

HISTORY OF ŚĀKTA PĪTHAS IN ASSAM (UPTO 18TH CENTURY)

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Śākta *pīthas* are the seat or abode of the Goddess in Her different manifestations at different places. There is a legend related to the origin of the Śākta *pīthas* in *Kālikā Purāna*, *Yoginī Tantra*, in the Epic *Mahābhārata* and in many religious literatures. Assam has been considered as the suitable place of worshipping the Goddess Śakti in various forms since time immemorial. Nobody can ascertain the exact date of the prevalence of Śakti worship in Assam. But some scholars ascertain that Śakti worship started in Assam from the pre-historic time. However many scholars are of the opinion that Naraka was the first Śākta worshipper in Assam who was the staunch follower of the then residing deity Kāmākhyā.

The most striking characteristic of ancient Assam (Prāgjyotisha-Kāmarūpa) was the Śakti cult which was the dominant and influential cult of Assam in the early period. It has been worshipped in different forms at different places in different times. Various literary evidence, inscriptions and sculptures of Assam are regarded as the most reliable sources which supply us authentic information about the prevalence of Śakti cult and its various forms even down to the Ahom rule upto 18th century CE. Various architectural remains scattered throughout the state evidenced the existence of various temples since ancient period. Even many of the medieval Śākta temples are still existed today though some of them are not in its earlier form. At least upto 18th century Ahom kings were the staunch follower of Śaktism in Assam. And there are many Śākta temples of this time.

From the mythological evidence we know that Naraka, the legendary hero and king of Prāgjyotisa who spread his supremacy over the eastern part of India was the first Śākta king and initiator of Śākta cult in Kāmarūpa. However *Kālikā Purāna* mentions that Śaktism prevailed in Assam even before Naraka. *Kālika Purāna* says that the genital organ of Sati fell on the Nilachala hill when her dead body was carried hither and thither in frantic sorrow by Lord Siva and it fell before many times earlier than Naraka. Again when Naraka occupied Pragjyotispur at that time Kāmākhyā was the supreme goddess of that land. So, it seems that Śaktism was prevalent in Kāmarūpa before Naraka.

After Naraka and his successors rulers of three dynasties such as Varman, Salasthambha and Pala ruled over ancient Assam since mid 4th century CE. Through epigraphical records in the form of the Doobi Plates and Nidhanpur, Tezpur and Parbatiya Plates

traces of the prevalence of Śaktism in ancient Assam can be noticed. Moreover iconographic representations of the *Devi Śakti* have been found in archaeological ruins discovered in different parts of Assam under different names. Though there is no mention about any Śākta *pithas* in the epigraphs but the names of various Goddesses have been found. However in the medieval period also Ahom kings patronised Śaktism and many Śākta temples were constructed. Koch king Biswa Singha reconstructed the Kāmākhyā temple. Besides this the Kacharis, Jayantias, Chutiyas etc. also contributed a lot in the spread of Śaktism through the ages.

The spread of Śākta cult in various manifestations necessitated the establishment of the abodes or temples for their enshrinement and propitiation. The concept of *pitha* or the seat of the abode of the dwelling place of the Goddess is of hoary antiquity. Such *pithas* or the abodes of the Goddess are also known as *Devasthanas*. The origin of *pitha* is generally ascribed to the *Mahabharata* period when the Daksa *Yajna* story was coined, although there were many holy places in the whole of Assam of early period. Many such sacred places were turned later on to Śākta *pitha*.

The Śakti cult in Assam took its headway centering round the Kāmākhyā *pītha*. Not only today but in ancient time also, besides Kāmākhyā, the Śakti had been worshipped in many of her manifestations. The widely known among them are Dasabhujā Durga, Sodasabhujā Durga, Ugratara, Ugracanda, Jayanti, Kausiki, Kamesvari, Sivaduti, Tripura, Annapurna, Dirghesvari, Diptesvari, Byaghesvari, Daksina Kali, Bhadra Kali, Smasan Kali, Tara, Caṇḍī, Mangal Caṇḍī, Jagaddhatri, Bhairavi, Manasa and Sitala. The most widely known manifestation of Śakti in Assam is Durga since early time. It appears that Śaktism and Śākta *pīthas* played a dominant role in Assam since early times upto 18th century. Though there is a prospect of extensive study on Śaktism in Assam and about Śākta literature, it is pertinent to mention here that no comprehensive and systematic attempt has yet been made by any scholar to study and highlight the Śākta *pīthas* in Assam. Therefore it is important to discuss the Śākta significance of Assam along with its Śākta *pīthas*. Hence it is important to survey the sites and monuments in full coverage of the present state of Assam to refer to published materials and to collect the legends and traditions connected with such *pīthas*. The study will be helpful for the history of religion, culture, art and architecture of Assam. The present study will discuss the Śākta *pīthas* in Assam systematically.

Objectives

This study aims –

1. To explore the origin and development of Śaktism in Assam.
2. To bring into light the different manifestations of Śākta cult in Assam.
3. To survey the different Śākta *pīthas* distributed throughout Assam.
4. To study the Śākta literature, rites and rituals associated with Śakti worship in Assam.
5. To study the art and architecture of Śākta temples of Assam.

Methodology

The study is based on records of primary and secondary sources, field study and interviews. To collect primary sources exploration is done in different Śākta *pīthas*. The study is also based on secondary sources like relevant books and journals which have been found in different libraries like-Assam University Central Library, K.K. Handique Library of Gauhati University, ICHR Library, NCB Library, Kāmarūpa Research Centre Library, the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, the State Museum and the Circle office of the Archaeological Survey of India in Guwahati, district libraries at different district head quarters and libraries of different colleges.

Proper scientific research methodology mainly the empirical and analytical methods are employed for collecting data and for a proper analysis of them. The proposed study will compare and contrast elements that will be found in all data. The proposed study will follow the convention of acknowledging sources and of appending those in a bibliography.

Organization of chapters

The proposed work is divided into one introduction and six chapters

Chapter I: Historical Geography, Land and People of Assam

Prāggyotisa-Kāmarūpa (ancient Assam) 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 group 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.

The land of Assam consisted of hills and plains and that hilly regions were inhabited by the tribes. Though it is surrounded by hills, but many tribes entered Assam through river valleys of Assam and Burma and a few passes in the north-east and the south. Assam contains mines of economic value, found mostly in the hilly regions, but distributed throughout a vast area. The main geological deposits are coal, petroleum, iron, lime, salt, gold and silver found in varying proportions. But, this rich mineral wealth is yet to be thoroughly brought into light. Gold mixed with sands is found in most of the rivers.

Chapter II: Political, Socio-Economic and Religious Condition of Assam upto 18th Century

Political Condition

Political, socio-economic and religion of a particular region played an important role in the growth and development of a particular culture in a particular time period. All these bring to us to reconstruct and trace the history of a particular region. Assam history which had been divided into three different periods viz. ancient, medieval and modern is a vast period of discussion. The present study attempted to highlight the political, socio-economic and religious condition of Assam upto 18th century CE. The actual political history of ancient Assam began from the mid fourth century CE. Moreover, according to some literary sources traditional legendary rulers (i.e., the mythical *Bhauma-Naraka*

Dynasty) ruled in Assam. But the epigraphical records indicate that in ancient Assam mainly three powerful dynasties ruled viz. Varman dynasty, Salasthambha dynasty and the Pala dynasty respectively. The Varmans came to power in ancient Assam from the middle of the fourth century CE. This family is also called the *Bhauma* or the Naraka family and also the Avaniakula in a more literary way. They established their capital at Pragjyotispur. The history of the Varman dynasty is known from the account of Hieng-Tsang as well as from the Nidhanpur Grant, the Doobi Copperplate Grant and the Clay Seals of Bhaskaravarman, who was the most powerful ruler of this dynasty. Next to the Varmans were the Salasthambha rulers who ruled in ancient Assam. No convincing evidence could be found as to who became king after the death of Bhaskara Varman. According to the Bargaon Copper Plate (1010-1050 C E) of Ratnapala, Salasthambha, the *Mlecha* king has brought to the end of the *Bhauma*-Naraka dynasty and twenty kings of this dynasty ruled over the kingdom. The dynasty came to be known as Salasthambha in the name of founder of the dynasty. King Salasthambha established this dynasty. The epigraphic records of the rulers of this dynasty evidenced the history of Salasthambha dynasty. The last ruler of this dynasty was Tyagsimha, who probably died childless and thus paved the way for the next dynasty under Brahmapala. Next to the Salasthambha dynasty was the Pala dynasty ruled over ancient Assam. The founder of the Pala line is given in the grants of the family, indicating that Brahmapala was of the same *Bhauma* dynasty, to which Pusyavarman and Salasthambha belonged. This is evident from the Bargaon Grant of Ratnapala, which says that when Tyagasimha, the twenty first king of Salasthambha family, departed from this world without leaving any of his race to succeed him, “the subjects thinking it well that a *Bhauma* (i.e., Naraka' race) should be appointed as their lord, choose Brahmapala, a kinsman of the deceased ruler, on account of his fitness to undertake the government of the country.” Thus Brahmapala was elected by his people, an incident which finds a parallel in the history of Bengal. The last important ruler of this dynasty was Dharmapala. Three epigraphic records namely- the Khonamukh Copper Plate Inscription, the Subhankarapataka Copper Plate Inscription and the Pushpabhadra Copper Plate Inscription of Dharmapala have been recorded. He ascended the throne probably in the early 12th century CE. It was during his reign that the boundary of his kingdom pushing to the west of Karatoya. Dharmapala shifted his capital from Prāggyotisa to *Kamrupnagara*. Though the genealogy of the Pala dynasty ended with Dharmapala but according to Silimpur Inscription, Jayapala was the successor of Dharmapala. After these three dynasties Khen dynasty ruled in Assam and in the 12th

century CE Muhammedan invasion took place in Kāmarūpa. Soon after these invasions the old kingdom of Kāmarūpa seems to have split into small principalities. By the beginning of the 13th century CE the Ahoms entered Assam from the east and a new era in the history of Assam began from 13th century began with the advent of the Ahoms to this land. They established their kingdom and ruled for six hundred years. Besides the Ahoms, there were Kacharis, Jayantiyas, Koches, Chutiyas who established their kingdom in this land along with the Ahoms.

Society

Society in ancient Assam was based on *varnasramadharmā*. Besides the four *varnas* there were some professional castes. There is meagre knowledge about the family and nature of inheritance of this period of ancient Assam. The society of medieval Assam is mainly divided into Brahmanas and non-Brahmanas. The Brahmanas continued to enjoy their old privileges as members of the priestly class. Among the non-Brahmana castes, mention may be made of the *Kayasthas*, *Keots*, *Kaivartas*, *Barias*, *Suts*, *Yogis* or *Naths*. Besides these, there were many tribes like the Chutiyas, Kacharis, Marans and the Barahis. The Ahoms who were the Tai-Shan group of people formed the major population of Medieval Assam.

Inscriptions are silent regarding the Assamese dishes of ancient Assam, and literature gives only incidental references. Rice, fish, meat, fruits and vegetables constituted the chief articles of food. Climatic conditions and the nature of her inhabitants determined their diet. In the medieval period rice, pulses, fish and milk were the staple diet of both the aristocracy and the commoners. Some idea of the varied delicacies of the upper strata in the society can be gathered from the *Kumar Haran* of Ramananda Kayastha.

Hindu life in general has been based upon the joint family system. The smallest unit of society in ancient Assam was probably the joint family or large household, comprising the patriarch of the family, his wife, his unmarried daughters, and his sons with their wives and descendants. This is clear from the Nidhanpur Grant where half or more shares of land were granted jointly to several brothers of a family (*bhratrtrayena ekamsah; bhratra sahardhamsah*, etc.)

Joint family was, as it had been in early times, the normal practice. The family was patriarchal and daughters had no right to their father's properties. She had, however, her

claim to the bridal gifts and presents and was entitled to maintenance, after the death of her husband, by her sons or by the brothers of her husband. At the death of the father, usually in case of commoners, separation and division took place, the youngest son getting the first preference in choosing his own share. Among the nobility, the usual practice was to hold the land in joint partnership and divide the profits at the end of the year. The Hinduised Assamese performed their marriages according to Vedic rites. In the observance of the social rites of the ceremony, however, tribal or local influence is still discernable. The traditional rites are performed by the tribes who accepted initiation from Vaisnava pontiffs. *Chaklang biya*, the traditional Ahom marriage custom was practiced by the Ahoms according to their own rites. When the Ahom king married a Hindu girl, then Vedic rites were observed.

Economic Life

Neither literature nor epigraphy depicts the economic pursuits of the people of Assam in the period before the arts of cattle-rearing and cultivation was known. As in other parts of India, Assam no doubt passed through various economic stages. It is worth nothing that the stage of hunting was not entirely over among the tribes in Assam until comparatively recent times, and we find traces of it even now among some of those of the inaccessible hills. The art of cattle-rearing along with cultivation, for which the land was privately owned, was therefore, an early institution in Assam. Both fishing and hunting constituted one of the important occupations of the people. There were craftsmen of many kinds in Kāmarūpa. We have in our records references to weavers, spinners, goldsmiths, potters and workers in ivory, bamboo, wood, hide and cane. The three varieties of Indian silk generally known as *Pat*, *Endi*, and *Muga* are specially associated with Assam. The names *Pat* (Pattaja), and *Endi* (Eranda) no doubt originated from Sanskrit, but *Muga* seems to be a characteristically Assamese name. The rearing of silk worms, even to-day, is the main occupation of many castes of Assam. Of the other important crafts mention may be made of engraving, with special reference to royal charters either on stone or copper-plates, brick-making and stone-carving.

The economy of medieval Assam was mainly rural cum agricultural and villages were largely self-sufficient. All the people from noble downwards were connected with agriculture directly or indirectly. Cultivation was done through ploughing in the valley but in the hills, people resorted *jhumming*. In course of time, there grew a wealthy

people, who carried on considerable amount of trade, both internal and external. But then also, there never developed an urban economy brisk with industrial and commercial pursuits at the popular level. Textile industry in Assam under the Ahom government reached a very high point of perfection. Tavernier writes that silk was produced on trees and the stuffs made of them were very brilliant. Since ancient times Assam was well known for her silk fabrics. The three varieties of silk – *muga*, *endi* or *edi* and *pat* were produced. The *muga* silk was an article of trade in Bengal as well as in the Coromandal and Malabar coasts in the early 17th century.

Religious Life

Brahmanical Religion - Saivism, Śaktism were prevalent in ancient Assam. Buddhism was not so popular at that time. Inscriptions of this period mentioned name of many Gods and Goddesses which evidenced the worship of these deities. The worship of Visnu was evidently prevalent in Assam from early times, as the kings of Kāmarūpa traced their lineage to Visnu through Naraka. These were the major religion of ancient Assam. Besides these major sects, we get some references to other Puranic Gods and Goddesses whose sculptural representations are also found in the province. We have images of such Gods as *Ganesa*, *Kartikeya*, *Indra*, *Agni*, *Kuvera*, *Surya*, etc., from the 6th century onwards, but we have however no definite knowledge of their cults.

From the beginning of the thirteenth to the end of the seventeenth centuries may be called a period of expansion and consolidation of Hinduism as the dominant religion of Assam. Although all the historical dynasties and kings professed Hindu religion and strived utmost for the maintenance and spread of Hinduism, yet the bulk of the population being ethnically non-Aryan remained outside the pale of Hinduism till the beginning of the thirteenth century. Saivism, Śaktism, Vaisnavism, Tantricism etc. were the religion of the people. The rulers of this period patronized all the above mentioned religion.

Chapter III: Origin and Development of Śaktism in Assam

Śakti cult is a deep-rooted religious and historical phenomenon which evolved throughout the ages in the whole world. The Śakti cult had been worshipped as the mother Goddess conceived as power both creative and destructive has been an object of worship in India from early times. The cult of fertility or the worship of the phallus,

linga and *yoni*, personified later on as Siva and the Mother Goddess or *Devi*, which formed the basis of Śaktism and Tantrikism is found not only in the prehistoric finds, such as Neoliths and Megaliths which are so extensive in Assam but also from the Indus valley remains. During the Indus Valley civilization, the worship of the female principle appears to have been in vogue among the Harappans as has been proved by the terracotta images of the Goddess and the ring stones. The Śakti as a cosmic energy, personified as a female, is one of the oldest faiths in India, and some of the names of the Goddess like Durga, Kali, and Uma occur in the Vedic literature. But it is almost certain that Śaktism had a non-Vedic origin and Uma or Kali was probably a female mountain ghost, which was later on identified with the wife of Rudra, or brought into line with the Brahmanic thoughts. The Epics and the Puranas are mainly responsible for the consecration of this female entity in Hindu pantheon and unfolding her diverse aspects supported by various myths and legends. Historical evidence suggests that Mother Goddess worship was prevalent in different forms in the Indian Peninsula. It is no surprise that literary evidence corroborated by archaeological findings suggests that Śakti Cult was widely worshipped in the eastern part of the country especially in Assam and Bengal in the early period of history. Śakti worship developed and flourished all over Kāmarūpa after the coming of the Aryans or during the royal dynasties on the aboriginal tribal cult. Traces of Śakti cult was found in the villages among agricultural society in different form - personal, family and in the *kulas* with the aboriginal tribal methods. The deities in course of time, were worshipped in the society in common form, but confined in a particular race such Kiratadevi, Mikirani etc by the matriarchal society.

Ancient Assam has been regarded as the principal place of Śakti worship from the very ancient times. From the nature, character and appearance of Śakti, it can be easily surmised that the Goddesses were pre-historic in origin. There was not a single Goddess common to all the people. But Siva was the only God worshipped by the tribal people in their own way. He was worshipped in a symbolic way-mostly in general in the form of symbolic or phallus way. Most of the tribes worshipped Siva in the shape of special type of thorny trees and a kind of cactus or the wood apple trees. They did not have any idea of idol worship. In natural form they worshipped Siva. Siva-Śakti was also jointly worshipped by the tribal and the indigenous people of Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa. Lots of sources are available as the evidences of the popular religion of Siva-Śakti in this land.

Mythological evidence states that the origin and development of Śāktism dates back to the pre-historic period.

Śākta Cult originated in the primordial period in the form of fertility cult, mother Goddess and *yoni* cult. The Goddess was worshipped in *Kulas*, families and individually. But there had no formulated rites and rituals and common form of Goddess in the society. But Śakti found its special shape and disciple under the royal authority. The traditional and historical rulers of Prāgjyotisa – Kāmarūpa extended royal support and patronage to the non-Aryan cults and encouraged the masses to accelerate and worship the existing cults and thereby helped in the development and extension of Śākta cult to all directions of the land.

Almost all the rulers of Assam from early period were directly or indirectly worshipper of the Goddess. In the ancient period though the rulers were seemed to be follower of Saivism but they were tolerant towards Śāktism. In the medieval period also the Kacharis, the Chutiyas, the Jaintiyas, Koches, and mainly the Ahoms were worshipper of the Śākta cult. Though the Ahoms were not follower of Brahmanical religion at the initial stage but later on they became the patron of Śākta cult and the rulers constructed many temples dedicated to the Goddess. 18th century was the period of zenith when Śākta cult received much patronage from the Ahom rulers. Mention may be made of Siva Singha and his wife Phuleswari. They were staunch Śākta s and built temples dedicating to the Goddess.

Śaktis being different names and forms seem to have worshipped by different sects. According to the Tantras, the great Goddess has innumerable forms, some of which are distributed in different *amnyas* or regions. The varieties of names and forms of Śakti have been brought under the most famous division of ten *Mahavidyas* (*Dasamahavidyas*), each having a distinct literature of its own. The better known Mahavidya goddesses are: Kali, Tara, Sodasi, Bhuvaneswari, Bhairavi, Chinnamasta, Dhumavati, Bagala, Matangi and Kamala. They are ten forms of Goddesses. The origin of those Goddesses has been found in the Daksa *Yajna* story. The popular myth behind the origin of the *Dasamahavidyas* is that when Sati came to know that her father Daksa is going to perform a sacrifice where he invites all but not Siva and Sati, she wanted to go there without an invitation. Siva forbade her and at this Sati became ferocious and angry. At the sight of her anger, Siva became perplexed and wanted to flee hither and

thither. Then Sati expressed herself in ten images in ten directions. Siva was perplexed and accorded permission to go to Daksa's place. These *mahavidyas* are the most important deities of the Tantra. In the *Kālikā Purāna*, the names of the *mahavidyas* are mentioned and the descriptions of some of them are given in some places. But we do not find any description of the ten mahavidyas in one place.

In Assam Goddess Kāmākhya is being the most famous deity worshipped in the Kāmākhya *pitha* had been widely worshipped since the distant past. The Śakti cult in Assam took its headway centering round the Kāmākhya *pitha*. The *Dhyanas* of Kāmākhya evidenced the worship of the Goddess and the rituals related to Her worship. Not only today but in ancient Assam also, besides Kāmākhya, the Śakti had been worshipped in many of her manifestations. The widely known among them are Dasabhuja Durga, Sodasabhuja Durga, Ugratara, Ugracanda, Jayanti, Kausiki, Kamesvari, Sivaduti, Tripura, Annapurna, Dirghesvari, Diptesvari, Byaghesvari, Daksina Kali, Bhadra Kali, Smasan Kali, Tara, Caṇḍī, Mangal Caṇḍī, Jagaddhatri, Bhairavi, Manasa and Sitala.

Śākta Pīthas in Various Places of Assam upto 18th Century

Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa was a sacred place and its land, water, mountain, trees were said to be sacred. So it is called a land of holy sages, who gathered here, from all around, to meditate in this land. The *Yoginī Tantra*, the *Kālikā Purāna* and other *Puranas* mentioned hundreds of holy places of Prāgjyotisa- Kāmarūpa. The remains of ancient civilization highlight the ancient culture of the land. There were temples on the mountains, in the jungles, in the plains and in the villages. The *Yoginī Tantra* mentions that an aspirant will attain equal fruits of desire whether it is worshipped in the water or in the ground. The most important Śakti temples of Kāmarūpa are the Kāmākhya, Dasamahavidya temples of Kāmākhya, Ugratara, Dirgheswari, Mahabhairabi in Tezpur, Kāmākhya at Silghat in Nagaon, Tamreswari, Malinithan and so on.

Mythological evidence and literary records mentioned the story of origin of Śākta *pīthas* in India as well as in Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa. There is a legend mentioned in the latest *Puranas* and *Tantras* which put forward the origin of the holy *pīthas*. The germs of legends can be traced in the *Rigveda*. According to the Vedic view, the Vedic people performed various *Yajnas* on the alters (later known as *pīthas* or temple) in particular places. These places came to be known as *pīthas* without shed. But after getting the royal

support and patronage, shrines were built under the auspices of the kings. The non-Aryan kings, extended royal patronage and thus the ancient culture was protected. They built the temples at the royal cost and thereby made them popular among the people.

There are many more temples developed under the royal patronage especially during the medieval period upto 18th century throughout the state. Such temples will be discussed distributing district wise in a list.

	Pītha	Location	Period	Description
1.	Kāmākhyā Pītha	Kamrup District	16 th Century C E	Constructed by the Koch kings and Ahom king. <i>Yoni</i> part had fallen here.
2.	Ugratara Devalay	Kamrup District	18 th Century C E	Constructed during Siba Singha's rule. Naval part had fallen.
3.	Dirgheswari Devalay	Kamrup	18 th Century C E	Two inscriptions of Ahom period have been found. Durga is worshipped
4.	Chatrakara Devalay	Kamrup	18 th Century	Mangalchndi is worshipped. Constructed by Kamaleswar
5.	Tamreswari Devalay	Sadiya, Dibrugarh	15 th Century	Legend says that Sat's hair fallen. Chutiya's were the worshipper.
6.	Malini <i>Than</i>	Chilapathar	10 th -12 th Century	Remains of old temple found. Sat's head had fallen here.
7.	Bhairabi Temple	Tezpur	18 th Century	Goddess Bhairavi is worshipped. Received Ahom kings patronage.
8.	Bhuvanesari Temple	Kamrup		Goddess mahagauri is worshipped. One inscription found here.
9.	Harhi Devalay	Dhokuakha		Goddess Kali is worshipped.
10.	Cāndi Temple	Tezpur	17 th Century	Gadadhar Singha buit this temple. Main deity is Caṇḍī.
11.	Umā Temple	Tezpur	18 th Century	Siva Singha was the builder of this temple. Goddess Uma is
12.	Barkalika <i>Than</i>	Deurigaon Tezpur		Goddess Manasa and Kali worshipped here.
13.	Maghnowa Dol	Narayanpur, Lakhimpur	18 th Century	Main deity is Goddess Kali. Rudra Singha built this temple.
14.	Mahamaya <i>Than</i>	Dhuburi		Three-eyed Mahamaya is worshipped here which is believed to have emerged from earth.
15.	Tukreswari Devalay	Krishnai, Goalpara		Legend says that Sati's thigh part had fallen here.

16.	Jay Durga Mandir	Hajo, Kamrup	18 th Century	Built during Lakhsmi Singha's reign
17.	Mura Dewar Devalay	Kalaigaon, Darrang	16 th Century	Built during the Koch rule.
18.	Padma Devalay	Darrang		Goddess Padma or Manasa is worshipped.
19.	Kāmākhyā Devalay	Silghat, Nagaon	18 th Century	Durga and Kali are worshipped. Built during Pramatta Singha's rule.
20.	Hatimura Durga Devalay	Koliabor, Nagaon	18 th Century	A rock cut image of Durga dated 10 th century is worshipped.
21.	Cāmunda Temple	Na-Bhanga, Nagaon	12 th Century	Goddess Cāmūṇḍā is worshipped. Image belonged to 12 th century C E.
22.	Kāmākhyā Dham	Mayong, Morigaon	16 th -17 th Century	Mayong king built this temple as recorded in their <i>Vamsavali</i> .
23.	<i>Kechaikhaiti Than</i>	Mayong, Morigaon	16 th -17 th Century	Goddess Kechaikhaiti is worshipped.
24.	Burhi Gosanir <i>Than</i>	Jorhat	18 th Century	Rudra Singha established this temple.
25.	Kak Gosanir <i>Than</i>	Bokakhat, Golaghat	17 th Century C E	Goddess Durga is worshipped. Gadadhar Singha built this temple.
26.	Durga Gosanir <i>Than</i>	Deopani, Golaghat	9 th Century C E	180 metre Durga image dated 9 th Century C E is worshipped.
27.	Devī Do'l	Gaurisagar, Sibsagar	18th Century C E	Built during Queen Phuleswari's reign.
28.	Devī Do'l	Sibsagar	18 th Century C E	Built during Ambika, Queen of Siba Singha reign.
29.	Burhi Gosanir Devalay	Rangpur, Sibsagar		Ahom king constructed this Devalay.
30.	Devī Ghar	Rangpur, Sibsagar	18 th Century C E	Goddess Durga is worshipped. Rudra Singha built this temple.
31.	Mahamaya <i>Than</i>	Karbi Anglong		Goddess Durga is worshipped. Temple constructed over an old ancient stone relics.
32.	Durga Mandir	Tilapahar, Karbi Anglong	10 th Century	Sculpted stone Image of Dasabhuja Durga dated 10 th century C E is worshipped.
33.	<i>Ranchandi Kali Mandir</i>	Khaspur, Cachar	18 th Century	Goddess Ranachandi Kali is worshipped. Temple belonged to Kachari period.
34.	Dasabhuja Durga Mandir	Siddheswar, Hailakandi		Dasabhuja Durga is worshipped. Temple was built during Kachari rule.

35. Dipteswari Devalay	Puthimari, Kamrup	18 th Century C E	Built during Ahom rule in 18 th century. Goddess Dipteswari is worshipped
36. Kali Temple	Ajara, Nalbari	18 th Century C E	Received Siba Singha's patronage.
37. Kali Temple	Balilecha, Nalbari	18 th Century	Daksina Kali is worshipped. Built during Siba Singha's reign.
38. Jayanti Temple	Rangia, Kamrup	18 th Century	Lakshmi Singha was the patron

Chapter IV: Śākta Literature, Rites and Rituals Associated to Śākta Worship of Assam

Every God and Goddess has some procedure and mode of worship. And this procedure of worship got mentioned in the scriptures like *Tantras* and *Puranas*. There are some rites and rituals associated to every Gods and Goddesses. Besides these there are some regional variations in the procedure, mode and rites and rituals of worshipping a particular deity.

Śākta Literatures

Assam being the land suitable for Śākta worship since time immemorial has some special features in the worship of the Goddess. Some scholars are of the opinion that Assam was a suitable place for Śākta worship due to its physical features. Kāmarūpa was said to be a *Siddha –pitha*, where many *sadhakas* from different corners of the land came here and practiced Śakti-*Sadhana* and achieved what they desired. Many Śākta literatures were composed in this land only to glorify the Goddess centering round the presiding deity Kāmākhyā at Kāmākhyā *pitha*. Some literatures associated to Śākta worship have been discovered. Among such Śākta literatures composed in Assam some of them were written in Sanskrit and some were in Assamese.

Kālikā Purāna

Kālikā Purāna is one of the most important Sanskrit Śākta literatures. This is a work of 9th -10th century, probably compiled during the time of Pala rulers of Assam. However there is still doubt about the exact time of its compilation. One manuscript of *Kālikā Purāna* is preserved in the Directorate of Antiquarian Studies, Panbazar. Some scholars tried to place the date of *Kālikā Purāna* in the 11th century. From the contents of the text,

it can be said that the book was written by a Brahmin Pandit, who was well-versed in Śaktism and Śakti-*Sadhana*, and had also perfect knowledge of different worship and occult secrets. The *Kālikā Purāna* is a voluminous book consisting of ninety chapters.

The *Kālikā Purāna* is a monumental work written for propagating and spreading Śaktism in early Assam. With the exception of few chapters, the whole book has been covered with the accounts of the glorifications of Lord Siva, Goddess Kāmākhyā and different manifestations of Śakti. The book deals with the various rituals and procedure of worshipping the Goddess. The description of nature and ways of worshipping Śakti has also covers many of the chapters. The description of joint worship of Siva –Śakti has been made here. The *Kālikā Purāna* raised Śakti to the status of Supreme reality. Vivid description is made about the Goddess Kāmākhyā. Various ritual processes and *Dhyanas* of Kāmākhyā have been mentioned in detailed. The *Purana* gives a detailed description of offering sacrifice to the Goddess and different manifestations of Śakti, their *Dhyanas* and method of worship has been described in a vivid manner.

Yoginī Tantra

The *Yoginī Tantra* is one of the sixty-four main *Tantras*. This famous *Tantra* was written in Kāmarūpa sometime in the fourteenth century CE. The *Yoginī Tantra* is certainly one of the outstanding Śākta -works in the history of Śaktism. From the historical and religious point of view regarding ancient Assam its importance is much greater. This *Tantra* is sub-divided into two-parts-*Purva-Khanda* and *Uttara-Khanda*. The whole book consists of twenty eight chapters- nineteen in *Purva-Khanda* and nine in *Uttara-Khanda*. The *Yoginī Tantra* describes about the peculiar system of *Sadhana* such as *Satkarma* (six black rites), *Purascarana* etc. The said *Tantra* also gives detail about *japa*. The Seventeenth Chapter deals with the procedure and efficacy of virgin-worship. The glory of Goddess Kali is also described in this *Tantra* and deals with the Supreme power of Goddess *Kali*. It also describes about many places and *pithas* included in ancient Kāmarūpa elaborately. The *Yoginī Tantra* gives an account of various kinds of rituals to be performed on various *Tithis* and *Naksatras* etc. It describes how to write a sacred book and also many other things about *Devi* as well as some special characteristics of Her worship. Again the *Tantra* gives an account on numerous rivers and the system of worship of various female deities. The *Yoginī Tantra* is out and out a Śākta *Tantra*.

According to this *Tantra*, *Devi* is the Supreme reality. Both Brahma and *Maheswara* also derive their power from Her.

Kāmākhyā Tantra

Kāmākhyā *Tantra* is another important Śākta -scripture, compiled in Kāmarūpa. Probably it was compiled sometimes after the compilation of *Yoginī Tantra* by some scholar- devotee of Goddess Kāmākhyā. At the outset of the *Tantra* it describes that this *Tantra* is compiled only to glorify the Goddess Kāmākhyā. Here the Goddess Kāmākhyā is described as the Supreme Mother of the Universe. The *Tantra* consists of nine *patalas*. The main themes of this *Tantra* are the glory and power of Kāmākhyā, the system and procedure of its worship.

Other Works

In addition to these works, we may say few words about a few Sanskrit works dealing with Śaktism directly or indirectly. *Hara-Gauri-Sambada* is a historical work written in Sanskrit verses. It is written in 23 *Patalas*. Besides history this book throws some light on the religious sphere of Kāmarūpa also. Another book is *Śakti-Sangama-Tantra*, wherein the glory of Kāmarūpa is most ardently described and depicted many things about Śaktism. *Sarvallasā-Tantra*, *Purascarana-Candrika*, *Pancha-mantra-diksa-kaumudi* and *Guhartha-Deepika*, *Saptasati-Canḍī tika* are some other Sanskrit work.

Assamese Śākta Literatures

The Assamese Śākta literature now available may be broadly divided into four heads-

i) Folk literature, ii) Manasa Literature, iii) Translations and adaptations from Sanskrit works, and iv) Śākta elements found in Vaisnava literature.

Among the folk songs such as *Ai -Nam*, *Apecara-Nam*, *Lakhimi-Savahar-Git* and *Devi-Air Git* are pure Śākta in nature. Among these, *Ai-Nam* is considered as the best both in points of language and importance. *Ai-Nam* is the devotional song, sung in tune with the clapping of hands by women in a body. With a view to satisfy *Ai*, the Goddess of poxes, *Ai-Nams* are sung in a ceremonial occasion. *Apecara- Nam* is also a class of devotional song expressing the glory and power of *Apecara*, and like *Ai-Nams*, is uttered collectively by women. *Lakhimi-Savahar Git* and *Devi-Air Git* are the Śākta songs sung almost in every part of Assam. *Lakhimi-Savahar Git* deals with the glory and attributes

of *Lakhimi*. Through this class of song, *Lakhimi* or *Laksmi* is welcomed and invoked. *Devi-Air Git* expresses the glory and attributes of *Devi (Durga)*, daughter of the Himalayas and the beloved consort of *Mahadeva*.

Besides these, there are some folk-songs like *Biya-Nam*, *Tokari-Nam*, *Baramahi-Git* and *Mantra*, which are not of Śākta -nature but some of them are not without Śākta - elements. There are numerous *Biya-Nams* (marriage-songs) in Assamese, some of which have however developed centering round the marriage problem of *Hara* and *Parvati*. In some of them the glory and power of *Hara* and *Parvati* and their conjugal life have also been described. *Tokari-Nam* is a kind of Assamese folk-songs, sung by a man with the help of a single-stringed instrument. *Baramahi-Git* is a section of folk songs in Assamese, which depict different beauties manifested in nature during the different months of the year. But in some of them Śākta elements is clearly found. Assamese *Mantras*, which were mostly composed in the 13th and 14th centuries, constitute an important branch of literature. There are several *Mantra-puthis* dealt with various purposes. Since early period Kāmarūpa has been known to all as a famous land for charms and incantations (tantric-*mantra*). In many *Mantras*, the name of Goddess Kāmākhyā is found. It is known from Sankar-Digvijay that Sankaracharyya of the 9th century came to Kāmarūpa and defeated Abhinavagupta, a noted Śākta scholar of Kāmarūpa. Abhinavagupta took revenge upon Sankaracharyya by incantation, which he suffered from fistula.

Assamese *Manasa*-literature was composed by three poets- Mankara, Durgavara and Sukavi Narayanadeva and their *Kavyas* were respectively known after their names as Mankari, Durgavari and Sukanani. The *Manasa-Kavya* of Mankara, consists of three sections-*Sristi-Khanda*, *Hara-Gauri-Vivaha-Khanda* and *Padma-Janma-Khanda*. Durgavara's *Kavya* comprises the main story of Beula and Lakhindara. Sukavi Naranarayana is not only the best of *manasa*-poets, but is one of the best poets of old Assamese literature. He is popularly known as Sukavi. Naranarayana's sizeable *Manasa-Kavya*, known as Sukanani, has been divided into two broad parts-*Padma Purana* and *Bhaltheli*. The first part, *Padma Purana* begins with the creation of the world and terminates with the marriage of Padmavati. The second part, *Bhaltheli* begins with the birth of Canda, the famous merchant of Campaka and terminates with Canda's happy union with his sons. The chief trait of Naranarayana's *Kavya* is its lyrical beauty. The whole *Kavya* is meant for recitation in appropriate tunes. Since the days of yore till to-

day, this *Kavya* has been sung by the *Ojapali* during the performance of *Manasa*-worship. The other Śākta literatures are those which are translated and adapted from Sanskrit works and the Vaisnava literatures where Śākta elements are found.

Rites and Rituals of Śākta worship

Purascarana is an extremely important religious rite, observed for making the Mantras efficacious. The *purascarana* consists of five elements; the muttering of the Mantra for a prescribed number of times, *homa*, *tarpana* and *abhiseka* with the same Mantra, followed by the fifth one- the feeding of the Brahmins. *Yoginī Tantra* mentioned that *purascarana* was observed in Kāmarūpa by the Śākta -*Sadhakas* and this practice is not totally extinct even to-day.

Among the seven kinds of Tantric *Sadhakas* such as *Vedacari*, *Vaisnavacari*, *Saivacari*, *Daksinacari*, *Vamacari*, *Siddhacari* and *Kaulacari* as mentioned in the sastras, it is known that *Daksinacara* and *Vamacara* are more popular and include almost all Śākta s. The latter is always superior to the former in the series respectively. One, who, following the principles of *Vedacara* worships *Devi Bhagavati* and meditates her name at right, is called *Daksinacari*. On the other hand, a *Vamacari* Śākta does not follow *Vedacara*, and worships Śakti through *panca-makaras-Madya* (wine), *Mansa* (meat), *Matsya* (fish), *Mudra* (fried grains) and *Maithuna* (sexual intercourse).

Offering sacrifice is an important element of Śakti- worship. Various sacrificial offerings such as goat, duck, pigeon etc are given to the Goddess. Śaktism is associated with the sacrifices of various animals, human beings etc. There is a provision of offering sacrifice both in *Vamcara* and *Pancamakara* systems of worship. These are Tantric worship. In Assam sacrificial offerings including human beings continued as an element of Śakti-worship from early times. In this regard Tamreswari temple is the most remarkable shrine in the north eastern region on account of the annual human sacrifice once carried out in its precincts. But this practice had been stopped during the time of Ahom king Gadadhar Singha. Offering of self blood (*svagatrarudhira*), is one of the eight kinds of sacrifice. It is stated in the *Kālikā Purāna* that blood from the lower part of the naval and from the back, lip and chin is not to be given. Besides these, *Japa*, *Homa* and *Yantra* worship are the part of Śākta worship.

Kumari Puja or Virgin worship is another Tantric ritual which is observed in Assam mainly Kāmākhyā temple since early times atleast before or at the time of compilation of *Yoginī Tantra* as the said Tantra mentioned about it. Joint worship of Siva-Śakti was also prevalent in Assam. There are some festivals which are associated to Śākta worship. Assam since early period observed some festivals of the Goddess in her various manifestations Among them mention may be made of *Saradiya Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Basanti Puja, Nag Panchami* and so on. In various Śākta *Pithas* of Assam these festivals are celebrated with great honour.

Chapter VI: Art and Architecture of Śākta Temples in Assam

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. The main aim of the building of temple architectures, sculptures and arts was the religion. In India temple architecture is divided into mainly two styles: the Indo-Aryan or North Indian style and *Dravidian* style. The architectural activities in Assam highly influenced by the Indo-Aryan (North Indian). The temples of Assam has some similarities with the temple of Orissa and the *Nagara* type temple of North India. As regarding the temple building activities of Assam in the early period there are evidences from the literature 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, 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. 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 worshiped and decorated with geometric figures or statues. The *rathas* are of various types such as *triratha*, *pancharatha* and *saptaratha*. 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*). Temples in

Assam have a *garbhagrihas* (one chamber), which may contain an antarala, a *mandapa*, a *mukhamandapa* or *ardhamandapa*. The *sikharas* of the temple may be of plain, *bhumi-amalaka*, *angasikhara* along with other decorative elements. 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. 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* which resembles with Assam hut type and Bengal *chala* 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.

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. 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.

Ancient Assam had been ruled by three main dynasties-Varmans, 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 today. However the material remains and epigraphical records highlighted the architectural activities by these rulers.

From the remains scattered and the epigraphic records one can surmise the possible form of the temple of the said period. The above evidences will indicate the abundance of old architectural pieces lying dislodged and scattered in many an ancient site in Assam. 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. But we do not find 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. However the architectural ground plan and remains indicate that Kāmākhyā temple at Nilachala and the temple of Goddess Tamreswari at Sadiya had been constructed before 12th century. The present forms of both these temples are 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

In the Medieval period, the Koch kings constructed the present Kāmākhyā temple after it was destroyed by Kalapahar. Among the Śākta temples of Assam existed today mention may be made of Kāmākhyā *pitha*. In plan, the Kāmākhyā temple consists of four chambers, a *garbhagriha* and three *mandapas* locally known as *calanta*, *pancaratna* and *natamandira*. Inscriptional evidence shows that the apsidal *natamandira* was added to the temple in 1759 C E by the Ahom king Swargadeo Rajeswar Singha (1751 C E-1769 C E) 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. 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 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. 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*.

The mass epigraphic evidence shows that the largest numbers of temples of Assam were built under the royal patronage of the Ahom kings. Rudra Singha, the successor of Gadadhar-Simha got constructed *Devi Do'l*, *Durga* temple. 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. *Ugratara* is of the same design as *Kāmākhyā*. The Ahoms introduced the *do-chala* type of roofing. There were so many Śākta temples built by the Ahom kings. During the time of Pramatta Singa the *Kāmākhyā* Devalay at Silghat and Hatimura Devalay of Kaliabar were constructed. The first one is also called *Burhi Kāmākhyā*. The Kachari King constructed the Ranachandi Kali temple of Khaspur. Tamreswari and Malinithan was constructed under Chutiya rule.

Temple Sculptures and images of Goddesses 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.

Sculptures of Assam closely associated with the style of Bengal and Orissa. The *Kāmākhyā* temple essentially follows the *Nagara* style of architecture of North India. The sculptures are apparent mostly on the exterior walls as well as on the interior walls of the *Kāmākhyā* temple. A good number of sculptures are also fixed on the temple gates. Besides, some of the sculptures are lying scattered within the temple campus. But due to the religious prohibition, the sculptures of interior walls are not given permission to study.

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 Siva in his various forms are found. Most of the figures of Siva show the terrific aspect which is called *Bhairava*.

Along with the great number of the male divine figures, two female 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).

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. 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. 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 small image is carved on a block of basalt. Stylistically, this image is assigned to pre-Ahom period, e.i. 11th-12th centuries CE. A beautiful image Mahisamardini is seen at Ulubari, Guwahati, by the side of G.S. Road. Here also 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. Another image is seen at Siddheswari temple, Sualkuchi. This image is represented same as the former one.

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 *sivalinga* 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.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

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 Kāmākhyā when he ascended the throne of Prāgjyotisa. Since then Naraka started worship the presiding deity Kāmākhyā. The abode of Goddess Kāmākhyā is at Nilachala hill of present Guwahati city in the shrine Kāmākhyā pītha. Śākta cult in Assam developed centering round the Kāmākhyā 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

pîthas have been mentioned in various literatures. There are some legends which are associated with the origin of various Śākta *pîthas*. Assam has been recognised as the principal centre for Śakti *sadhana* centering round the Kāmākhyā temple. It is because of this great Goddess Kāmākhyā 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 *pîthas* 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 were 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 Siva 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 *pîtha*. 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 *pîtha* 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 *pîtha* 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 Kāmākhya, 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 stucken by pox. Women folk of Assam mainly participated in this ritual and sung the *Āi naams*.

Tantra plays an important role in Śaktism and in worshipping the Goddess. In Śāktaworship 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 *pīthas* 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. Cāmuṇḍā, 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.