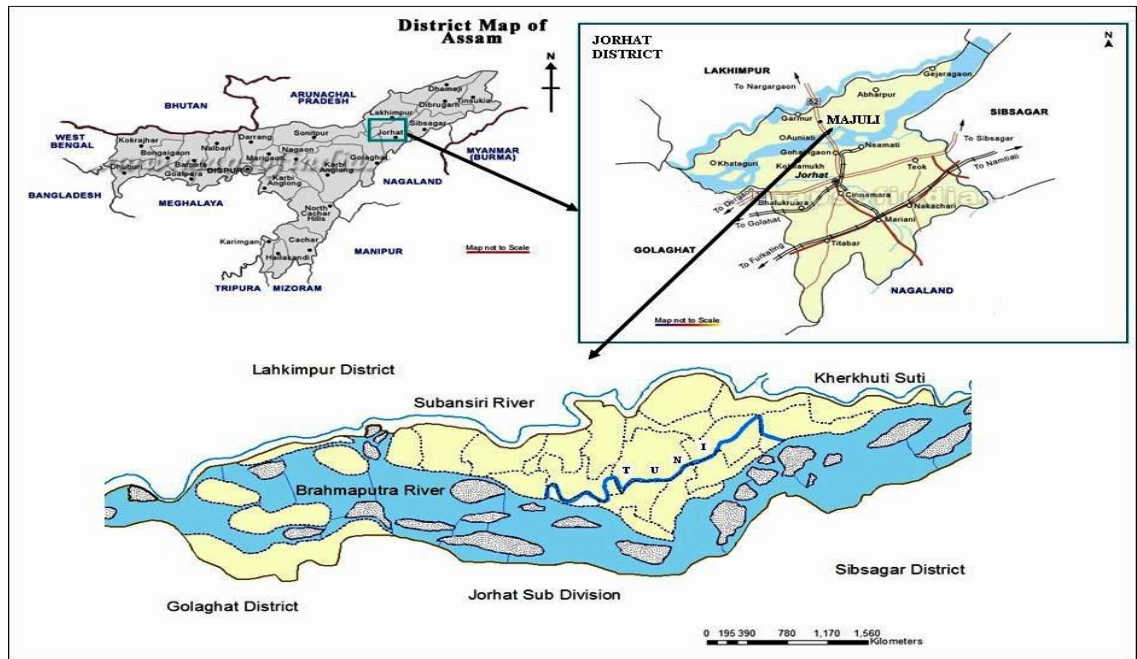
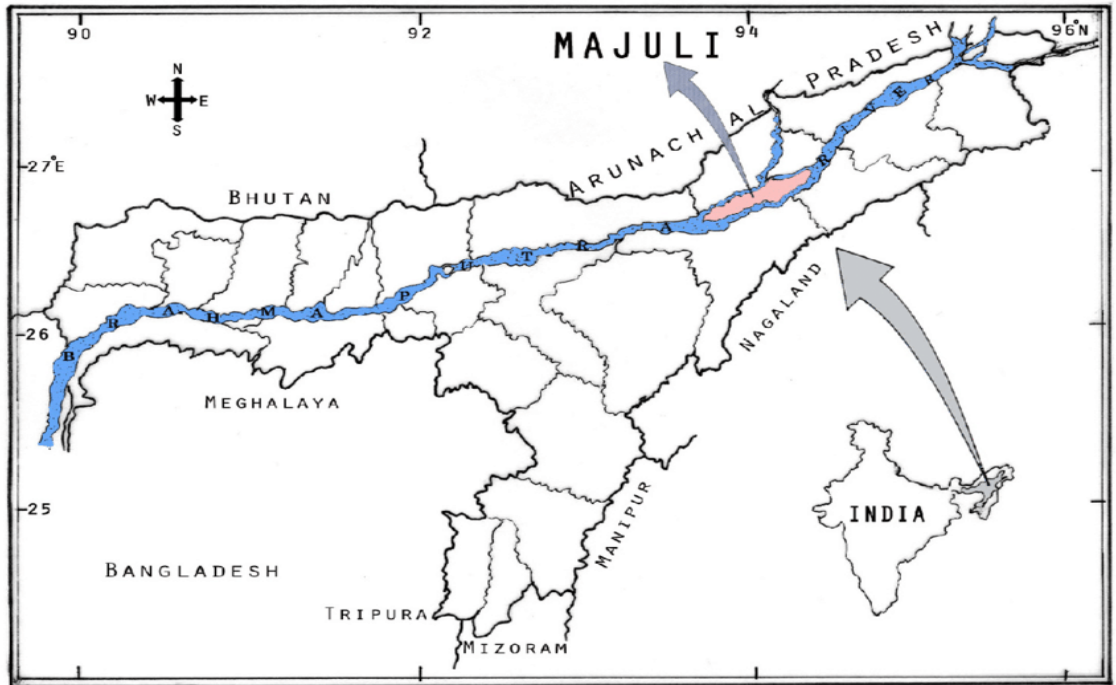


Fig: Majuli District Map

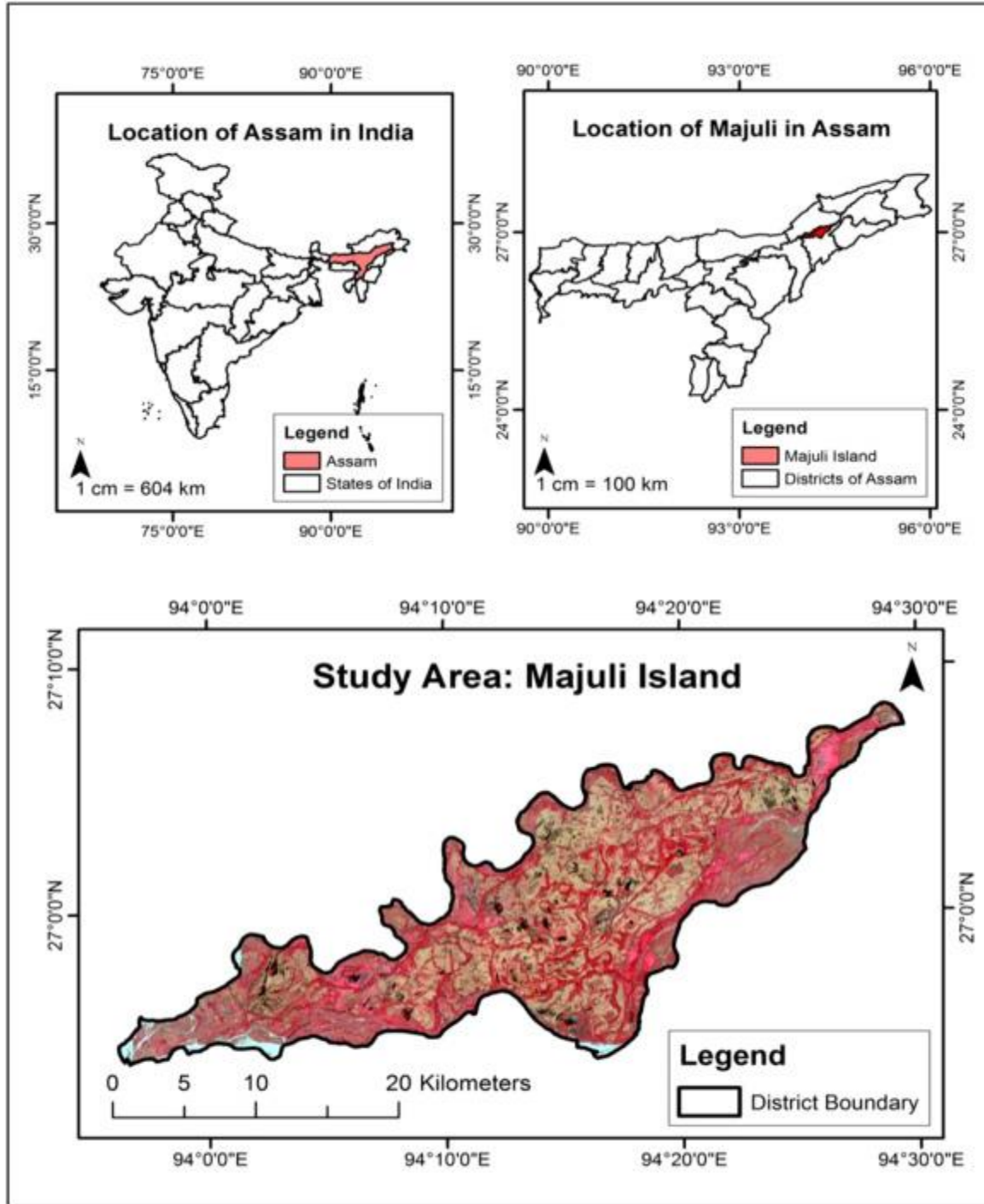


Fig: Majuli District Map





History:

Set amidst the mighty and the mythical male river Brahmaputra, Majuli is known as the oldest and the largest inhabited riverine island of the world. Majuli is a district curved out of Jorhat district in the north east province of Indian Sub-Continent. Obviously Majuli is not a single island within a single parameter, but it is the combination of Cluster of islets formed and developed in the mid-river stream of the mighty Brahmaputra and its tributaries-the Luit & Kherkatia to the north & north east and north west extremity.

It is very difficult to ascertain the year or the period of the creation of Majuli as sufficient and convincing records are not available to support the views in regards to its history. However, on the basis of certain geographical evidences and literary accounts, it may be presumed that Majuli took its island's shape at least before the 13th century A.D. before Sukhapha's arrival at the Brahmaputra valley in the year 1228. It was formerly known as " Majali " which was situated in between the " Dihing " and the Brahmaputra. Another chronicle upholds that Koch-king Naranarayana sent his brother Chilarai to extend his kingdom towards upper Assam region. Dr. D. Nath in his book " The Majuli Island, Society, Economy and Culture " described that Koch king Naranarayana had made his camp at " Mojali " (Majuli) and it was there at the camp, that he had received the tributes and present from the Ahom king Sukhampha alias Khora Raja (1548-1563), WHO was defeated in the war. Pre-historic reference mentioned that the original name of the present Majuli was known either as " Majali " or " Mojali" and later in 1562, it was also called " Luitor Majuli " indicating the same area of Majuli prior to taking of its present shape. Another reference regarding the early existence of Majuli is found in " Yogini Tranta " that Chutiya king Ramchandra founded his capital in Ratanpur, Majuli which was perhaps washed away by the Brahmaputra. An early Assamese chronicle holds the view that during Sukhapha's

arrival at the mouth of Dikhow he observed an isolated area known as Haboung. The Bodo originated term "Haboung signified a low lying flood affected area. So, we might believe that the geographical picture of the land indicated no other than Majuli, a part of which falls in between the mouth of Dihing and Dikhow. Apart from such legendary beliefs and chronicler evidences. We have early historical references of Majuli and its land area mentioned by historians and other biographers. King Aurangjeb's biographer Mahmad Kazim during mid-17th century estimated Majuli's land area as 100 miles. A. J. Mafat Mills recorded in "Report on Province of Assam" that Majuli island was extended to a land area of 2,82,165 acres in 1853. In another reference of British writer B. C. Allen in his "Provincial Gazetteer of India" published during 1901, mentioned that Majuli's total land area was around 185sq. Miles and its population was 35000 only. According to a British doctor John Peter Wede, the island was 160 Miles long and 60 Miles broad (1927).

However, on the basis of historical and literary references the present Brahmaputra was flowing to the north of Majuli as pointed out by Sir Edward Gait. The Brahmaputra, according to Gait "flowed down the course of what is now called the Luit river, along the north of the Majuli island while the Dihing followed the present channel of the Brahmaputra to the south of it, and after receiving the waters of the Disang and the Dekhow united with Brahmaputra at the western extremity".

Many historian holds the view that the land mass now encircled by the Brahmaputra on the north and the Dihing, Dikhow combined on the south took the shape of an island in its most embryonic form with the half dead mouth of the Dihing demarcating its eastern extremity. This historic event must have happened at least before the 13th century A.D.

Presumably, the human habitation in Majuli started from the period when the agrarian people were in search of conducive and fertile soil. Majuli's land mass was regularly inundated by floods spreading sediments to its soil which made it suitable for growing paddy, mustard, sugarcane, pulses, jutes, garlies, potatoes and other essential goods. For existence of innumerable beels, wetlands, inactive river channels and sparsely scattered population, the entire Majuli's land area did not come to the notice of the settlers. Most of these were occupied by wild birds and animals. As per the land survey records of 1950 the total habitable landmass was 1245.12 sq. kms. Mysteriously the number of its population is increasing more than 1.35 lakhs during the post independent decades in Majuli.

The pervading beauty that envelopes the island all throughout the year later turned into a pilgrimage since the advent of Srimanta Sankardeva, who had been joined by Madhavdeva, the Chief Apostle, in Majuli's Dhuwahat Belaguri at the early part of the 16th century. Majuli began to excel from his historic event of communion (Manikanchan Sanyog) and subsequently ushered in the spreading of Neo-Vaisnavism across the entire island and the north east region of India.

CULTURE - IN THE RIVER ISLAND OF MAJULI

Majuli as a Vaisnavite site has its special distinction which made it unique in the eyes of the world. During 16th century A.D., concomitant with the renaissance period, that changed the face of the world, a similar resurgence in socio-cultural dimension by the great Vaisnava Saint Sankardeva had brought in the ideas of democratic social values, unification of diverse ethnic groups with verdant spiritualism which founded the basic fabric of a casteless social structure, the Assamese Society. It created a system of social governance and community living which continued over centuries, is a unique example of unity in diversity. In

addition to that, Majuli is also enriched by the vibrant multicoloured culture of its ethnic inhabitants belonging to the Mishings, the Deoris, the Sonowal Kacharis, the Ahoms and the Nepali Communities.

Culture in the river island of Majuli can be viewed and understood in the following categories:

- Drama
- Mask making
- Festivals
- Manuscript writing
- Music
- Weaving
- Boat making
- Fishing

DRAMA

The Ankiya nat (form of drama) and bhaonas (expressions of Lord Krishna and Lord Rama) were developed as a medium by Sri Sankardeva as a part of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement to narrate the religious stories and the contents of Srimad Bhagwat Purana and the Ramayana to the devotees. This mode of expression was more engrossing, involving, entertaining and made the contents easily comprehensible. Hence, this traditional art is popular among all Sattras and as well as among the locals. Today Sattriya dance is synonymous to the existence of the Majuli Island. It has been recognized as one of the eight main dance forms of India along with Bharatnatyam, Kathak, Odissi, etc. The Sattriya drama form is locally

referred to as Ankia nat. This drama form is symbolic of Sattras in Majuli and it is classical in nature. At the time of festivals, it is performed both by the bhakats and the villagers. Within the Sattras this drama form integrated with music and dance is taught to the young disciples by the elder ones. bhakats usually have their practice sessions every afternoon under the supervision of the elder bhakats.

In 1468 A.D., Sankardeva at the age of 19 years performed the drama Chihnayattra which is regarded as the first drama form in the Assam valley. The drama form is called as the Ankia nat of which 12 are known as Barachowa Ankia Nat. They are still performed in various festivals and occasions in Sattras and villages as well.

There are 12 popular drama like Patni Prasad, Kaliya Daman, Keli Gopal, Rukmini Haran, Parijat Haran, Ram Vijay, etc. Some dramas were started by Sri Madhavdeva for example Arjun Bhajan, Chordhara Pimpara Guchuwa, Bhumi Lotowa, Bhojan Bihar, Bhushan Heruwa, Katora Khela etc. All the drama forms are classical by type. The sattriya drama form follows its own textual and canonical forms, somewhat similar and elaborate in nature though. These dramas are also referred to as Bhaonas. There are canonical directions for actors in bhaona such as the selection of the actor, color of the skin, and costumes which should suit the character the actor is going to depict in the drama.

Music and dance are an integral part of the drama. In the natya shashtra there are 36 types of Dristis such as rasa, drishti ved, eye movements etc. There are 67 hasta mudra. Sri hasta Muktavali which is the Vaishnava canonical text, describes 71 mudras for dances. All the dances aforesaid follow these canonical procedures. Additional dance forms are also found in these dramas such as such as Biharnach, Chali nach, Pravesh nach, Nadu bhangi nach, Jhumura nach, Krishna and Ramachandra nach, Balak Krishana nach, stri nach, Veera nach, Sage, Gaduda,

Hanuman pravesch nach, war dance etc. Bhaonas or the dramas which are also called the Ankiya nats include Faujiya Bhaona, Dhura bhaona, Assamese language bhaona, Mela raag and Bandha Raag.

Ankiya Bhaonas were created by Shankaradeva with parts from the classical drama form, Natyashashtra of Bharata, sanskrit dramas, cultural assimilation from different parts from India, local folk, cultural ideas and his own inputs. The Bhaonas are done with few steps which are very essential to maintain: Gayan-Bayan, Sutra nitya (introduction of the drama by Sutradhara), Sloka, Geet (songs for the masses), Vrajavali language, masks and finally harinaam (the recital done for well being). An important part of Assamese drama is the sutradhara who introduces the actors to the masses and summarizes the dialogues which is a very unique part in Assamese Sattrra drama (bhaona). Selection of the Sutradhara is also carefully done as he needs to be a proper Vaishnava with sharan and Bhajan.

In the Sattras of Majuli, 8 important drama (Nat) of Shankaradeva are preserved. The dramas such as Kali damana (Subjugation of the serpent Kali), Patni Prasada (favour to Wives), Keli Gopal (Sport with the milkmaids) Rukmini Harana (Abduction of Rukmini), Parijata Harana (The theft of the flower Parijat) and Rama-vijaya (The Conquest of Rama) are still performed.



Fig: scene of BHAONA



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Fig 1: SutraDhar

Fig 2: Raas Leela



Fig: Gayan Bayan

MASK MAKING:

Mask making is one of the most famous traditional crafts still practiced in Majuli. It is mainly practiced by the Sattras. Natun Chamaguri Sattra has worldwide acclaim in making exquisite masks. It has been practiced by the Bhakats here for centuries. Masks are an integral part of Sattriya culture. Traditionally, masks were used for religious dance and drama. They were conceptualized as a tool by Shri Shankaradeva to make and depict the characters of Srimad Bhagwat to the devotees. Masks helped to provide a physical form to the puranic characters. They also helped people to associate with the character and expressions of the mythical heroes.

However, presently the masks are made both for religious as well as commercial purposes. This art is practiced by a few Sattras like Uttar Kamalabari and

Chamaguri. In most of the Sattras at Majuli this art is not practiced at large scale, only those Bhakats who are inclined towards mask making have continued the tradition. Apart from these sattras individual craftsmen from nearby villages also have been practicing the tradition of mask making.

Masks are used for religious performances and traditional dramas. Mainly materials like bamboo and cane, cloth, clay and rock color etc are used for making masks. In some case wood may also be used. Traditionally three types of masks are prepared viz.

- Mukha: these are face masks.
- Lotokai mukha: this type of mask is used to move lips, eyes hands etc.
- Bor mukha: this is nearly life size or even larger in special cases.

Traditionally, first the frame of mask is prepared using bamboo and string etc, then using color and cloth the final finishing is done by the master craftsmen. Bhakats plant trees as per their requirement and maintenance of these trees are also their responsibility.

Mask making is one of most well known craft forms of Majuli in present day. However the craft is not practiced by all the Sattras. Chamaguri Sattra is famous for making masks in the region; Bhakats of this Sattra are known to make beautiful masks which are used for religious dance and drama.



Fig: Mask Making (Mukha Silpa)



Fig: Mukha Silpa

MANUSCRIPT WRITING :

The practice of worshipping religious scriptures led to the emergence of paintings in manuscripts. The word manuscript is derived from two Latin words manu and scripture which means 'hand written'. The art of painting in manuscripts developed in the Majuli in response to the religious movement of Neo Vaishnavism under Shri Shankaradeva. The art of painting manuscripts was patronised by King Shiv Singha (1714 A.D.) in the royal court. The theme of all the manuscripts is the life and the events related to the life of lord Krishna. He is either the centre of the painting or is conceptually related to the content of manuscripts. Illustrations together with written literature helped in comprehending the text easily and make the text interesting. The illustrations are rich in color and detailed in expression. Paintings were done in the Sattras especially on the ceiling and walls of the namghar. There are references of paintings done on the walls, ceiling, beams and posts in the biographies and specimens of this type are still found in the Sattras.



Fig: Manuscript

STYLES

There are three styles of manuscript writing which are popular in this region :-

1. Gargayan script- this style was popular during the reign of the Ahoms around Gargaon in the Sibsagar area. This type of script is very artistic in

character. Well-educated writers were patronized by Ahom kings to practise this school of script.

2. Kaithali - this style is associated with the Kayastha community. Suvankazri, Kitabar Manjari and Hasti Vidyarnava by Sukumar Bankayastha are the examples of this style script. In lower Assam, the kayasthas are known by the title of Lahkar and hence known as Lahkari script or letter.
3. Bamunia- The writer of Bamunia scripts were the Sanskrit scholars or people associated with the study of Sanskrit(Devanagari) and Kamrupi script. In the script of their writing, there is an influence of the structure of Later-Brahmi or evolved Kamarupi script.

PATRONAGE

This art of paintings and manuscript writing was patronized by the Ahoms and also by the Sattras. The Ahoms mostly patronized the translation and original works of secular nature, while the Sattras prepared the Assamese rendering of the Bhagwat Purana, the epics and other Puranas bearing religious significance and importance in the context of Neo Vaishnavism. The earliest illustrated manuscript of Assam is the Adya Dasama of the Bhagwat Purana rendered into Assamese by Shri Shankaradeva, Chitra Bhagwat (Manuscript with painting).

Likhak was mainly involved in copying from original text

Khanikar prepared colors and illustrated the text

Together they prepare the surface of manuscripts, colors and write texts in different styles. Historically, the Ahom kings used to patronize and support their own

copyists under the supervision of a royal officer called likhakar barua meaning superintendent of scribes. The royal court also attached a set of compartments called gandhiya bharal for the preservation of royal manuscripts records and letters of the palace. The various styles of manuscript writing were developing different artistic schools with different artists expressing their artistic penmanship. However, though there is influence of devangari, their script shows that they exhibit the style and structure of the modern Assamese script. In Bamunia script the letters show the similarity with Kaithali and Gargaon style. Example of this style of scriptwriting is to be found in Subodhini Tika of Bhagavata Gita by Sridhar swami or Bhakti Ratnavali by Mahadeva. The origin of the Assamese script developed from the Brahmi script. The script was associated with old Sanskrit language. The three stages of development of Assamese script are:

1. Early Period: 5th to 13th Century
2. Middle Period: 14th to 19th Century
3. Present Period: From of 19th Century (with the publication of Arunodoi in 1846) to present time.

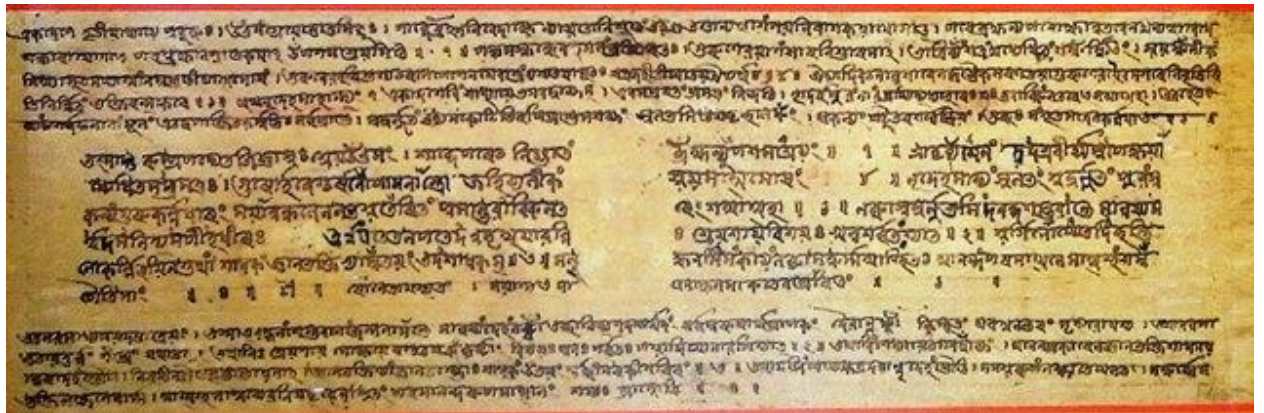
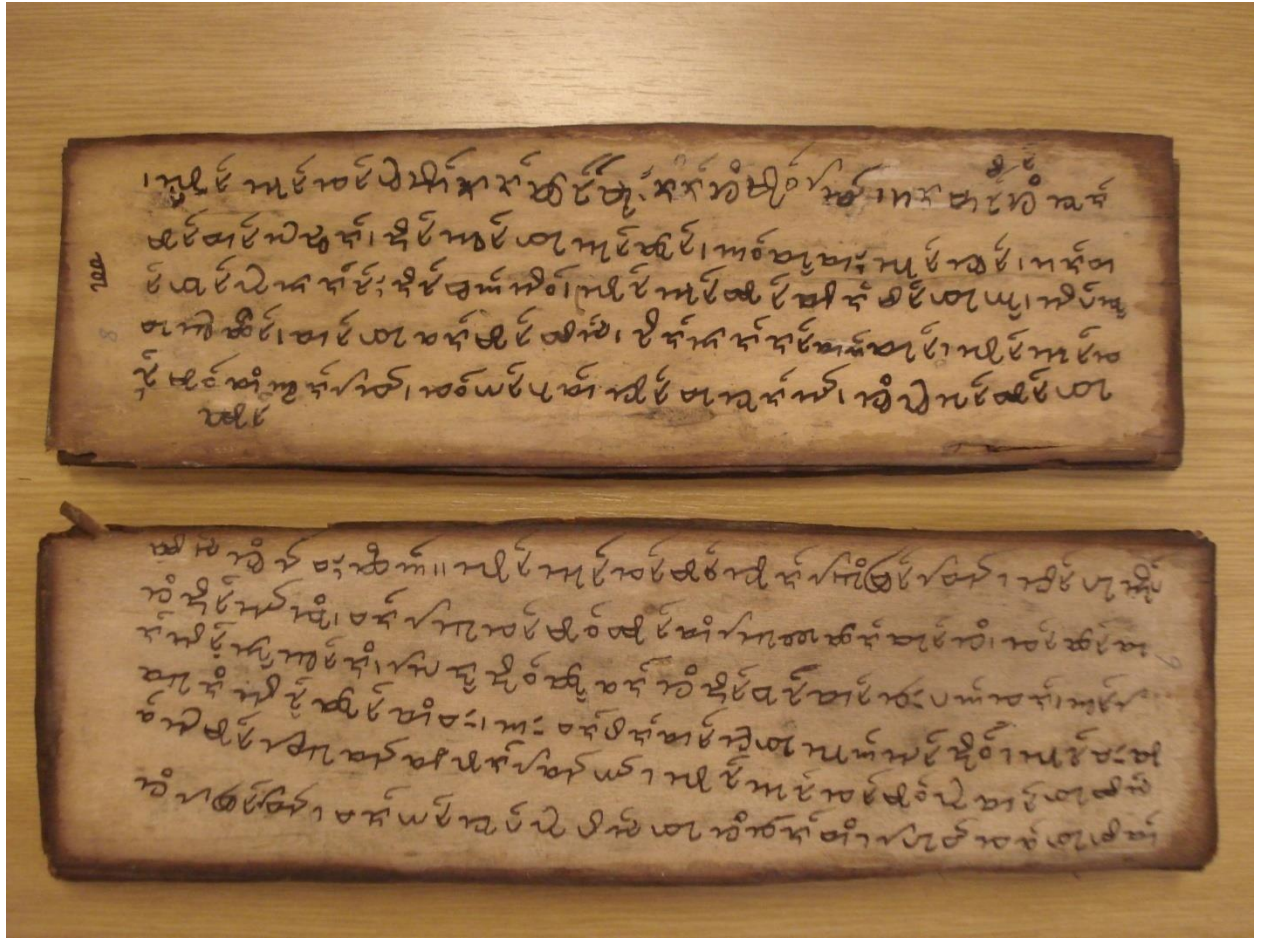


Fig: Sachi Patot Likha (Manuscript In Sanchi Tree Bark)



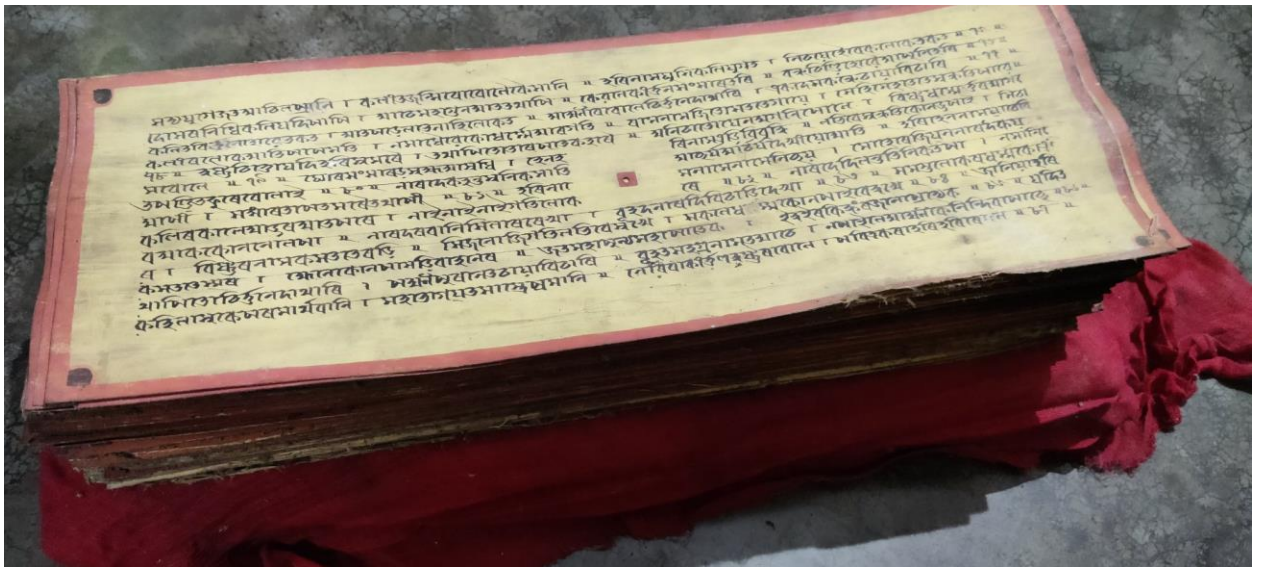
The writing of scripts on the bark of sanchi or tula pat had some specific rules -The writings were generally done from the reverse side of the leaf. A margin on all four sides was left on both sides of each sheet and on the left side of each leaf numbers were given as identification. Hence on each and every paper there was a small central whole with some empty portions called salabindhā (Nabhi).

Part of the word or sometimes part of the even letter or compound letters are found written separately in two lines. In the manuscript there was no use of comma (,), semi-colon (;), note of interrogation (?), note of exclamation (!) or other marks as in its modern form. They would only use stop marks indicated by single line (I) or double lines (II) and also by colon (:) marks. Stress was practically on pronunciation and often the sense or meaning of the writing was determined from the manner of pronunciation. In case of a mistake they did not remove it from the paper.

Nearly 3000 manuscripts are preserved in the Sattras, village Naamghar and house-holders of the Majuli Island. Traditionally, a special storage area called gandhiya bharal was allocated for keeping the manuscripts. Presently,

a dedicated space as storage area for manuscripts is located within the Sattras. Manuscripts are wrapped in white paper and with cloth to protect it from dust and insects. Manuscripts have been sorted on the basis on the content. Each set is labeled as per the subject of the manuscript.

equired material for manuscript writing is locally available. Plant species like Sanchi or aloe tree and Silikha are used for preparing base for writing, ink and color respectively. These species grow naturally on the island. The climate and soil condition in Majuli supports their growth. Within the Sattra complex, Sanchi trees are planted by the Bhaktas near the Hatis and the maintenance of these trees is also their responsibility. Silikha trees are also located along the many pathways on the island. Requirement of materials for manuscript writing at the Majuli Island is fulfilled at the local level.



FESTIVALS:

Major cultural events of the Majuli are an integral part of the life of the people. Seasonal variations and celebration of festivals are correlated. This has a direct

impact on the activities and occupation pattern of people of the Majuli. The Sattras are the major centers where the local people assemble in large numbers for the celebration of festivals. These are the occasions when people get united and perform the rituals along with the Sattradhikar and the bhaktas. These are times when people get spiritually and rejuvenated by following the practices. It gives them a better understanding of the Vaishnavite principles and philosophy.

Another aspect of the celebration of festivals is related to the farming practices. The Sattras give equal importance to these festivals. These are also occasions when the villagers and the Sattradhikar along with the bhaktas come together to celebrate the event.

Hence, the Sattras give equal importance to religious events and farming practices and the same ideology is transmitted to the villagers as well, as they are their followers.

Following are the festivals celebrated in the river island of Majuli:-

1. FALGUTSAV
2. BOHAG BIHU
3. ALI AI LIGANG (MISHING)
4. BISU (DEORI)
5. BARSIK BHAONA-SABAH/BAR SABAH
6. BAH-GOROWA
7. GARAKSHIA SABAH
8. JANMASHTAMI
9. SHRI SHANKARADEVA'S DEATH ANNIVERSARY
10. SHRI MADHAVDEV'S DEATH ANNIVERSARY

- 11.PO'RAG (MISHING)
- 12.DEO PUJA (DEORI)
- 13.BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF SHRI SHANKARADEVA
- 14.KATI BIHU
- 15.PAAL NAAM
- 16.RAAS UTSAV
- 17.DIWALI
- 18.AMROK (MISHING)
- 19.SAWANIA PUJA(DEORI)
- 20.MAGH BIHU
- 21.NA KHOWA
- 22.NORA-CHIGA (MISHING)

Most important one is **RAAS** utsav

According to folklore, Dakhinpat Satra's 10th Satradhikar Basudev Goswami got a divine order in his dreams to hold Sri Krishna Raas Leela in the Satra to save the Satra from erosion. Following that order Basudev Goswami wrote a play on Lord Krishna's life till the killing of Aristasur and began holding acts based on that play.

Raas Leela was introduced as a stage performance by Sri Sri Pitambardeva Goswami, ex-Satradhikar and social reformer of Garamur Satra in the year 1934. In 1950, he permitted the girls of the Satra to take roles in Raas Leela and dance. Today in most of the centers, women participation in Raas Leela is quite normal. This festival has a great impact on the life and the culture of the people of Majuli. Though it is a part of the culture of the Satras, it is performed in many of the villages. During the festival every man, woman and child remains busy in receiving visitors and performing different duties related to the festival. This lasts

for four to five days at a stretch, lakhs of outsiders visit the island and people of Majuli treats them as their guests.

Raas leela is the story of the life of Lord Krishna presented in the form of performing art. The event of Raas Leela as mentioned in the 'Bhagawat Purana' depicts a blissful story with Bhakti Rasa. Here Lord Krishna plays the lead in divine form, who is accompanied by the Gopis of Gakul. The Raas leela is classified mainly into nine Bhakti Raas and Natya Raas, out of which Bhakti Raas assumes much significant. It begins with the birth of Lord Krishna, his upbringing at the house of King Nanda, his tending the cows at Gokula along with his fellow cowherds, his childhood activities, his killing of the demons like Bakasura, Aghasur, Pralambasur, Dhenukasur, Chakrabat, Putana, Kaliya and of Kansa-his maternal uncle, at various times of his youth and on various other occasions, and finally his amorous play with the Gopis. In the Udasin Satras, the Raas dance is performed by the celibate inmates of the Satra- the Bhakats-donning female costumes in the night in the Namghar with music and dance. Performance of Raas Leela involves various classes of musical instruments, mask, painting, music, dance and artifacts. Raas Leela is an annual festival performed on the full moon day (Purnima) in the month of October-November (Kati-Aghun) during the autumn season. During this festival, Majuli draw a large number of deciples, devotees and tourists.



Fig: Performance of RAAS LEELA

MUSIC

ANKIYA GEET

These are songs which are sung mostly for the dramas since Borgeets are not sung in dramas. The Ankiya Geets have compositions for rhythm etc. They differ from drama to drama and composed mainly for mass entertainment.

BORGEET:

The name Borgeet popularly refers to a special set of devotional songs, set in ragas mentioned in the ancient Indian musical treatises, composed during the late 15th and the early 16th centuries A.D. by Srimanta Sankaradeva and his chief disciple and associate, Sri Sri Madhavadeva, the two prime exponents of Vaisnavism in Assam. Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva referred to their songs as geet only. The adjectival prefix Bar, meaning grand or superior, must have been a later reverential addition by their devout disciples, which might bear upon the musical grandeur of the songs too.

Sankaradeva established a community centre called Namghar for religio-cultural practices like Bhaona and Nam-Prasanga. Bhaona is the enactment of the dramatic works, popularly referred to as Anka, by Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva. Even these Ankas are full of songs, set in ragas, like the Borgeets. A Bhaona is preceded by an elaborate group performance of percussionists playing the Khol (a barrel-shaped drum) and the Tal (the cymbal). The performance involves not only the playing of the instruments but also singing and varied footwork by the percussionists. Nam-prasanga is the common and the chief religious ritual of the Vaisnava cult in Assam which involves the singing of the devotional songs and

verses composed by Sankara-Madhava. The Borgeets have been traditionally an indispensable part of this Nam-prasnga.



Fig: Namghar

BOAT MAKING:

Majuli receives heavy rains during the monsoons and the region is prone to biannual flooding of the river Brahmaputra. Hence, water ways are needed and they are the chief mode of transportation in Majuli. Boat making is one of the most

common activities practiced on the island. Crafts related to boat making have been practiced in Majuli since the time of the arrival of diverse communities on the Island. Hence, the locals are proficient in the knowledge of making boats. This craft is popular among both Sattras as well as other communities. Auniati and Kamalabari Sattra are famous for making good quality boats in the region. Usually all the families in Majuli have boats which are used mainly during the Monsoons and during floods. Boats are used for commuting from one place to another as they are easily available and an economical mode of transportation.

Boat making is the main occupation of people from Salmara, Borgayon, Nawsali. 3000 families from these villages are dependent on this traditional craft of making boats. Traditionally, boats were made of Azhar wood which is presently very costly. Hence, the chief material used for construction of boats is the wood from Semalo tree, Uriam, Outenga, *Atrocarpus chaplasha* (Samkathal) and Hijal tree which are locally available in plenty. Traditionally, single piece of wood from a big tree was used to make boats called Guttaiya nao. Today boats are made from split timber. Boats are named on the basis of the use they are put to. Traditional hacksaws and blades, chisels and rivets are still used to make boats.

The economics of boat making is dependent on a sustainable cycle of production and consumption of boats on the island. Presently, the production of boats is on a small scale. There is a ready market available in the nearby areas and also within Majuli which helps to sustain this traditional craft.



Fig: Boat Making



FISHING:

ishing has been the traditional occupation of the Kaivarta community since the time of human habitation on the island. The land form, its water level, aquatic plants and seasonal variations are the guiding and significant factors of the occupation. It plays a significant role in maintaining the natural cycle and hence sustaining the ecological value of the area. Fishing is one of the main sources of livelihood for a section of people in Majuli. It is practiced by mostly scheduled caste and tribes like Mishings and Deories. The different types of water bodies of Majuli Island are the main resources. They include the wet land, marshy land, ponds, rivulets etc. Different fishing techniques have been evolved by man based on the level of water and probability of fishes.

The techniques employed for fishing change with the change in season. Hence, the tools used for fishing also vary according to requirements in each season. Usually during floods fishing is prohibited as it is time for fertilization and migration of fishes into depressions. Occasional fishing is practiced by the communities. They prepare special fishing traps like polo, dingora etc.

Community fishing i.e. by using small baskets is low during this season. Fish traps are especially made and put along the embankments against the water flow. During post monsoon season, water level in different water bodies recedes and it allows fishing. In this season fishermen are predominantly dependent of wet lands and marshy land. The scale of fishing increases and they get used for commercial purposes. Fishes collected from flowing water channels are prepared as dried fish for its consumption at local level as well as for commercial purposes. Bamboo bed is prepared at the river bank for drying of fishes. This is predominantly carried out

by Mishing and Deoris. During winter season fishing becomes predominant. Fish is one of the most marketed commodities during this time.



Fig: Fishing



WEAVING :

Weaving is an important aspect of the cultural life of the people of the Majuli Island. Every house irrespective of caste, creed and social status, has a loom. It is a traditional industry that can be traced back to very ancient period. In ancient times, kings are believed to be wearing clothes from Mezankori plant. This plant is used for rearing muga larvae. Weaving is practiced by the inhabitants of Majuli mainly for utility purposes. Traditionally, weaving is done by womenfolk. It is practiced by most of the communities residing in Majuli. Generally a family's requirement of cloth is met by cloth woven at home. The tools required for weaving are indigenous in nature, made from locally available bamboo and timber like looms, ugha, chereki, mako and neathani etc. Raw materials required by weavers are mainly cotton silk from cocoons and mulberry leaves etc.





Fig: Weaving

Majuli At A Glance:



Uttar kamalabari sattra cultural programe



Behar nitya



Oja pali



Chali nach to Bhortal nitya



Satriya Nitya



Mati Akhara



Gayan Bayan



Naam Prasang



Bhaona



Village Disciples Welcome The Sattradhikar



Sutradhari Naach



Sattriya Nitya

Conclusion:

Majuli, the geo-cultural heritage of Assam, has been facing a dual catastrophe of river bank erosion and flood year after year and the existence of the island is under serious threat in the coming decades. Although, many efforts have been made to tackle these issues, but the problem of erosion is still looming large. It is evident from the geographical study that there has been a continuous decline in the area of the island. The erosion problem is more acute after the flood events in most of the places, the main cause being over-steepening of the bank materials due to the deposition of high amounts of sediments during the flood.

MOLAI FOREST



Molai Forest located near Kokilamukh in the Jorhat district of Assam is the outcome of the constant hard work put in by a famous environmentalist named Jadev Molai Payeng. He has done a phenomenal work of planting in 1360 acres of land within a time of 30 years. A humble farmer from a marginalized tribal community, Jadav Payeng, known as the “Forest Man of India” has single-handedly changed the landscape in his state of Assam. Payeng, 58, is reclaiming an island in the mighty Brahmaputra river where increased flooding has changed the flow and built up sandbars along the long stretch of the river that runs through the middle of Assam.



He started with a very small step of planting trees on the bank of the River Brahmaputra which later on turned into a huge forest area giving home to several wildlife creatures. It is truly delightful to visit this Molai Forest and it shows how beautiful our surroundings can be if we have greenery around us. This man-made forest has become a famous tourist attraction of the state.



When Payeng was just a teenager in 1979 he came across a bed of dead snakes on the sun-baked shores of the Brahmaputra river. Even at such a young age, he knew that someone had to do something, so he started planting a tree sapling a day in the barren soil. Now over 40 years later, his forest covers 1,390 acres—approximately the size of 15 football stadiums. Jadav left behind his formal education to give all his attention to the forest.

The Molai Reserve was once a place of wonder with an area of approximately 2,500 acres. But every year during the monsoon season, the river floods everything in sight, destroying homes and farms causing erosion. The land is now under constant threat because of extensive soil erosion on its banks. Every year In the past seventy years the reserve has diminished by more than fifty percent and there are concerns it will be fully submerged within twenty years causing the 150,000 inhabitants to lose their homes and livelihoods.

Payeng began by planting bamboo and then moved onto other species. At first planting trees was time consuming until the trees started providing the seed themselves. As his forest grew dense, so did the amount of inhabitants. Soon, the forest was filled with hundreds of species of birds, with deers, rhinos and tigers, and even included a herd of elephants straying into his forest three months out of the year.

Jadav's life began to change in the fall of 2007, when a photojournalist stumbled upon Payeng and discovered him seeding his forest and wrote an article about him. He soon gained the attention of the Indian government and then the entire country — winning multiple awards for his incredible achievements and giving TED talks. He has viable ideas to save Majuli Island from erosion by planting coconut trees that grow straight and when planted together in close

proximity protect the soil. In turn, this would not only help India's economy but help fight climate change.

Payeng's worst fear for his forest is deforestation for financial gain, which makes the flora and fauna vulnerable to human greed. He believes all species on this planet are animals, including humans, and that humans don't realize that frugality and honoring nature is key to our survival.

To honor Payeng for his environmental activism and for planting one tree every day, the forest was named "Molai" after him. Jadav Payeng was honoured at a public function arranged by the School of Environmental Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University on 22 April 2012 for his achievement. Sopory named Jadav Payeng as the "Forest Man of India". In the month of October 2013, he was honoured at the Indian Institute of Forest Management during their annual event Coalescence. In 2015, he was honoured with Padma Shri, the fourth highest civilian award in India. He received honorary doctorate degree from Assam Agricultural University and Kaziranga University for his contributions. Jadav's story also inspired a children's book, *Jadav and the Tree Place*, that tells his story of how he made a forest that is now home to wild animals. He has been the subject of award-winning documentaries and now people travel across the globe to see the Molai forest. His inspirational story is also being taught in ecology classes at schools across the United States.





The forest is now home to some of Asia's most iconic and threatened species including the Endangered Bengal tiger (*Panthera tigris*), the Indian rhinos listed as Vulnerable by the IUCN, the Endangered Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*), hundreds of deer, vultures and scores of other birds. Several thousand species of trees can also be found in the Molai forest today while over 300 hectares of its expanse is bamboo-covered. Not only does this forest provide a safe haven for wild animals, it is now also a breeding ground for them. In recent years, a herd of about 100 elephants that regularly visits the forest has reportedly given birth to at least 10 calves. Reports from 2012 indicate that one of at least five tigers inhabiting Payeng's forest has given birth to two cubs. Migratory birds, too, have started flocking here. Deer and cattle have attracted predators.



Several varieties of trees are found here some of which comprise of gold mohur, valcol, arjun, moj, koroi, himolu and many bamboo trees. This forest has a major role in saving the environment of Assam by maintaining a proper ecological balance.

With such high biodiversity in both flora and fauna, one could easily mistake this thirty year-old sanctuary for an ancient, old-growth forest.