

CHAPTER - III

Origin and Development of Śaktism in Assam

Origin and Development of Śaktism

The term “Śakti” originates from the root ‘Sak’ which means that to be able to have energy ‘to do’ or to act’. Thus, Śakti worship is the worship of Energy which is personified as a female and is generally conceived as the all-pervading Mother Goddess. She is regarded as the Supreme Creator, sustainer and Destroyer of the universe. And one who worships Her is known as a Śakta.¹

Śaktism, the worship of female principle occupies a unique position in the Indian religious tradition. It originated from the primitive Mother Goddess cult prevalent among the athonous society, in course of time it incorporated various heterogenous traits from other religious faiths and emerged as an independent religion forming a significant aspect of mainspring of Indian religious system. In its present form Śaktism is a medieval religion but it is direct offshoot of the primitive Mother Goddess cult which was prominent features in the religion of the agricultural people who based their social society on the principle of mother- right.² No other religion can claim to have a continuous and colourful history of its own in actual from the pre-historic times to the present day with richest source of mythology, theology, iconography and numerous manifestations as Śakti.³

The historical and archaeological sources generally trace the origin of Śakti cult to the Indus valley civilization but though in reality its existence can be traced from the dawn of the civilization. The earliest evidences regarding the prevalence of the Mother Goddess worship have been traced from a large number of inscriptions, clay statues and seals which have been found from the Indus Valley, on the basis of which the history of the worshippers of the Mother Goddess has been traced. As for example, the figurines of females found at Mohenjo-daro and Harappa portrayed in the form of standing and almost nude females, wearing either bands.⁴

The ancient literatures such as Vedas, Upanisads, Epic, Mahapuranas, Śakta-Upa-Puranas and Tantras abound with data on the evolution, rise, spread and numerous manifestations with iconographic features substantiated by abundantly available

archaeological evidence in a chronological sequence from the Indus times to the later medieval period in shape of sculptures (terracotta, bronze and stone), epigraphs, coins, temples etc.

Rigveda mentioned different names such as Ratri, Prithvi, Saraswati, Aditi, Usha, Aditi, Rudrani, Agneyi, Sachi, Urvasi, and Nirti and so on. Each Goddess, personification of female energy, occupied a subordinate position in the male-oriented Vedic society. Some of these female deities such as Aditi, Usa, Saraswati etc. are of a very interesting character. On analysis of the importance ascribed to them by the ancient Seers of India it can be recognised their importance.⁵ Aditi had been conceived as the Divine Mother as Her origin is considered as Divine and birthless bringing forth all life in this universe. Gods, Gondharvas, human being and all the living creatures were born from her. Usa is considered as the Goddess of Dawn as she was responsible for bringing day-light and remove darkness from the universe. In the Vedic Hymns it is described that Usa is called the preserver of men, Goddess of earthly treasure, preserver of the world, producer of food, curer of diseases etc. Having all these qualities, she is a war-like Goddess, rebellious and revengeful in nature.⁶ On the other hand Saraswat is considered as the river and a Goddess. Aryans who entered India in course of time established themselves at the bank of river Saraswati and performed sacrifices. The concept of Saraswati as the Goddess of speech and knowledge, charitable, beneficent, beautiful and white-complexioned formed the basis of her iconography in later period.⁷

So it appears that even in the Vedic age also the germ of Śaktism was laid down. The Vedic people after arriving India came in contact with the non-Vedic people who were already existed there and they got mixed with their culture. So it is natural to influenced by their religious cults and their rituals.⁸ As a result of this a number of non-vedic Goddesses such as Ila, Mahi, Gandharvi, Asuniti etc. found their place in the Rigvedic pantheon. Post –Rigvedic literature Goddesses such as Ambika, Uma, Durga, Kali etc were non-Vedic deities which were later adopted by the Vedic Aryans. The different names of the Mother Goddesses appear to have originally indicated different tribal deities who were afterwards identified with the wife of Śiva Pashupati, the pre-Aryans God known to have been worshipped by the Mohenjo-daro people. Ambika is called Rudra's sister in the *Vajasaneyi Samhita* while the *Taittiriya Aranyaka* describes her as his spouse.⁹ Thus, there was a very gradual penetration of

the mother cult in the Brahmanical religious set up. Therefore, it seems that a new lease of life was infused into the pre-Vedic Mother Goddess cult during the post Rigvedic period. The worship of Śaktism or the Mother Goddess assumes different forms in different parts of the country. People adhering to this cult, the Śāktas conceive the Mother Goddess as the personification of primordial energy and the source of all divine as well as cosmic evolution.¹⁰ Mother Goddess did not achieve supreme position in the Rigvedic period, but the spirit of worship of this form flows unabated throughout the Vedic literature and its crystallisation took place in the later period only. During the Vedic period several new Goddesses came into existence large due to the assimilation of local and pre-Vedic elements. The Śiva-Śakti became a powerful form and gained popularity as a supreme deity during the period under view. The Goddess Usha gained popularity during the Sutra period.¹¹ *Rudrani, Bhavani, Sarvani* gained prominence as consorts of Rudra while *Indrani, Varunani, Sita, Lakshmi, Kali, Shashthi, Bhadrakali, Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswati, Apsaras, Prithivi* also began to be worshipped and revered. Thus in a nutshell manner it seems that in this period future Hinduism began to take shape.¹² The worship of the Mother Goddess, after re-asserting itself in the post-Vedic period, made sufficient grounds during the pre-Mauryan age, which was a period when early Vedic religion had gone into a considerable change. This period provides ample archaeological material for the purpose of studying the development of the Śakti cult in the country. The sculptural representation of Mother Goddess during this period is marked to a large extent by nudity. The Yaksha-Yakshi cult too began to gain prominence from this period onwards. The archaeological materials of the Sunga-Kushana periods namely sculptured reliefs, terracotta figures, coins, etc throw considerable light on the worship of this cult. This period may therefore be described as a formative one, for on the one hand Buddhism was making its presence felt and on the other, foreign invasions brought about some drastic alterations in the conception of Gods and Goddesses.¹³ The Gupta age brought to the fore a well-developed and matured Mother Goddess cult for which there is no dearth of literary or archaeological materials. However, it is the Epics and the Puranas, which emphasise on the final form of Hinduism in all its maturity. The consorts of all the three members of the Hindu trinity- Brahma, Vishnu and Śiva emerged as deities of definite cults and their images have been found in abundance. The images of a number of minor Goddesses namely the Saptamatrikas were also found during this period. All these throw light on the fact

that worship of the Mother Goddess remained popular during the Gupta Age, which can be traced in the *Devī-Mahatmya*. Thus by the 5th century CE, the Goddess cult reached its maturity and in the form of Śakti *Devī* her conception is preserved in the Puranic literature, thereby establishing the superiority of the feminine over the masculine.¹⁴ In the process of evolution of the cult of the Mother Goddess, a number of places came to be associated with Śakti worship and thus came to be regarded as Śākta *pīthas*.¹⁵ The mythological legend regarding the origin of Śākta *pīthas* will be discussed in the later part of this chapter. Śakti, the consort of Śiva also associated with the great mother of early history was the third symbol of supreme Godhead and the cult of Śakti grew around her.

Devī Śakti is the one eternal power having various forms but she is one. The Goddess manifests herself in a number of forms and known by a multitude of names in accordance with her origins, functions and relationships with other Gods. The diversity of names underlines the basic tenet of the existence of one and only supreme authority encompassing the many distinct forms.¹⁶ The generic name *Devī*, however has an abstract quality not suggestive of an immediate identification. Ambika and Uma representing two of the oldest names given to the Goddess may also be included among significant appellations of Śaktism through the ages. In the classical period, the Goddess is often referred to as *Devī* such as in the *Devī Purana* and in the *Devī Bhagavata Purana*.¹⁷

One important aspect is *Devī* which includes her being represented as a cosmic force. In this form the Goddess creates, annihilates and recreates the universe – sometimes of awesome appearance, the Goddess often destroys the demonic forces that threaten the world equilibrium, wielding weapons in multiple arms which bear testimony to her ability to perform multiple tasks simultaneously. In this form she is Durga, the Mahishasuramardini, slayer of the buffalo demon, the dark-skinned Kali, the emaciated Chamunda and the *Devī* herself.¹⁸

Thus it appears that Śaktism was prevalent since pre-historic times. In the pre-historic times people did not worship her as Śakti but as a mother earth and in symbolic form. It was in the latter period only Śaktism took its headway with different forms in iconography by the Puranic and Tantric procedure. The Eternal power or energy is one but the Goddess takes her different form to save her devotee and to destroy the

enemy. Sometimes the Goddess takes her fearful and dread form to destroy the darkness or enemy and sometimes she is calm. According to her forms the Goddess has been worshipped by the devotees at different times.

Development of Śāktism in Assam

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 Śiva 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 Śiva 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 Śiva. Śiva-Śakti was also jointly worshipped by the tribal and the indigenous people of Prāgijyotisa-Kāmarūpa. Lots of sources are available as the evidences of the popular religion of Śiva-Śakti in this land. B.K. Barua in his *Cultural History of Assam* defines that the cult of Mother Goddess or Śakti was not originated in Kāmarūpa but it was well nourished here from the pre-historic times by different tribes at different places with different processes.¹⁹ Mythological evidence states that the origin and development of Śāktism dates back to the pre-historic period.

Kāmarūpa was a heap of world culture. The attractive culture of this land was developed due to the admixture of various tribes like Kiratas, Dravidas and the Aryans, migrated from different centres of the world such as Indonesian Island, Austria, South and South West of Asia, Indo-China, Himalaya, West of China, Egypt, Babylon. These tribes carried to this land different cultures which enriched Prāgijyotisa-Kāmarūpa. These nomadic races carried the germs of the cult of fertility, similarise with Mother Goddess, mother cult as *yoni* worship in symbolic form.²⁰ Most of them were matriarchial in nature. So it has been said that roots of Śāktism go back to the pre-historic times as to the fertility cult. The cult of fertility, or the worship of phallus-*yoni*, was the beginning of the religious system of the Śakti cult. The worship of the phallus, *linga* and *yoni*, was personified later on as Śiva and Mother Goddess Śakti. Although the Vedic literatures were silent about Parvati, they convey the ideas of Śakti referring to the name as Usha, Sanchi (Indrani), Rudrani etc.

So the historians unanimously remarks that the germs of Śāktism were laid down in the Vedas also.

The inhabitants of Prāḡjyotisa- Kāmarūpa migrated from different places of the world, conveying various cultures and they exercised their customs in the newly settled colonies. After the observation of the ancient remaining like various customs, rites and rituals, behaviour among the racial groups, the matter of the origin of Śakti cult is divided into two theories- Divine or Mythological theory and the second one Matriarchal theory.²¹

Since ancient times Prāḡjyotisa or Kāmarūpa was famous all over India for Śakti cult. Kāmarūpa, unanimously gets recognition as the most powerful and significant Śākta *pītha*. It is also discussed that Prāḡjyotisa or Kāmarūpa as mentioned in the *Kālikā Purāna* and *Yoginī Tantra* that this was the most suitable place for Śakti worship because of its physical features. It is mentioned that from the age of classical Sanskrit literature to that of Tantric literature, may even down to the Ahom period this vast tract of land was famous as a place of magic and witchcraft. The available sources furnish us authentic picture regarding the establishment of Śākta cult in the land. In Prāḡjyotisa-Kāmarūpa, Śakti has been worshipped in the symbolic form such as Mother Earth in the form of *yoni*, and Śiva in the form of *linga*.²² Śakti has been worshipped as Divine energy in various forms on the basis of myths. Different tribes worshipped Śakti in different places of Kāmarūpa in the earlier ages, depending on the conception of the local tribes. For the study of the origin and development there is no any authentic data except the traditions, literatures or myths, sculptures and icons. It is also important to mention here that Śaivism was also an important sect, no less ancient than Śāktism in Kāmarūpa. There are similarities in the worship of both the Śaiva and Śakti sect.²³ The relation between Śiva and Śakti has been established so firmly by the worker of the Tantric period that, a worshipper can hardly proceed with the worship of quite independently. Therefore it appears that the worshipper of one of the two sects is not free from the idea of the other. Hence the antiquity of Śaivism and Śāktism leads one to think that the bond of relation between Śāktism and Śaivism though not so tight as in the later period, was nevertheless prevalent in ancient times also. The flow of Śaivism running from the very ancient times has not dried up even today like Śāktism. There are many high caste people belonging to Śakti and Śaiva sect.²⁴

From the very ancient times the nomadic people had no idea about or Goddesses. They conceived an idea of primordial Force as its source. The force conceived as Energy, termed Śakti in Sanskrit and later it is personified in the form of female. The female principles were personified later on as the Goddesses. The common concept of Śakti is a Pan-Indian phenomenon. Although the Vedas traced the idea of Śakti, it is manifested in the Mohenjodaro- Harappa from female figure unearthed there. As the concept of Śakti cult is a Pan-Indian phenomenon, so it will be discussed on the Indian concepts.²⁵

Some scholars opine that Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa is the great anthropological Museum²⁶ as it is the homeland of various races like Negritos, Austro-Asiatic Mon-Khmer, Indo-Chinese, Tibeto-Burmans, Dravidians, Kiratas and the Aryans. These races entered Kāmarūpa from South-east Asia, oceanic world, India and western countries like Egypt and Babylon with rich culture. These aboriginal tribes living in various parts of Kāmarūpa followed different cultural rites and rituals. They used to worship their deities according to their own customs. They established their own culture in Kāmarūpa carried away from their original land. India was a wild country inhabited by savages and cannibals to whom the conquerors brought the blessings of civilization. The first race of people that came here by sea route with a more or less organized form of society was the Austro-Asiatic or Austric.²⁷ According to R.M. Nath these people settled in Kāmarūpa in about 2750 B CE.²⁸ They were cultivators and the practice of fertility cult was associated with them. The Austric race who settled in Kāmarūpa was the champion of the matriarchal society or mother-kin society. *Yoni* Goddess was sprang up and migrated into Prāgjyotisa with the migration of the Austric people.²⁹

Nityananda Gogoi is of the opinion that Austric people were the founder of the Neolithic Age. They were driven of this place by the most powerful Tibeto-Burmese Bodo group to the present Meghalaya Hills. The conception of *yonī* or Mother Goddess was thus imported from outside the different periods. Naraka's Kāmākhya has been patterned on the earlier conception of the Mother Goddess or *yonī* Goddess as a primordial deity.²⁰ The worship of the phallus, in the form of *linga* and *yonī*, turned into the worship of Mother Goddess. Originally Kāmākhya was worshipped by the Austric and Kiratas as *yonī* Goddess, when Naraka founded a kingdom in Kāmarūpa he established himself as the custodian of this *yonī* Goddess. The Austric

people had the belief that women were related to Earth and further it strengthened the belief that women were favourite to God and so women took an active part in the religious ceremonies as go between men and God. According to R.M. Nath, at the time of draught, the dancing of a naked women round the area considered enough to please the energy God and relief.³¹

N.E. Elliot is of the opinion about the origin of the Śakti cult that “It is probable that the Śaktist form of worship originated in Bengal and Assam. It is true that a Goddess who requires to be propitiated with human victims has temples in most parts of India, but Śaktism in the sense of a definite sect with scriptures of its own, if not confined to the north-east corner, at least has its headquarters there”.³² “Except in Bengal and Assam, I doubt if there are any temples in India which admittedly countenance the rites of Śaktism and its adherents elsewhere are largely recruited from among Bengali clerks. There is, therefore every reason to ascribe to it a local origin and many of the chief Tantras show distinct local colour”.³³

“The concept of Śakti, in its broad sense, is Indian phenomenon. So it is difficult to identify the original place of Śaktism. But it is believed that the idea of fertility, mother or *yoni* cult migrated from abroad with the migration of the Austriacs, Dravidias, Kiratas and the matriarchal groups who were connected with the old civilization of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Babylon etc. Assam lay at the threshold of a number of routes to various foreign countries. In the process many people might have passed through Assam, some of which made Assam as their homeland pushing the original rudiments to the foothill.”³⁴ The idea of fertility cult and *yoni* cult were the invention of the tribes coming from abroad who conveyed the idea to this land of Kāmarūpa and introduced it in their locality or in the villages. But regarding the origin and original place of Śakti, conflict arose among the views of the historians. R. Sathinathaier very strait forwardly says that Assam is the home of Śakti and fanaticism. The archaeological evidences, literatures, phallic symbols, nature of rites and rituals practiced by the tribal people show that Kāmarūpa was the original place of Śaktism. R.D. Choudhury identifies Bengal and Assam as the homeland of Śaktism.³⁵ Sir Elliot opined that the birth place of Śaktism as a definite sect seems to have been north-eastern India. But during the non-Aryan period Kāmarūpa became the principal centre of Śaktism with the centre of Kāmākhya and a strong Śakti sect formed in Kāmarūpa. Kāmarūpa, Tibet and Nepal became a place of Śakti worship.³⁶

It is true that long before the advent of the Aryans Śakti sect was formed in Kāmarūpa. H.H. Wilson, in the preface to his translation of the *Vishnu Purana* says that it is a singular and seems to have been in a great degree the source from which Tantrism and Śaktism proceeded.³⁷

The origin and growth of the important element of Tantrism may be supposed to be the contribution of the non-Aryan in Kāmarūpa. So it may be strongly supported on the basis of tradition, myths, customs, rites and rituals, practices of different customs that Śakti cult originated in the form fertility and *yoni* cult and developed in the Śakti form or woman figures from the primordial times by the aboriginal tribes. Although, seeds of Śakti cult migrated to this land from outside, it formed a special cult of Śakti worship in the society in Prāgjyotisa- Kāmarūpa. Before the conquest of Prāgjyotisa by Naraka, Śakti was a living faith in Prāgjyotisa. The *Kālikā Purāna* refers to the existence of Kāmākhyā before Naraka-

Nimajya Khyamatrena Prāgjyotisa purana gatah |
Madhyagang Kāmarūpashya Kāmākhyā Yatra nayika ||³⁸

Many *yoni* symbol was found out in various places of Kāmarūpa which identified that *yoni* worship (Mother Goddess) was prevailed in this land as the symbol of regeneration long before the introduction of divine Goddess like Durga, Parvari, Kali, which were of Aryan origin.³⁹ But it is sure that the cult was confined in the locality or in the village, in the family and individually. So it cannot be possible for the aboriginal tribes or people who were economically very weak and lacked in knowledge, to construct a temple or to carve out images of deities.⁴⁰ In that situation there was no archaeological development on the Śakti deities till the royal encouragement or support or patronage.⁴¹

The universal energy originated in those border countries furnished with the mother-kin- society. P.C. Bagchi asserts that the social structures of the countries are matriarchal. But it is true to speak that Śaktism originated in Kāmarūpa and its responsibility must go to the Aryans who got immense obstacles from the aboriginal tribes of the land to settle and spread *Arya-Dharma* here. The political and social condition of the land or the east of Sadanira river (Karatoya) was not favourable to them. So, to overcome the political and social resistance of the non-Aryan tribes, they

created a new idea and philosophy of Śakti cult with the help of the local elements available here, which led them to assimilate with the tribes and settled in Prāgjyotisa.⁴² Bengal was aryanised little earlier than Assam. They settled and spread *Arya-dharma* in Bengal without any obstacles. So the Vedic religion touched Bengal earlier than Assam with the Vedic Aryans. On the other hand, the situation of the east of Sadanira (Karatoya) or Assam was different from that of Bengal. So to achieve the goal, that was to settle and spread the *Arya-dharma* in Kāmarūpa, the Aryans found out the means of a new cult suitable to the aboriginal tribes. But the origin and growth of the important elements of Tantrism are to be attributed to the non-Aryans in ancient Assam. Śakti cult already was there among the aboriginal tribes in the form of *yonī* and fertility cult associated with some barbaric rites and rituals, which were formulated in a system with disciplined way by the Aryans, called Śakti cult. Gradually the Brahmanas became the spiritual guide of the Śākta sects.⁴³

Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa was called to be the fertile land for Śaktism. All the elements were found in Prāgjyotisa and Magic, witchcraft etc. were common in the land. So, P.C. Choudhury, thinks that the origin of Śaktism and Tantrism are to be attributed to the non-Aryans in ancient Assam, and the foundation of Śakti and Tantric faiths which was largely laid by the megalithic culture of Assam.⁴⁴

Śākta Cult originated in the primordial period in the form of fertility cult, mother Goddess and *yonī* 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 accept and worship the existing cults and thereby helped in the development and extension of Śākta cult to all directions of the land.⁴⁵

Mythological evidence says that Narakasura, the king of Prāgjyotisa was the first initiator of Śākta cult in Kāmarūpa (ancient Assam). Naraka, the prince of Mithila, invaded Prāgjyotisa and killed the Kirata king Ghataka, usurped the throne with the help of Vishnu. Naraka was called the champion of Śakti worship. There are enough informations regarding Śakti cult under the Royal dynasties in Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa. But it is very strange that the *Kālikā Purāna*, the *Yoginī Tantra* and other historians

like P.C. Choudhury, B.K. Barua and K.L. Barua refer to the Śakti cult under Naraka but they all are silent about the prevalent of Śakti cult under the Varman, Salasthambha and Pala dynasties, who claimed themselves as the successors of *Bhauma* Naraka dynasty. The inscriptions, images, architectures, sculptures and the scattered remains supply sufficient information on which it is proved that the aboriginal people originated Śakti cult continued as before in strong force in Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa.⁴⁶

Kālikā Purāna stated that when Naraka usurped the throne of Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa, the kingdom of Kirata, at that time the presiding deity was Goddess Kāmākhyā. Vishnu advised him to worship only the Goddess Kāmākhyā and not the other Gods and Goddess. Kāmākhyā has been worshipped as a *yoni* Goddess by the *yoni* symbol.

*Kamakhang Tvang bina pītha nanyadevang majibyasi*⁴⁷

Naraka introduced the worship of Kāmākhyā in order to win over the support and allegiance from the remaining Kiratas. The non-Aryan origin *yoni* Goddess Kāmākhyā acquired the Royal recognition and patronage, which established Kāmākhyā in firm footing by Naraka. Naraka brought with him a large number of Brahmanas and other high castes people and granted them land on the Nilacala Hill.⁴⁸ Naraka brought the village or local Goddess ‘*yoni* Goddess’ to the Royal palace and the village Goddess was regarded later on as Divine energy in the Purana and the Tantric literatures composed by the Aryans. The *Kālikā Purāna* and *Yoginī Tantra* clearly refer to the introduction of Śakti worship by Naraka in the Nilacala Hill. Naraka himself was the chief priest and himself worshipped Kāmākhyā. He became a staunch worshipper of Śakti.⁴⁹

After Naraka his successors such as Bhagadatta and Brajadatta’s religious policy is not clearly known. The Puranas and Tantras are also silent about their religion. But in the Doobi and Nidhanpur Copper Plate Grants of Bhaskaravarman, it is mentioned that both Bhagadatta and Brajadatta were the follower of Vedic religion.⁵⁰ Here also regarding Śakti worship no information is given. But it does not mean that Śaktism was not prevailed in Kāmarūpa. But the Copper Plate inscription of Banamala says that Bhagadatta, ascending the throne of Prāgjyotisa, satisfied Mahadeva by observing a vow, the purpose of which was to expand his paternal empire (*samprapte bhagadattah srimatpragjyetisadhinayatvam I, vinayabharana tadetya*

praradhayadisvam tapasa II here the word Isvara means mahadeva). It gives us a scope for having an idea of Bhagadatta's Saivite cult, but notwithstanding, there is contradictory thing to be considered. It is stated in a forecasting manner in *Hara-Gauri-Sambada*, comparatively a modern Sanskrit work, depicting the historical accounts of Kāmarūpa from Bhagadatta to Kamaleswar Singha, that minister of Bhagadatta, in obedience to the advice of the king (Bhagadatta) would recite the "Caṇḍī" one thousand times. This focuses certainly, some amount of light on view that probably Bhagadatta was a devotee of Śakti.⁵¹ Śakti cult had already gained ground and become a dominant cult in Kāmarūpa. The chief purpose of the colonization of the Aryans was the settlement and spread of Arya *dharma* in Kāmarūpa. To fulfill this object they adopted the non-Aryan cults, mixed up with the aboriginal tribes and the kings appointed them in the army. So, in this connection, it was not possible for any ruler to neglect the predecessor's policy. Not only Bhagadatta and Brajadatta, but also any other ruler of this dynasty made no attempts to violate the non-Aryan cult.⁵²

It is true that the epigraphic sources and the historians mention that Śiva was the presiding deity of the *Bhauma*-Naraka successors up to the end of the Pala line. But there is also enough informations whatsoever, regarding the prevalence of Śakti cult among the people of Kāmarūpa. The epigraphic sources, of course do not directly mention about the worship of Śakti, but it mentions the name of various Śaktis, their gracious and frightful nature, virtues and motherlike character. The great Goddesses were compared to their queens, with the popularity and influence of the Śakti cult in the land as well as in the royal Harem. It also continued as it were earlier, without any obstruction from the royal authority. There was no other king of Kāmarūpa who worshipped Śakti or Kāmākhya. Only king Balavarman and Indrapala's names were associated with the deities Kamesvara-Mahagauri, who were identified as Kāmākhya.⁵³

Although the inscriptions are silent about the Śakti *pīthas* and system of Śakti worship but they mentioned about the Tantric rites and *Yogic* practices which were regarded as an essential part of Śakti worship. On the other hand, the Goddesses, mentioned in the inscriptions, had similarity with the iconographical description that of the Goddesses mentioned in the Puranas and the Tantras. These are sufficient evidences to prove that

during the *Bhauma*-Naraka dynasty from mid 4th to 12th century CE, Śakti cult was a dominant cult in the kingdom.⁵⁴

To find out the real picture of the Śakti cult of the Varman dynasty, one must discuss the inscriptions of ancient Assam. In this connection, the Doobi and Nidhanpur Copper Plate Grants are regarded as the most reliable and authentic sources. The Doobi Copper Plate mentions that Samudravarman performed the practice of *Yoga*, an indispensable element of the Śakti-Tantric system and he retired to heaven with the help of *Yoga* (V-13). Verse 28, 29 indicate that the idea of heavenly bodies has been already existed in Kāmarūpa. It has mentioned the daughter of the mountain (parvati) and Narayanvarman's wife Devamati who were compared to Parvati. Devamati gave birth to a son named Mahendravarman as Parvati gave birth to a son Kartikeya. In this context, Devamati was compared to supreme deity Parvati so also her son was compared to Kartikeya in beauty, power and fame. Verse 35 of the Doobi Copper Plate and verse 16 of the Nidhanpur Copper Plate mention Bhogavati. Bhogavati is a name of Durga (Śakti). Bhoga means woman and so it means the female Goddess. The queen of Chandramukhavarman assumed the name Bhogavati equal to Durga. In verse 51, reference is made of Durga. The queen of Sthitavarman was compared to Durga in virtue. Susthitavarman's queen was like the daughter of the king of mountain (Parvati) in verse 53 of the Doobi Copper Plate. In verse 70, Śakti is mentioned as a type of weapons of Bhaskaravarman. The Nidhanpur Copper Plate of Bhaskaravarman (V-20) refers to the Goddess Syama. Syama is identified with the Goddess Kali. Again the queen of Susthitavarman was regarded equal in virtue, with Goddess Syama and she adopted the name Syama Devī.⁵⁵

However, it is obviously proved that during the Varman rule Goddesses like Kali, Durga, Parvati, Bhogavati were widely worshipped. Of course, Śakti cult already became the dominant cult in the land. The kings had nothing to do but to the development of Śakti cult. Śakti cult was the most popular and powerful cult which had great impact on the royal palace and so most of the queens were known to the name of the Goddesses. The evidences relating to Bhaskaravarman clearly suggest that Śaktism was prevailed in Kāmarūpa in strong force. Of course, Śaivism received far-reaching attention to the kings of the Varman rule, so also Śakti cult continued without stepping down.

The Nidhanpur Copper Plate Inscription of Bhaskaravarman begins with humble obeisance to and high adoration of Lord Śiva, which clearly proves that Bhaskaravarman was a Śaiva. K.L Baruah has written “Bhaskarvarman and his predecessors were Śaivas, and not Buddhist or Jainas”. So from the above discussion it is proved that the rulers of Varman dynasty were liberal in their religious view. Though Śaivism was their main faith but they were liberal to other religion. Goddesses like Durga, Kali, etc. were mentioned as supreme powers in the inscriptions. If there was no Śakti or Goddess, the name of them would not have mentioned in the Plates.⁵⁶

During the reign of Salasthambha dynasty the bulk of the Śakti cult was extended. It was during their reign, the Tantric ideology was disseminated into the region.⁵⁷ In the “*Early History of Kāmarūpa*”, K.L.Barua refers to the kings of Salasthambha dynasty, who were the worshippers of their tutelary deities ‘Kameswara-Mahagauri’ mentioned in the inscription of Vanamala. The Tezpur Copper Plate of Vanamalavarmadeva refers to the temple of Kameswara and Mahagauri on the Kamakuta Hill (V-11-13). Mahagauri and Kameswara are no other than Kāmākhya and Śiva, which identified later on as Śiva-Śakti worship under the royal patronage. Śakti was so popular that a tank was dug in the name of Caṇḍīka, which is referred to in the Parvatiya Plates of Vanamalavarmadeva (V-25, 26). He also built the second Kāmākhya temple near Silghat due to worship of Kāmākhya nearby his capital. Some remains of Biswanath identified the high regards of the Salasthambha kings to the Śakti cult. The structures of the complex indicate that there might have been a group of temples but remained incomplete. Some holes like symbols on rock have been found which are identified with the Gods and Goddesses viz. Biswanath temple, Uma temple, Caṇḍī temple and Kameswara temple. The holes might have been the images of the temples.⁵⁸ According to local tradition, earlier Bana, the king of Sonitpur intended to establish in Biswanath a second Kasidham. But due to non-cooperation of two sages his ambition was not fulfilled and Biswanath came to be known as Gupta Kasi (secret Kasi). But according to the historians it was not Banasura but Vanamalavarmadeva, who attempted to construct lots of temples to make it second Kasidham in Kāmarūpa.⁵⁹ In the inscription of Vanamalavarmadeva, mention is made of numerous temples in the country and where *Yajnas* were performed. Vanamala

himself rebuilt the large temples of Hatakeswara to which he dedicated a number of prostitutes evidently for service of *Devadasis*.

It appears from the above discussion that Salasthabha rulers were worshipper of Śiva and Śakti both. The construction of second Kāmākhya temple by Vanamala, the Caṇḍīka tank, the temple of Kameswara-Mahagauri on the Kamakuta Hill mentioned in the inscription of Vanamala suggest that they were worshiper of both Śiva and Śakti side by side.

After the Salasthambha rulers, the Palas came to power. They ruled from about 1000 to 1125 CE. It was during the time of Pala dynasty that the glory of art and culture reached its zenith. A great number of images of Śakti and temples are discovered in various places of Kāmarūpa. Most of them are still existed. There are references to the *Kula Devī* (Goddess of the family) that was the female deity in ancient Kāmarūpa, as family Goddess called *Kula Devī*, which was reflected in the royal family. The queen of Brahmapala of the Pala line, assumed the name '*Kula Devī*' that was the Goddess of the family. Hence, the queen is supposed to be an embodiment of the presence of the Goddess of fortune of the family. During Ratnapala's reign, Tantric rites were practised. He himself was famous for Tantric lore.⁶⁰

The *Kālikā Purāna* was composed most probably sometime in the eleventh century in Kāmarūpa certainly by a Brahman Pandit who was at a home in Śaktism and Śakti-*sadhana*, and had sufficient Geographical knowledge of Kāmarūpa. The detailed descriptions of so many manifestations of Mahamaya Adya Śakti, different modes of their worship, say by which a devotee can be proceed on the path of liberation, found in this Purana, reiterate all these about Śaktism and Śakti-*Sadhana* had been in practice before or at the time of composing the *Kālikā Purāna*. But without the royal patronage, any religious sect could hardly come into prominence in ancient times.⁶¹ Therefore, it is presumed that the Pala-Kings, holding the ruling rod at that time, were perhaps liberal Śāktas, if not rigid, and under their patronage Śaktism could spread. Another thing to be noticed is that before, or at the time of writing the *Kālikā Purāna*, not only the power and glory of Goddess Kāmākhya and Her shrine spread, but she was also regarded as the Supreme Mother or Supreme Energy. If it had not been so, the *Kālikā Purāna* could not have given so explicit description of that nature about Goddess Kāmākhya. In this case also, royal support of the ruling authority; viz. of the

Pala king came. Under these circumstances it can be said that the kings of the Pala dynasty were inclined to Śaktism and during their reign, Śaktism spread to a great extent and its glory rose to a considerable height.⁶²

In the medieval period from 13th century upto 18th century many political powers came out. However Ahoms were the main power who established their kingdom and ruled six hundred years in Assam. At the beginning of 13th century there was a political turmoil and many small feudatories emerged independent. In medieval period the political powers such as Chutiyas, Kacharis, Koch, and Ahoms etc ruled over Assam. In the second quarter of the thirteenth century came the Chutiyas in to power after the death of Nilambara of Khen dynasty in 1498 CE.

There is no doubt that the Chutiyas were devout Śāktas. The Chutiyas and their kings worshipped Goddess Kali in the form of *Kecai-Khati*-the eater of raw flesh, before whom even human sacrifices, not to speak of goats or buffaloes, were offered. Edward Gait commented that the reign of the Chutiyas was a curious one. They worshipped various forms of Kali with the aid, not of Brahmanas but of their tribal priests or *Deoris*. The *Deodhai Asom Buranji* stated about the story of Mahakalika as the *Devī Śakti*.⁶³

The *Kachari Buranji*⁶⁴ and other historical chronicles depicting the political, social and some other aspects of the Kacharis clearly evidenced that the Kacharis were the worshipper of Śakti. In the *Kachari Buranji* it is stated that Bhimbala, a Kachari prince, during the reign of Ahom king Pratap Singha (1611-1649 C E) prepared to fight against the Ahom king. Before he started for the expedition he had collected necessary offerings for *Devī* worship, and believing in a superstitious method, placed those offerings before an elephant. In that very night he saw Goddess *Kecai-Khati* in a dream who said that she had always been in favour of them (Kacharis). He was to worship her by offering sacrifices, and then he would win the battle. Accordingly, Bhimbala worshipped and came out victorious. There is conspicuous evidence in *Kachari Buranji* that the Kacharis from a long time past were worshipping Goddess *Kecai-Khati* with sacrifices. This view is also confirmed by S.K. Bhuyan's remarks that "The copper temple of Sadiya, dedicated to *Kecai-Khati Gosani*, where human sacrifices were offered in ancient times, was worshipped not only in the Brahmaputra Valley, but also by the Kacharis of Cachar. Though there are no evidences to prove

that whether all Kacharis regarded the Sadiya Goddess as their protectress, but we have the evidence to prove that the royal family of Cachar worshipped the *Kecai-Khati* Gosani of Sadiya and the Goddess was their tutelary deity.”⁶⁵ The Kachari king Yasonarayan Dev who reigned during the last quarter of the sixteenth century, was a devotee of Śiva and Uma.⁶⁶ This line of worship has already been discussed. This indicates that Kacharis were Śāktas.

The Jayantiya kings were also the Śāktas. There is evidence of a Brahmin king named Jayantaray of Jayantiya who worshipped Gauri and by the grace of the Goddess he was blessed with a girl named Jayanti Devī. The girl Jayanti Devī was married to Landhabar, who once observed an austere vow of Bhadrakali. According to *Jayantiya Buranji*, Jayanti Devī was separated from her husband, and she also propitiated Goddess Durga. At the time of enthroning Bargohain, Landhara’s son born from the womb of one Matsodari, Jayanti Devī presented him a ten-handed image of Goddess Durga made of copper. Geneologically as described in the *Jayantiya Buranji*, this Jayanti Devī was the seventh predecessor of Yasamanik, who is contemporary of Pratap Singha reigning from 1603-1641 CE.⁶⁷ It has been calculated that Jayantiya Devī ruled atleast in the middle of fifteenth century tentatively, at that time or atleast a bit earlier it is known that Durga worship and the use of Durga image were prevalent in Jayantia *Rajya*.⁶⁸ Hence it can be said that Jayantias were also worshipper of Śākta cult.

Ahom kings from Pratap Singha down to Rudra Singha, who reigned from 1696-1714, all Ahom kings had Hindu proclivities, and most probably all, but one, had liking to Śaiva and Śākta sects. Jayadhvaj Singha (1643-1663) was the first Ahom monarch to accept Brahmanical religion formally by taking initiation first from Niranjana-deva, who has been installed as the first Vaisnava abbot of the Auniati satra and then from Vanamalideva abbot of Vaisnava satra of Dakshinpata. Gadadhar Singha, an outstanding personage of Ahom dynasty, who ruled from 1681-1696 CE, was a great patron of Śākta cult. History, of course, does not give evidence of his formal conversion to Śāktism by taking *Sarana* from Śākta Guru. But it is true that strong liking for Śāktism and Brahmanical religion was the main thing which urged him to make build the temple of Umananda on a hillock standing in the midst of the dashing current of the mighty Brahmaputra near Gauhati, and granted lands to the Brahmins and the temples. As a patron Gadadhar Singha used to take the prohibited

food and drink and got the Durga puja performed regularly. His son and his successor Rudra Singha (1696-1714 CE) were extremely generous towards the Vaisnava as well as the followers of Śaiva and Śākta cults.⁶⁹ Rudra Singha perhaps the greatest king of the Ahom rulers was no doubt temperamentally a Śākta. He made up his mind to embrace formally Śaktism. He therefore sent men to Bengal for Krishnaram Bhattacharya, a famous Śākta Guru of that time, living in Nadiya.⁷⁰ It is here to be noted one important point that it is certainly not that at that time competent and saintly Śākta Guru was not available in Assam. Certainly Rudra Singha, being a great monarch, only to keep up his superiority complex, did not like to take *sarana* from any Assamese Śākta Pandit, who was nothing but a mere subject of his.⁷¹ A great scholar Krsnaram Bhattacharyya Nyayavagisa was brought from Santipur of the Krsnanagar district of Bengal. The appearance of the Nyayavagisa could not impress the monarch and hence the question of initiation was ruled out, but his son and successor Siba Singha and his consort Phuleswari took initiation and became staunch followers of the Śākta cult.⁷² The neophyte king provided the spiritual master with all the facilities and a proper dwelling on the top of the Kāmākhyā hill and the Śākta abbot came to be known as *Parbatiya Gossain*. *Asomar Padya Buranji* says that, along with Siba Singha, his other brothers and many Brahmins and Ahom people also became the disciples of this Śākta Pandit. Most probably, except Rajeswar Singha and Lakshmi Singha, other two brothers of Pramatta Singha and Mohanmala Gohain took *sarana* with their eldest brother. To speak the truth, during the so-called rule of Siba Singha, Śaktism, under the royal patronage, reached its highest climax. He granted land to the priest of Kāmākhyā and Ugratara temples, constructed the Dirgheswari temple, and built its door.⁷³

When he ascended the throne, after that the Brahmins and the astrologers foretold the king's degree of fate, according to which very bad days would be drawing near him and his power also would come to an end shortly. On hearing this, Siba Singha, who was temperamentally religious and naturally weak, as advised by his religious preceptor⁷⁴ handed over the ruling rod to his queen Phuleswari. Siba Singha had three wives-Phuleswari, Ambika Devī and Sarbeswari who were married respectively, one after the death of the other, and all of them were devout Śāktas. Having had the power, Phuleswari wanted to spread Śaktism amongst all, and indirectly perhaps, to oppress those who were anti-Śāktas. With that purpose, she made the Moamaria

Mahantas of Vaisnava persuasion, present at a Durga-puja festival, performed with great pomp and splendor under royal patronage, where at the Mahantas were at only compelled to bow down their heads before the Goddess, but also to have *tilaka* marks of vermilion, red sandal and blood of sacrificed animals and to take the *nirmalya* and *prasada* of the *Devī* as described in the Buranji literature. The Mahantas felt insulted by such an act of Phuleswari which later on during the time of Lakshmi Singha became a cause of the rebellion of the Moamarias in history and the rebellion partly brought the Ahom towards the decline of their power. Phuleswari also constructed the Gaurisagara tank (1734 CE) bearing the name of Gauri, i.e., Goddess Durga, and three temples on its bank respectively of *Devī*, Śiva and Visnu.⁷⁵ On Phuleswari's premature death Ambika, sister of Phuleswari assumed the regal power and constructed the tank Śiva sagar and the temples of *Devī*, Śiva and Visnu on its bank.⁷⁶

Over and above it is clear that Siba Singha and his wives were followers of Śaktism and they tried to spread the same in many ways. Siba Singha granted lands to Brahmins, erected numerous temples and made arrangements for their support, wrote some Śākta books, and even he himself composed some Śākta Verses.

Pramatta Singha (1744-51 CE) who was the successor of Siba Singha also excavated the Durgasarovara tank at the foot of the Nilacala hill at Guwahati,⁷⁷ Kāmākhyā temple of Silghat and Durga temple of Hatimura hill, Kaliabar. Rajeswar Singha (1751-69 CE), successor of Pramatta Singha offered a silver umbrella for the Dirgheswari temple, constructed the *Natamandira* Kāmākhyā temple and granted land and servitors for the Dirgheswari temple. Lakshmi Singha (1769-80) took *sarana* from one Śākta Guru imported from Bengal by the king himself. According to *Padya Buranji*, the name of Śākta Guru was Ramananda Acharya. Becoming the disciple of this Acharya, Lakshmi Singha gave sufficient lands and wealth and established him, since then he and his successors were known as Na-Gosains, besides which *Padya-Buranji*⁷⁸ called them Pahumariya Gosains.

Gaurinath Singha (1780-95 CE) who had initiation from another Pahumariya Gosain named Gangadhara granted lands for the Bhuvaneswari temple, Guwahati and the Durga temple of Marangi.⁷⁹ Gaurinath is described as a devotee of Kāmākhyā.⁸⁰ About Guru of the last three kings of the Ahom dynasty viz. Kamaleswar Singha (1795-1810 CE), Chandra Kanta Singha (1810-1818 CE and 1819-1826 CE) and

Purandar Singha (1818-1819 CE) nothing definite is recorded. Kamaleswar Singha constructed temple of Mangal Caṇḍīka, Śiva as well as Visnu on the Chatrakara hill of Guwahati.⁸¹ It is stated in the *Padya Buranji* that one Phukan, in obedience to the order of King Kamaleswar Singha and his minister, built one temple at Kāmākhyā which gives us scope to think that the king was a Śākta. Again in the same *Padya Buranji* says that Rajmao, the mother of Chandrakanta Singha praised the glory of Lord Krsna before her son, as a result of which the later accepted Krsna as his God. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the power of king's was in a state of decadence, the spread of Vaisnavite belief began in Ahom Empire. So in the later part of the Ahom rule i.e., from the first part of nineteenth century Vaisnava faith grown in ground and might have influenced the kings and the subject for which Śaktism began to grow weaker and weaker by the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The Koch kings ruled over the Western part of ancient Kāmarūpa from the early part of the sixteenth century were Śāktas and patrons of Brahmanical religion. Edward Gait and S.K. Chatterjee⁸² are of the opinion that Biswa Singha (1515-1540 CE), first king of Koch dynasty, was a worshipper of Śiva and Durga. The following points gleaned from the *Darrang Rajvamsavali* should duly warrant that Biswa Singha and his successors were great devotees of the mother Goddess: i) Even as a child Biswa Singha along with his fellow cowherds, used to worship Goddess Durga by decapitating grasshoppers in the name of offering sacrifices.⁸³ ii) In the very initial posture against the ruling Bhuyan chiefs he had some set-back due to forgetting the favours of Durga, but could ultimately succeed in receiving the favour of the Goddess. Biswa Singha found a ten- handed image of Durga in an out of the way place, brought the same to his residence and worshipped her with animal sacrifices. He ascended the throne formally with silent prayers to Śiva and Durga. As a king he had the habit of daily offering puja to the Goddess according to Brahmanical procedure, and he received in a dream instructions to marry from Goddess Kali. iii) Biswa Singha's successor Naranarayana (1540-84) in the very beginning of his career built a temple and installed therein the idol of Goddess Trisula *Devī*, who was identical with Caṇḍī. iv) Naranarayana and his brother Chilaraya visited the Nilacala hill and found there the remains of a destroyed temple. They proposed to reconstruct the temple but before doing so Chilaraya set out in an expedition against the Gauda kingdom. They rebuild the Kāmākhyā temple in 1565 CE and the same fact stands

corroborated by two inscriptions containing three beautiful Sanskrit verses in all.⁸⁴ At the ceremony of dedicating the temple, where Naranarayan and his able brother Chilaray were present, as stated in *Darrang Rajvamsavali*, one lac of sacrifices consisting of buffaloes, he-goats, pigeons etc. were offered to Goddess Kāmākhyā. In this connection, Sir Edward Gait made this statement “When the new temple of Kāmākhyā was opened, the occasion was celebrated by the immolation of less than a hundred and forty men, whose hands were offered to the Goddess on salver made of copper”.⁸⁵ This is a serious mistake made in rendering the meaning of a verse of *Darrang Rajvamsavali*. The verse meant that the king dedicated 140 paiks for service to the temple, by means of a copper-plate grant.

From the Charitputhi it is known that Parikshit narayan, who was the son of Raghudev and grandson of Chilaray was an ardent supporter of Durga-worship with offering sacrifice. He, once in fit of rage exiled Damodardeva, a veteran Vaisnava and religious preceptor, who at any cost was not willing to worship Durga. Traditionally it is known that the descendents of Naranarayan were also worshipper of *Devī*.

Like the Ahom empire, during the first half of the eighteenth century Śāktism reached its zenith, so also in Koch empire the glory of the same cult spread to the greatest extent during the reign of Biswa Singha and Naranarayan, special mentionable characteristic found in the nature of the Koch kings was that, they being themselves Śāktas, were liberal to the spread of other sects also. Sankaradeva, Madhavdeva and Damodardeva, great religious preachers, being unable to stay in Ahom kingdom, ultimately resided and tried to preach Vaisnavism in Koch kingdom. These three saints went to Koch Behar where they received of the hospitality of the Koch kings and lived there till they breathed their last. From the beginning of the sixteen to the first part of the seventeenth century, the current of Śāktism flooded the Koch Empire for which he said Vaisnava Gurus could not increase the number of their disciple’s upto their satisfaction.

***Devī* Worship in Assam in Her Various Forms**

Woman is the mother of the three worlds, the representative of the three worlds, the container of the three worlds and body of the three worlds. Whether the form is male or female, all the best forms are those of woman. All the beauty the world contains is created by woman. There is no friend better than a woman, no way better than a

woman, no luck better than a woman, no kingdom better than a woman, no *tapas* better than a woman, no *tirtha* better than a woman, no yoga better than a woman.⁸⁶

The Gods most frequently worshipped in Brahmanical religion are Śiva and several manifestations of Vishnu. Numerous sects have developed around these male deities, stressing different styles of devotion. Equal importance is given to the Great Goddess who takes many forms, both benign and malevolent. As Saraswati she is the symbol of learning and culture. In her manifestation as Lakshmi she represents good fortune, wealth and luxury. When she is Kali or Durga, people both fear and respect her. In this aspect she is capable of great vengeance against those who would cross her. Kali demands blood sacrifices to symbolize her strength as the arch enemy of the demons. As Sitala the Goddess is able to either cause or cure diseases, particularly smallpox and cholera. Then there are many small *gram Devīs* (Village Goddesses) found in most Indian villages. Here the Goddess is mother of her people, protecting them from enemies and natural disasters.

In the “*Devīmahatmya*” chapter of the *Markendeya Purana*,⁸⁷ the *Devatas* in their Prasasti to *Devī*, uttered that *Devī* is Gauri, Jagadjanani, Bishnumaya, Chetana, Bhudhi, Nidra, Khddha, Chaya, Śakti, Trisna, Lajjya, Santi, Mother, Brahmi, Bhranti, Kanti, Lakhi, Bhritti, Smriti, Daya, Tusti, Sraddha etc. which identify all qualities that are imbibed within men, and by acquiring these within men can attain the position of a *Devī* or Supreme power or knowledge by the exercise of *Yoga-Sadhana* or kundalini Śakti. The *Yoginī Tantra* states that *Devī* killed Canda and Munda, so *Devī* came to be known as Caṇḍī and Cāmuṇḍā. The *Markendeya Purana* refers to Ambika as Kaumararupini.⁸⁸ Vaisnavirupini, Narayani, Maheswari and Katyayani, Bhadrakali, Bhayahari etc. This identifies that Śakti is one but she manifested herself in Sashtra (Hundreds of) forms.⁸⁹

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. Sometimes thirteen, or more often eighteen, Mahavidya goddesses are also mentioned. Dasamahavidyas are Tantric Goddesses. 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 Śiva and Sati, she wanted to go there without an invitation. Śiva forbade her and at this Sati became ferocious and angry. At the sight of her anger, Śiva became perplexed and wanted to flee hither and thither. Then Sati expressed herself in ten images in ten directions. Śiva was perplexed and accorded permission to go to Daksa's place.⁹⁰

The ten Mahavidyas are Kali, Tara, Sodasi, Bhuvanewari, Bhairavi, Cinnamasta, Dhumavati, Bagala, Matangi and Kamala. David Kinsley is of the opinion that the Mahavidyas emerged about a millennium ago. However some Goddesses like Kali have significant early and independent footing. The ten forms, while lacking any obvious internal coherence, are overlapping embodiments of the great Goddess (*Maha Devī*) representing many of her paradoxical aspects-benign and horrific, creative and destructive.

In Assam Goddess Kāmākhya is being the most famous deity worshipped in the Kāmākhya *pītha* had been widely worshipped since the distant past. Naraka, procreator of Aryan culture in Pragjyotispur followed the advice of Vishnu to worship the Goddess Kāmākhya, the presiding deity.

Svaparvate kamarupe sirang tabang tista putrak ||
MahaDevī mahamayang jagannatarambikam |
Kāmākhyaṅ tabang bina putra nanadevang jajishyasi ||
Itu anyama tabang biharan gaprano bhavishyasi |
Tasmannarak jatnen samayang proti palay ||⁹¹

(This means Vishnu advised to Naraka to reside in the *kama parvat* and worship not other than the Maharupini Goddess Kāmākhya. If Naraka do not follow his advice then Naraka would die. Hence he must follow his advice.)

The Śakti cult in Assam took its headway centering round the Kāmākhya *pītha*. The *Dhyanas* of Kāmākhya evidenced the worship of the Goddess and the rituals related to Her worship. There is also evidence regarding the worship of Goddess Kāmākhya by the Koch kings. Biswa Singha, Naranarayan and his brother Chilarai were the follower of Śaktism and worshipped Goddess Kāmākhya. They also reconstructed the

Kāmākhyā temple. Ahom king Rudra Singha, Siba Singha and Rajeswar Singha were also worshipped Goddess Kāmākhyā.

Not only today but in ancient Assam also, besides Kāmākhyā, the Śakti had been worshipped in many of her manifestations. The widely known among them are Dasabhuja Durga, Sodashbhuja Durga, Ugratara, Ugracanda, Jayanti, Kausiki, Kamesvari, Śivaduti, Tripura Bhairabi, 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 ancient time. The Goddess has various forms such as Dasabhuja Durga. Dasabhuja Durga is born out of the energy of all gods in a mysterious way. The Goddess Durga with a view to destroy Mahisasura, she is told in the *Devī-Mahatmya* or *Caṇḍī-khanda* of the *Markendeya Purana*, the ultimate Reality- the living spirit of both substantial and unsubstantial things of the universe, the cause of both liberation and bondage and the source from which even Brahma, Visnu and Maheswara also are born.⁹²

Malladev alias Naranarayan, the Koch king was the follower of both Śaiva and Śākta cult. His father Biswa singha was the worshipper of Goddess Durga. In his young age while grazing cattle worshipped Goddess Durga by offering sacrifice of a grass-hopper “foring”. *Darrang Rajvamsavali* stated:

Eka dina sarat kalia samayat |
Goruk sariya fure pakhia banat ||
Durgak pujibe proti korileka mana |
Gurakhiya sokolak bulila bachan ||
Suno gorokhiya sava muro agya dhara |
Foringa dhoriya aani diuk sattar ||
Durgak pujibe mural age bhakti bhava |
Puja kori namaskar karu taan pave ||
Parvati badati putra loiu ishta bar |
Tonyi raja hoiyu ayhi sansar bhitor ||⁹³

Biswa Singha worshipped the image of Dasabhuja Durga by offering various gift and sacrifices. He got this image from the side of a hill. In this regard the *Darrang Rajvamsavali* stated thus:

Namo namo mahagauri Namō Devī sakambhari
Tumi durga samastare mata |
Namo namo katyayani namo chandi trinayani
Sevak janak bardata |
Namo namo maheswari saraswati vidyadhari
Tumi pokshi jagat janani |
Uma sarangini medha indrani iswari svadha
Das buli rakha narayani ||⁹⁴

Sukladhvaj alias Chilarai when became captive in the hands of Gauda *raja*, he did not get any idea to release from there. So he worshipped Goddess Durga which had been mentioned in the *Darrang Rajvamsavali* in this way:

Bule marti bhagavati jagat janani |
Patit pavani bhava bhaya binashini ||
Mahish mardini namo subha binashini |
Namo devamata namo durgati tarini ||
Nilakut nibasini namo kameswari |
Devatak rakhi aasa asur sanhari ||⁹⁵

Thus it can be said that Biswa Singha (15h Century CE), Narayaran and Chilarai (16th Century CE) was also a worshipper of Śaktism. Since their time Durga puja had been gained its popularity.

Buranjis say that Ahom king Pratap Singha imported clay images of Durga from Bengal and celebrated Durga Puja. Ahom king Gadadhar Singha was also a follower of Śākta cult. Edward Gait stated that “He was a patron of Śākta Hinduism”⁹⁶ His son Rudra Sigha was both follower of Śaiva and Śākta cult. In one of his copper plate he ascribed both Gauri and Durga in this way-

*Param prasanda pratap tapan dalit praval ripu potol nikhilasal
Pal mouli mala bilashi....manorath puran kalpa padap hara
Gauri padar vinda makaranda modhukar saradindu sundar kirti nikar
Sri sri swarganarayan maharajadhiraj rudrasingha devang samprathardaya...l*⁹⁷

Rudra Singha was a staunch follower of Durga. According to Gait, he was a patron of Śākta Cult.⁹⁸ He celebrated Durga puja through royal support. Like his father Siba Singha also worshipped Durga and donated lands for the *Devī* temples. During his time also Durga puja was observed by making images of Durga.

One of the most furious forms of *Devī* was no doubt Kali. The *Mahanirvana Tantra* ascribes her as the progenitor including animate and inanimate object. According to the Śākta Cult, Goddess Kali is worshipped in the new moon night in autumn. Kali is the consort of Mahakala, the Eternal Time. She represents Śakti, the Primordial Energy which is the cause of all creation and destruction of all objects of the universe, animate and inanimate.⁹⁹ *Tantrasara* quotes the *dhyana* (meditation form) of the Goddess Kali from *Siddheswari Tantra*. It seems to be much more dreadful than the Puranic description.

*Savarudhan mahabhiman ghoradramstam varapradan
Hasyayuktam trnetranca kapalakartrakakaram
Muktakesim lolajihvam vipantim rudhiram muluh.*

Here the Goddess is found standing on a corpse (*sava*) and drinking blood with her lolling tongue. Bhadrakali is another form of the Goddess, is much fiercer in appearance and attributes as portrayed in the *Tantra-sara* and *Saradatilaka Tantra*. One of the *dhyanas* is as such:

*Ksutksama kotaraksi masimalinamukhi muktaessi rudanti
Mahan trpta vadanti jagadakhilam grasamekam karomi
Caturvayuka Devīn varabhayakaram smaret*¹⁰⁰

Cāmundā kali is one of the most furious forms of *Devī*. With four arms, she has very 'thin and hungry looks', long and emaciated limbs, long teeth, large ears and face, and red-shot eyes. She puts on tiger hide only, with a garland of human skulls added

to it. Sitting on a skeleton, she produces furious sounds. It may be noted in this connection that there is a wonderfully chiseled stone Cāmundā in front of one of the minor temples on the Nîlâchala (Kâmâkhyâ) that should not escape the eye of the archaeologist.

The worship of Daksina Kali was also prevalent in Assam since ancient times is also evidenced by the various Kali temple spread throughout the state again which gives ample proof of the wide-spread worship. Daksina Kali is specifically worshipped when there breaks out epidemic like Cholera to get rid of the panic caused by that disease.

In the *Kâlikâ Purâna*.¹⁰¹ mention is made about the two manifestations of Mahamaya-Bhadrakali or Sodasabhujâ *Devî* and Ugracanda. The said Purana mentioned that the Adya Śakti Mahamaya had assumed two forms Viz. Ugracanda and Bhadrakali before she assumed the form Dasabhujâ Durgâ. *Devî* Mahamaya in her first form as Ugracanda slew Mahisasura, in her second creation as she slew Mahisasura as Bhadrakali and in her third creation she slew the same demon by assuming Durgâ *Devî*. It is explained in the *Dhyana* that Bhadrakali is sixteen handed, three-eyed and lion supported. Complexion of the Goddess is like that of Atasi flower colour (atasipuspavarnabha), head is adorned with a diadem and a digit of the moon and the neck with a string of gold along with a serpent etc.¹⁰² Ugracanda as described in the same Purana is also eighteen handed, three eyed and lion supported. Her complexion is like melting collyrium; face is terrible and hangs a garland of human heads around her neck etc. From the description of the above mentioned *Devîs* in the *Dhyanas*, it can be said that in the ancient period these two *Devîs* Viz. Bhadrakali and Ugracanda were worshipped in Kâmarûpa.

Ugratara is another manifestation of *Devî* and her worship was prevalent in Assam since ancient times. There is information about the curse of Basistha on Ugratara for which the Goddess had been worshipped through the *Vamacara* mode of Tantricism. There is also one temple of Ugratara at the heart of Guwahati city. From the Puranic tradition it is known that in that place where the temple of Ugratara is situated, there had fallen the naval part of Sati. As this *Devî* saves her devotees from terrible fear, she is called Ugratara.¹⁰³ She is four handed, black in complexion, clad in tiger skin

and terrible faced. Her neck is adorned with a string of human heads and breast with a serpent etc.

The *Devī* has other manifestations including the ten mahavidyas as discussed earlier. Of the various forms of *Devī*, Dikkaravasini deserves particular notice. Dikkaravasini is the presiding deity of the river Dikkara (Deopani) in the present day Arunachal. The Goddess has two aspects, Tiksnakanta and Lalitakanta. In the first, she is dread Goddess, relishing wine and human flesh. It is perhaps Tiksnakanta Dikkaravasini, who came to be later known as Tamreswari of *Tamar Mai* and *Kecaikhaiti*, the raw flesh-eater. Hence this description can be found in the *Kālikā Purāna* as:

Pithe dikkara vasinya dvirupa ramate Śiva |
Tiksnaklanta habaya tveka yugratara pratirtita ||
Para lalit kantakhya ya shri mangal chandika ||
Tasyasto satatang rupang tiksnakantihvayang nripa |
*Krishna lambodari ya tu sa syadekjata Śiva |*¹⁰⁴

(In the *pītha* of Dikkaravasini Śiva alias Parvati or Durga resided as Tiksanakanta and Ugratara- in both of these form the Goddess resided. Lalitakanta was the name of Mangalchandika and Tiksnakanta. Tiksnakanta is black in complexion, lambodari and ekjatta)

There is similiarity between the procedure of worship of Goddess Kāmākhya and Tamreswari. The Goddess Tamreswari is the same Goddess Dikkaravasini as mentioned in *Yoginī Tantra*. *Yoginī Tantra* stated thus:

*Nivasatyang pratyaksya jatra dikkaravasini |*¹⁰⁵

This Dikkaravasini or Tamreswari had been worshipped since early period in a temple at Sadiya. The Goddess had been later come to be popularly known as *Kechaikhaiti* or eater of raw flesh. Chronicles provide information about the worship of this Goddess by the Chutiya people. They offered animal sacrifices to the Goddess. According to saome scholars there was a tradition to offer human sacrifice to the Goddess. There might be the possibility of the name of Goddess *Kechaikhaiti* become prominent. Still the temple of Tamreswari is at Sadiya. So it seems that this Goddess has been worshipped by the people till today.

The *Vidhi* given in the *Kālikā Purāna*¹⁰⁶ states that Tripura *Devī* and Kameswari-the former, an aspect of Goddess Kāmākhya and the latter an aspect of *Devī* Mahamaya, were worshipped systematically in ancient Assam. The *Kālikā Purāna* stated three aspects of Goddess Tripura with three different *Dhyana* having only a little difference in fundamental points. The three different aspects are- the first one is “bāghbhana”, the second one is “kânarājaka” and the third one is “dāmaram mohanañca”. According to the process, given, the devotee is to hear the three aspects in his mind and finally unite them in to one mentally. In the *Dhyana*, it is states that the Goddess Kameswarī is six-handed, twelve-handed and eighteen-eyed. Her complexion resembles melting collyrium, and hair is black and glossy etc.¹⁰⁷

Another lovable form of *Devī* is Kauśikī, who is supposed to have come out of her very essence. There is nobody, it is asserted, in the world that can excel Kauśikī in point of beauty.¹⁰⁸ The Goddess was supposed to occupy a place in the religious domain of Assam in by gone days, but not today. The Gods being greatly tormented by two mighty demons, Śumbha and Niśumbha, most humbly propitiated *Devī* Mahāmāyā uttering eulogies, as a result of which Mahamaya appeared in the form of Parvati, out of whose body another Goddess, named Kauśikī came out.¹⁰⁹ The ten handed Goddess sits on a tiger hide, mounted on a lion, and spells out her charm on both gods and demons.

It is stated in the *Kālikā Purāna*¹¹⁰ that the Goddess Śivadūtī is born out of the body of Sri Hari, while meditating the name of Kauśikī. But it is stated in the *Caṇḍī* that the Goddess was born out of the body of Caṇḍikā. The Goddess was so named as she sent Śiva as her messenger to Śumbha and Niśumbha. The four-armed Śivadūtī has an extraordinarily large body of the colour of vermilion, even her teeth being ever red. She has a heavy body and large lips too. Resting her left foot on a jackal, she is surrounded by a flock of foxes.

These are the different manifestations of *Devī* approved in the canonical Tantric literatures and various Puranas. Besides these there are numerous local forms of the Goddess obtaining in different localities, all going by local names. Jayanti, Annapurna, Dipteswari, Byagheswari, Dirgheswari, Bhairavi, Smasana Kali, Tara, Mangala Caṇḍī, Caṇḍī and Jagaddhatri - all these Goddesses are known to have been worshipped in Assam since old days till to-day. The worship of Tara and Smasana

Kali is not so common in Assam, but it is performed occasionally. *Devī* Mangal Candī is being worshipped from ancient times in Assam. *Devī* Candī and Jagadhâtrī worship is also prevalent till today.

There is a temple of *Devī* Jayantī in the Jayantia village near Rangia. The Ahom king Siba Singha granted land and money to this temple. It is stated in the *Kālikā Purana*¹¹¹ that Jayantī is one of the Nava-Durgās. Annapurana, the Goddess of food (*Anna*) has been worshipped in Assam as one of the important and powerful deities. Goddess Dipteswari is worshipped in the famous Dipteswari temple of Rangia in the Kamrup district. There are two temples of Byagheswari- one at Adabari, a village and the other at Bangaigaon in Goalpara district. The *Dhyana* of Byagheswari is the same as that of Jagadhatri. Dirgheswari as stated in the *Kālikā Purāna* is one of the *Astayoginis* of Kāmākhyā. Perhaps gradually in the later period of time, it became one of the famous manifestations Śakti, and has been worshipped in some places. Goddess Durga in the name of Dirgheswari is being worshipped in the temple of Dirgheswari.¹¹²

Another manifestation of the Goddess is Bhairavī. This Goddess had been worshipped in the ancient period by daughter of the famous ruler of Sonitpur called Bana. This temple is known as Bhairavī temple and still regular worship is done in this temple. In the later part of this chapter it will be discussed elaborately about the tradition of this temple and the royal patronage.

Another form of *Devī* is Sitalā, who is believed to be a Goddess of pestilence. This Goddess can mitigate the suffering of or save from dreadful pestilence diseases like small-pox, measles and chicken pox. All these pestilence diseases are known in Assamese as *Āi*. This Goddess had been worshipped in the early period and even today when the disease break out people worshipped the deity. Sitala is propitiated according to the principle of both Sastras and traditional usage. The worship of Sitala will be discussed in the next chapter.

Another Goddess known as Manasa, the serpent and pestilence Goddess is worshipped now a days in Kamrupa, Goalpara and also in some parts of Mangaldoi sub-division of Assam. According to *Manasa Kavya* which deals with the birth of Goddess manasa and the nature of her worship, which was composed by two eminent poets-Mankar and Durgavara in the early part of the sixteen century, Manasa cult was

prevalent in some form or other at least sometime earlier than the *Kavyas* were composed to eulogise her deeds and power. According to some scholars, manasa worship entered Assam from east Bengal due to Muhammedan invasions from thirteen century onwards. Another two popular Goddesses in Assam are Lakshmi and Saraswati. Lakshmi, the Goddess of fortune and Saraswati, the Goddess of learning are two Vedic Goddesses widely worshipped in Assam. Rituals associated to Manasa worship will be discussed in the next chapter.

Śākta Pīthas

Pīthas are the places of the abode of the Goddesses. There are legends regarding the origin of the pīthas. One legend gives the mythological explanation of the origin of the pīthas. This legend had been traced back to the *Mahabharata* period which has been developed into the well known Daksa-yajna story. The same story has been slightly in modified form found in many of the Puranas (*Matsya*, ch.12; *Padma*, *Srstikhanda*, ch.5; *Kurma*, I, ch. 15; *Brahmanda*, ch.31, etc.) as well as in Kalidasas *Kumarsambhava* (I, 21).¹¹³ “According to this modified version of the legend, the Goddess who was the spouse of Śiva, was in the form of Sati, daughter of Prajapati Daksa. Daksa was celebrating a great sacrifice where he did not invite Śiva and his daughter Sati. Sati being uninvited went to Daksa’s sacrifice but she was insulted by her father. As a result of this ill-treatment Sati died of a broken heart or by *yoga* or as Kalidasa says Sati puts herself into fire and perished.”¹¹⁴

The legend of the origin of Śākta *Pīthas* is thus-

There is a legend offering a mythological explanation of the origin of the pīthas. According to *Kālikā Purāna*, lord Śiva was not interested in worldly activities. Brahma, the creator was afraid that if Śiva did not marry, then the whole process would come to a halt. So he engaged Kamadeva, the God of love to enchant Śiva . By doing so this Brahma wanted to convince Śiva to marry which would ultimately help in the process of creation. Brahma wanted to make the Primal Energy to be the wife of Śiva. So she told Daksa to worship the mother goddess so that she was born as the daughter of Daksa. At the advice of Brahma, Daksa worshipped the mother goddess for about three thousand years. Being satisfied the Goddess told Daksa that she would take birth as Daksa’s daughter and also marry Śiva. But at the same time, she warned

Daksa that if she was neglected by Daksa, she would abandon her life.¹¹⁵ According to her promise, the mother Goddess took birth as the daughter of Daksa. In her youth she worshipped Śiva to get her husband. Satisfied with her worship Śiva married her and both of them began to stay at the Himalayas. It is mentioned in the *Kālikā Purāna* that in the ancient period, Brahma along with the other kings of that period organized a great sacrifice. On this occasion people from everywhere came to participated and take their respected seats. Daksa, the son of Brahma also arrived there. At the time of his arrival, those who were present there stand up and showed respect and honour to the king Daksa except Śiva. Being very dissatisfied with Śiva, Daksa wanted to punish and insult him. Then Daksa decided to perform a sacrifice without giving invitation to Śiva and Sati, his daughter. Daksa did the same and excluded Śiva and Sati from the sacrifice. But when Sati heard about the sacrifice and came to know that they were not invited by her father, she went to the sacrifice alone. But she was insulted by her father saying her that ill of Śiva as Kapalika. Daksa mentioned that Sati was merely the Kapalika's wife. Being neglected by her father Sati abandoned her life at the sacrificial fire.¹¹⁶

When Śiva heard about the sudden death of his wife Sati, he became very angry and went to Daksa's house with his follower Birabhadra to destroy the sacrifice. Śiva destroyed the whole sacrifice and also beheaded Daksa there. But at the request of Daksa's wife Birini, Śiva transposed the head of a goat to Daksa's body. With heavy panic Śiva took the dead body of Sati on his soldier and started his journey towards the east. Seeing the anger of Śiva, Brahma, Vishnu and Sani entered into the dead body of Sati. Vishnu started to cut the different parts of the dead body with his Chakra. The parts of the deadbody of Sati, a human incarnation of the mother Goddess fell into fifty one places. At each place, there emerged a *Śaktipītha*, a shrine of Śakti, alongwith a *linga*, the phallic representation of Śiva.¹¹⁷

“The idea of the *pītha* associated with certain limbs of the mother-Goddess seems to be essentially connected with that of the Linga or phallus. Some of the early Tantras refer to four *pīthas*. This *catuspītha* conception may have been associated with a conception of the *Sahajayāna* School of the Buddhist according to which one can rise to eternal bliss from sexual pleasure. A *Sahajayāna* text entitled *Catuspīthatantra* and its commentaries speak of the four *pīthas* as *Ātmapītha*, *Parapītha*, *Yogapītha* and *Guhyapītha* and deal with the various kinds of Vajrasattva's intercourse with the

Yoginis, such as *Prajñāpāramita* and others. This philosophical concept of the *Catuspītha* was either the cause or effect of the early recognition of four holy places as *pīthas*.”¹¹⁸

The Tantras and Puranas refer to *pīthas* in various places of ancient India. Many of them had already been destroyed and many still exist as living faith. The *Hevajra tantra*, a Buddhist work mentioned four *pīthas* namely Jalandhara, Odiyana, Purnagiri and Kāmarūpa. All belonged to Śakti *pīthas*. *Sadhanamala*, another Buddhist work mentions four sacred places- Odiyana, Purnagiri, Kāmarūpa and Srikatta. Abul Fazal’s *Ain-i-Akbari* mentions Kāmarūpa as one of the four important *pīthas*. Different traditions put forward different different views regarding the number of *pīthas*. Historians are also not unanimous about the exact number of the seats of the mother Goddess. The *Kālikā Purāna* mentions also followed the tradition of four pithas but in a different section in the same Purana mentioned seven *pīthas*. The seven *pīthas* were- Devīkuta, Udiyana, Kamagiri (Kāmarūpa), Dikkaravasini, Purnagiri and Lalitakanta. The *Rudrayamala* (earlier than 1052 CE) mentions 10 holy *pīthas*, including Kāmarūpa. The *Kularnava Tantra* listed 18 *Pīthas*, excluding Kāmarūpa. The *Kubjika Tantra* (supposed to be a fairly early work) refers to 42 *pīthas*. A different section of the *Jananarnava Tantra* recognized 50 Śākta *pīthas* of India in which Kāmarūpa was mentioned as an important *pītha*. In the *Matsya Purana* (Ch-13), for the first time, a list of 108 names of the Mother Goddess with the specification of her association with particular holy places is to be found. In the list of the *pīthas*, the *Pīthanirnaya* (17th century) mentioned 108 names of Mother Goddess or *Devī Pīthas* without mentioning the particular limbs of Goddess (Sati).¹¹⁹

The tradition of number of fifty one Śākta *pīthas* is well known and it has been mentioned by all the scholars who have written on the subject. The number of 50 or 51 Śākta *pīthas* has been mentioned in the texts *Jnanarnava Tantra*, *Devībhagavatapurana*, the *Shivacharita*, *Tantrasara*, *Pithanirnaya* and the *Pranatoshini Tantra*.¹²⁰ In the following three tables regarding the tradition of the number of *pīthas* as mentioned by *Tantrasara* has been listed out- 4, 10 and 51.¹²¹

Table 1

<i>Pītha</i>	<i>Chakra</i>	<i>Bhairava</i>	<i>Bhairabi</i>	<i>Anga-pratyanga</i>
1. Kamagiri	Agni	Mitrishanatha	Kameshvari= Rudratmashakti	Muladhara (base of the spinal column)
2. Jalandhara	Surya	Shashthinatha	Vajreshvari= Vishnavatmashakti	Hridaya (heart)
3. Purnagiri	Soma	Uddishanatha	BhagamaliniDevī= Brahmatmashakti	Lalata (forehead)
4. Uddiyana	Parambhrasma	Shricharyanatha	Mahatripurasundari= Brahmatmashakti	Brahmarandhara (cranium)

Table 2

Name of ten Śākta *pīthas* as found in the *Rudrayamala*, a Tantra work of considerably mid 11th century CE.¹²²

<i>Pītha</i>	<i>Anga-pratyanga</i>
1. Kāmarūpa	Muladhara
2. Jalandhara	Hridaya (heart)
3. Purnagiri	Lalata (forehead)
4. Uddiyana	Brahmarandra (cranium)
5. Varanasi	Bhruvavormadhye (between the eyebrows)
6. Jvalanti	Lochantraye (in the three eye)
7. Mayavati	Mukhavritee (face)
8. Madhupuri	Kanthe (mech)
9. Ayodhya	Nabhideshe (naval)
10. Kanchi	Katya (hip)

Table 3**Fifty one Śākta pīthas**

Following list of *pīthas* is prepared as description found in the *Pīthanirnaya* (*Mahapīthanirupana*).¹²³

<i>Pītha</i>	<i>Anga-pratyanga</i>	<i>Devī</i>	<i>Bhairava</i>
1. Hingula Hingulata	Brahmarandha	Kottari Kottavi Kottarisha KottaKottarisha	Bhimalocana
2. Karavira Sarkarara	Trinetra	Mahisamardini	Krodhisha
3. Sugandha	Nashika	Sunanda Sugandha	Tryambaka
4. Kashmira	Kantha	Mahamaya	Trisandhyeshvara
5. Jvalamukhi	Jihva	Siddhida Ambika	Unmatta
6. Jalandhara	Stana	Tripuramalini tripuranashini	Bhisana Ishana
7. Vaidyanatha	Hrdaya	Jayadurga	Vaidyanatha
8. Nepala	Janu	Mahamaya	Kapali
9. Manasa	Daksina-hasta	Daksayani	Hara Hari Amara
10. Virajaksetra in Utkala	Nabhi	Vimala Vijaya	Jagannatha Jaya
11. Gandaki Gandaka	Ganda	Gandaki Caṇḍī	Cakrapani Jagannatha
12. Bahulā Bāhulā	Vama-bahu	Bahulā Bāhulā	Bhiruka Tivraka
13. Ujjayini Ujani Ujjani Urjani Urjayini	Kurpara	Mangala mangalaCaṇḍī	Kapilambara Kapileshvara
14. Cattala (Candrashekhara)	Daksina-bahu	Bhavani	Candrashekhara
15. Tripura	Daksina-pada	Tripura Tripurasundari	Nala Tripuresha Tripuraska

16. Trisrota (Sans. Trisrotas) Tirota	Vama- pada	Bhramari Ambari	Ishvara Ambara Amara
17. Kamagiri in Kāmarūpa (ten pithas were originally located here)	Mahamudra (Yoni)	Kāmākhyā	Umananda Śiva nanda Ramananda Ravananda
18. Yugadya (Ksiragrama)	Daksina- padangustha	Yugadya (Yogadya)	Ksirakhanda Ksirakantha
19. Kalipitha Kalapitha (Kalighat)	Daksina- padanguli	Kali	Nakulesha Nakulisha Nalisha
20. Prayaga	Hast-anguli	Lalita	Bhava
21. Jayanti Jayanta	Ama-jangha	Jayanti	Kramadhishvara
22. Kirita Kiritakona	Kirita	Bhuvanesi Vimala	Siddhirupa Samvarta
23. Manikarnika at Varanasi	Kundala	Visalaksi	Kala
24. Kanyasrama	Prstha Dristi	Sarvani	Nimisa
25. Kuruksetra	Daksina-gulpha	Savitri	Sthanu Snayu
26. Maniveda Manivedika Manavedaka	Manibandha	Gayatri	Sarvananda
27. Srisaila Srihatta	Griva	Mahalakshmi Mahamaya	Samvarananda Samarananda Sarvananda
28. Kanchi	Kankala	Devagarbha	Ruru
29. Kalamadhava	Nitamba	Kali	Asitanga
30. Narmada Sona Saila	Nitamba	Sona Narmada	Bhadrasena
31. Ramagiri Rajagiri Ramakini	Stana Nasa Nala	Śiva ni	Canda
32. Vrndavana (Umavana) Keshajala	Kesa	Uma Katyayani	Bhutesa Krsnanatha
33. Suci Anala	Urdhva-danta	Narayani	Samhara Samkrura

34. Pancasagara	Adhodanta	Varahi	Maharudra
35. Karatoyatata	Vama-karna Talpa Gulpha	Aparna	Vamana Vamesha
36. Sriparvata	Daksina-karna Talpa (Daksina)- gulapha	Sundari	Sundarananda Sunandananda
37. Vibhasa	Vama-gulpha	Bhimarupa Kapalini	Kapali Sarvananda
38. Prabhasa	Udara Andhra	Candrabhaga	Vakratunda
39. Bhairavaparvata Bhiruparvata	UOstha Tundardhvostha	Avanti	Lambakarna Namrakarna
40. Janasthana Jala-sthala	Civuka	Bhramari	Vikrta Vikrtaksa
41. Godavaritira	(Vama)-ganda	Vishveshi Rakini	Vishvesha Dandapani Vatsanabha
42. Ratnavali Ratnavati	Daksina-skandha	Kumari Śiva	Śiva Kumara
43. Mithila	Vama-skandha	Uma MahaDevī	Mahodara

Among the ten *pīthas* in Kāmarūpa that were omitted in the original text were as follows-

<i>Pītha</i>	<i>Anga-pratyanga</i>	<i>Devī</i>	<i>Bhairava</i>
44. Nalahati	Nala	Kali	Yogisa Yogesa
45. Kalighata (Kalipitha)	Munda	Jayadurga	Krodhisa Krodhesa
46. Vakreshvara	Manas	Mahisamardini	Vakranatha
47. Yasora	Pani	Yasoresvari	Canda Candesa
48. Attahasa	Ostha	Phullara	Visvesa
49. Nandipura	Hara	Nandini	Nandikesvara
50. Lanka	Nupura	Indraksa	Raksasesvara Nandikeshvara
51. Virata	Padanguli	Ambika	Amrta Amrtaksa

Jnanarnava Tantra gives different account regarding the number of Pithas. In one section of the same Tantra mentions eight pithas while in another section recognised its number as fifty Pithas. The recognised numbers of these fifty pithas are¹²⁴:

(1)Kāmarūpa, (2) Varanasi, (3) Nepala, (4) Paundravardhana (Mahasthan in the Bogra District, North Bengal), (5) Kashmir, (6) Kanyakubja, (7) Purasthita (v.l. Purasthita), (8) Carasthita (v.l. Candrasthira, Carasthira), (9), Purnasaila, (10) Arbuda, (11) Amratakesvara, (12) Ekamra (Bhuvaneshvar in Orissa), (13) Trisrotah (the Tista river in north-eastern India), (14) Kamakotta (v.l. ⁰Kota), (15) Kailasa, (16) Bhrgu, (17) Kedara, (18) Candrapura, (19) Sripitha (probably, Srihatta), (20) Oñkāra, (21) Jālandhara, (22) Mālava (v.l. Mānava), (23) Kulānta (v.l. Kūpānta), (24) Devakotta, (25) Gokarna, (26) Māruteśvara, (27) Attahāsa, (28) Virajā, (29) Rājagrha, (30) Kolvagiri (Kaulagiri), (31) Elāpura (Ellora), (32) Kāleśvara (v.l. Kāmeśvara), (33) Jayantikā (Jayantī), (34) Ujjayinī, (35) Ksīrikā (Ksīragrāma), (36) Hastināpura, (37) Uḍḍīśa (Orissa), (38) Prayāga, (39) Vindhya, (40) Māyāpura, (41) Jaleśvara, (Orissa) (42)Malaya, (43) Śrīsaila, (44) Merugiri, (45) Mahendra, (46) Vāmana, (47) Hiranyapura, (48) Mahālakṣmi, (49) Uḍḍiyāna, (50) Chāyāchatrapura.¹²⁵ (This passage is also found in D. C.Sircar's book *the Śākta Pītha* and he referred to other manuscripts -*Tantracūḍāmaṇi*, and in Brahmananda's *Śāktānandatarangini*). The same list of fifty above have been found in the *Tantrasara* and one *pītha* have been strangely splitted i.e. Merugiri (no. 44) into two names-Meru *Pitha* and Giri *Pitha*.

There is one more tradition which believes in the recognised number of *pīthas* as 108. This recognition has the importance in the fact that in India the sectarian worshippers often attempted to endow their deities with 108 names. Thus, it appears that according to tradition the number of Śākta *pīthas* varied from text to text. The legend of fifty one *pīthas* has been modified with the time and it has gradually increased with tradition.

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* mention 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.

*Jale Sthale kamyrupepujanachcha samang phalang*¹²⁶

This indicates` that the entire Kāmarūpa was like a temple. There was no disparity between mountains, plains, rivers, rocks, caves and trees all are sacred in Kāmarūpa. From Sadanira in the east to Goalpara in the west there were innumerable *pīthas* or temples, some of which are in living position and many were devastated. There are references to shrines or temples under the Kirata rule. The non-Aryan Kiratas worshipped Mother Goddess according to their own customs, rites and rituals. Most of these temples were destroyed by natural calamities. The *Yoginī Tantra* mentions that the original Kāmākhyā temple was destroyed by earthquake. Yet traces of the old Śakti temples are found in various places of Kāmarūpa. Of course some of them are destroyed and some are standing even today bearing the ancient glory, which enriched the Assamese culture. There are many ancient temples living with the coexistence of nature till today. The most important Śakti temples of Kāmarūpa are the Kāmākhyā, Dasamahavidya, Ugratara, Dirgheswari, Bhairabi in Tezpur, Kāmākhyā at Silghat in Nagaon, Tamreswari, Malinithan, and Tukreswari and so on.

The sacred *pīthas* of this land was recognized by socially and politically. Various tribes and communities established different temples in different places and they worshipped there on the basis of their local customs, rites and rituals but these were recorded in the literatures and they are still found in the *Pīthanirnaya*, *Kālikā Purāna*, *Jnanarnava Tantra*, *Kubjika Tantra* etc. The literatures make different list of holy *pīthas* of India from 4 to 108. But among these lists Kāmarūpa occupies a place as the famous centre of Śakti *pīthas* and one of the most important holy places in India.

Mythological evidence and literary records mentioned the story of origin of Śākta *pīthas* in India as well as in Prāggyotisa-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.

The *Kālikā Purāna* mentions the different places where the parts of Sati fallen in the following way:

Kāmrūpe kamagiru nyaptat yonimandalam |
Tatriba nyaptaddhumau purbato nabhimandalam ||
Jalandhare stanayugan svarnaharabhibhusitam |
*Ansagribhan purnagirau kamrupaotahsirah ||*¹²⁷

(The genital organ of Sati fell into the Kamaparvata in Kāmarūpa. The naval portion of Sati fell into the eastern side of Kāmarūpa. Again, the breast of Sati fell into Jalandhara. The head of Sati fell into the last part of Kāmarūpa.)

However it is to be mentioned here that the first body part of Sati fell into Devīkut as mentions in the *Kālikā Purāna* and the second body part fell into Uddiyana. The foot part of Sati's body fell into Devīkut and the thigh part of Sati's body fell into Uddiyana:

“Devīkute padajugmang pratham jagatang kshetyau |
Uddiyane churajugma hitaya jagatang tatah || ”

Klika Purana also mentions five main *Śaktipīthas* in which different parts of Sati has fallen.

“Katayani codayane Kāmākhya kamrupini |
*Purnesvari purnagirau chandi jalandhare girau || ”*¹²⁸

(These five main centres of Śāktism are Katyayini at Uddiana, Kāmākhya at kāmarūpa, Purneswari and Chandi at Jalandhara and Dikkaravasini at the eastern-most part of Kāmarūpa). Kāmākhya came to be recognized as the important *Śaktipītha* among the five main one as it is related to the genital organ of the mother Goddess.

The seventh *patala* of the *Kubjika Tantra* (*Kubjika Tantra* (Chapter VII) mentioned that among the fifty one Śākta *pīthas*, Kāmarūpa was also a great Śākta centre¹²⁹:

*Śrūyatām Sāvadhanena siddha pītham pativrate,
Yasmin Saādhanamātreṇa Sarvasiddhiśvaro bhavet
Māyāvati Madhupurī Kāsi Gorakṣakārīnī
Hingulā ca Mahāpītham tathā jālandharampunaḥ
Jvālāmukhī Mahāpītham Nagarasambhavam
Rāmagirirmahāpītham tathā Goddavarīpriye
Nepālam Karna Stūraṅce Mahākarṇam tathā priye
Ayodhyā ca Kurukṣetram Simhanādam manoramam
Mañipuram Kṛṣikeśam Prayāgaṅca tapovanam
Badari ca Mahāpītham Ambikā ardhanālakam
Triveṇī ca mahapītham Gaṅgāsagarasaṅgaman
Nārikelaṅca Virajā Uḍḍiyanam Māheśvarī
Kamala Vinalā Caiva tathā Mahiṣmatī Purī
Vārāhi Tripurā caiva Vāgmatī Nilavāhinī
Govardhanam Vindhyaḡirih Kāmarūpam kalauyuga
Ghaṅṭakarṇo hayagrivo mādhavaśca Śuresvarī
Kṣiragrāmam Vaidyanātham Jāniyāmalocane*

All the Śākta *pīthas* of Prāḡjyotisa-Kāmarūpa were connected with the legendary accounts and mythology. It is the belief of the local people and many popular legends are related to the origin of the Śākta *pīthas* in Prāḡjyotisa-Kāmarūpa by some way or the other. However one noteworthy point is that royal patronage caused the evolution of many Śākta temples in different parts of Assam to the 18th century CE. From the chronicles of Assam it is evident that especially during the Ahom period Śaktism reached its zenith and many Śākta temples were constructed.

Śakti worship developed and flourished all over Kāmarūpa after the coming of the Aryans or during the Royal dynasties on the basis of aboriginal tribal cult. Traces of Śakti cult are found in the villages among agricultural society in different form-personal, family and in the *Kulas* with the aboriginal tribal methods. The deities, in the society in common form, but confined in a particular race such Kirata *Devī*, Mikirani etc. by the matriarchal society. The Austriacs and their offshoots worshipped

the *yoni* symbol as the power of regeneration on the Nilacala hill in a cave, later known as Manobhava cave during the Tantra age. The *yoni* Goddess on the Nilacala is considered as the most ancient holy place of Prāgjyotisa-Kāmarūpa. The *yoni* Goddess developed into Mother Goddess cult of Kāmākhya after the settlement of the Aryans by Naraka.¹³⁰ The Puranas and Tantras personified the Yoni Goddess with the spouse of Śiva as Parvati, Sati, Uma etc. an imaginary composition. On the other hand, Kāmākhya was called Durga, Kali, and Bhuvaneswari etc. by the *Puranas* and the Tantras and they are already recognized by the *Mahabharata*.

The above discussion make it clear that Kāmarūpa was one of the most sacred places because the the great Goddess Kāmākhya resided there. The above discussion also pointed out that there were many Śākta *pīthas* in Assam. Though all the Śākta *pīthas* are not associated with the Sati's body part but many *pīthas* grew up due to the royal patronage. This shows the development of the cult with the patronage of the deity by the rulers of Kāmarūpa from time to time. So it is necessary to discuss and list out those Śākta *pīthas* which played an important role towards the development of the cult at different period under royal patronage upto 18th century. Following discussion will make it clear.

Kāmākhya Pītha

The land of North-East India is known as Kāmarūpa-Kāmākhya. The Puranas and Tantric literatures mentioned Kāmākhya as the famous Śākta pītha and include iconographical description and the system of worship. Kāmākhya was surrounded by Nine *pīthas* in the Nilacala Hill, hence it is called *Nava Yoni*. They are Upabithi, Bithi, Upapītha, Pītha Siddhapītha, Mantrapītha.¹³¹ The supreme Kāmākhya *pītha* (**Plate 1**) is called by the *Yoginī Tantra* as Mahogra. The *Yoginī Tantra*, refers to the origin of Kāmākhya. Mahakali said to Brahma-“*Yonimandala* originates there with my blood and flesh, where the Kesi Asura is killed. The *yoni* is the source of generation of all creatures. But the *Kālikā Purāna* also refers to the origin of Kāmākhya from the limbs of Sati. According to the *Yoginī Tantra*, *Yonimandala* is the symbol of creation and suggests Brahma to worship the *Yonimandala* and to create the Universe. On the advice of Mahakali, Brahma worshipped Kali and attained his siddhi. So Kāmākhya is a holy *pītha* not only for the people but also for the *Devatas*.¹³²

Goddess Kāmākhyā is the most dominating name in the early history of Assam. It was under her banner that the first empire in early Assam was built. The shrine of the Goddess Kāmākhyā is situated about three miles from present town of Guwahati and about fifty miles from the range of hills. The Kāmākhyā temple is situated on the Nilachala Hill. The shrine is a place of culmination of Śaktism, Tantricism, Śaivism, Tantric Buddhism and Vaisnavism. Ancient Assam was a very important seat of Śaktism. Through the ages Kāmākhyā has remained the most celebrated centre of the Śaktism cult in Assam.

The Kāmākhyā temple situated on the Nilachala or the Nilasaila Hills on the river Brahmaputra is one of the famous Śaktism temples of India. Instead of an image or iconic representation of the Goddess, prayer is offered to a *Yonimandala* of stone. Several literary works like the *Kālikā Purāna*, the *Yoginī Tantra* give different accounts of the Aryan origin of Kāmākhyā. However Banikanta Kakati and Nirmal Prabha Bordoloi mention Kāmākhyā as a non-Aryan Goddess. The temple was constructed by Koch king Biswa Singha during 1515-1540 CE. The present temple was constructed on the earlier temple by Koch King Naranarayana with the help of his brother Chilarai in 1564 CE.

According to the *Kālikā Purāna* and *Yoginī Tantra* Kamrupa remained the most suitable place for Śaktism worship from the ancient period for the practice of magic and witchcraft which were mainly practiced in the Kāmākhyā. *Kālikā Purāna* mentioned the legend related to the the origin of Goddess Kāmākhyā and Kāmākhyā *pītha* which has been discussed above.

According to the *Kālikā Purāna*, as the Goddess came to fulfill her sexual desire with Śiva in the Nilakuta Hillock, she is named as Kāmākhyā. The *Kālikā Purāna* says,

“*Kamarthamagota Yasmanamaya Sarddhan mahagirau*
Kāmākhyā procyote nilkute rahogata||”¹³³

Kālikā Purāna also mentions the other variants of the name of the Goddess Kāmākhyā as Kamada, Kamini, Kama, Kanta and Kamangadayini. In this respect, the *Kālikā Purāna* says-

“*Kamada Kamini Kama Kanta Kamangadayini*
Kamanganasini Yasmat Kāmākhyā tena cocyate||”¹³⁴

The *Kālikā Purāna*, written in the 10th century CE, also relates the story of Naraka, the mythological king of Kāmarūpa, with the Goddess Kāmākhya. According to the *Kālikā Purāna* ,

“*Rajasvala gatraya gorbhe beeryena potrinah|*
*Yato Yatastato bhuto deva putraohapi so ha surah||*¹³⁵

(Mother Earth gave birth to Naraka. He was fathered by the Boar incarnation of Visnu. The concept took place during the period of her menstruation. Therefore, he behaved like a demon)

According to the *Kālikā Purāna*, Mother Earth gave birth to Naraka at the sacrificial place of Janaka, the king of Mithila, also known as Videha. Mother earth told Janaka that he would have to take care of the son. After the birth of the son, Visnu told Mother Earth that he would be the king of Prāgjyotisapura at the age of sixteen. He again said that until he followed the human conduct he would be happy and wealthy.

King Janaka adopted the baby-boy born placing its head on a human skull in his sacrificial place. So the sage Gautama named the boy as Naraka. Mother Earth took care of the boy in disguise of a nurse named Katyayani. Sixteen years later, mother earth brought Naraka to the bank of the river Ganga from where Visnu brought of them to Prāgjyotisa and Śiva dwelt in a secret place. In Prāgjyotisa, Naraka killed Ghataka, the kirata king ruling in the region. Then Naraka started to worship Mother Kāmākhya on the advice of Visnu.

However, at the end of the *Dvapara* age, Naraka gave up the worship of Visnu and Kāmākhya as he came under the influence of Bana, the king of Sonitpura and a worshipper of Śiva. Naraka also prevented sage Vasistha to offer his prayer to the Goddess Kāmākhya.

The sage cursed Naraka that his own father would kill him very soon and until then the Goddess would disappear from the Nilachala Hills. Being frightened, Naraka worshipped Brahma who blessed him with five boons. Being empowered by Brahma, Naraka started neglecting all Brahmanical rites and took away the *kundala* (ear-rings) of Aditi, the Mother of the gods. Hearing the miseries created by Naraka, Krishna, the incarnation of Visnu at the *Dvapara* age, killed Naraka in a battle. Thus, Krishna

translated Vasistha's curse into reality. After the death of Naraka, his son Bhagadatta was enthroned by Krisna as the king of Prāgiyotisa.¹³⁶

The *Yoginī Tantra*, written in the sixteen century CE, gives a different account about the origin of Kāmākhyā. According to the fifteenth *Patala* (Chapter) of the *Yoginī Tantra*, *Devī* asked Maheswara about Kāmākhyā and Maheswara answered in the following way.

“*Ya Kali parama vidya Brahmarupa sanatani|
Kāmākhyā Saibe dibesi Sarbasiddhibinodini||*”¹³⁷

(Supreme Goddess Kāmākhyā is not different from Kali)

According to the *Yoginī Tantra*, Brahma after creating the Universe became arrogated at his Creation. The goddess then created a fearsome Demon called Kesi from the pride of Brahma. The Demon Kesi tried to swallow Brahma as son as he was born. The Demon Kesi also built a city named Kesipura and started to harass the people of the three worlds. Finding no way of rescue, both Brahma and Visnu started to pray the Goddess Kali. Kali asked Brahma to create a hill from the ashes of Kesi. She asked Brahma to do so, so that he can free himself from his sin of taking pride in his creation.

Kali, or Kāmākhyā, killed the Demon Kesi at the request of both Brahma and Visnu. Goddess Kali told Brahma that in the spot where Brahma and Visnu prayed her to kill the Demon Kesi, would emerge a *Yonimandala* (*yoni* circle). This *Yonimandala* would emerge for the welfare of Brahma and the whole world. The entire region would be known as Kāmarūpa.¹³⁸

The literary evidences inform us that Naraka was a devotee of Kāmākhyā. However there is no information in the *Kālikā Purāna* about the construction of the Kāmākhyā temple by Naraka. Only in the *Assam Buranji* by Raibahadur Gunabhiram Barua mentioned that the Kāmākhyā temple was constructed by Naraka. He also tells a story about it. It is stated that being attraction by the beauty of Kāmākhyā, Naraka wanted to marry her. Goddess Kāmākhyā told Naraka that she will marry him only if he built a rest house and four stone roads from four sides to the shrine within one night. Naraka started his construction and was about to complete the task. The Goddess forged a cock to declare the advent of dawn. Being angry, Naraka beheaded the cock.

The road built by Naraka still prevail in the Kāmākhyā temple and the place where Naraka beheaded the cock still known as *Kukurakota Chaki*.¹³⁹

Though there are various literary evidences about the origin of Kāmākhyā, it is difficult to determine definite and specific date and period of the origin of Kāmākhyā. The *Kālikā Purāna* says that the genital organ of Sati fell on a hillock named *Kubjikapītha* in Kamrupa before the advent of Naraka. As the genital organ of Sati fell on the hill, the hill turned blue. Hence the hill came to be known as the Nilachala. As soon as the genital organ of Sati fell on Nilachala Hill, it turned into a slab of stone which came to be considered as the Goddess Kāmākhyā.

Yuan Tsang, who visited Kāmarūpa during the period of Bhaskar Varman gives a valuable description of Kāmarūpa in his book *si-yu-ki*. According to him, during that period there were several *Deva* temples in Kamrupa which also proved the existence of Śaivism at that time. All the ruling dynasties of Assam, occupy the Pala king Vaidyadeva, who was a worshipper of Visnu, had worshipped Śiva.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, probably during the period of the Varman dynasty, Śaivism had a predominant role in the religion of Assam and the glory of Śaktism had declined after them.

It is mentionable that the Koch king Biswa Singha, who belonged to sixteen century, built a temple on the Nilachala Hills. There is no sufficient evidence about the construction of the Kāmākhyā temple before sixteenth century. Only the *Assam Buranji* of Gunabhiram Barua mentions that Naraka constructed a road by the *Kukurakota Chaki* on the Nilachala Hills.

One day, Biswa Singha during his expedition against the Ahom Kingdom arrived at the Nilachala Hills and came to know that the hills are the sacred dwelling place of Goddess Kāmākhyā. Biswa Singha worshipped Goddess Kāmākhyā with great devotion to help him to regain his lost army. He promised her to build a temple of gold in that place. Surprisingly his desire was fulfilled. Consequently he had constructed a temple on the Nilachala Hills by giving one Rati of gold to every slab of stone according to his promise. Thus Biswa Singha revived the glory of Kāmākhyā by constructing the temple complex. However temple constructed by Biswa Singha was destroyed by Kalapahar, the powerful general of Nawab of Gauda (Bengal). Chilarai, the brother of Biswa Singha's son and successor reconstructed the Kāmākhyā temple in 1565 CE.

According to Raibahadur Gunabhiram's *Assam Buranji*, king Naranarayan had brought some Brahmanas from Uttar Pradesh to worship Goddess Kāmākhyā.¹⁴¹ Thus Naranarayana and his brother Chilarai took significant roles in the renovation of the temple and also in the spread of Śaktism in the region. Chilarai or Sukladhvaja introduced Durga Puja in the Kāmākhyā temple.

During the period of Ahom rule, the glory of Kāmākhyā enhanced greatly. Siba Singha, the son of Rudra Singha was preached by Krishnaram Bhattacharya, the chief priest of the Kāmākhyā temple to become a disciple of Śaktism. The Nat Mandir of the Kāmākhyā temple was constructed by king Rajeswar Singha and Gaurinath Singha. Two inscriptions belonging to the Ahom king Pramatta Singha testify that he constructed the Amrakeswar Mandir and the Daul Mandir of the Kāmākhyā temple.¹⁴²

On the basis of several literary evidences a critical investigation about the origin of Kāmākhyā can be done. Banikanta Kakati mentions that the word 'Kāmākhyā' has its origin in the Austric Khasi word Kesh, meaning pine trees. After cutting down the pine trees on an around the Nilachala Hills, some hermits started worshipping Kama, a 'cremation-ground-dwelling goddess.' Eventually this goddess came to be known as Kāmākhyā.¹⁴³

Nirmal Prabha Bordoloi mentions that at the beginning Kāmākhyā *pītha* was the place of mother worship of the non-Aryan people. The concept of mother worship remains important among the Austric Khasi people. Moreover, the Mongoloid Bodo people worshipped the Śakti. Therefore, Kāmākhyā might, be a place for mother worship of the Bodo and Khasi people in the ancient period.¹⁴⁴

The name of Kāmarūpa and Kāmākhyā both indicate male and female object and their roots go back to the non-Aryan Kirata period because there existed among them the pair of *Devatas* or couple of *Devatas* just as Kirata-Kiratani and the other tribes such as the Mikiras recognized their Devatas as Mikir-Mikirani, the Chutiyas as Kundi-Mama and the Mlechas as Mecha-Mechani etc

In North-East India the tribal people worship bamboo in some of their festivals instead of an image. The Kāmākhyā temple also lacks an image. Here also a symbol of *yonī* is worshiped. The *yonī* represents the creative force of the mother Goddess.

The worship of *yoni* existed as *linga* worship existed among the non-Aryan people in the ancient period. During the age of the prevalence of Tantricism, this worship of *yoni* was assimilated with the religions beliefs of the Aryan group of people. Being influenced by the Aryan culture, the *yonipītha* or the worship of the female genital organ got associated with the worship of Śakti or *Devī* and Kāmākhya became centre for the worship of *yoni*.

Śakti *pītha* Kāmākhya, famous for Śakti worship in India is a meeting ground of various religious cults like Tantricism, Śaivism, Vaisnavism, Buddhism etc. All these religious cults which exist in the temple are deeply associated with each other and so it is difficult to make a separate study of each of these cults. Śaktism enjoyed a strong hold in the religion of Assam from the ancient period. According to *Kālikā Purāna* and *Yoginī Tantra* Kāmarūpa was the most suitable place for the worship of Śakti. Śaktism, the cult of worshipping the mother Goddess as the supreme deity known variously as *Devī*, Durga, Kali, Kalika, Uma, Kāmākhya, Tara, Chandi, Chamunda, Vindhyavasini, and Sakamabhari and so on, centred in and around the Kāmākhya temple in ancient Assam. The Śakti *pītha* Kāmākhya came to be recognized as the most important Śakti *pītha* not only among the Śakti *pīthas* of Assam but also among the five main Śaktism centres in India viz, Katyayani at Uddiyana, Kāmākhya at Kāmarūpa, Purneswari and Chandi at Jalandhara and Dikkaravasini at the eastern part of Kāmarūpa.¹⁴⁵

Śaktism is associated with the sacrifices of various animals, human beings etc. Sacrifice of pigeons, ducks, goats and buffaloes are still prevalent in the Kāmākhya temple. Without the sacrifice the worship of Kāmākhya is not supposed to be completed.

Śaktism is also associated with the worship of *yoni* in the Kāmākhya temple. In the temple, prayers are offered to a *yonipītha* of stone in lieu of an image or iconic representation of the Goddess. Though there is an image of goddess Kāmākhya belonging to much later period main worship is still offered to the *yonipītha* in the monobhavaguha (the cave in which the *yoni* of the Goddess exists). The sex organ of a female represents creation. Therefore, *yoni* worship means the desire for fertility. Thus, the desire for fertility in the form of *yoni* worship got associated in the Kāmākhya temple.

Śaktism has three types of worship viz, *Jap*, *Hom* and *Tarpan*.¹⁴⁶ *Jap* is the system of worship in which mantras are uttered by the priest to worship the goddess. *Hom* is system of worship in which items like Ghee, Belpat (wood-apple leaves), *Til* (serame) and *Chaul* (rice) are sacrificed in the sacred fire. *Tarpan*, the worship of the Goddess with sixteen *upacara* is also an important part of Śakti worship in the temple. The sixteen *upacaras* are- *Asana* (seat), *Swagata* (calling), *Padya* (protection for foot), *Arghya* (an utensil made of copper to pour milk or water to the goddess), *Asamania* (to wash hand and mouth), *Madhuparka* (mixture of honey, curd, milk, molasses and sugar), *Punarasamaniya* (again to wash hand and mouth), *Snana* (bath), *bastra* (cloth), *Abharana* (ornaments), *Gandha* (perfume), *Puspa* (flower), *Dhup* (incense sticks) *Deep* (eathen lamp) and *Naibedyā* (eatable items like gram and fruits offered to the Goddess).¹⁴⁷

The religious festivals observed in the Kāmākhyā temple are related with the worship of Śakti. The festivals associated with the Śakti worship are Durga puja, Manasa Puja, Kali Puja, Lakshmi Puja and Saraswati Puja and so on.

Durga Puja which is observed in the autumn season is a popular festival of temple. It is observed in the month of Ahin (mid September to mid October) of Assamese calendar and worship is offered according to the Tantric mode. No image of Goddess Durga is used in the temple. Sacrifices of animals like goats, pigeons and buffaloes are offered to the goddess during that period.

Another important festival observed in the Kāmākhyā temple is the Manasa Puja or Devadhani festival. It is observed on the last day of Shaon and first day of Bhada (mid August) of Assamese calendar. The folk Goddess Manasa is considered as the Goddess of snakes. During this festival different musical instrument are played along with the recitation of the Beula-Lakhindar ballad. Sacrifices of animals are offered to the goddess during this festival.

Laksmi Puja is also observed in the Kāmākhyā temple on the next bright fortnight of Bijayadasami (the last day) of Durga Puja. In this festival sacrifices are offered to goddess Kamala, one of the Dasmahavidyas. Goddess Kamala is considered as the Laksmi in the Kāmākhyā temple. Kali Puja is observed in the Kali temple (one of the Dasamahavidya temples) in the Kāmākhyā temple complex on the next black

fortnight of Laksmi Puja. The worship of Goddess Kali is performed by giving animal sacrifices.¹⁴⁸

The Sarawati Puja which is also a worship of Śakti is performed on the fifth day of bright fortnight of Assamese *Magh* (mid January to mid February) month. The Saraswati Puja is performed in the Matangi *pītha* (one of the Dasamahavidyas) of the Kāmākhyā temple in which animal sacrifices are offered to the Goddess.

Kāmākhyā temple is also associated with the worship of folk goddess Sitala in the Sitala temple on the southern side of the Kāmākhyā temple. Moreover, an image of goddess Sitala also exists in the Kāmākhyā temple premises. In Assam, Goddess Sitala is considered as ‘nature goddess’ who can cure small-pox, one of the common diseases of Assam.

Śaivism is another important religious cult associated with the Kāmākhyā temple. In Kāmākhyā temple, the Mahadeva cult is connected with the cult of Śaktism. The cult of fertility or the worship of the phallus or Linga which was later personified as Lord Śiva is also found in the Indus valley remains and Vedic literature. Śaivism is one of the oldest religious faiths of Assam. During the period of Naraka Śiva dwelt secretly. He was then worshipped by the indigenous Kirata people. Bana the king of Sonitpura followed Śaivism. Śiva worship was first introduced in early Assam by king of Jalpaiguri (North Bengal) known as Jalpeswara and also had founded a Śiva temple by his name.¹⁴⁹

The Chinese traveler Yuan Tsang had given some information about the prevalence of Śaivism in Assam. Yuan Tsang who visited Kamrupa during the period of the Varman king Bhaskar Varman (594-650 CE) mentions in his book *Si-Yu-Ki* that there were hundreds of Deva temples in Kamrupa¹⁵⁰ Perhaps those *Deva* temples mentioned by Yuan Tsang were dedicated to Lord Śiva, because he used the word *Deva* in place of the word *Devī*. Probably during that period the tradition of mother worship continued in a low profile.

The worship of Śiva prevailed in Assam from a remote period and it was the popular form of religion amongst both the aboriginals and the Aryanized people. The popularity of Śaivism in ancient Assam is also proved by the copperplates and land

grants of the kings appeared in the *Kamarupasasanavali*. The kings of ancient Assam had expressed their allegiance to Śaivism through those copperplates and land grants.

In the Kāmākhyā temple the joint worship of Śiva and Śakti is prevalent. Tantra also popularizes the worship of Śiva and Śakti. According to Tantras, Śiva without Śakti is not capable of moving. The joint worship of Śiva and Śakti is purely of a Tantric origin. The mother goddess Kāmākhyā is united with Śiva or Mahakala or Kamesa and pairs with Him as Kameswara-Kameswari.

The union of Śiva and Śaktism is proved by the Dasamahavidya temples existing in the Kāmākhyā temple. Dasamahavidyas represent ten different forms of Śaktism. There are ten Mahavidya temples in the Kāmākhyā complex. Except Dhumavati, who is represented as widow, the nine Mahavidyas are worshipped with their Bhairavas. The Bhairavas of the Mahavidyas are- Goddess Kali (worshipped with Mahakala), Tara (with Aksaubha), Sodasi (with Kameswara), Bhubaneswari (with Tryamvaka Śiva), Bhairabi (with Dakshinamurti), Chinnamasta (with Kavandha), Bagala (with Ekavaktra Śiva), Matangi (with Matanga Śiva) and Kamala (with Sri Visnu).¹⁵¹

There are five *pīthas* of Panchanana Śiva within the Kāmākhyā temple which proves the existence of Śiva cult in the Kāmākhyā temple. Besides this there are some other Śiva temples in the Kāmākhyā *pītha*.

Some local festivals observed in the Kāmākhyā temple are also related with Śaivism. One such local festival prevalent in the Kāmākhyā temple in the *Puhan Bia* or Punsavan ceremony. This ceremony is one of the ten Hindu *Samskaras*. It is performed to produce male child. It is observed at the seventh or eight month of the first conception of any remembrance of the Hara-Gauri's (Śiva -Parvati's) marriage ceremony. This festival is held on the second or third *Tithi* of dark fortnight of the Pusya constellation of the *Puh* or the *Magh* month (mid December to mid February).

Śiva ratri, another religious ceremony performed to worship Śiva in the Kāmākhyā temple on the Krishna *Chaturdasi Tithi*, i.e., on the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight of the month of Fagun (mid February to mid March), also proves the prevalence of Śaivism. In this occasion non-vegetable *Bhoga*, made of fish and meat of castrated goat is offered to Kāmākhyā in the five Śiva *pīthas* (Panchanana). In this festival a castrated goat is decapitated in the temple.

Tantricism is also associated with the worship of Goddess Kāmākhyā. The shrine is regarded as the perfect place for the practice of the Tantric cult. Tantricism has also a non-Aryan origin and all the elements like the use of magic and charms, the use of wine, the evolving rites the beliefs in the efficacy mantras and sex worship are found in other primitive cultures around the world.

One element of the religious heritage of ancient Assam is 'Fetishism', a belief in magic which is associated with objects like stones and trees etc. constituting the foundation of Tantricism in Assam with its centre at the Kāmākhyā temple. Tantric worship centres round the union of Śiva and Śakti. In the Kāmākhyā temple unified prayer is offered to Śiva and Śakti in the forms of Kameswara and Kameswari respectively.

As a centre of Tantricism, the *Panchamakara* i.e. the 'fifth *M*' method is practiced in the Kāmākhyā temple. These *Panchamakara* include *Madya* (alcohol), *Mangsa* (meat), *Matsya* (fish), *Mudra* (signs of seats) and *Maithuna* (sexual intercourse). *Yantra* worship is also an integral part of Tantrik worship which existed in the Kāmākhyā temple. In the temple worship is mainly performed on the *Srichakra* (*Yantra*) which is considered as principle among the other 960 *Yantras*. This *Srichakras* (*Yantras*) are actually symbols which the *sadhaka* tries to establish God or Goddesses in that symbol.

Several festivals are observed in the Kāmākhyā temple at various times. Many of them are related with Tantricism. The Ambubachi festival observed in the Kāmākhyā temple from the seventh day to the eleventh day of Ahar (within the first fortnight of the month of June) is an example of such festivals. It is believed that this is the period of menstruation of Goddess Kāmākhyā. During this period the temple is closed for the devotees and Visitors. The temple is re-opened on the fourth day. After the period of menstruation, the productive power of a woman becomes active. Ambubachi is a festival which signifies the power of fertility. Thus, the concept of fertility is related with mother goddess Kāmākhyā. This is a Tantrik belief.¹⁵²

In the Kāmākhyā *pītha*, the worship of the Dasamahavidyas is also prevalent. These temples are the Kali temple, the Tara temple, the Bhubaneswari temple, the Bhairavi temple, the Bagalamukhi temple, the Dhumavati temple, the Sinnamasta. All the Mahavidyas except Bagalamukhi, are worshipped with red flowers. The use of wine is

the speciality of the worship of the Dasamahavidyas along with *Dhyana* and Bijamantra. The Bagalamukhi is one of the famous Goddess among the Dasamahavidyas and in Kāmākhyā temple also there is a temple of Goddess Bagala. Bagala is the best example of the assimilation of the Buddhist and the Hindu Tantras. In the Buddhist Tantras, there is a Goddess named Bagala or Bogla Dakini.

The Kāmākhyā temple is also associated with the Buddhist faith especially with the Buddhism or Tantrik Buddhism. The architectural remains of the Natachala Hills indicate the Buddhist influence on the temple. Some Buddhist tradition state that Buddhism entered Kamrupa around the third century BCE. Kalhana's *Rajtarangini* also mentions about the prevalent of Buddhism in Kāmarūpa of the pre-Bhaskarvarman era.

Various Buddhist relics are found on the Nilachala Hills in which testify the Buddhist influence on the Kāmākhyā temple.¹⁵³ All the sculptures are in various shapes. They are on the verge of decay. They depict episodes of Gautam Buddha's life. Two images of Buddha and *Buddhisattava* are found on the Nilachala Hills. Moreover, a rock cut image of Buddha under the Bodhi tree was discovered by the side of the old path of the Kāmākhyā temple. Some other Buddhist sculptures like Gautama in archery contest, Gautama on horseback etc. are also found on the Nilachala Hills. Moreover, a broken image of Padmapani Buddha in the form of *Dhyana* and an image of a mother with a child, probably representing the Buddhist goddess Hariti are found in the temple. Some broken images of elephants and oxen's are also found in the Kāmākhyā temple. All these sculpture belong to the seventh or the eight centuries and they signify the existence of the Buddhist cult in the Kāmākhyā temple.

The cult of Vishnu is also associated with the Kāmākhyā shrine. According to the *Kālikā Purāna*, Mother Earth gave birth to Naraka. Naraka was fathered by the Boar incarnation of Visnu. After coming to Prāgjyotispura, Naraka started to worship Goddess Kāmākhyā on the advice of Visnu. This signifies the influence of Vishnu cult over the Kāmākhyā Shrine.

In the Kāmākhyā temple there is a temple of Vishnu, known as Kamleswar in which both Visnu and Śiva jointly exist and the sonnet form is known as Kambalakhya. There are several stone structures and statues related with the Visnu cult in the Kāmākhyā temple. These testify the prevalence of Vishnu cult in Kāmākhyā temple.

There are several stone structures related with the Visnu cult in the Kāmākhyā temple. In the Nilachala Hills, there is a stone statue of Visnu Vasudeva and three statues of Visnu Krisna. Moreover, there are several stone statues of Visnu Balarama, the elder brother of Krisna, carrying a plough in his hand. In the first gate of the main walking path to the Kāmākhyā temple, a statue of young Balaram is affixed. Balaram is seen as killing Mustika, the wrestler of king Kansa.¹⁵⁴ A rock cut flute playing statue of Krisna Vasudeva is also found in the Kāmākhyā temple. Moreover, near the main temple of Goddess Kāmākhyā, a Krisna temple exists. Regular worship is held in the Krisna temple.

Some festivals observed in the Kāmākhyā temple are also related with the cult of Visnu. The Douljatra or Holi, the festival of colour and joy is observed in the temple on the full moon day of the Assamese month *Fagun* (mid February to mid March). The Douljatra is a festival related with Lord Krisna. The festival is observed in the Kāmākhyā temple with pomp and grandeur.

Another important festival related with the Visnu cult or Krisna cult is the Janmastami (the birthday of Krishna). Janmastami is celebrated in the Kāmākhyā temple on the Krisnastami *Tithi* (day) of the month of *Bhada* (i.e. on the eight day of the black fortnight between mid-August to mid September). In this festival, *Hom* is offered in the Kamaleswar temple. Moreover, animal sacrifices are also conducted in the main *pītha* of the Kāmākhyā temple on this occasion. All these festivals signify the existence of the Visnu cult in the Shrine.

The worship of Ganesa is an important part of the religious aspect of the Kāmākhyā temple. In the temple, a traditional ritual exists in which the devotee can enter the main Kāmākhyā *pītha* after taking permission from the image of Ganesa which is situated near the tank Saubhangakuda. Stone images of Ganesa are found on the Nilachala Hills in large numbers. The numbers of Ganesa idols discovered on the Nilachala Hills are above fifty.¹⁵⁵ It is mentionable here that most of the Ganesa statues on the Nilachala Hills have two full teeth where the Ganesa images of rest of India are generally single toothed.

The Kāmākhyā *pītha* is assimilated with several religious cults like Śaktism, Tantricism, Śaivism, Buddhism and Vaisnavism etc. However, it is popular mainly as the centre of Śākta Tantricism. On the Nilachala Hills, several families inhabit. They

are mainly Brahmanas, Kayasthas, Napits, Dhobas and so on. All these people are associated with the Kāmākhya temple by several professions. The Brahmanas are the *Pandas* who conduct the worship of Goddess Kāmākhya. All these people are living at the Nilachala Hills are followers of Śākta Tantricism. Besides Śaktism, they believe in other cults like Śaivism and Vaisnavism. As all these religious cults are amalgamated with the worship of the Kāmākhya shrine, the people have naturally, become the followers of all these cults. Therefore, there is no distinct sectarian division among the inhabitants of the Nilachala Hills who belong to Śākta, Tantric, Śaivite and Vaisnavite sects at the same time.

Kāmākhya Dham, Mayong

According to local tradition, in Mayong there was a Kāmākhya Dham where Goddess Kāmākhya was worshipped.¹⁵⁶ People of Mayong had a popular belief that the “Thigh” part of the body of Sati had fallen on the Mayong *pahar* (hill) which is located at Burhamayang. The place where the thigh part had fallen is called by the people as “Kāmākhya Dham”. There is a stone “*Monikut*” at Burhamayang area where according to local tradition Goddess Kāmākhya comes from Nilachal hill to this Mayong Hill for doing “*Lila*” on the 6th Bohag (Baisakh) every year accompanied by 33 crore Gods and Goddesses.¹⁵⁷ According to Mayong *Rajvamsavali* “*Pancha-Gosains*” (Five Gods) of Mayong are also brought to this Kāmākhya Dham every year on that day. From the accounts of *Rajvamsavali*, one *Deori* was the main priest in this puja. Sacrifices like Cocks, ducks, pigeons he-goats were offered to the Goddess. It is said that earlier human sacrifice was also practised.¹⁵⁸ Kāmarūpa had been well known for the practice of Śaktism *sadhana* centering round the Kāmākhya *pītha* which was a place of assimilation of various religious cults and sects. One noteworthy place which had been famous for its practice of magic, sorcery popularly known as the place of *Tantra-Mantra* is Mayong might have been under the boundary of Kāmarūpa. Probably, during that time the area was known to the people with different name and only in the later time, the name has changed to Mayong. Mayong the land known for its magic and sorcery is still famous among the people of Assam. Local tradition and oral sources of that place speak that Mayong was a land of *Tantra-Mantra* since early period. Some of the archaeological sites and sculpture of the area also indicate the prevalence of Tantric elements in that place. Mayong is not too far from Kāmākhya *pītha* of Nilachal. One cannot deny the specialities of Mayong as a

Tantric land because of such characteristics. Various rock cut sculptures, terracottas, architectural remains scattered in the Mayong area reveals its specialities in magic and sorcery for which the land is still famous among the people.

Sculptures of Hara-Gauri have been discovered at places such as Kachosila, Burhamayang, Chanaka of Mayong area.¹⁵⁹ Recently State Archaeology Department has discovered sword¹⁶⁰ of medieval (Ahom) period which were possibly used to offer sacrifice before the Goddess. Tradition of offering sacrifice such as animals and possibly human being before the Goddess Śakti was in the medieval period. As mentioned above about the Kāmākhyā Dham of mayong, there was such a tradition heard by the local people. So possibly Mayong was a land of Śakti *sadhana* in the distant past. The physical features of Mayong area and the archaeological remains also evidenced the prevalence of Tantric tradition in the remote past. Hence there may be possibility of Kāmarūpa known to the outside world as a suitable place for Śakti *sadhana* with the influence of Mayong's tradition of magic and sorcery. Though nothing can be said definitely but the mystery of Mayong is yet to be discovered which may unfold the history of Assam in a different direction.

Bhuvaneswari Temple

Bhuvaneswari temple situated on the top of Nilacala Hill in the complex of the Kāmākhyā *pītha*. Goddess Bhuvaneswari is one of the Dasa-Mahavidyas. Bhuvaneswari is the manifestation of Śakti or Mahamaya. Bhuvaneswari was worshipped with the Tantric methods and mantras of Kāmākhyā. The devotees gain equal fruits to that of Kāmākhyā by worshipping Bhuvaneswari. Bhuvaneswari is no other than Parvati. Bhuvaneswari and Durga are worshipped with the same mantras.¹⁶¹ The *Kālikā Purāna* refers to the Astayogini which were situated around the Kāmākhyā temple in the *Yonipītha* namely Gupta Kāmākhyā, Srikama, Vindhyavasini, Kotiswari, Vanastha, Padadurga, Dirgheswari and Bhuvaneswari. Mahagauri Siddheswari Yogini was situated as a stone on the top of the Brahma mountain. This beautiful Goddess was Bhuvaneswari. *Yoginī Tantra* refers to Bhuvaneswari as Upapītha. Bhuvaneswari is called the destroyer of demon, Siddhikali and Brahmarupa Bhuvaneswari. According to *Yoginī Tantra Devī* Bhuvaneswari lives in the Mahogra *Pītha*. According to mythological description, the forehead of Sati fell on this place. It is known from Nilachal Bhuvaneswari copper plate grant that Ahom

king Gaurinath Singha granted lands for this temple.¹⁶² However the plate is broken and destroyed, so the writings are not clear. Like the other Śākta *pīthas* of Assam Bhuvaneswari temple might have got royal patronage from time to time since the distant past.

Dirgheswari Temple

Dirgheswari temple is situated on a hillock, about 5 km to the north-east of North Guwahati, the temple takes its name after the hillock Dirgheswari; its other name is Sitaparvat. It is situated in the Rangmahal area of Barbareswar Mauza in North Guwahati.

The *Kālikā Purāna* refers to the Astayoginis of Kāmākhyā with their own *pīthas*. Dirgheswari was one of the Astayoginis. She always fulfills the wants of her worshipper. Here in this temple Goddess Durga has been daily worshipped from ancient times. *Yoginī Tantra* refers to the significance of the worship of *Devī* Dirgheswari. *Devī* is called savior of distressed. *Devī* fulfills theaspires of her devotees, who visits the *Devī pītha*, he can enjoy peace and prosperity for sixty thousand years.

*Drista dirgheswaring Devīng sarvakamafala pradana
Sastibarsesaha srani devaradhabi madate |¹⁶³*

She is also known as Bagheswari. Some say that it is so called because formerly the area was abound in wild animals particularly leopards (*bagh*). Tiger was the main vehicle of *Devī* Dirgheswari. According to the traditional account two tigers moved to and fro around the temple complex but they did not harm anyone. Legend says that the temple stands at site where the left *uru* (thigh) of Sati fell. There have been seen the foot prints of Bhogavati in the Dirgheswari. It is known from the priests of the temple that the system of worship of Dirgheswari is *Vamacara* Tantric system. In ancient times there did not prevail the system of human sacrifice. The system of sacrifice was introduced later. The *Kālikā Purāna* refers to the place as the place of *Sadhana*. There are the images of Śiva, Ganesa, Durga, Visnu and tiger. But there was no image of *Devī* Dirgheswari.

From the archaeological point of view, the site does not contain any remains of ancient temple. The site first mentioned in the survey report prepared during the reign of Rudra Singha. However during the Ahom kings, the pītha received royal patronage from time to time. The stone inscription¹⁶⁴ attached to the temple says that Panidihingiya Barphukan under the order of king Siba Singha built the present brick temple of Dirgheswari. Another rock inscription¹⁶⁵ found there says that Sridurga duar (the main entrance of the temple) was built in *Saka* 1659 (1735 CE) by Tarunduara Barphukan. In *Saka* 1661 (1739 CE), Siba Singha endowed the temple with a large number of men including the priests and other functionaries specifying seva-puja to be performed in the temple. Later on Rajeswar Singha made grant of men and land to the temple. Edward Gait also mentioned about the two land grants made by King Siba Singha in *Saka* 1661 and in 1679 CE by king Rajeswar Singha. King Rajeswar Singha presented a *Japi* (a kind of broad hat) made of silver for covering the image of Dirgheswari. The inscription¹⁶⁶ on *Japi* records that it was made of silver weighing 216 tolas (approximately 27 seers). During the Bhauma dynasty it had not received any kind of royal support. An inscription of the Pala king Dharmapala was discovered in Rangmahal but it does not refer to the *Devī* Dirgheswari or royal patronage to the *pītha*.

Ugratara Devalay

Ugratara Devalay (**Plate 2**) is situated in the Uzanbazar area in the heart of Guwahati city. According to mythology, the naval part of Sati had fallen on this place, where subsequently the temple was constructed. The *Kālikā Purāna* says that in the eastern part of Brahmagiri Brahmasaila, on the ground, the beautiful, favourable to devotees, the naval part of Kāmākhyā was situated there.

*Brahmasaila Pūrbashyāng bhūmipithe bhyabasthistam,
Chārūnim nasūbhābartang Kāmākhyā nābhimansalam,*¹⁶⁷

There was no image of the Goddess Ugratara. In the *garbhagriha* there is a *Kunda* of water and the devotees after oblation touch the water of the *Kunda* in the hope that it will remove all the distress from their life. There are two tanks known as Jorpukhuri by the side of the temple. An inscription¹⁶⁸ found near the tanks inform that these tanks were dug by Bar Raja Phuleswari or Parthameswari, wife of Siba Singha. The

inscription dates back to 1738 CE. From the priests and dolois of the temple it is known that the present temple was established by Ahom king Siba Singha which is supported by the information in the inscription also. But the site shows evidence of a much earlier temple. The earlier temple might have been destroyed over which during the Ahom period the present temple was constructed. Although there is no trace of old temples, the remains of the old temple are scattered here and there.

Tāra is the one of the Mahavidyas of Śakti which earned great popularity in Assam from the early period. Tara, the most well known and famous Buddhist Tantric Goddess has found her place in Hindu Tantricism. Among the various forms of Goddess Tara, Ugarata is one form. The Tara cult was incorporated from Tibet to Assam. The name of sage Vasistha is also connected with Goddess Tara. According to *Rudra Yamala* and *Yoginī Tantra* Vasistha meditated on Goddess Tara on the Kāmākhyā hill. The *Tara Tantra* specifying the formula on which Vasistha meditated says that it related to Goddess Tara.¹⁶⁹ It is known from the *Kālika Purāna* that Ugratārā was worshipped in the *Vāmācāra* system. The same purana put forwards an exaggerated account regarding Kāmarūpa as the most holiest place and refers to the system of *Vāmācāra* worship of Ugratārā

Chatrakara Temple

In the Uzanbazar area another temple was constructed under the order of Ahom king Kamaleswar Singha in 1795.¹⁷⁰ This is the Chatrakara temple (**Plate 3**), as the temple is situated on an umbrella shaped hillock so the temple is known as Chatrakara. The *Yoginī Tantra* mentions Chatrakara, an umbrella shaped hillock on which the temple is situated, as a sacred place.¹⁷¹ Goddess Mangalchandi is worshipped in this temple. Mangalchandi is another form of *Devī Durga*. Though nothing definite is known about the antiquity of the temple before Kamaleswar Singha but it can be said that it was before or at the time of compilation of *Yoginī Tantra* there might have been worshipped MangalCaṇḍī *Devī*. Near the main temple there is a broken brick temple where worship of Śiva is performed. In the same line of the hillock there is one Visnu temple. From the rock inscriptions of the Chatrakara temple it is known that the Pratap Vallabh Barphukan constructed the temple under the order of his king Kamaleswar Singha. In Kasinath Phukan's *Buranji* it is said that the Barphukan constructed copper house in Kāmākhyā and Constructed Devalay in chatrakara.

The architectural activities of the present temple indicate to say that it has similarity with the other temples constructed under the Ahom kings. This evidenced that it was the contribution of the Ahoms. The temple has 2288 *bighas* of revenue free land.

Dipteswari Temple

Dipteswari temple is one of the remarkable Śakti *pīthas* in Assam. This temple is situated in the Rangiya area of Kamrup district. An inscription of 1764 of this temple says that King Rajeswar Singha was the main patron of this temple and he granted many *bighas* of revenue free land for this temple. The temple has 1286 *bighas* of revenue free land.¹⁷¹The worshipping deity is *Devī* Dipteswari alias Annapurna. However one mysterious and interesting thing connecting to this temple is that there is always sufficient water in the temple and the image is seen over the surface of water.

Temple of Jayanti

This temple is located in the Rangiya area of Kamrup district. The Ahom king Lakshmi Singha was the patron of this temple and there is one copper plate inscription of this temple. Goddess Jayantī is the worshipping deity. However it is mentionable that Goddess Jayanti is identical with Goddess Matangi, one manifestation of Śakti. The *Dhyana* and *Vija-Mantra* of Goddess Jayantī and Goddess Matangi is same.

Kali Temple at Ajara

This is a temple of Goddess Kali located in a village named Ajara in the district of Nalbari. In this temple the worshipping deity is the Dakshina Kali. However this temple also received patronage from Ahom king Siba Singha. The copper plate inscription of this temple says that Ahom king Siba Singha granted a vast area of land for this temple and a sword for animal sacrifice to the temple. The inscription also mentions the *vidhi* of worshipping the Goddess.

Kali Temple at Balilecha

The Kali (**Plate 4**) temple at Balilecha village of Nalbari district is one of the resplendent Śakti *pīthas* in Assam. This temple was constructed under the order of Ahom king Siba Singha and he donated land to the temple. The worshipping deity of the temple is Goddess Dakshina Kali, four handed and three-eyed. The temple

received patronage from the Ahom kings time to time and donated land and properties for the temple. Many socio-religious festivals are observed in the temple time to time. Daily prayer is offered to the Goddess and the method of worship is Tantric. Everyday sacrifices of animals like goats and pigeons are offered to the Goddess. However sometimes buffaloes are also sacrificed to the Goddess. Some religious festivals like Durga puja and Kali puja and a special festival called *Sabha* is observed in the *Domahi* (the day between two months) of *Puh* and *Magh* months. One more festival i.e. *Bhotheli* festival (Bamboo puja) related to fertility is observed in this temple.

Mahamaya Temple

The Mahamaya temple is situated in Dhuburi district. It is believed that the Goddess emerged from the earth itself. The Goddess is three-eyed and only the upper portion of the image is visible to the people. It may be due to sinking of the image to the ground. Everyday prayer is offered to the Goddess and the mode of worship is Tantric. Animals like goats, pigeons and sometimes buffaloes are offered to the Goddess. People believed that the Goddess fulfils all the desires of the worshippers and cures the illness of the devotees.

Barkalika Than

The Barkalika *than* (**Plate 5**) situated at Deori gaon of Kalabari area in the Sonitpur district is one of the most important Śākta *pīthas* in Assam. The image in the temple is Goddess Kali. It is believed that the Goddess fulfils all desires and illness of the worshippers. This temple is also known as Phoolbari Devalaya because originally this temple was situated in the Phoolbari area of Lakhimpur district. It has been shifted to the Kalabari area of Deori gaon. It is said that this Phoolbari Devalaya was established during the Ahom rule. Ahom king Rudra Singha was the main patron of this temple.

Devi Do'l / Durga Devalay, Sibsagar

Durga temple (**Plate 6**) of Sibsagar belonged to the Ahom period. This temple was constructed under the patronage of Ahom king Siba Singha. Many religious festivals like Durga puja, Kali puja, Basanti puja etc. are observed in the temple. Tantric form

of worship is practised in the temple. Sacrifice of animals and birds are offered to the Goddess.

Kāmākhyā Devalay, Silghat

Another notable Śakti *pīthas* is the Kāmākhyā Devalay (**Plate 7**) which is located in the Silghat area in the district of Nagaon. There are two images of the Goddess-Durga and Kāmākhyā in the temple. However Goddess Kāmākhyā is worshipped as Burha Kāmākhyā in this temple. There are some myths connected to the origin of this temple. According to present pujari (citation) of the temple the Goddess once came into the dream of the Ahom king Pramatta Singha and suggests him to construct this temple. When after finishing the construction one day the king with his wives came to worship the Goddess, then the small queen while taking the seven rounds through the *Mandapa*, suddenly disguised from there. That day again Goddess came into his dream and said his small queen was the Goddess herself. An inscription (**Plate 8**) of the Kāmākhyā Devalay says that Ahom king Pramatta Singha was the patron of this temple under whose order Tarunduara Barphukan constructed the temple in the *Saka* year 1667. Many Bighas of land were granted for this temple. Presently people related to this temple settled in those lands and the area of this settlement is like a village. Now it is known as Kāmākhyā village where the Brahmanas and their families appointed by the king resides there. Various socio-religious festivals like Ashok Astami Mela, Durga puja, Kali puja are observed in this temple.

Hatimura Durga Temple

Hatimura temple (**Plate 9**) is situated at Hatimura village of Koliabar area. This is a temple dedicated to the Goddess Mahisamardini (Durga). An inscription (**Plate 10**) attached to the temple evidenced that the temple was constructed by Tarunduara Barphukan under the order of Ahom king Pramatta Singha in *Saka* 1667. Regarding the age of the sculpture K.L. Barua said that the image may be belonged to 9th-10th centuries CE. To judge the sculpture representation of the lion may be taken into account, as similar images have been found in the Tezpur ruins that belonged to the 9th-10th century CE. According to him there was originally a stone temple, which may have demolished by an earthquake and again in the 18th century Pramatta Singha built the present brick temple. One sword has been recovered from this temple which is now deposited in the museum of the Anusandhan Samiti. It has been judged that the

recovered sword might have been used for human sacrifice.¹⁷² It may be assumed that tantric worship and sacrifice was once prevalent in the temple which was in trend during the time of Kāmarūpa kings of the 9th-10th centuries CE. Besides this there is no any other fact to trace the mode of worship in the temple during early period. At present one noticeable thing of this temple is that instead of animal sacrifice, they are offered to the Goddess by smearing a *tika* but they are not given in sacrifice.

Tamreswari Temple

From the scriptural and historical accounts it is known that the temple of Goddess Tamreswari was one of the most famous Śakti *pītha* in the eastern most part of Kāmarūpa in the ancient time. This *pītha* was well known for Śākta worship among the people. From the present Sadiya town some eighteen miles off, lies the temple of Tamreswari also known as Goddess Dikkaravasini in a dilapidated condition. The *Devī* is called Dikkaravasini as the temple was situated in the extreme east of Kāmarūpa, on the bank of river Dikrong. In the *Kālikā Purāna* and *Yoginī Tantra*, it is frequently mentioned that this was the eastern most boundary of ancient Kāmarūpa.

In quest of the antiquity of the Goddess one may find good scope for going to the long past, nay even to the days of Naraka. It is stated in the *Kālikā Purāna* that Visnu, arriving at Prāgjyotisa with his son Naraka, advised the latter to drive away the Kirata to the region of Goddess Dikkaravasini. From the locations of different rivers, specified in the *Kālikā Purāna*, if minutely observed, it is seen that the extreme east portion of Kāmarūpa was the region of Goddess Dikkaravasini. Not very far from the temple of Tamreswari, there is a river, Digaru by name. In ancient times, this river might have been known by Sanskritised name Dikkara, the course of which might have also run by the side of the temple. Hence like Vindhyavasini, this Goddess was also possibly called Dikkaravasini.

The *Kālikā Purāna* mentions that Goddess Durga is present in the place of Dikkaravasini in Her two forms- Tiksna-Kanta (dread fully attracted) and Lalita Kanta (Gracefully attracted). Tiksna Kanta was black, tall and matted haired (*Ekjata*). She is also called Ugratara. The mode of worship of Tiksna kanta is also clearly given in the *Kālikā Purāna*. Her worship, as stated in the said Purana is the same with that of Goddess Kāmākhyā, only with the exception that wine is to be given to Her (Tiksna kanta) as a drink, human-sacrifice as sacrifices, and Modaka (sweets),

coconut, meat, curry and sugarcane as offerings.¹⁷³ It cannot be definitely said that when the Goddess Durga had conceived in two aspects, but nevertheless it can be before or during the time of compilation of *Kālikā Purāna* that the Goddess was worshipped in the two aspects. In the later period the terrible form of the Goddess might have become prominent in the domain of worship. It is probably Goddess Tamreswari or *Kecaikhaiti* of subsequent period, most probably the same Goddess Durga or Dikkaravasini in Her terrible aspect, known as Tiksnakanta or Ugratara of early times.

The Goddess Dikkaravasini had been worshipped since ancient times by the aboriginals through their respective beliefs and sentiments. But during the time of Pala dynasty when the *Kālikā Purāna* was compiled and Tantricism and tantric procedure gained in ground, this Goddess also received the favour of the Hindu Sastra and also attained a high status. But the period from Pala rule to the beginning of the Chutia rule nothing can be said definitely about the worship of the Goddess. It is probable that before the coming of the Chutias, the temple of this *Devī* might have been built with copper-sheet, and since then, she might have been called Tamreswari. And it is also known from numerous histories and chronicles that Chutias were the ardent worshipper of the Goddess Tamreswari. Regarding the Kacharis it is known from some historical evidence that not all but some of the Kachari kings also worshipped the Goddess. During the Chutia kings, the Goddess Tamreswari was worshipped in Tamasika-manifestation in the hands of its tribal worshippers. It is known that the worship and religious activities in the temple of Tamreswari, are the performance practiced by non-Brahmin worshippers (*Chutiya-Deuris*) during the reign of the Chutiyas. On the basis of the story notes on different ruling dynasties, it may be said that during the rule of the Chutiya dynasty some practices like human-sacrifice were in full swing. The great Goddess is also known as *Kechai-Khaiti*, because of eating raw-flesh.

S.K. Bhuyan remarks make it clear that the practice of human sacrifice at Tamreswari temple had been continuing upto the reign of Sulikpha Lara Raja. This practice had been abolished by the Ahom king Gauri Nath Singha. The Deuris of the temple believed the Ahoms lost their kingdom, because of the fact that they had abolished the custom of human sacrifice to the Goddess. At present about the original temple of the Goddess tamreswari is not known definitely. From two European Scholars like M.B.

Brown and S.P Hunt's writing some information on architecture of the original temple is known.

Bhairabi Temple

Bhairabi temple (**Plate 11**) is situated on a small hillock known as Bamunipahar facing the Brahmaputra in the Tezpur city of Sonitpur district. Among the ancient Śakti temples, Mahabhairabi temple of Sonitpur has been conveying the ancient glory of Śakti predominance in the non-Aryan society. There is a strong and popular tradition regarding the origin of the temple. According to the tradition the temple was built by a non-Aryan king Bana of Sonitpur, who was the contemporary king of famous Naraka of Prāgjyotisa. Bana, a devotee of Śiva was liberal to other sects. Śiva was his personal deity or *Istadevata* while Bhairabi, another name of Parvati, was the *Istadevata* of his daughter Ūshā. Since then, probably some sort of prayer and worship had been going on.

The original temple is not there now, it has prostrated on the ground thousand years ago. The piece of stone are scattered around the present temple. No steps have taken for the preservation of the ruins. However the present standing temple has been built there later on and got royal patronage from the Ahom king. The Ahom king Siba Singha granted a large area of lands to this temple. After getting royal favour, systematic and regular worship of the Goddess is continuing uptill now. The temple at present has 864 bighas of revenue-free land. The system of worship was *vamcara* Tantric system but the system of worship in the ancient times is not known. One of the noticeable rituals of this temple is that all the sacrifices made to the goddess are always flown on the river Bharali.¹⁷⁴

Caṇḍī Temple and Uma Temple at Biswanath

According to the tradition, Biswanath have been known as the "Second Kasi" in Kāmarūpa. This place has been well known for the admixture of innumerable temples of deities in the *Kunda* form. It is situated on the west bank of the Brahmaputra. The most significant salient features of the place are the *Kundas* which identify both male and female or Gods and Goddesses. One of the *Kundas* represents Biswanath (Śiva), one represents Jagra and other two represent Caṇḍī and Uma. The Uma temple is now situated in the west side of the Brahmaputra and in course of time, a small branch of

the river divides it into two parts. The original Biswanath temple remains in the west. According to local sources (people) the western part is called Gaya Kasi and the eastern side where the bamboo made temple is located is called Gupta Kasi. In the *Kālikā Purāna* reference is made to Biswanath (in the form of Linga) and Biswa *Devī* (in *yonī* form) situated on the bank of the river Brahmaputra.

*Bridhagangajalashyantashire brahmashutashya boi,
Viswanathahvahyo deva Śiva lingashamanti tah.
Viswa Devī Maha Devī yonimandarupini.*¹⁷⁵

Towards the east there existed a *Kunda* representing Uma. Like other Śakti temples, tantric system of worship done here and the system of animal sacrifice also prevailed. According to traditional views, king Bana made a plan to build the second Kasi in Biswanath. In the western there found a Caṇḍī image in the floor of a temple called Caṇḍī temple. The image is assigned to the image of Caṇḍī. There existed a huge *Kunda* representing Caṇḍī with various items of worship. The present temple is most probably built few centuries ago.

Malini Than

Malini *than* is the most important Śākta *pītha* in the eastern most part of Assam. It is situated at the foot of the present Sibang hills under the Likabali sub-division of Arunachal Pradesh. The present temple is constructed on the plinth of the old temple. The old temples were destroyed and the scattered ruins of the temple have been collected by the Archaeological Survey of India and gathered near the present temple. On the top of the hillock there is a library cum-museum, where important pieces of stones including images of different Gods and Goddesses are preserved. Among the images there are miniature female image, Saraswati, Apsara, Vidyadhary, Female Erotica, Lakshmi, Śiva, Nandi bull, Surya, Brahma, Durga and many others. From the excavation of the area images of many Gods and Goddesses, valuable masterpieces of stone have been unearthed. These witness the rich culture of the area. The original temple was destroyed and over it a Śakti temple is standing. The inscriptions, literatures are silent about it. There is no mention about the origin of Malinithan. The original temple probably dates back to 10th to 12th century CE. The temple architecture may be assigned to the Pala period. The epigraphic records of the Pala

speak that they have constructed many temples at different places of their kingdom. The salient features of the art and architecture of the pala period were the construction of a group of temples at one place, short statures of temples, the *ratha* type of ground plans, use of low quality sand stones, presence of erotic figures etc. The three bases of Malinithan possess these characteristics. Hence, it may be said that Malini *than* was influenced by the Pala kings. The present temple is of recent origin and regular worship is done to the presiding deity Durga.

Kālikā Purāna refers to the eastern part of Kāmarūpa where the head of Sati had fallen. Perhaps it was at this place where the Malinithan is situated. Thus Malinithan became one of the important *Śaktipīthas*. The eastern part of Kāmarūpa is identified by the historians to be the Malinithan. Malini *than* is considered as the prominent Śakti shrine of the east of Kāmarūpa. Goddess Malini is worshipped in accordance with the Hindu tantric rites.¹⁷⁶ Mythologically, Malinithan is associated with Lord Kṛṣṇa legends. According to this legend when Lord Kṛṣṇa came to Kundil to marry Rukmini, on their way back to Davaka they rested there where Śiva and Parvati were in meditation. Goddess Durga in the guise of a woman garlander (Malini) offered Kṛṣṇa a garland of beautiful flowers. Lord Kṛṣṇa impressed upon her addressed as Malini.

Burhi Gosani Temple

The temple of Burhi Gosani is presently situated at Godali in the Jorhat district. Establishment of this temple is connected with some historical fact. The Ahom king Rudra Singha (1696-1714 CE) brought the image of Burhi and her *yoni* along with many other presents from the Jayantia kingdom by subjugating the Jayantia king under his control. Then Rudra Singha established this Goddess at his capital Gargaon. The original worshipper of the Goddess was a Brahmin, whom the king brought from Jayantia and entrusted him with the worship of the Goddess in his capital. Since then from generation to generation the Brahmins family attached with the worshipping of the Goddess. When the Ahom capital was removed from Gargaon to Rangpur and thence to Jorhat, the image of the Goddess was also removed from there and finally established at Jorhat. The daily worship of the Goddess was done with *Dhyana* of the Saradiya Durga. At the end of daily worship, the worshipper had to offer the *nirmali*,

prasada and the ashes of *homa* to the Ahom kings which showed their devotion to the Goddess.¹⁷⁷

The image brought by King Rudra Sigha is identified as Goddess Mahisamardini Durga. The Goddess came to known as Burhi Gosani later on. During the Ahom rule the Burhi Gosani temple was known by another name i.e. *Barpujaghar Deol*. The Brhamins or the pujaris were given the tittle of *Pujagharia Barua*. Ahom king Chandrakanta Singha donated one silver and gold *chatra* (umbrella), and a *dao* (big knife) for conducting animal sacrifice.¹⁷⁸

Tukreswari Temple

The temple of Goddess Tukreswari is considered as one of the twenty one *upa pīthas* related to the Daksa *Yajna* legend. This temple is situated in Krishnai, Goalpara district at the hill called Tukreswari in the name of the Goddess. The Tukreswari hill is about 50 metre height where at the hill top the temple is situated. The area is well known as *Tukura*. The name *Tukura* also has some legendary affinity. When Lord Śiva carried the dead of Sati towards eastern part of India, then Visnu cut the dead body into several parts. As the thigh part of Sati fell in to a hill where the present Tukreswari temple is located. Therefore people called the temple Tukreswari, which is associated with a *tukura* (a part or piece). Though nothing is known about the early history of the temple, at the top of the hill where the thigh part had fallen a temple has been constructed later by the queen of the dead king of Bijni. This temple is made of iron and the roof is made of tin. The foot print of the Goddess is there, which is protected by giving one *chali* (roof) above it.

List of Śākta pīthas in Assam

There are so many Śakti *pīthas* 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. A list is prepared that mainly highlights the Śakti *pīthas* which had evolved on and before the 18th century.

The list is as follows:-

	<i>Pītha</i>	Location	Period	Description
1.	Kāmākhyā <i>Pītha</i>	Kamrup District	16 th Century CE	Worshipped <i>yoni</i> symbol.
2.	Ugratara Devalay	Kamrup District	18 th Century CE	Constructed during Siba Singha's rule. Naval part had fallen.
3.	Dirgheswari Devalay	Kamrup	18 th Century CE	Two inscriptions of Ahom period have been found. Durga is
4.	Chatrakara Devalay	Kamrup	18 th Century	Mangalchndi is worshipped. Constructed by Kamaleswar
5.	Tamreswari Devalay	Sadiya, Dibrugarh	15 th Century CE	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 Mandir	Tezpur	18 th Century CE	Goddess Bhairavi is worshipped. Received Ahom kings patronage.
8.	Bhuvanesari Temple	Kamrup		Goddess mahagauri is worshipped.
9.	Harhi Devalay	Dhokuakhana		Goddess Kali is worshipped.
10.	Caṇḍī Temple	Tezpur	17 th Century CE	Gadadhar Singha built this temple. Main deity is Caṇḍī.
11.	Uma Temple	Tezpur	18 th Century CE	Śiva Singha was the builder of this temple.
12.	Barkalika <i>Than</i>	Deurigaon Tezpur		Goddess Manasa and Kali worshipped here.
13.	Maghnowa Do'l	Narayanpur, Lakhimpur	18 th Century CE	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 CE	Built during Lakshmi 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 CE	Durga and Kali are worshipped. Built during Pramatta Singha's
20.	Hatimura Durga	Koliabor, Nagaon	18 th Century CE	A rock cut image of Durga dated 10 th century is worshipped.
21.	Cāmuṇḍā Temple	Na-Bhanga, Nagaon	12 th Century CE	Goddess Cāmuṇḍā is worshipped. Image belonged to 12 th century.
22.	Kāmākhyā Dham	Mayong, Morigaon	16 th -17 th Century CE	Mayong king built this temple as recorded in their <i>Vamsavali</i> .
23.	Kechaikhaiti Than	Mayong, Morigaon	16 th -17 th Century CE	Goddess Kechaikhaiti is worshipped.
24.	Burhi Gosanir Than	Jorhat	18 th Century CE	Rudra Singha established this temple.
25.	Kak Gosanir Than	Bokakhat, Golaghat	17 th Century CE	Goddess Durga is worshipped. Gadadhar Singha built the temple.
26.	Durga Gosanir Than	Deopani, Golaghat	9 th Century CE	180 metre Durga image dated 9 th century CE is worshipped.
27.	Devī Do'l	Gaurisagar, Sibsagar	18 th Century CE	Built during Queen Phuleswari's reign.
28.	Devī Do'l	Sibsagar	18 th Century CE	Built during the reign of Ambika, queen of Siba Singha.
29.	Burhi Gosanir Devalay	Rangpur, Sibsagar		Ahom king constructed this Devalay.
30.	Devī Ghar	Rangpur, Sibsagar	18 th Century CE	Goddess Durga is worshipped. Rudra Singha built this temple.
31.	Mahamaya Than	Karbi Anglong		Goddess Durga is worshipped. Temple constructed over an old ancient stone relics.
32.	Durga Mandir	Tilapahar, Karbi Anglong	10 th Century CE	Sculpted stone Image of Dasabhujā Durga dated 10 th century CE is worshipped.
33.	Ranchandi Kali Mandir	Khaspur, Cachar	18 th Century CE	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 CE	Built during Ahom rule in 18 th century. Goddess Dipteswari is worshipped.
36. Kali Temple	Ajara, Nalbari	18 th Century CE	Received Siba Singha's patronage.
37. Kali Temple	Balilecha, Nalbari	18 th Century CE	Daksina Kali is worshipped. Built during Siba Singha's reign.
38. Jayanti Temple	Rangia, Kamrup	18 th Century CE	Lakshmi Singha was the patron.

From the above discussion it is clear that Śāktism was prevalent in Assam since early period. Earlier fertility cult of the non Aryan people later developed into the present form of Śakti cult. Earlier there were no images of the Goddess. It was worshipped in the symbolic form. It is during the Puranic age that the iconic form of different Goddesses developed. With the development of the iconic form there comes the need of a building to worship the deity. Thus in Assam developed so many Śākta *pīthas* in different period at different places. The Goddess having various forms had been worshipped in Assam since early time till today. Assam centering round Kāmākhya temple became the principal center for Śakti *sadhana*. But with the passage of time many Śākta *pithas* developed. Śākta *pithas* received royal patronage and the kings granted many lands in the name of temples. Many more Śākta *pithas* grown up atleast in the 18th century because it was during this time that Śaktism reached its zenith.

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82. Gait, *Op.Cit.*, Ch.4; Chatterjee, S.K., *Op.Cit.*, p.64
83. Sarma, Nabin Ch., 1973, *Darrang Rajvamsavali*, Barpeta, V.77-78.
84. Neog, 2008, *Prachya Sasanavali*, *Op.Cit.*, p.15
85. Gait, *Op.Cit.*, p.59.
86. Bhattacharya, N.N. 1982, *History of the Tantric Religion*, Delhi, p. 347.
87. *Markandeya Purana*, 18/12/341-42
88. *Markandeya Purana*, 91/15/360
89. Barman, Ramani, *Op.Cit.*, p.56
90. *Brihadharma, Madhyama Khanda*, 13-14
91. *Kālikā Purāna*, 35/143-44
92. Doloi, 1969, *Op.Cit.*, Pp.110-111
93. Sarma, Nabin Ch., *Op.Cit.*, Ch., Pp.78-86
94. *Ibid.*, p.116
95. *Ibid.*, Pp.510-11
96. Gait, *Op.Cit.*, p.174
97. Neog, 2008, *Op.Cit.*, plate.15
98. Gait, *Op.Cit.*, Pp.186-87
99. Bandyopadhyay, pranab, 1990, *The Goddess of Tantra*, Calcutta, Pp.19-20
100. *Tantrasara*, p.490
101. *Kālikā Purāna*, Ch.60
102. Doloi, 1969, *Op.Cit.*, p.115
103. *Ibid.*
104. *Kālikā Purāna*, 80/37/40
105. *Yoginī Tantra*, 2/1/44

106. *Kālikā Purāna*, Ch.63, 64
107. Doloι, 1969, *Op.Cit.*, p.116
108. Neog, Maheswar, 2008, *Religion of the North East*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers' Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 121
109. Doloι, 1969, *Op.Cit.*, p.116
110. *Kālikā Purāna*, 61/95
111. *Kālikā Purāna*, 68/58
112. Doloι, 1969., *Op.Cit.*,p.118
113. Sircar, D.C., reprint1998, *The Śākta Pihta*, Delhi, p.5
114. *Ibid.*
115. Sarma, Sanghamitra, *Op.Cit.*, Pp.34-35
116. *Ibid.*
117. *Ibid.*
118. Sircar, D.C., *Op.Cit.*, Pp.7, 11
119. Das, H.C., *Op.Cit.*, p.11
120. Pal, Pratapditya, (Ed.), 2009, *Goddess Durga. The Power and Glory*, Mumbai, p.164.
121. *Ibid.*, Pp.165-173.
122. Pal, Pratapditya, *Op.Cit.*, p.165

कामेशा कामरूपे त्वं पूर्णा काश्यां विगुक्तिदा
नेपाले पुण्डदा पुण्या सुवेशा पौण्डवर्धने ॥

धर्मबुद्धिः सुधा चैव सुखदा पापमोचनी ।
पारस्ये परमानन्दा ब्रह्माणी कान्यकुञ्जके ॥
पुण्याद्रौ च महापुण्या पूर्णा यज्ञफलेश्वरी ।
कात्यायन्यर्बुदे देवि धनदा शिववक्त्रभा ॥
एका चैकाग्रके देशे सुरूपेशाग्रकेश्वरे ।
त्रिपुरे सुन्दरी दिव्यरूपाखिलमनोहरा ॥
कामकीटे महापीठे प्रमदा मदनालसा ।
कामेश्वरी रतिश्चैव भृगुपुर्यां व्रजेश्वरी ॥
ब्रह्मेशा च तपोलक्ष्मीः कैलासे भुवनेश्वरी ।
केदारं वरदा चैवामृता चन्द्रपुरे सिता ॥
कलावती प्रभेशा च श्रीपुरे श्रीरमा प्रिया ।
कुमारी ब्रह्मचर्या च कन्या च कन्यकापुरे ॥
जालन्धरे महापीठे नागर्याग्निमुखी शुभा ।
ज्वालामुखी लोलजिह्वा सुवेशा च सुरङ्गिणी ॥
मालवे च महाविद्या विल्वपीठे च रूपिणी ।
रूपवती महादेवी देवीकोटेऽखिलेश्वरी ॥
मोक्षार्णे प्रियपीठे त्वं रुद्राणी सर्वमङ्गला ।
पवने हरपीठे च गन्धश्रीश्च सुगन्धिका ॥
अट्टहासे महापीठे भीमकाली च कालिका ।
विरजे मुक्तिहेतुश्च नमःस्वस्तिस्वधामयी ॥
जयश्रीराजलक्ष्मीश्च सुवेशा राजपर्वते ।
एलापुरे महासम्पत् मादेश्वरी महापथे ॥
गायत्री ब्रह्मरूपा च तत्सदोङ्कारपीठके ।
जया जयपुरे देवी जयदा जयमङ्गला ॥

विजया मङ्गला गौरी उज्जयन्यां सदाशिवा ।
 गौरीश्वरी महादेवी हरिद्रापीठके शिवा ॥
 चौरपीठे युगाद्या च चौराख्या नियमप्रभा ।
 राजेश्वरी महालक्ष्मीर्हस्तिनापुरवासिनी ॥
 कमला विमला भक्तौ रौद्री च नीलपर्वते ।
 योगेश्वरी विवेषी च त्रिस्रोता ब्रह्मरूपिणी ॥
 सिन्धुस्थली कामधेनु षष्ठी षष्ठीपुरे प्रिये ।
 माया मायापुरे देवी सुरभौ सौरभेश्वरी ॥
 विलासिनी महानन्दा प्रियचन्दनपर्वते ।
 महाव्रजेश्वरी श्रेष्ठा श्मनेश्वरपीठके ॥
 भवानी भवभक्ता च श्रीशैले शिववक्त्रभा ।
 देवता या स्वर्गलक्ष्मीः कनकामरपर्वते ॥
 उमा गौरी सती सत्या पार्वती हिमपर्वते ।
 इन्द्रेश्वरी सुराराध्या माहेन्द्रे जगदीश्वरी ॥
 अक्षा भोगेश्वरी नित्या श्रीमङ्गलिपुरे शिवा ।
 सुवर्णा कनका रामा हिरण्यपुरपीठके ॥
 महालक्ष्मीर्महेशानो महालक्ष्मीपुरेऽम्बिका ।
 चण्डपुरे प्रचण्डा च चण्डा चण्डवती शिवा ॥
 कृष्णे मेघखणा चैव मायाश्वेश्वरी (श्याया° ?) तथा ।
 कालीघट्टे महापीठे काली कालात्मिका तथा ॥
 लिङ्गाख्ये भैरवी विद्या विजया जाङ्गवीतटे ।
 इति ते कथितं दिव्यं पीठक्रममुदाहृतम् ॥

124. Sircar, D.C., *Op.Cit.*, p.20

125. The following passage is found in the D.C. Sircar's book which has been quoted by him from the fifth patala of the *Brhan-Nilantra*:

कामरूपं प्रियं वाराणसी नैपालमेव च ।
 पौण्ड्रं वर्द्धनपीठञ्च पावक्यं (पारस्यं) कान्यकुब्जकम् ॥
 पुष्याद्रिमर्बुदक्षैव (पुण्या°) एकास्रमात्रकेश्वरम् (°वैकास्रमाघातके°) ।
 त्रैपुरं कामकोटञ्च तथा गुप्तपुरं (भृगु°) वरम् ॥
 कैलासं पीठकेदार(°रं) शुभचन्द्रपुरं तथा ।
 श्रीपुरं च तथा काल्याः (कन्या°) पुरं जालन्धरं तथा ॥
 मानवं (मालवं) बिल्वपीठञ्च देवीकोटं तथैव च ।
 गोकर्णं मासतेश्च तथाट्टहासमेव च ॥
 अमुकानामगोत्रञ्च (विरजापुरक्षेत्रञ्च) एलापुरमलिप्रियम् ।
 महापथपुरञ्चैव ओङ्कारपुरमेव च ॥
 जयदक्ष जयपुरम् उज्जयिनीपुरं तथा ।
 हरिद्रापीठकक्षैव प्रिय(यं)क्षीरपुरं प्रियम् ॥
 गजाक्षयपुरञ्चैव उड्डीनपुरमेव (उड्डीश°) च ।
 प्रयागञ्च तथा षष्ठीपुरमेव शिवप्रदम् ॥
 मायापुरमन्त्रिषुं पुरञ्च परमेश्वरम् (शमने° ?) ।
 श्रीशैलमेरुपीठञ्च हिमालयमहागिरिम् ॥
 महेन्द्रपुरपीठञ्च तथा बलिपुरं प्रियम् ।
 हिरण्यपुरपीठञ्च महालक्ष्मीपुरं तथा ॥
 चण्डीपुरमन्त्रिषुं (चण्ड°?) तथा च्छायापुरं (छायाक्षत्रपुरं) प्रिये ॥

126. *Yoginī Tantra*, 6/151/426

127. Bhattacharya, Debendranath, 2008, *Kalika Purana*, Dibrugarh, Guwahati, Tezpur, p.167

128. *Ibid.*, p.168

129. *Kubjika Tantra*, seventh patala Manuscript no.3174, R.A.S.B; cited by Projit Kumar Palit in *History of Religion in Tripura*, Pp.111-112

130. Kakati, B.K., *Op.Cit.*, p.38

131. *Yoginī Tantra*, 11/28-29/148

132. Barman, Ramani, *Op.Cit.*, Pp.90-91
133. Bhattacharya, 2008, *Op.Cit.*, p.794
134. *Ibid.*
135. *Ibid.*, p.392
136. Goswami, 1996, *Op.Cit.*, Pp.25-30
137. *Yoginitantram*, 1994, p.203
138. Kakati, B.K., *Op.Cit.*, Pp.35-36
139. Barua, Gunabhiram, 1972, Assam Buranji, Guwahati, p.22
140. Barua, S.L., 2002, *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Guwahati, p.105
141. Doloi, 1969, *Op.Cit.*, p.211
142. *Ibid.*, p.213.
143. Kakati, B.K., *Op.Cit.*, p.160
144. Bardoloi, Nirmal Prabha, 1986, *Devi*, Sahitya Prakash, Guwahati, p.165
145. Sarma, Sanghamitra, 2010, *Op.Cit.*, Pp.52-53
146. Barua, B.K., *Op.Cit.*, p.177
147. Sarma, Sanghamitra, 2010, *Op.Cit.*, p.55
148. *Ibid.*, p.56
149. Kakati, B.K., *Op.Cit.*, p.12
150. Barua, S.L., *Op.Cit.*, p.105
151. Goswami, 1998, *Op.Cit.*, Pp.79-81
152. Bordoloi, Nirmal Prabha, *Op.Cit.*, p.195
153. Choudhury, P.C., *Op.Cit.*, p.37
154. Deka, Pranavjyoti, 2004, *Nilacala Kāmākhyā: Her History and Tantra*, Guwahati, p.77
155. Sarma, Sanghamitra, 2010, *Op.Cit.*, p.74
156. Roy, Dhanyaram, 2009, *A Study of the History of Mayong With Special Reference to the Archaeological Remains in Mayong*, Vinayaka Mission University, Tamilnadu, p.85

157. *Ibid.*
158. *Ibid.*
159. *Ibid.*
160. Rahman, Daulat, *New Light on land of black magic-Huge swords unearthed at Mayong in Assam point to human sacrifice.* <http://www.telegraphindia.com>.
161. *Kālikā Purāna*, 9/109/810
162. Neog, 2008, *Op.Cit.*, p.77
163. *Yoginī Tantra* , 7/117/456
164. Neog, 2008, *Op.Cit.*, p.35
165. *Ibid.*, Pp.35-36
166. *Ibid.*, Pp.54-55
167. *Kālikā Purāna*, 79/77/806
168. Sarma, Sanghamitra, *Op.Cit.*, p.24
169. Kakati, B.K., *Op.Cit.*, p.31
170. Neog, *Pavitra Asom*, *Op.Cit.*, p. 229
171. Doloi, Harinath Sarma., 1983, *Asomat Śakti Sadhana Aru Śākta Sahitya*, Barpeta, p.141
172. *Ibid.*, p.153
173. Barua, K.L., 1984, *Readings in the History & Culture of Assam*, Kamrup Anusandhan Samiti, Guwahati, p.14
174. *Kālikā Purāna*, 80/51
175. *Kālikā Purāna*, 80/23-24/820
176. Dutta, J.C., *Op.Cit.*, p.56
177. Doloi, 1969, P *Op.Cit.*, p.225-26.
178. Bordoloi, Nirmal Prabha, *Op. Cit.*, Pp.265-66.