

CHAPTER - VI

Conclusion

Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa was a land of vast region comprised of present Assam along with other neighbouring territories such as Bengal, Bhutan, Nepal. The modern Assam comprises only a part of it. The boundaries since early time change with the change of different political powers. Earlier inhabitants of this land were non-Aryan people. These people were known as Kiratas by the literary works. Waves after waves of immigration took place in Assam since early times. Australoids, Negritos, Tibeto-Burmans and many other ethnic groups entered Assam through various passes. Aryans came to this land at later time. Aryanisation took its headway and mixed with the non-Aryan people. So Assam got mingled with both the Aryan and non-Aryan culture.

Assam was ruled by many political powers upto 18th century CE. With the change passage of time, the social, political, economic and religious condition underwent change. Major political powers that ruled in the ancient period were the Varmana, Salasthambha and Pala. At the beginning of 13th century Assam came under the rule of the Ahoms. This dynasty ruled for about six hundred years. There were other contemporary powers such as Chutiyas, Kacharis, Koches, Jaiyntiyas etc. who ruled at different times in Assam. Society was based on *Varnasramadharm* where Brahmins got the high status. Besides the Brahmins there were other castes many of them belonged to different professions. According to their profession there grew up many professional castes. Some changes took place with the advent of the Ahoms. They established their rule in Assam and they created many post corresponding to the profession which later on became a caste. People of Assam were the follower of Saivism, Śaktism, Vaisnavism and many other minor cults like Ganesa, Surya etc. Buddhism was also to some extent prevalent but not so prominent. In the religious life of Assam, Neo-Vaisnavism of Sankardeva took its headway in the later part of the 16th century CE and later on popularity of Śaktism came in hindrance in the later part of 18th century.

Śākta cult indeed had a remarkable growth in Assam under various royal patronages upto 18th century. If one goes through the history of development of Śākta cult in

Assam, it will clearly indicate that the cult had traced its origin in the distant past. Earlier it had been worshipped in symbolic form and with entering into the Brahmanical fold it took the present form as Śakti. The *Puranas* gives description of the Goddesses. The cult has various forms and among these the *Dasamahavidya* form has been very popular. Śaktism was a dominant faith in Assam since the time of Naraka. The literary evidence such as *Kālikā Purāna*, *Yoginī Tantra* describes the story of Naraka. *Kālikā Purāna* speaks that Naraka was the initiator of Śākta worship in Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa. There is a legend in *Kālikā Purāna* according to which Naraka was advised by Brahma to worship not other than Goddess Kāmākhya when he ascended the throne of Prāgjyotisa. Since then Naraka started worship the presiding deity Kāmākhya. The abode of Goddess Kāmākhya is at Nilachala hill of present Guwahati city in the shrine Kāmākhya pītha. Śākta cult in Assam developed centering round the Kāmākhya temple.

The rulers of ancient Assam were mainly worshipper of Saiva cult but from their inscriptions it is evident that they were liberal to the Śākta cult. Various names of the Goddess have been found in their inscriptions and queens of the rulers have had names of Goddesses especially during the Varman rule. The Koches, Kacharis, Ahoms, Chutiyas, Jaintiya rulers propagated Śaktism and constructed many temples. There are numerous Śākta temples spread throughout the state. Śaktism like other parts of the country developed in Assam also. The origin and development of Śaktism and Śākta *pīthas* have been mentioned in various literatures. There are some legends which are associated with the origin of various Śākta *pīthas*. Assam has been recognised as the principal centre for Śakti *sadhana* centering round the Kāmākhya temple. It is because of this great Goddess Kāmākhya Śakti cult is strong in Assam till today. It influences the people of Assam socially and on the religious ground also.

Earlier, people worshipped primitive mother Goddess and there was no any iconic form of the Goddess. It was only after the Aryanisation and mixing of both Aryan and non-Aryan culture that Śaktism took different direction and developed in various iconic forms from the time of Puranic age. Earlier people worshipped fertility cult and they worshipped symbols such as yoni as Mother Goddess and Phallus as *Pashupati* Siva. People worshipped *gram devata*, *kula devatas* individually. But it is in later period that these Gods and Goddesses received their iconic form and worshipped in their different forms. They entered in the Brahmanical fold and under such

development in the Brahmanical fold there was need for a particular building to worship the Gods and Goddesses. Such development could have been possible only under the royal patronage. Thus under royal patronage at different places developed numerous *pīthas* that we called as temple.

In Assam Goddess have been worshipped in Her various forms. The inscriptions of ancient Assam evidenced the prevalence of the cult. Among them in the Doobi and Nidhanpur Copper plate of Bhaskaravarman contains various names of Śakti. In the Doobi plate Nayana Devi is compared to Durga (and Parvati) which throws light on the respect and devotion to the Goddess and her popularity. And the queens were also compared to Śakti in power, beauty and fame. The Nidhanpur plate refers (1.87) to a donee named Kaliswami which signify the popularity of the cult of Kali to a certain extent. In the same plate (V.20) refers to Syama and the queen assumed the name Syamadevi. Syama is also a form of Goddess Durga or Kali, the great Goddess of the *Devimahatmya*.

The Gachtal Copper Plate of Gopalavarmadeva refers to the daughter of mountain Himalaya (Parvati). In the Khanamukh Grant of Dharmapala the *mangala* verse is addressed to the Goddess in the *Ardhayuvatiswara* form. In the eleventh verse of the same plate queen Ratna is compared to Goddess *Girija* belonging to Sambhu. The same plate (v.9) also refers Goddess Saraswati. In the Subhankara Pataka Grant of Dharmapala (V.19) the mother of the donee is compared to Goddess Parvati, the spouse of Siva, the killer of Andhaka (parvativa daityandhakadvisah). The Hayunthal Copper Plate of Harjaravarman mentions that Harjaravarman was born to Jivadevi, who is identified as Mother Earth. The above discussion indicates that there is various manifestation of the Goddess which was popular in ancient Assam. Lord Siva is directly associated with Śakti in the physical manifestation of *Gauri* as seen in the Tezpur Copper Plate Inscription of Vanamala and Guwakuchi Grant of Indrapala. The Bargaon grant also shows a new motif where Siva and *Gauri* were playing Dice. Later on Śiva and Parvati acquired a unity and both were coalesced into one. The Khonamukh and Subhankarapataka Grant of Dharmapala invoke *Ardhayuvatisvara*.

According to the Puranas and Tantras entire Kāmarūpa have been considered as a pītha. In the Puranas Kāmarūpa have been recognised as a sacred place as it was the abode of Goddess Kāmākhyā. Most of the Puranas and Tantras references of

Kāmarūpa have been noticed. Among the popular fifty one Śākta *pithas*, Kāmarūpa was one. The concept of Śākta *pītha* developed with the time. Earlier the number of Śākta *pithas* was four and it gradually increased its number to 10, 51 and 108 *pithas*. But the concept of 51 *pithas* is more popular among the people. This concept has been followed by the whole country. Kāmarūpa was included in all the concept of 4, 10, 51 and 108. It seems that Kāmarūpa was one of the principal Śākta *pithas* among all others. According to the legend the yoni part of Sati had fallen in Kāmarūpa. Thus the land is considered as sacred and Kāmākhyā *pītha* is considered as the main centre of Śakti *sadhana*. Being the principal Śākta centre influenced the people of this land and developed many Śākta *pithas* in Assam. Thus under various political power grown up many Śākta centres. There are so many Śākta *pithas* throughout the state of Assam. However some of them are recent origin while some were evolved in the distant past and still exist in the state of Assam. Through the archaeological remains of various sites it appears that many temples were there and many more were destroyed due to natural calamities and foreign invasions. Numerous *thans* dedicated to the Goddess of different manifestations have been found. Some of these did not get royal patronage. There are many local traditions and belief regarding the origin of these Śākta *pithas* in Assam.

With the development of the cult it was necessary to worship the Goddess with some prescribed procedure. So many scriptures were composed to glorify the Goddess both in Sanskrit and Assamese. In order to worship the Goddess in her various manifestations, there are some Śākta literatures written in Sanskrit have been found in Kāmarūpa. The *Kālikā Purāna*, *Yoginī Tantra*, *Kamakahya Tantra* are such literatures which were composed in Assam to glorify Śaktism in Assam. These literatures give in detail about the worship of the Goddesses such as Kāmākhyā, Durga, Kali, Tara and so on. In Assamese also some Śākta literatures have been found. These literatures give in detail the procedure of worshipping the deity and also tell legends related to the Goddess. Folk literatures in oral form have been found in Assam which provide information about various rituals of worshipping the Goddess such as Apecara, Lakhimi, Sitala, Manasa through the songs *Apecara Āir Nam*, *Lakhimi Devir Geet*, *Sitala Āir Nam* or *Āi Nam*, *Manasa Devir Geet* respectively. These indicate that besides worshipping the Puranic and Tantric Goddess, there are some Folk Goddesses worshipped in Assam since early period. For this many folk literatures have been

composed by poets specially Manasa Kavi- Mankar, Durgabar, Naranarayan and so on. The songs composed by these poets were sung during Manasa puja. Worship of Āi or Goddess Sitala was also prevalent in Assam. This folk Goddess is worshipped when someone got sticken by pox. Women folk of Assam mainly participated in this ritual and sung the *Āi naams*.

Tantra plays an important role in Śāktism and in worshipping the Goddess. In Śākta worship Tantric modes are performed. In Assam also Goddesses were worshipped with the Tantric rites and rituals. In Tantric worship *Mantra, Yantra, Diksa*, offering of self-blood, *Homa*, animal and human sacrifice, *Purascarana* and *Vamacara* principles, Kumari puja are the integral part. All these Tantric rituals have been seen in Assam while worshipping the Goddess since early time. In various Śākta *pītha* these principles are still prevalent.

Various rituals are associated with the worship of the Goddesses in Her various forms. Festivals associated with the Goddess have also been observed since early days in Assam till to-day. In Assam such festivals are observed in their families and also publicly. There were records of observation of Durga puja by the Ahom kings, Koch kings. Festivals like Kali puja, Basanti puja, Manasa puja, Kumari puja, Ambubasi are observed in Assam since time immemorial.

With the development of the cult grew up many Śākta pithas throughout Assam. Building a temple was necessary to keep the Gods and Goddess at a particular house. Thus, developed the temple art and architecture. The architectural style of temple building in Assam is same as the North Indian type i.e., *Nagara* style. There is one *Garbhagriha, Natmandira, Antarala* and so on. *Sikhara* type temples and *Do-Chala* type of Bengal imitation hut roof introduced by the Ahoms have also been seen. In Assam both these types have been noticed. The ground plans of the temples are mainly ratha types which are similar in imitation to the North Indian temple. *Saptaratha* and *pancharatha* structures are mainly seen among the existing temples. Though the temples of early period do not exist to-day and some temples were constructed over the earlier ground plan but from the material remains and the ground plan one can identify the structure. It is very difficult to identify fully the whole structure.

Sculptures of Assam which were depicted on the walls of the temples, it can be said that images of various Gods and Goddesses, various contemporary scenes, animal designs etc could be found. This chapter focuses only the sculptures of *Devi* discovered at various temples and sites. Numerous images of Goddess have been unearthed and some are preserved in Assam State Museum. Mostly the images belonged to 9th to 13th century CE. However images of later period have also been discovered. These images were made of stone, metals like bronze, clay and so on. The images of various forms of Goddess have been discovered. Various sculptures Mahisamardini form Durga, have been found in Assam. They are ten-handed, eight-handed, sixteen handed carrying various *ayudhas* in her hands. Discovery of numerous Mahisamardini images induces to presume that there was widespread worship and popularity of this Mahisamardini form of Durga in Assam. Images of Kali in her Bhadrakali, Daksina Kali form have been found. Camunda, another form of Śakti was also worshipped by the people of Assam. Some images of this Goddess have been found in Assam and preserved in the Assam State Museum. River Goddesses Ganga and Yamuna were also known to the people of Assam. Images of both these Goddesses have been seen in Assam. Manasa, the snake Goddess have been worshipped in Assam as a folk deity. Images of Manasa have also been discovered. In Assam worship of the Goddess with her consort is common since early time. Images of both *Uma-Maheswara* in different postures have been found. *Ardhanariswara* etc have been discovered. It shows that these Goddesses were worshipped in that period and they are still prevalent in Assam.