



Experiencing Kamakhya: A Survey

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Abstract: The present study explores the religiosity associated with the Kamakhya Temple, one of the most revered Shakti shrines in North Eastern India, through an empirical analysis of devotees' experiences and perceptions. Revered as a living embodiment of the divine feminine and associated with fertility, creation, and cosmic power, Kamakhya has long attracted pilgrims, seekers, and ritual specialists from diverse regions and social backgrounds. Beyond its theological significance, the shrine functions as a powerful cultural symbol that shapes regional identity, collective memory and everyday religiosity in Assam. The experiential dimension of faith associated with Kamakhya- expressed through pilgrimage, vow-making, ritual participation, and personal devotion- offers a rich field for anthropological inquiry into lived religion and sacred perception. Drawing on primary data collected via a structured questionnaire survey, the research investigates how pilgrims and visitors conceptualize the sacredness, ritual efficacy and spiritual significance of Kamakhya in their personal and collective religious lives. The objective is to illuminate the dimensions of faith, devotion, and symbolic meaning that shape religious attitudes toward the shrine in contemporary Assam.

Keywords: Religion, Ritual, Kamakhya, Etc.

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Introduction

Merriam Webster Dictionary defines religiosity as the quality or state of being religious (often an intense, excessive or fervent religiousness) (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/religiosity>). Cambridge Dictionary defines religiosity as the quality of too or very religious (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/religiosity>). Religiosity refers to the degree of religiousness or

devotion an individual or group exhibits. It encompasses various aspects, such as beliefs (acceptance of religious doctrines and teachings), practices (participation in religious rituals, prayers, and ceremonies), experiences (personal experiences and feelings related to faith, such as spiritual experiences or emotions) knowledge (familiarity with religious texts, teachings, and traditions), and identity (sense of belonging to a religious community or group). Upbringing of a person along with his/her cultural and social environment plays a great role in shaping the religiousness. Personal Experiences such as life events, crises, or transformations also shape faith. Access to religious education and information also provides foundation to it. The expression of religiosity finally depends upon individual personality like openness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism.

The archaeologists have made quite a few studies where the architectural and structural aspects of the different temples. There are again quite a few elaborate reports on temples written by the Indologists, travellers and missionaries, besides the reports given in the different district gazetteers. However, anthropological studies on temples are relatively few in comparison to the large number of historical and architectural studies made on the temple of India. Located in the Nilachal Hill of Kamrup, Kamakhya Temple is an epitome of female fertility, a shaktipeeth where the yoni mudra of Goddess Sati is worshipped. Here the goddess is worshipped as the source of all powers.

In this paper, an effort is made to highlight the aspect of religiosity of the people towards this particular shaktipeeth. The present study seeks to understand how individuals perceive and internalize the sacredness of Kamakhya in contemporary times. The research is grounded in primary data collected through a structured questionnaire survey designed to document devotees' experiences, beliefs and attitudes related to the shrine. Rather than focusing solely on doctrinal or institutional aspects, the paper approaches Kamakhya as an experiential sacred complex whose meaning is continuously produced through personal encounters and socio- cultural narratives. By eliciting respondents' reflections on their sense of faith, exceptions and emotional connection with the temple, the study aims to uncover patterns of religiosity and perception embedded in popular consciousness.

Understanding religiosity is crucial as

Objectives

The objectives of the paper are:

- 1) To see people's perception towards Kamakhya.
- 2) To find out their actions associated with those thought.
- 3) To see the degree of religiosity on the basis of their thought and actions.

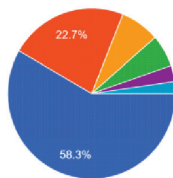
Methods Adopted

For this paper, data were collected through questionnaire in Google forms. The questionnaire method was adopted due to the promulgation of lockdown during the study period. Total 132 people responded irrespective of age, sex and locality. However, the major limitation of the work was that some of the participants skipped some questions. Further interviews were carried out from some selected person to gain their perspective.

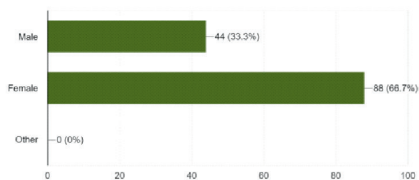
Findings and Analysis

The recorded responses are given below-

Which age group do you belong to
132 responses



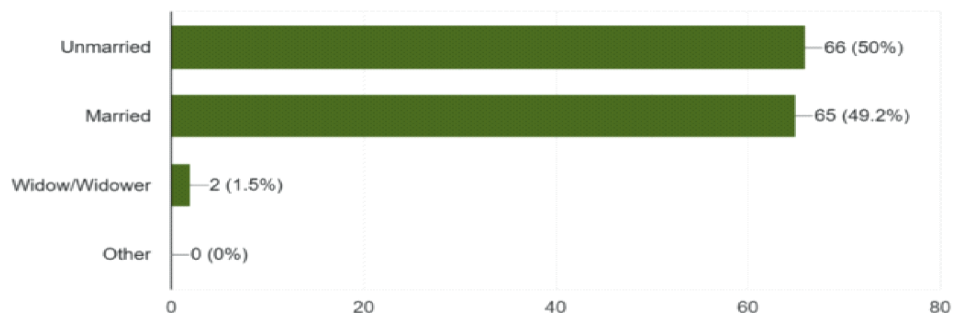
Gender
132 responses



As depicted in the above two diagrams, majority of the respondents (58.3%) belong to the age group 20-30 years followed by 30-40 years(22.7%) among whom female respondents are dominant in number (66.7%).

Marital Status

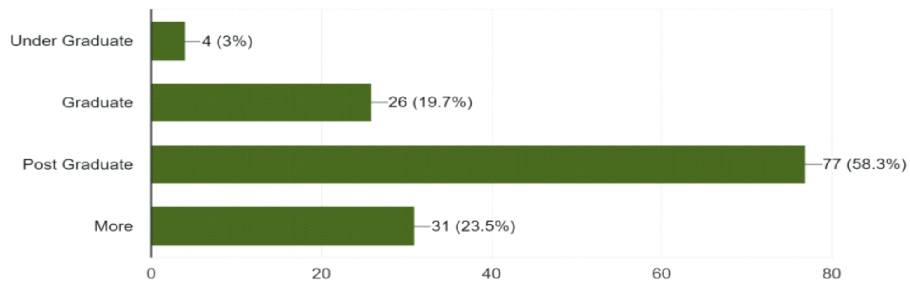
132 responses



Respondents were both married(49.2%) and unmarried(50%) as they were randomly selected irrespective of age. Only 1.5% among them are widow and widower.

Educational Qualification

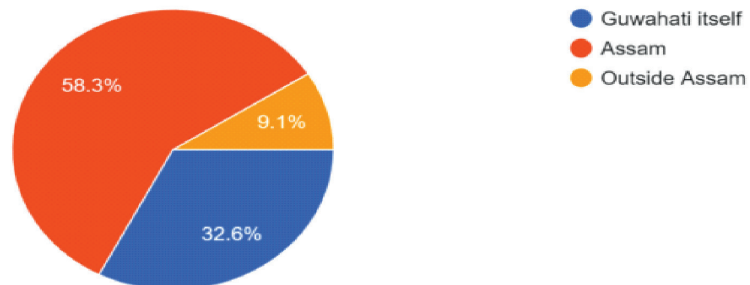
132 responses



As the data was collected via questionnaires, the respondents were mostly educated. Majority of them are post graduate.

Your residence

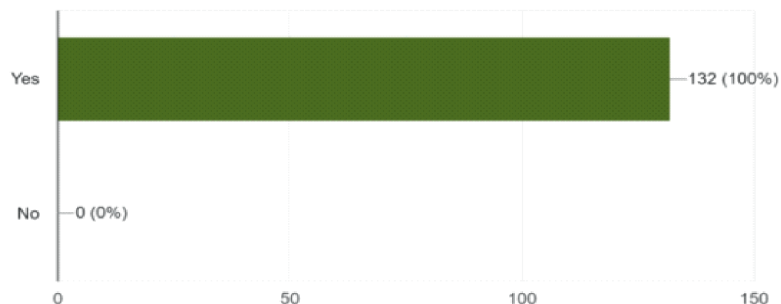
132 responses



The greater part of the respondents (58.3%) is from Assam. Around 32% are from Guwahati itself. A small section of the sample was from outside Assam too.

Have you heard about Kamakhya temple?

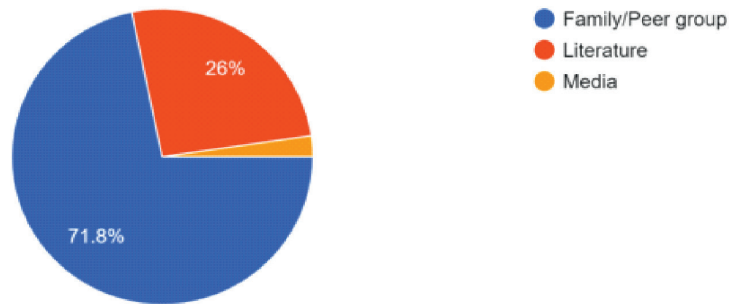
132 responses



All of them are aware of the temple from one source or other as seen from their response.

How did you come to know about Kamakhya temple?

131 responses

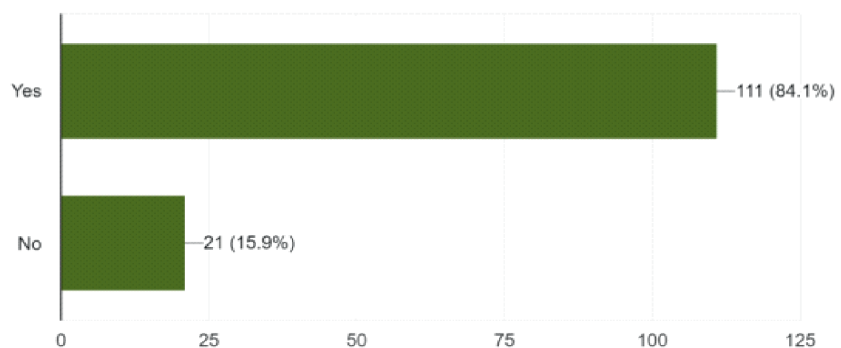


There are different sources to know about Kamakhya temple such as Books, Academic Journals, Documentaries and Videos, Government Reports, etc. Online sources like Assam Tourism Website and Kamakhya Temple Official Website provides information on the temple's history, architecture, and rituals. These sources provide a wealth of information on Kamakhya Temple, covering its history, architecture, cultural significance, and more.

However, Most of the respondents came to know about the temple from their family or peer groups followed by Literature.

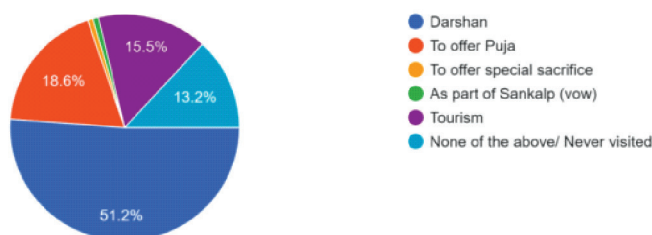
Have you ever visited Kamakhya?

132 responses



Majority of the respondents i.e. 84.1% even visited the temple.

What was your purpose of visit?
129 responses



The above pie diagram shows that more than 50% people visited the temple for Darshan which is followed by other reasons such as offering puja, tourism and so on.

Further interview revealed that devotees visit the Kamakhya Temple for various purposes:

Spiritual and Religious Reasons

1. Seeking Blessings: Devotees pray for happiness, prosperity, and fulfillment of desires.
2. Fulfilling Vows: Many visit to fulfill vows made to the goddess, such as offering prayers or performing rituals.
3. Spiritual Enlightenment: The temple's unique energy and sacred ambiance attract spiritual seekers.

Personal and Emotional Reasons

1. Healing and Wellness: Devotees seek the goddess's blessings for physical and mental well-being.
2. Fertility and Childbirth: Kamakhya is revered as a fertility goddess, and childless couples visit seeking blessings.
3. Emotional Solace: The temple provides comfort and solace to those facing personal challenges.

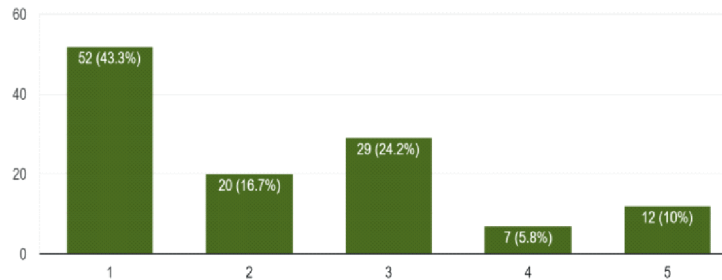
Tourism and Exploration

1. Architectural Marvel: The temple's unique architecture and scenic location attract tourists.
2. Historical Significance: Visitors interested in history and archaeology explore the temple's rich past.

3. Cultural Immersion: Tourists immerse themselves in the local culture, attending festivals and events.

How frequently do you visit Kamakhya?

120 responses



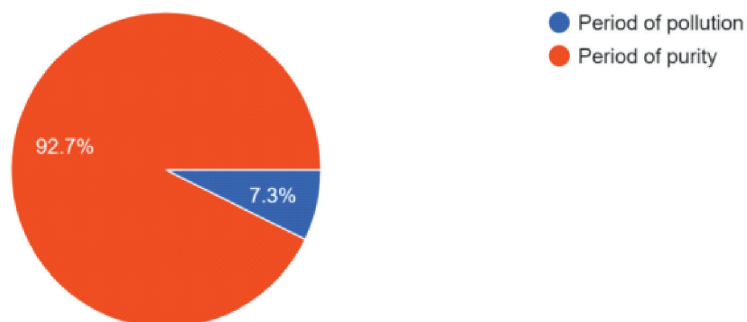
Here, respondents were asked to fit themselves according to their frequency of visit. Five degrees were given ranging from one to five where one stands for seldom visits and five represents most frequent visitors. Major portion of the respondents accepted to be less frequent visitor of Kamakhya temple.

The Kamakhya Temple in Guwahati, Assam, is open to visitors throughout the year, except for three days during the Ambubachi Mela, when the temple remains closed.

Devotees can visit the temple any day of the week, including Sundays. However, locals said that they avoid visiting during weekends and festivals as they prefer smaller crowds.

How do you consider the period of menstruation?

124 responses



Above 90% of the respondents consider the period of menstruation as period of purity from religious point of view. This exceptional response shows the dominance of mother cult in people's mind.

Interviewees admitted that menstruation has been viewed differently, leading to contrasting perspectives on whether it's a period of purity or pollution.

Menstruation is considered as Pollution on following grounds:

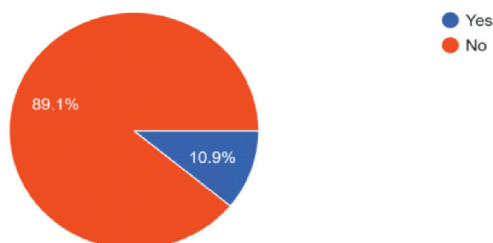
1. **Taboo and Stigma:** In some cultures, menstruation is considered impure or unclean, leading to social isolation and exclusion of menstruating women.
2. **Religious Restrictions:** Certain religious traditions, such as some Orthodox Jewish and Hindu communities, impose restrictions on menstruating women, considering them impure or polluted.
3. **Biological and Hygienic Concerns:** Menstruation has been associated with concerns about hygiene, odor, and the potential for infection.

On the other hand Menstruation as Period of purity means:

1. **Symbol of Fertility:** In some cultures, menstruation is celebrated as a symbol of fertility and womanhood, emphasizing the potential for new life.
2. **Natural and Healthy:** Many modern societies view menstruation as a natural and healthy part of life, recognizing the importance of menstrual health and hygiene.
3. **Empowerment and Self-Care:** The menstrual movement has promoted a positive perspective on menstruation, encouraging women to prioritize self-care, education, and empowerment.

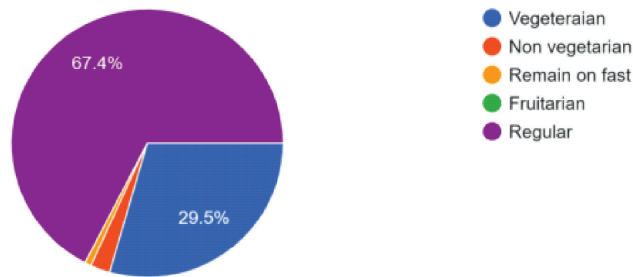
The above response reflects a cultural and spiritual understanding of menstruation as a natural and sacred process, rather than a source of pollution or impurity.

Have you ever visited Kamakhya during Navratri?
128 responses



As seen in the above diagram, only a few people however visited the temple during Navaratri.

What kind of food do you take during Navaratri?
129 responses



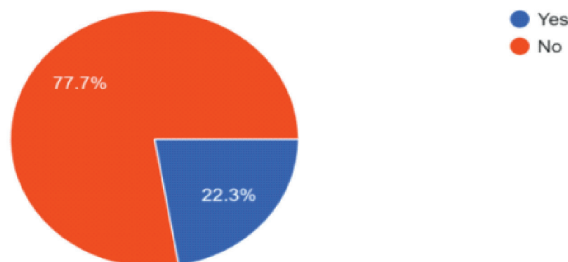
Most of the respondents take regular food during the days of Navaratri. However, a considerable section of around 30% of the respondents prefer vegetarian diet during these days.

Very few people stick to the non vegetarian diet.

During Navratri, a 9-day Hindu festival, devotees often follow a specific diet. Here are some common food practices during Navratri:

1. Fasting: Some devotees fast during Navratri, abstaining from food and water for the entire day or for a specific period.
2. Vegetarian diet: Many people follow a vegetarian diet during Navratri, avoiding meat, fish, and eggs.
3. Avoiding certain foods: Some devotees avoid certain foods like onions, garlic, and mushrooms, considering them *tamasic* (impure).

Have you ever visited Kamakhya during Ambuvachi?
130 responses

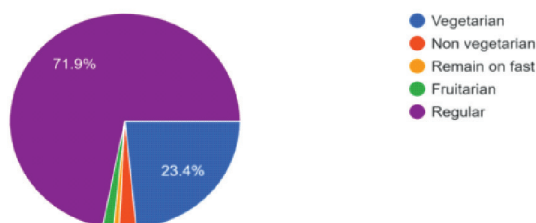


Traditional Navratri Foods include Fruits, Sabudana (Tapioca Pearls), roasted Makhana (Fox Nuts), Milk, yogurt and milk based sweets.

However, these are general guidelines, and individual preferences and regional traditions may vary.

It seems that only around 20% of the respondents have visited the temple during the days of Ambuvachi.

What kind of food do you take during Ambuvachi
128 responses



Major portion of the respondents take regular food on the days of Ambuvachi. A considerable portion of 23% of the respondents like to take vegetarian food. A small section of people go for non vegetarian food while the widows follow fruitarian diet.

During Ambubachi, a 4-day festival celebrated at the Kamakhya Temple in Assam, India, devotees follow a specific diet, which is largely vegetarian and avoids certain foods. Here is a list of some traditional foods consumed during Ambubachi:

Pitha: Steamed or fried rice cakes, often served with vegetables or lentils.

Xol Mool: A spicy fish-based curry, although some devotees may avoid fish during Ambubachi.

Masor Tenga: A sour fish curry made with fish, elephant apple, and other spices.

Khar: A traditional Assamese dish made with fermented fish, vegetables, and spices.

Doi: Yogurt is a staple during Ambubachi, often served with rice, vegetables, or fruits.

Fruits: Fresh fruits like bananas, apples, and oranges are widely consumed.

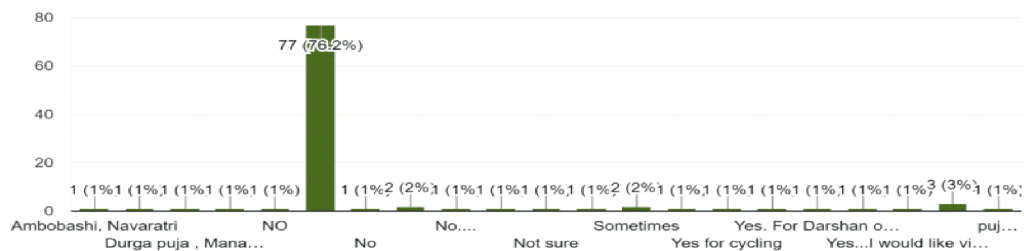
Vegetables: Leafy greens, potatoes, and other vegetables are cooked in various ways.

Onions, Garlic, Meat, and Eggs are restricted to eat during Ambuvachi. Malpua (A sweet, deep-fried pancake made with wheat flour, sugar, and ghee), Laddu (A

sweet ball made with gram flour, sugar, and ghee), and Jalebi (Crunchy, sweet fried batter coils) are considered as some of the important *prasadas*(offered food).

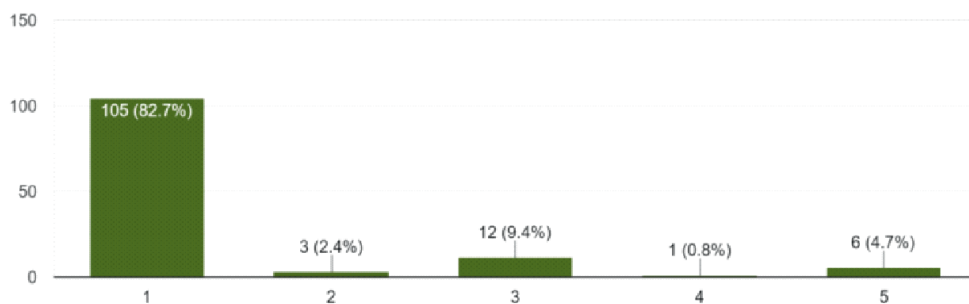
These traditional foods and *prasadas* are an integral part of the Ambubachi celebrations, and devotees believe that consuming them brings spiritual merit and blessings.

Have you visited Kamakhya on other festival days? If yes, when?
101 responses



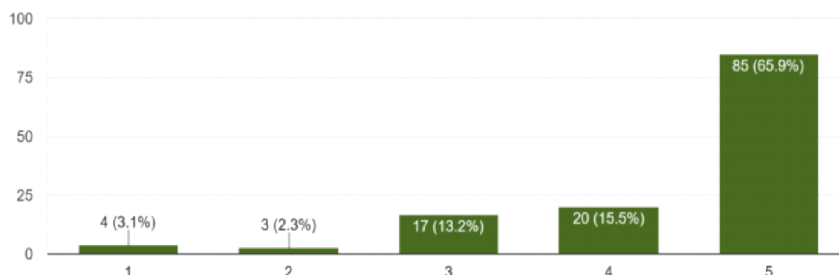
It seems from the above diagram that a large section of the respondents have not visited the temple during any festival. They went to the temple for different purpose like darshan, offering puja or sacrifice or donation,etc., Some went for trekking the hill, while some for cycling.

Do you support animal sacrifice for the purpose of religion
127 responses



Here, five options were given where one means those respondents who are totally against animal sacrifice and five means those who support the act. It is obvious from the diagram that there is a major section of respondents is against animal sacrifice. However some still support it for the purpose of religion that too in varied way.

How do you feel when you talk about Kamakhya
129 responses



In this question one means those respondents who are less influenced by Kamakhya while five means the emotionally attached and devoted category. The bar diagram shows that most of the respondents fit themselves in the fifth category.

The above responses reveal that Kamakhya is not perceived merely as a physical space of worship but as a living sacred presence embodying feminine divinity, fertility and transformative power. Participants articulated experiences ranging from fulfillment of vows and healing to emotional reassurance and identity affirmation. The findings suggest that religiosity linked to Kamakhya operates at multiple levels- ritual participation, mythic imagination and socio cultural belonging- indicating a deeply internalized sacred orientation rather than purely formal religious observance. The study also identifies variations in perception across demographic factors such as age, gender, and frequency of pilgrimage, highlighting the dynamic interplay between tradition and individual spirituality. By foregrounding devotees' voices, the paper contributes to anthropological discussions on lived religion and sacred geography in South Asia. It demonstrates how experiential engagement with Kamakhya sustains and reproduces regional consciousness while accommodating modern sensibilities. The research thus underscores the continuing vitality of Shakti worship in Assam and the centrality of Kamakhya as a focal symbol of collective religiosity and cultural identity.¹

Conclusion

All these response together shows the inclination of people of all categories towards this particular religious institution. The findings affirm that Kamakhya is perceived not merely as a ritual site but as a living sacred presence whose power is believed to intervene in personal, familial and social spheres of life. Such perceptions reveal a

form of lived religiosity in which devotion is sustained through emotional attachment, symbolic meaning, and culturally transmitted beliefs rather than through formal theology alone. The temple thus functions simultaneously as a centre of worship, a source of spiritual assurance, and a marker of collective identity. Overall, the study highlights that the significance of Kamakhya lies not only in its historical or theological status but in the lived experiences of devotees who continually reproduce its sacred meaning. The people of Assam have a deep reverence for Kamakhya Temple, which is an integral part of their cultural and spiritual heritage and personal lives. In other words the reverence towards Kamakhya temple is deeply rooted in the emotional fabric of the people of Assam and beyond. However all these aspects undoubtedly open a path for further research in this area.

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