

CHAPTER - V

Art and Architecture of Śākta Temples in Assam

General Over View of Art and Architecture

In the Vedic period as people were nature worshipper, they never demanded the raising of a temple for worship. It was the *Bhakti-marga* (cult of devotion) that gave an unequalled encouragement for the construction of the temple which became the places of popular worship. Once the temple as an abode of the deity was materialized, temple building began as a new craft which, with time, spread throughout the country and its neighbouring areas and even beyond. Assam, being a neighbouring state could naturally be expected to have fallen under the spell of this activity since its inception, distinct instances of which could be noticed among the earliest legends and relics of the land.¹ The construction of temple in Assam goes back to an early period and the existence of numerous shrines dedicated to Śiva, Surya, Visnu, Devi, and other deities are fully attested to both by inscriptions and the contemporary literature.²

There is a common conception regarding the building of the temples or *pīthas* and that was religion or to pay homage to the power that can protect from all disasters. But if we go to the early non-Aryan period, there was no idea of Gods and Goddesses. They knew only Mother Earth, who produced crops and supplied food and human Mother, who brought up their children. The aboriginal tribes gathered in a place and worshipped Mother Earth for the growth of production. They enjoyed, danced and sacrificed in the place where they performed the worship to the Mother. This particular shrine under the Kirata rulers and under the Aryan rulers turned into temple with a beautiful design. But unconsciously they tended to religion. The main aim of the building of temple architectures, sculptures and arts was the religion. So, B.K. Barua comments, “It is religion which fostered the growth of temples and images.”³ In Assam also temple building and the art of architecture and sculpture grew hand in hand with the spread of religion. There was no trace of temple architectures and sculptures in the aboriginal period, but the inscription refers to the temples during the *Bhauma* Dynasty.⁴

In India temple architecture is divided into mainly two styles: the Indo-Aryan or North Indian style and *Dravidian* style.⁵ The architectural activities in Assam highly influenced by the Indo-Aryan (North Indian).⁶ The temples of Assam has some similarities with the temple of Orissa and the *Nagara* type temple of North India.⁷ As regarding the temple building activities of Assam in the early period there are evidences from the literatures and the epigraphs. No trace of early edifices are found today. So by studying the epigraphs and the literary works and also some of the ruins scattered, one can examine the architectural style and activities of Assam.

The temples in Assam were mostly *sikhara* or *rekha deul* type in elevation. The ground plan of the temples developed with time. The square (**Figure III, a.**), rectangular plan could be seen in some of the temples. By examining the *sikhara* of the temples, it reveals that they were of various shapes as *rekha deul*, hut shaped barrel-vaulted, bulbous, round, and pyramidal and polygonal, *ratha* type.⁸ In the temple architecture of Assam, *ratha* plans were very common in the early period. A *ratha* is a facet or vertical offset projection on the tower. *Ratha* means chariot but it is not clear in case of architectural *ratha*. “The *rathas* are worshipped and decorated with geometric figures or statues.”⁹ The *rathas* are of various types such as *triratha* (**Figure III, b.**), *pancharatha* (**Figure III, c.**) and *saptaratha* (**Figure III, d.**). “If there is only one facet, this is a temple with three *rathas* (*triratha*): the wall and the facet on the left and on the right. If there are a main facet and a secondary one, the temple has five *rathas* (*pancharatha*). There are also temples with seven *rathas* (*saptarathas*).”¹⁰ Temples in Assam have a *garbhagrihas* (one chamber), which may contain an *antarala*, a *mandapa*, a *mukhamandapa* or *ardhamandapa*.¹¹ The *sikharas* of the temple may be of plain, *bhumi-amalaka*, *angasikhara* along with other decorative elements.¹²

People of Assam used both bricks and stones for the construction of the temples. Sometimes they used timber along with brick or stone. However temples of early medieval period were mostly display use of stone but in the later medieval period they used brick for building activities.¹³ Thus in the Ahom period mostly brick building temples mostly appeared. Though there was inducement north Indian and central Indian style in the structure of temples of Assam but the Ahom king Rudra Singha developed one new type that is *chala* type roof. It was of *Do-chala* (**Figure IV, a.**) which resembles with Assam hut type and Bengal *chala* (**Figure IV, b.**) hut. *Do-*

chala roofing was developed in the later period after it was introduced by Rudra Singha. Bengal *chala* type can be seen in the existing Kachari architecture at Khaspur group of temples. Bengal *chala* types are of *Do-chala*, *Char-chala* or *At-chala* roofs.¹⁴

The history of temple architecture in Assam is not as old as the Indian architecture. There is dearth of source material regarding the architecture of Assam. As mentioned most of the temples of Assam in the early period is not existing today, only from the ruins one can examine the architectural design and its form. However some of the temples of medieval period still existed today.

Temple Architecture of Assam upto 18th Century

The architectural activities especially of temple architecture in Assam can be date back to 5th century CE which coincides with the imperial Guptas, so architecture of that period in Assam is almost similar in theme and spirit with the Indian architecture of that period.¹⁵ The history of temple architecture in Assam is of later development comparing to the Indian context in architectural field. If it is compared to the chronology of Indian architecture, then it coincides with the age of Imperial Guptas. The available source material indicates that the architecture of Assam is not only meager but also not very old. On the basis of archaeological source it enables us to go back only to the 5th century CE.¹⁶

Ancient Assam had been ruled by three main dynasties-Varmanas, Salasthambhas and Palas respectively. The rulers of these three dynasties constructed many temples during their respective time period. But not a single of early edifice of these temples is exist to-day. However the material remains and epigraphical records highlighted the architectural activities by these rulers. From the Umachal Rock inscription of Surender Vaman alias Mahendrarvarman, it is asserted that there was a cave temple in the Nilachal area.¹⁷The rulres of Varman dynasty was contemporary to the Guptas. The architectural activites indicate that Gupta style of architecture was intact during that time. In general the temple architecture of the early Assam got influenced by the *Nagara* style. Another inscription which records the reconstruction of a temple is the Tezpur Grant of Vanamala,¹⁸ who was the king of Salasthambha dynasty. This grant mentioned that the king Vanamala out of devotion got the tall and towering temple of

Hatakasulin rebuilt and provided it with villages, elephants and dancers. The older temple which had fallen disrepair belonged to the earlier period.¹⁹

By reviewing the architectural activities of the Pala dynasty it provides some evidence. The Gauhati Grant of Indrapala records that Ratnapala caused the whole earth to be covered by white washed temples of Śiva.²⁰ In the Gachtal Grant of Indrapala,²¹ it is recorded that Indrapala by constructing a series of clearly white washed temples of Sambhu, rendered the whole world full of Kailasa Mountain. The Gauhati Grant of Indrapala²² refers to a temple of Vasumdhara and the temple of Mahagauri-Kamesvara. We find reference to a temple dedicated to Sri Madhusudana (Srimadhudanasatka) in the Pushpabhadra Grant of Dharmapala.²³ In the Assam Plates of Vallabha²⁴ reference made to an alms-house near the side of a Śiva temple. This indicates the existence of a Śiva temple.

From the inscriptional evidence it is clear that temple building activities in Assam was in progress in the early period at least from the 5th century CE. These few instances may reasonably indicate a far more widespread activity in founding and building religious establishments.²⁵ From the remains scattered and the epigraphic records one can surmise the possible form of the temple of the this period. The above evidences will indicate the abundance of old architectural pieces lying dislodged and scattered in many an ancient site in Assam.²⁶ However it is unfortunate that not a single pre-Ahom temple existed in its early form. It is over the old temple that in the Ahom rule many temples were built some of which are still existing. From the epigraphic and literary evidences it is apparent that there was a brisk activity in temple-building in the pre-Ahom period upto 12th century which is borne out by the vast mass of architectural remains lying scattered throughout the state.²⁷ There is no mention of construction of Śakti temple in the epigraphic records. Only in the Gauhati grant of Indrapala we get reference to the temple of *Vasumdhara* and *Mahagauri-Kameswara*.²⁸ However the architectural ground plan and remains indicate that Kāmākhya temple at Nilachala and the temple of Goddess Tamreswari at Sadiya had been constructed before 12th century. The present form of both these temples is of later construction.

The temple architecture of Assam in the ancient period had resemblance with the Orissan and *Nagara* or North Indian style. As there is many such material remains

scattered throughout the state, some are under earth which needs to be unearthed so that the architectural history of Assam can be supplemented by recovering them.

“Of the different expressions of Indian architecture, it is no doubt that the highest achievement is seen in the temple where a deity is believed to reside in full royal state.”²⁹ A temple developed under the political and royal influence which makes it popular with the time and region. The medieval period of Assam which began from 13th century CE was mainly ruled by the Ahoms, Koches, Kacharis, Chutiyas, Jayantiyas etc. The political history of Assam is very confusing due to disturbances from the external powers and other neighbouring territories. However regarding source of the temple architecture we have the inscriptions attached to the temples and some of the temples built during this time still existed which provide us an idea about it.

Temple Architecture under the Koches

The Koch dynasty came to power by mid-sixteen century CE. Koch Behar was their capital but they expanded their political and architecture towards the Brahmaputra Valley. Though there is lack of detailed account of their architectural activities in Assam, inscriptional records evidenced the construction of Kāmākhyā temple of the Nilachala hill, Hayagriva-Madhava temple of Hajo and the Pandunatha temple of Pandu.³⁰ Though the architectural activities were highly rich under their rule, only two of them have survived today. The first Koch king Biswa-Simha said to have constructed many temples in his kingdom including the famous temple of Goddess Kamatesvari. Our point of discussion is not about the other temples but the Śākta temples only. So here discussion will be only about the Śākta temples.

Kāmākhyā Temple

The earliest example of the building activity of the Koches is the famous temple of Goddess Kāmākhyā (that was destroyed earlier) reconstructed by the king Naranarayana and his brother Chilaray in *Saka* 1487 (1565 CE) on the Nilacala hill.³¹ The Koch kings constructed the present Kāmākhyā temple after it was destroyed by Kalapahar. This is evident by the stone inscription attached to the inner wall of the *garbhagrihas* of the temple. The work of reconstruction was entrusted first to one Mahat Ram Vaisya, but he was soon removed for misappropriation of funds and

Megha Makdum took over charge.³² “A reconstruction on the *sikhara* of the temple was attempted. The lower part which belonged to the 9th-10th CE was left as it had been. This spire has a characteristic of its own, met with only in the medieval temples of Assam and Bengal. “The *sikhara* is half way in between a real dome and a true spire”.³³ “This type of dome has been termed as the *Lahara sikhara* by Prof. S.K. Saraswati, since the sikhara is formed of over-hanging rings formed of stone pieces arranged in that way. As a result the outer side of the roof gave the appearance of a rather wavy outline rather than a smooth spire. The term is derived from *Lahara* or waves of the sea.”³⁴ “Example of this type of domes is restricted to Kamrup districts, Bakreswar in Bengal and Ramgarh on the Damodar districts in Hazaribagh district.”³⁵ Rajmohan Nath calls this type of domes the ‘*Nilachala type*’ due to their preponderance on the Nilacala Hill, Gauhati and other parts of Kamrup district.³⁶ The sculptures as well as the decorative designs could be stylistically assigned to 11-12th century CE. The *Sikhara* along with the *angasikharas* is a Koch innovation in its entirety. For the reconstruction of the *Sikhara*, instead of following the salients and recesses of the ground plan, they made a polyground dome in bricks which is obviously an innovation for the Hindu architecture. In fact from the structural point of view, the construction of the dome is typically Islamic. Thus a hybrid type of architecture was born, to be subsequently known as the *Nilacala* type, which grew into one of the most popular styles during the Ahom period.

In plan, the Kāmākhyā temple consists of four chambers, a *garbhagriha* and three *mandapas* locally known as *calanta*, *pancaratna* and *natamandira* (**Figure V, a**).³⁷ Inscriptional evidence shows that the apsidal *natamandira* was added to the temple in 1759 CE by the Ahom king Swargadeo Rajeswar Singha (1751 CE-1769 CE) The other three chambers of the temple appear to be of one and the same original scheme. “The *Vimana* of the temple was constructed on the original ground plan of a former temple which was *pancaratha* in form.”³⁸ The *Vimana*, because of its renovation, needs be studied in two parts, i.e., the *bada* and the *sikhara*. The tryanga *bada* has a *pancaratha* ground-plan. If it is assessed, it reveals that the *bada* consists of old components arranged somehow to bring the *bada* to a shape without, however, adhering strictly to the old sequence. “The *antarala* is roofed with Assam type *do-chala* roofing, the *calanta* possesses pyramidal roofing and the *bhogamandapa* is roofed with five domes or *ratnas*.”³⁹

Temple Architecture of the Ahom period

The Tai Shan group of people commonly known as Ahoms entered Assam in 1228 CE. The temple building activities of the Ahoms have direct link with their inclination towards Brahmanical religion.⁴⁰ The earlier kings upto the succession of Svargadeo Gadadhar Singha did not permanently accept Hinduism. Some of them of course patronised or practised tolerance towards Brahmanical religion. It was since the time of Svargadeva Gadadhar Singha that the temple building activities were undertaken in full swing and maintained their momentum till the end of the Ahom rule.⁴¹ The mass epigraphic evidence shows that the largest numbers of temples of Assam were built under the royal patronage of the Ahom kings. The architectural activities of the Ahom could be broadly divided into two major phases. The first phase covers from the beginning of the Ahom rule to the time of Sulikpha alias Loraraja in CE 1681, and the second phase begins with the reign of Gadadhar Singha upto the end of Ahom rule 1826 CE. The Ahoms built temples of many deities such as Śiva, Śakti, Visnu and so on. Among these many Śakti temples were constructed under the Ahoms which will be discussed here.

Maghnowa Do'l

In the first phase of the temple architecture under the Ahoms, it is seen that one Śakti temple Maghnowa do'l (**Figure VI**) under king Pratap Singha got constructed. This temple does not possess a date of its construction.⁴² It is believed that the Maghnowa Do'l is the Phulbari Devalay of the Ahom chronicles.⁴³ This temple is located in near Dhalpur in the Lakhimpur district. This temple has some similarities with the Garakhiya Do'l of Nazira⁴⁴ in the structural form and in planning. The ground plan of both these temples are same i.e. octagonal. There is one *vimana* and a *mandapa* in of the Maghnowa Do'l. The *Mandapa* of Maghnowa Do'l is measuring 3.75 metres, the width of the doorway of *vimana* measures 1.45 metres.⁴⁵ The rectangular *Devakosthas* on the *bada* of the temple inset with sunken chambers crowned with pointed arches, which are typically Islamic architecture. The Maghnowa Do'l contains five niches in every wall in each row. The *sikhara* of this temple bears an octagonal dome instead of conical *sikhara*.⁴⁶

In Assam octagonal planning was not intact before this time. Octagonal planning could be seen in the Islamic architectures and it is presumed that this influence have

been seen in the architecture of Ahom under Swargadeo Pratap Singha's time. The Garakhiya Do'l is also octagonal planning which was constructed during Pratap Singha's time. This Garakhiya Do'l and Maghnowa Do'l have some similarities in planning and structure. Though there is no any date of construction of the Maghnowa Do'l but by examining the structure and planning it can be said that it might have been constructed under Pratap Singha.

The period after Pratap Singha till the enthronement of Gadadhar Singha (CE 1681-CE1696) is marked by domestic feuds and internal discussions for the Ahom monarchy. During this period eleven as many as eleven kings ruled within a small span of forty years⁴⁷ of which the year 1675 CE itself saw the exit of three kings. The building activities started by Pratap Singha gradually declined till the time of Gadadhar Singha. Gadadhar Singha was a follower of Śākta cult but there is no record of any Śakti temple built by him. He built Umananda temple, Thaora Do'l. It was his son and successor Rudra Singha who built some Śakti temples in Assam.

Devi Do'l of Jaysagar

Rudra Singha, the successor of Gadadhar-Sinha got constructed many temples. The contribution of Rudra Singha towards the development of the Ahom architecture are unique and unsurpassed. "The largest concentration of his construction is seen on the north and west banks of the Jaysagar tank, the biggest of all the tanks constructed by any Ahom king".⁴⁸ During his reign Devi Do'l was constructed on the bank of *Jaysagar* tank. He also constructed *Durga* temple on the *Nilachala* hill. But there are no epigraphic records of these constructions. Rudra Singha seems to be the first Ahom monarch to have translated the Assamese cottage into *do-chala* structures, which he proceeded to erect both as independent structures, as also as the mandapas attached to the *vimanas* of the temples. The largest of this type of the Assamese *do-chala* of his time was the Devi ghar or Devi Do'l which still stands intact on the western bank of the Jaysagar tank.⁴⁹ In plan Devi Do'l is rectangular.

Devi Do'l of Gaurisagar

Śiva Singha, the son and successor had brought the Ahom architecture to its zenith. On the north bank of the Gaurisagar he built three temples. Among them one was the Devi Do'l (**Figure VII, a.**). In all the three temples of Gaurisagar group the *mastaka*

(**Figure VIII, a.**) design was same. The Devi Do'l is *Saptaratha* in plan which is situated in the extreme east.⁵⁰ The Devi Do'l is of *nagara* type having *pancaratha vastupurusamndala*. It has an antarala and a spacious mandapa of the Assamese *do-chala* type. Of the three temples constructed at Gaurisagar, this is the largest, finest and the best preserved. It can claim to be the first brick built temple of the *nagara* type of later medieval Assam, as his predecessors did not attempt a single *nagara* type and the earlier kings restricted their work to renovation of medieval stone *nagara* temples only.⁵¹

Devi Do'l of Sibsagar

The Ahom monarch Śiva Singha constructed three temples at Sibsagar which is popularly called as the Sibsagar group of temple. Of these three one was the Devi Do'l (**Figure VII, b.**) which is of *Nilachala* type. The *sikhara* of the Devi Do'l is patterned after the *sikhara* of the Devi Do'l of Gaurisagar. But it is better in execution, graceful in proportion and balanced in decorative treatment.⁵² The design of *mastaka* (**Figure VIII, b.**) has similar style with the Śiva and Vishnu Do'l. It is one of the finest Devi Do'l built in Assam. "This temple had another spacious mandapa which could be marked by a brick-plinth that exists only up to the ground level. Approximately 25 metres X6.5 metres in size, the plinth of this *mandapa* shows round holes of 30 cms. Diameter at equal distance, indicating that they were meant for erecting wooden posts. The 65 cms thickness of the plinth wall for a span of 6.5 metres as well as the existence of the above holes indicate that the *mandapa* was an open *Namghar*, with timber roof-frame covered with thatch. The necessity for such an open hall was due to the rising popularity of the Śākta worship under royal patronage, and also for organising annual festivals with all pomp and ceremony."⁵³

The period succeeding Siba Singha was not marked with any conspicuous achievement. Numerous temples were no doubt built, but almost all of them became smaller in size and were repetitions of the earlier forms. Śiva Singha's successor Pramatta Singha (1744-1751) brought some novelty during the short period of his reign, but they proved structurally unscientific. One of his attempts was the Hatimura Durga (**Plate V, b.**) temple near Jakhalabandha in the Nagaon district. The temple is *Saptaratha* in plan. Here the designer made the blunder not only of making the salient angles of the *rathas* critically acute, which considerably failed to resist the weathering

actions, but also by including the huge rock containing the large Durga image into the brick-masonry of the walls, which evidently prevented it from coalescing into a homogenous bond and thus contributed to the disintegration of the wall portion.⁵⁴ During his reign the Kāmākhyā temple Silghat was also renovated. *Ugratara* Devalay which was built during the reign of Siba Singha is of the same design as Kāmākhyā temple of Nilachala hill.

Temple Architecture under the Kacharis

The Kacharis are regarded as the earliest known inhabitants of Assam who remained as ruling authority of the whole region from Dikhau to the river Surama. The architectural development under the Kacharis centered round the three Kachari capitals i.e., Dimapur (in present Nagaland), Maibong (N. Cachar Hills) and Khaspur (Cachar District) These places representing three great phases of the Kachari architectural activities which may help us to build up some concrete idea about their architectural activities. Dimapur-megaliths retain the earliest evidence of their activities. By the middle of the sixteenth century CE, the Kacharies established their second capital at Maibong, where the ruins of several temples are seen but only structures bearing some architectural features survived he is a small rock-cut temple on the bank of a rivulet, Mahur.

Ranachandi Temple

The only complete religious edifice at Maibong which has managed to survive the test of time is the Ranachandi temple. The structure lies half a kilometre east of the city of Maibong and exist just at the foot of the southern range of hills. This is a monolithic temple hewn out of the upper portion of a huge rock. It is typically a *do-chala* type temple introduced first by the Ahom king Rudra Singh (1696-1714 CE) with curvilinear eaves and a hipped ridge indicating Bengal influence. The structure is provided with four false doors at its walls. The walls of the temple carry two inscriptions indicating that it was done by king Harishchandra in 1721 CE.⁵⁵ The survival of the name Ranachadi among the people and its continued popularity even though the capital was subsequently shifted to Khaspur in the plains of Barak Valley, tend to prove that this building was either intended to be hewn out as a solid shine in the manner of the *gota dols* of the Ahom or because of its increased and lasting

popularity, came to be recognised as the very expression of the deity Ranachandi herself.⁵⁶

Temple Architecture under the Chutiyas

One of the greatest tribes of Assam was the Chutiyas. The chronicles of the Ahoms recorded the major encounters that took place between the Ahoms and the Chutiyas.⁵⁷ In some of the Copper-plate charters,⁵⁸ it got mentioned about the cultural pursuits of the Chutiyas. Probably they occupied a region in Upper Assam bounded by the Subansiri river in the east and Disang in the South⁵⁹ with the boundaries in the north and the east encroaching upon the hilly region of this area.⁶⁰ The *Deodhai Asom Buranji*, mentions *Saka* 1111 (CE 1189) as the earliest date that can be reckoned with.⁶¹ When the Ahoms annexed their territory to the Ahom kingdom, Chutiyas came under the subjugation of the Ahom king and this ended their independent identity.⁶²

The Malini Than

During the time of Chutiya rule numerous there were shrines and temples. Among those, the most prominent are the remains of a stone temple on the Assam-Arunachal border, about 8 kilometre away, from the small township of Lekabali in the Lakhimpur District which is popularly known as the Malini *Than*. This site is under the protection of Archaeology Department. It has been exposed by the Archaeology Department of Arunachal which has brought into light the architectural structure of the temple. “The ruins evidenced a *Saptaratha* stone temple along with numerous Hindu icons from the body of the temple. The *tharas* of the temple plinth has some similarity with the ruins in the Goalpara District. The temple consists of a *garbhagrihas* and three *mandapas* as evidenced by the ground plan.”⁶³ The *garbhagriha* and the first *mandapa* are built in one joint lay-out following the temple plans of the medieval Assam and appear closer in planning to the central Indian temples than to the Orissan temples.⁶⁴ The two other *mandapas* are laid independently with a gap between each pair of the buildings in the line of the Orissan temple lay-out. Each gap between two buildings shows the provision of an *antarala*. From the developed nature of the temple plan as well as the stylistic features of the images we may place the temple in the 12th century CE. The perfection in sculpture and the precise craftsmanship of the building art exhibited here could be achieved only

through a continuous art tradition. There is close similarity with the sculptured ruins found at Numaligarh and Malini *Than*.⁶⁵

Tamreswari Mandir

The Tamreswari Mandir located at Sadiya area of Dibrugarh district was one of the temples developed under the Chutiya kings. Popularly the temple of Tamreswari is known as *Kecāi khāiti*.⁶⁶ It is presumed that this temple was a popular religious centre of eastern Assam during the later medieval period. “The site found to be granite stone with a beautifully carved door-frame at the entrance.”⁶⁷ According to Lieutenant Dalton, it was constructed of massive stone blocks, and iron dowels were used for joining them. “The Lieutenant found the cella of this temple to have measured 2.45 metres x 2.43 metres with walls measuring 1.37 metres in thickness.”⁶⁸ It is believed that the roof of the temple was originally built of copper from which the word “Tamreswari” (i.e., the copper Goddess) was derived.⁶⁹ “It is known from the record on architecture during Ahom period “*Changrung Phukanar Buranji*” that the temple actually contained plates of copper laid over it.”⁷⁰ “From this reference we may presume that the original stone *sikhara* of the temple, on being damaged or lacerated by natural vagaries during the later part of the medieval period, was covered with copper sheets.”⁷¹

The only authentic source is the *Changrung Phukanar Buranji* from where a detailed account of the temple can be found. Dalton did not find the temple intact, except its plinth. The height of the temples is 12 cubit, equivalent to 5.5 metres, but regarding the type of *sikhara* is not known from it.⁷² However, the square plan of the structures indicates that the *sikhara* must have been pyramidal with a straight or curvilinear extrados. It is being conical, or of a *ratha* shape does not appear to be a possibility because of the use of massive stone blocks without traces of any notch or curve on them. Structurally it is a very simple building and there is nothing special in its architecture. Its only importance lies on its presence at a place during a period when masonry building was very rare. It may be added that though the Chutiyas were a cultured tribe, evidence of their being efficient builders is lacking.⁷³

Temple Sculptures and Images of the Goddesses in Assam upto 18th Century

Sculptures play an important role in the architectural activities. Temples in Assam were also decorated with various sculptural designs with the scenes from epic and contemporary scenes, various natural scenes, erotic scenes, sculptures of various Gods and Goddesses and so on. Various animal carvings are also seen which adorn the walls and ceilings of the temples.

There is a very close association in between the sculptures of Assam with the sculptures of Bengal and Orissa. In this regard says that, “the sculptures of Assam are included under the fourth school of Indian art representing the Bengal, Orissa and Assam due to the stylistic similarities.”⁷⁴ The architectural style of Kāmākhyā temple follows *Nagara* style of North India. The sculptures of the temple are seen mostly on the outer walls as well as on the inner walls of the Kāmākhyā temple. Some sculptures are also fixed on the gate of the temple. Besides these many of the sculptures are seen lying scattered within the temple campus. But due to the religious prohibition, the sculptures of inner walls are not given permission to study.⁷⁵

“The walls of Kāmākhyā temple are richly embellished with the numerous relief sculptures where varieties of subject matters are depicted such as religious, secular, flora and fauna and geometrical designs. The divine images of the temple are included the religious subject matter and found abundantly. A great number of exquisite figures of the divine images which follow the iconographic rules are inscribed on the outer walls of the sanctum and they serve to evoke the religious feelings of the devotees. Mostly, the life size male divine figures are installed on the outer temple walls of this gesture. It is noteworthy that the depictions of Śiva in his various forms are found. Most of the figures of Śiva show the terrific aspect which is called *Bhairava*.”⁷⁶

Along with the great number of the male divine figures, two females Goddesses are associated on the exterior wall of the sanctum. The females are identified in the form of Śakti namely Gauri and Uma. Gauri is standing in graceful posture and holding a half bloomed lotus in the right hand while the other performs the *kati-hastamudra*. The figure reflects the characteristic feature of the Gupta art in the carving style. Like Gauri, Uma is also almost similar but the figure is holding a mirror which is special emblem of Uma. Since Uma is holding a mirror; therefore, the figure produces the *shringar rasa* (erotic sentiment).⁷⁷

Sculptures of different Goddesses or *Devi*

The Goddess Śakti had been worshipped in her various manifestations that goes back to the remote antiquity in India and both in her iconic and aniconic form side by side.⁷⁸ The representation of Śiva and *Devi* in the form of *linga* and *yoni* respectively are found extensively in Assam. No sculptural art in any medium assigned proved by the ruins of Da-Parvatiya.⁷⁹

Variety of *Devi* images associated with different Śakti cults has been discovered and some are preserved in the state museum. As regards the *Devi* images found so far in the state, Deopani image of Durga is the earliest. The Goddess has four hands; the two lower arms are in the *varada-mudra*. Of the two upper ones, the right hand holds a trident and the left one a mirror. On each side of the Goddess stands a small worshipping female, holding the hands with the palms joined together in front of the breast, the usual attitude of supplication.

Mahisamardini, the *ugra* form of *Durga*, is the most important and earliest, according to literary texts. *Mahisamardini* occupied an important place in the Hindu pantheon. She either appears alone or in company in temples. This form of Goddess *Durga* is most popular in India particularly in Assam and Bengal. The images of *Mahisamardini*, rock-cut as well as curved on stone slabs are found in Assam. *Mahisamardini* Durga had different names according to the number of hands. The ten-handed image is called *Katyayani* and sixteen-handed image is called *Ugrachanda* according to *Matsya Purana* and *Agni Purana*.⁸⁰

An image of *Mahisamardini*, carved on a stone slab (90x50 cm) comes from Sirajuli, a village in the vicinity of Dhekiajuli and is now preserved in a private house of Dhekiajuli town.⁸¹ Here the Goddess has ten arms, stands in *tribhanga* posture, with the right leg placed on the back of her vehicle, the lion, while the left leg is on the back of beheaded Mahisa. This image, which is in a perfect state of preservation, displays excellent proportions in execution and is a pleasing work of art. Stylistically, this image may be placed in 10th century CE. The second image of *Mahisamardini* is noticed at Hajo. The image is small in size which is carved on a block of basalt. The image is assigned to pre-Ahom period. According to its style it belonged to 11th-12th CE.⁸² Another image of *Mahisamardini* is seen at Ulubari, Guwahati, by the side of G.S. Road. The image is very beautiful with fine carvings. The deity has ten hands

and stands in the usual way, placing the right foot on the *vahana* and the left one on the Mahisa. Stylistically this may be assigned to 11th century CE.⁸³ Another image of Mahisamardini is seen at Siddheswari temple, Sualkuchi. This image is represented same as the former one. **(Plate 12)**

An eight-handed Mahishamardini was carved on a rock in Uzanbazar area of Guwahati. Except the sword in the right topmost hand, a trisula in the lowest right hand and a blow in the third left hand, all other attributes in the hands are in distinct. The image corresponds to the *dhyanas* of *Agni Purana*.⁸⁴ The eight-handed Mahishamardini in the form of Ugrachanda is rare in Assam. In that respect the image is has importance and high iconographic significance. Another eight handed bronze image collected from Kukurmata, Hedayatpur, Guwahati is now preserved in the Assam State Museum. The image is very small and it is difficult to identify the image. The *vahana* of the Goddess is not shown. R.D. Choudhury holds the view that this is the only icon of Mahishamardini so far found in Assam belonging to the Pre-Ahom period, where the Vahana of the Goddess is absent.⁸⁵

One interesting image is sixteen-handed Mahishamardini **(Plate 13)**, made of clay stone is found in Ambari (Guwahati) site, she has her right leg on her usual *Vahana*, the lion while the left leg is placed on Mahisasura with a view to push him down forcefully.⁸⁶ The Goddess is standing on an *alidha* posture. The pedestal bears an inscription, identifying her as ‘Candanayika’. Candanayika is described as one of the eight Śaktis of the great Goddess in the *Kālikā Purāna*. In the *Agni Purana* and the *Bhavisya Purana* Candanayika is mentioned under the collective designation of Nava-Durga.⁸⁷ The Nava-Durgas are Rudracanda, Pracanda, Candanayika, Canda, Candavati, Candarupa, Aticandika and Ugracanda.⁸⁸ However, the ayudhas of Candanayika prescribed in the Agni Purana and Kalika Purana do not conform to that of the Candanayika found at Ambari. Inscribed Goddess image is rare in Assam and for this the image has great significance. The stela is pointed. The kirtimukha is depicted on the top of the stela. Two flying Vidyadharas are holding malas on both sides of the upper stela. The influence of Pala art is visible.⁸⁹

A four handed stone image of the deity is to be seen in the *nata-mandapa* of the Kāmākhyā temple and another small image of the Goddess is noticed along with the image of *Uma-Mahesvara* and a *Śivalinga* on the way to Kāmākhyā. Two badly

mutilated stone figure of the deity are also seen in the Assam State Museum. In all these four cases, the right foot of the deity is placed on the back of *vahana*, the lion, while the left foot is on the *Mahisa*; and the right leg of the *asura* is pounced upon by the *vahana* of the deity. The lion and Mahisasura are depicted facing each other in each case.⁹⁰

Six miniature images of ten-handed Mahishamardini Durga from Ambari ruins are now preserved in the Assam State Museum. These miniature images are made of grey sandstone. These images carries identical attributes in their hands and all the Goddesses are shown with her right leg upon the lion and the left leg upon the buffalo. A big image of Mahishamardini is found in Bhoi Parvat in Nagaon district. The image is cut on a granite boulder. The Goddess right leg is on the back of the beheaded buffalo and the left leg on the lion. The position of the buffalo shown here is different from the former images and is placed to her right while the lion is to her left at the bottom. This arrangement is nowhere seen in any other composition of Mahishamardini Durga.⁹¹

Other ten-handed Mahishamardini images are found in the ruins of Singari, Charduwar and Bamuni Pahar area in Sonitpur district in Assam. Characteristics of all these images are the same.

It is interesting to note that though Goddess Durga is most popular in her Mahishamardini form, at a certain phase of art history, Durga became associated with the God Śiva as his wife. In the *Devimahatmya* of *Markandeya Purana*,⁹² various aspects of Durga are described along with her icon types. In the sculptural art of Assam, sometimes she is also depicted in the *santa* (pacific) form.

A big image of Durga, carved on a block of granite, is noticed at Deopani near Golaghat. Here the deity is in *samapadasthanaka* attitude. The Goddess is four-handed. The lower right hand is in *padmahastavaradamudra* and the upper right hand is holding a trisula. The upper left hand holds a *cakra* and the lower left hand holds a sankha. The Goddess adorns a jatamukuta and the third eye. The Goddess follows the *dhyanas* of *Saradatilaka Tantra*. This is characteristic of the Vaisnavite deities.⁹³ Another twelve-handed image of the Goddess is carved on granite rock in Surya Pahar in Goalpara. The *ayudhas* in the hands are not distinct. The Goddess is also wearing a Vanamala. The image belongs to thirteenth century CE.⁹⁴ Thus it appears

that there has been an attempt to represent a synthesis between Śakti and Visnu in sculptural art.

Another image of Durga in her placid form is seen at Dimapur (now in Nagaland). This four-handed image is in *Samapadaasthanaka* attitude. The sculptors adopted the same technique and same style in both the cases i.e. in the Deopani Durga and the image at Dimapur. These two images are different from the other sculptures recovered from the Brahmaputra Valley in the physiognomical ground.⁹⁵ The sculptures of this area, with a remote influence of the classical tradition and some local traits of their own, are treated as separate school and Manoranjan Dutta termed this school as Deopani School.⁹⁶

An interesting image of ten-handed Durga (**Plate 14**) in grey sand stone found at Mangaldoi in Darrang District is now preserved in the Assam State Museum. The local tribe used to worship this deity as Durga and Burhi Gosani (i.e. old Goddess). This image belongs neither to EISMA nor to any other recognized school of art of India.⁹⁷ The treatment is typically local. The workmanship is simple but crude and flatly carved on a stone. The hands are stiff extensions from the body like some parallel lines. Her emblem is there in the hands. For eyes, ears and mouth there are sockets. The deity is represented with a hole on her forehead, identified as a third. The Goddess is flanked by one figure in the right hand and two figures in the left hand. In the pedestal there is a lion. The image is approximated to the thirteenth/fourteenth century CE by scholars like Bhattacharjee and others.⁹⁸

The Goddess Durga is sometimes found riding on a lion, which is her *Vahana*. A ninth-tenth century image of this type carved on granite basalt is now at the Assam State Museum. A four-handed image of Durga⁹⁹ locally called Bagheswari has been found in the Barkhetri area. Here the Goddess is depicted seated on a tiger. In the Vasundhari pahar of Nagaon a rock cut Simhavasini image locally called Vasundhari is found.¹⁰⁰

Images of Kali, another form of Śākta Goddesses is also found in Assam. An image of Kali is noticed in Deopani which stands in *samapadaasthanaka* attitude on *padma pītha*. The Goddess wears *mukuta* and *mundamala*.¹⁰¹ The Goddess is flanked by two female attendants. The image has been assigned to the ninth century CE. In the Panchanan temple, of North Lakhimpur, a four-handed image of Kali seated on a

prostrate human figure is seen. At Bhaitbari in Garo hills, Meghalaya two forms of Kali have been excavated. One is depicted in *stanaka* attitude, wearing a long mundamala and long dishevelled hair and protruding tongue. In her right hand holding a *Khadga* and in her left hand *kapala*.¹⁰² This is the common form of Kali. The other form is shown seated on a prostrate human male figure holding his *urdha linga* by the two toes of the right foot. The pot bellied Goddess holds human head in her hand. This form of Kali is rare in Assam.

An image of four-armed Tripura Bhairavi (**Plate 15**) is found from Jogijan, Nagaon and now it is preserved in Assam State Museum. The Goddess wears *jatamukuta* and *mundamala*. One interesting point to note here is that on the stela there are some small images of *Saptamatrika* such as Vaisnavi, Kaumari, Maheswari, Brahmani and Camunda. In between the figures of *Saptamatrika* miniature Bhairavas are seen seated on *prestasana*.¹⁰³ The image is assigned to tenth century CE.¹⁰⁴ This type of Śākta Tantric image is rare in Assam and this unique image is of great importance.

Camunda is a common usually with four hands and sometimes with six or eight hands too. The following are the general characteristic features of the Camunda image. She is depicted as a skeleton in appearance with-flesh dried up, bones showing through the skin, eyes sunken and abdomen contracted; she wears a necklace of skulls and bones, she is often dressed in a tiger skin and have a corpse and an owl as her vehicle; her complexion is generally of dark or blue colour. Sometimes a vulture is represented on her banner; she may be represented as standing, dancing, sitting etc.¹⁰⁵

A six-handed image of Camunda is to be seen at Na-bhanga, five miles away from Hojai railway station in the Nagaon district. It is carved on a stone. It has a dreadful appearance. The body is emaciated, the exposed chest bones, sunken eyes, and shrivelled abdomen and with mouth open. Around her hair-lock, waist and neck human heads are faced. The image is half seated upon a dead body. In the pedestal on the right side is a vulture and in the left side a jackal. According to scholars like Bhattacharjee, the image is assigned to tenth/eleventh century CE.¹⁰⁶ In the book of N. K. Bhattasali, he mentions one image of this type which is preserved at Decca Museum. According to him the image is Camunda of Rudracarcika type.¹⁰⁷ One very fine image of four-handed Camunda is seen at Kāmākhyā temple. The Goddess is seated on a double-petalled lotus pedestal with legs crossed. She wears a headdress of

jatamukuta bedecked with three human skulls and two serpents. The Goddess shown here is wearing *naramundamala*. In her upper right hand she is holding a *naramunda* and the lower left hand a *khatbhanga*. Behind the head of the image there is a circular *siracakra*. The image is assigned to the 9th-10th century.¹⁰⁸

A six-handed image of Camunda is seen inside the *natamandapa* of the Kāmākhyā temple. The deity is in dancing posture with *sthanaka* attitude on a human body. The deity is holding *ayudha* – *kartika*, *damaru*, *kapala*, *muda khatbhanga* and *sula* in her hands. She is wearing a long *mundamala*.¹⁰⁹ One image of Camunda (**Plate 16**) found in Barpathar is preserved at Assam State Museum. The image is carved on a block of sandstone. The Goddess is in *utkatikasana* posture. Here the deity is looking very unpleasant with her emaciated body exposing ribs, sunken eyes, and shrunken belly. She is holding *ayudhas* but only *kapala* is distinct. The image is assigned to 7th- 8th century CE.¹¹⁰

Vaisnavi, one of the *Saptamatrikas* is described as the power of Visnu is also found in Assam. A terracotta plaque of Vaisnavi from Bhaithbari in Meghalaya has been found. In the Nalbari district at Purani Sirpur Devalay an image of Vaisnavi is noticed. This four-handed Goddess is holding *ayudhas* are *sankha*, *cakra*, *gada* and *padma*. This image is assigned to 10th -11th century CE.¹¹¹

Varahi is another *Saptamatrikas* described as the power of Varaha, the boar headed form of Visnu. An independent ninth century image (*svayampradhana murti*) of Varahi is now preserved in Assam State Museum. This two-handed Goddess holding a *gada* in her left hand and *ayudhas* in the right hand is not distinct.

Yami, the Śakti form of Yama as mentioned in Varaha Purana is another form of *Matrikas*. A bronze image of Yami is found in the Narakasura ruins in Kahilipara. The Goddess wears a *mukuta*, *kundala* and *kankanas*. The *vahana* of the Goddess is buffalo. According to *Brihatsamhita* the characteristic *vahana* of Yama is buffalo and characteristic weapon is *danda*. On the basis of the *vahana*, the image has been identified as Yami. As Image of Yami is rare in Assam, so this icon is of great importance. The assigning date of the image is said to be ninth century CE.¹¹²

River Goddess and icon of Gaja-Laksmi are always single. Figures of river Goddess Ganga and Yamuna represented on the door-jambs at Da-Parbatiya, are found to be

common in door-jambes of early Gupta and medieval temples. From the archaeological site of Ambari, Guwahati, icons of Ganga and Yamuna are discovered. Here Ganga, made of sandstone, is depicted in *tribhanga* posture and standing on the back of makara.¹¹³ The two-handed Goddess is holding a pot and a snake. A three-hooded snake is shadowing her head. One duck is depicted on the left. The image of Goddess Yamuna, made of sandstone is also in *tribhanga* posture. The Goddess is two-handed standing on her vahana, kurma. A single-hooded snake is showing her head like an umbrella.¹¹⁴ R M Nath has noticed an image of Ganga at Nabhanga.¹¹⁵

One important aspect of Goddess Laksmi was Gaja-Laksmi, depicted in the art of ancient Assam represented either independently or as a consort of Visnu. One terracotta sculpture of Gaja-Laksmi is found from Da-Parvatia presently preserved in Assam State Museum which follows the classical idioms.¹¹⁶ Another sculpture of Gaja-Laksmi depicted in *Lalitasana* posture is preserved in Assam State Museum. This sculpture is assigned to 8th century CE.¹¹⁷ The composition is too well known to admit of any doubt about the identification of the image as that of Gaja-Laksmi. This type of Gaja-Laksmi have also been seen at Devasthan (Nagaon) and Maudanga, Mahamaya than and Tezpur. Besides this independent aspect of Laksmi, the Goddess was worshipped with her consort Visnu. Large numbers of Visnu images of pre-Ahom Assam were accompanied by his consort Laksmi and Saraswati.

The Goddess Saraswati is represented either independently or in accompaniment with Visnu in the art of Assam. In the context of Assam we have to restrict our study to the Hindu Goddess Saraswati of whom a few from independent auspicious Goddess to spouse. An image of two-handed Saraswati, playing veena is preserved in the Assam State Museum. This image has been roughly assigned to tenth/eleventh century.¹¹⁸ Four-handed seated Saraswati images are found in Tezpur and Kāmākhyā. In Assam the representation of Saraswati as a consort of Visnu is most common.

In Assam the folk deity Manasa, the snake Goddess was popular in the ancient time. An image of Manasa found in Guwahati is now preserved in Assam State Museum. The two-handed deity is holding a fruit in varada-mudra in her right hand and a child on her lap with the left hand. There is a *chatra* like a serpent's hood over her head. Another similar type of image is found from Narakasur hill.¹¹⁹ It is carved on a piece of black basalt. The deity is canopied by a seven-hooded snake. To the right of the

deity a rishi probably Jaratkaru is seen sitting while to the left a figure holding unidentified *ayudha*, is sitting in *lalitasana*. Similar types of stone images of Manasa are found in Barangabari and Phulbari Devalay of Sonitpur district. The assigning date of these images is tenth-eleventh century CE. In these sculptures influence of Pala-Sena art is clearly visible.¹²⁰

Another very interesting image of Manasa (**Plate 17**) is found in a tea garden near Kaliabor (Nagaon district). Here the *vahana* of the deity is an elephant which is an exception. In the Brahmavaivarta Purana, the term 'nagendra' is denoted as the vahana of the Goddess. Here the meaning of 'nagendra' is a big snake but *naga* also means a *gaja* (elephant). So it can be said that the vahana of the Goddess sculpted by the sculptor is wrong. This type of image is rare in Assam.¹²¹

Śiva-Śakti is incomplete if one is separated from the other. It was probably due to joint power and devotion of love that both were worshipped jointly. Possibly due to such love and devotion as found in different Puranas and Tantras the joint sculptures have been carved out by the sculptors and people worshipped both the God and Goddess jointly in this form. This tradition was prevalent in Assam since the distant past. We have numerous sculptures depicting Śiva and Śakti jointly. In the literatures also the name Śiva and Śakti has been found jointly. In the inscriptions of early Assam also the name such as Hara-Gauri, Kameswar-Kameswari etc. have been found. It appears that this worship of Śiva-Śakti in their joint form was existed since that time till today. In the Kāmākhyā temple the joint worship of Śiva and Śakti is still prevalent. In the *Kālikā Purāna*¹²² it is described that after the death of Sati in the sacrificial pyre of her father Daksa, her spirit went to Menaka, wife of Himalaya. Sati satisfied by Menaka's prayer blessed her with boons for one thousand sons. She herself born as a daughter of Menaka and came to be known as Uma. The sage Narada advised Himalaya to give his daughter to Śiva. In the meantime, a demon named Taraka tortured the Gods for which the Gods approached Brahma. Brahma told them that a son of Śiva will kill the demon. Śiva burnt Kamadeva in the meantime, because Kamadeva tried to enchant Śiva to marry Uma. Ultimately Śiva agreed to marry Uma. In one occasion, Parvati assumed half body of Śiva (Hara) and paired with him as Hara-Gauri. Probably joint worship of Śiva-Śakti began with this when Parvati accepted the half body of Hara.¹²³

The worship of Śiva-Śakti is Tantric in origin.¹²⁴ Tantras popularize the worship of both Śiva and Śakti. According to it, Śiva without Śakti is incomplete and not capable of moving anywhere. The fifty one Śakti *pīthas* proved it as in each of these Śakti *pīthas* there is one *Bhairava pītha*, a shrine of Śiva.¹²⁵ The mother Goddess Kāmākhyā pairs with Śiva or Mahakala or Kamesa as Kameswara-Kameswari.¹²⁶ The union of Śiva and Śakti is proved by the Dasamahavidya temples of Kāmākhyā. The *Dasamahavidya* represent ten forms of Śakti which have been discussed earlier. Except Dhumavati, who is represented as widow, the nine Mahavidyas are worshipped with their *Bhairavas* or Śiva. So it can be said that joint worship of Śiva and Śakti is still in existence since early times.

One very familiar iconographic theme is the composite image of Uma-Maheswara where the God Śiva is shown in the company of his consort Uma or Parvati. The motif is commonly known in Assam and it follows the description of the *Matsya Purana* and *Visnudharmottar Purana*.¹²⁷ One image of Uma-Maheswara (**Plate 18**) form found at Davaka is now preserved in Assam State Museum. This image shows the God and Goddess together on a lotus leaf.¹²⁸ In the Uzanbazar area one peculiar image of Uma-Maheswara (**Plate 19**) has been found which is now in Assam State Museum. The assigning period is roughly of ninth-tenth century CE. In this image the whole scene is divided into nine parts. In the central scene two miniature figures of Uma-Maheswara is depicted. The lower part shows the figures of Visnu and Surya. This image is important because of its peculiar character of depicting the figures of Visnu and Surya in the background.¹²⁹ The composite image of Uma-Maheswara has been found in the places such as Tezpur, Barganga and Deopani. Scholars are of the opinion that it is attempted to synthesize the two cults- Saivism and Śaktism. Rock cut image of Uma-Maheswara has been found in the Kachosila (**Plate 20**) and Burhamayong (**Plate 21**) at Mayong area of Morigaon district also.¹³⁰

A composite iconographic motif combining Śiva and his consort in one body is known as *ardhanariswara*. This combined form is depicted in early Assam and is evident from the Khanamukh and Subhankarapataka grant of Dharmapala¹³¹ in each of which the first verse invokes the God under the name of *ardhanariswara*. One such image is seen in Mathorbari, Nagaon district.

One interesting composite image of Harihara assigned to eight century CE is now preserved in Assam State Museum. In this image Harihara is depicted along with Durga and Laksmi, consorts of Śiva and Visnu respectively. Here the peculiarity of the image is that the sculptor has given equal status to Saiva, Vasnavite and Śākta cult by maintaining the height of the figures of Laksmi and Durga to the figure of Hari and Hara.

Yoni, symbol of female creative power is worshipped in Assam. The Kāmākhya temple is the Śākta *pītha* where the Goddess is worshipped in her symbolic form as Yoni. There is no icon in the temple. This had been worshipped since time immemorial. In Assam a large number of yoni *pīthas*-big and small has been unearthed from places like Ambari, Surya Pahar etc. At Ambari archaeological site big-sized *yoni-pīthas* are found to be made of clay stone, the small ones are of granite.¹³²

Apart from Brahmanical Goddesses Buddhist Goddesses were also popular in ancient Assam. Though most of the rulers of ancient Assam were followers of Saivism but Buddhist Goddess Tara occupied an important position in the religious history of Assam. Two metal images in small size are preserved in Assam State Museum which has been found from Narakasur hill.

Some new features could be seen in the sculptural style during the Ahom period. The Hinduised Ahoms used to build and rebuilt temples edifices decorated with sculptures.¹³³ The qualities of sculptures vary from place to place of the same age. One example can be shown: “We can compare a panel displaying Parvati on Śiva’s bull with another carrying a representation of seated Visnu.¹³⁴ The icon of Parvati sits to front under a foiled arch and on one side of the back of a walking bull, shown in profile. The figures of the Goddess and the animal have appreciable volumes and they reveal the sculptor’s skill at proportionate modelling and his capacity to impart to the animal a sense of movement. There is nothing particularly or unnaturally angular at the bends of the limbs. In fact, the figures are bounded by almost gliding lines. A classical quality in Indian art is captured here. On the other hand, an emphasis on angularity is clearly visible in the treatment of the figure of Visnu, seated in *Padmasana*. The thighs are unusually long and the torso looks like an inverted triangle with its two angles at the shoulder-ends and the third angle cut off at the waist

level. The treatment of the figure is flat. The treatment is not so flat, though angular, in case of a representation of Mahisamardini in the Śivasagar area. Again a representation of Kali from Gaurisagar has two legs looking logs of wood and without any indication of knees.”¹³⁵

Several icons of metal and stone sculptures assignable to the age and area of medieval Assam are known. There was a tradition of making bronze sculptures in ancient Kāmarūpa. So this tradition of making metal images continued in the later period also. A Mahisamardini image of early medieval Assam made of bronze has been unearthed at Hahara (Kamrup district) now preserved in Assam State Museum.¹³⁶ The three-eyed, ten-handed image is standing in the *alidha* pose with the left foot on the severed buffalo and the right foot on the back of a lion (or on the pedestal). The Goddess is wearing a long garment, ornaments and a turreted crown topped by a crescent.

Some Metal icons of late medieval age have also been found. One metal sculptures of the late medieval age is the icon of Mahisamardini from Tinsukia.¹³⁷ The Goddess is made of brass. This ten-handed Goddess is without any *ayudha*. Probably the *ayudhas* or weapon might have been lost due to some reason. The Goddess wears a diaphanous drapery and a turreted crown without any ornament. She has a third eye on her forehead; on the other hand her regular two eyes are half closing under thick eye-brows due to drooping eyelids. Her nose is not sharp, while the lips are thick. She stands in the *pratyalidha* pose, putting one foot on the demon and another on the lion, which is attacking the latter. This sculpture has been assigned to 17th -18th CE.¹³⁸

It appears from the above discussion that there were many Śākta temples built by the rulers of Assam at different period. However, only few of them are existing today and none of them are in its original form. But the material remains especially the sculptures and architectural remains proved its existence. Moreover, it appears that Koch and the Ahoms contributed a lot towards these architectural activities along with the Chutiyas and Kacharis. The Koches, Chutiyas, Kacharis, Jayntiyas and the Ahoms were tolerant towards the Śākta cult and accepted the faith. They worshipped the Goddess and for this they built temples throughout the territory. As regards the sculptures of the Goddess, numerous sculptures of ancient and medieval Assam have been unearthed and many of them have been preserved in the Assam State Museum. No sculptures before 5th century CE have been found. Most of the *Devi* sculptures

found have been of 9th to-13th century CE. In the medieval period sculptures of metal and stone both have been found. But *Devi* sculptures found throughout the state of the medieval period is few in number comparing to the ancient period. This might be due to the use of mostly perishable materials such as wood and clay by the Ahoms in their age. Only in the later period they used metal in making images of various religious and secular themes.

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