Religion in Early Assam

An Archaeological History

Rena Laisram

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To

My Parents

Ima and Pabung

CONTENTS

PREFACE

Religion is a phenomenon that is as complex as it is paradoxical. Today, the debate on the relevance of religion to society continues, and religion has once again come to the forefront of human concern, though more often than not, for negative reasons. Religion has survived because it has accommodated itself to the dominant ethos of modern society. Another significant factor for its continued existence is the pursuit for the spiritual renewal of self and society that has been manifested in new religious movements. By the end of the 20th century CE, globalization had indeed increased the pace of cultural interaction, which initiated debates on the place of the individual and society in the perceived order of the universe. Closely linked to the process of globalization, was the comparison and confrontation of worldviews which led to cultural conflicts on issues of identity and nationality. It is in such a situation that religious traditions began to occupy a distinct role, since they could be mobilized to provide an ultimate justification for one's view of the globe, the resurgence of traditionalists with a global agenda being a case in point. As a response to the demands of the contemporary world, the search for a new consciousness has been enhanced by some key processes of modernity, viz., migration, travel, and, perhaps most importantly, mass communication, such as films, television, and the internet. It may be noted that, often, ethnic movements and issues of nationality have begun to involve archaeology, and assumptions drawn from it, to prove or refute claims of a community's identity. Thus, the political implications of archaeological enquiry may play a role in contemporary concerns of the legitimation of modern ethnic and national claims. The material dimension of religion does not exist outside the ideological realm. This study on the religion of Early Assam attempts to gain insights into the ways in which material culture interacts with religion, which is evident in the divine representations of art and architecture.

Situated as it is, Assam formed a link between Southeast Asia on one side, and the Indian mainland on the other, a factor of importance in understanding the history and identity of the diverse ethnic communities who migrated and settled in the land at different periods of history. Its most ancient name is Prāgjyotiṣa, which finds mention in the two epics: the *Rāmayana* and the *Mahābhārata*, and also in the principle *Purāṇas*. According to the *Kālīka-Purāṇa*, a text dated to about the 11th century CE,

the kingdom changed its name to Kāmarūpa, due to the association with the presiding deity Kāmākhyā, and came to be referred to as Kāmarūpa-Kāmākhyā. However, in epigraphic records, the name Kāmarūpa was first mentioned, along with Davāka, in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription (350 CE) of King Samudragupta, as a frontier kingdom of the Gupta Empire. The political boundaries of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa did not remain static, and at the height of its political glory, the erstwhile kingdom included most parts of modern Assam, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Bihar, and North Bengal. Assam acquired its name in the 13th century CE, when the Ahoms, belonging to the Tai group of people having migrated from Southern China, crossed the Patkai range and settled in the Brahmaputra valley. The year 1228 CE marked the advent of the Ahoms to the Brahmaputra valley, and the beginning of gradual political integration and socio-cultural amalgamation of many ethnic groups under their rule, which was to transform the history of Assam in the next six hundred years (1228-1826 CE). The medieval period of Assam history was followed by the modern period, with the signing of the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826 CE, a historical event that ushered in British expansion in Northeast India.

This book is organized into six chapters. Beginning the discussion with a background to the study of Early Assam, *Chapter One:* ***Introduction***, outlines the context, scope, historiography, conceptual foundation, and the theoretical framework of *doing* the archaeology of religion. Given that religion has ideological concerns, archaeology, with its basis on material culture, is considered an incomplete discipline for the study of religion. It may be noted that the approach to the study of religion has been debated by scholars of varied disciplines, such as archaeology, anthropology, and history. *New Archaeology* explains the possibility of establishing, and methods to establish, a more scientific approach to the study of man and culture by examining artefacts in the context of whole cultural systems. The importance of archaeological evidence, viz., inscriptions, sculptures, coins, and temple ruins, as sources for the reconstruction of the religion of Early Assam, can hardly be over-emphasized, since alternative sources are not available for the study of this aspect of Assam history. Notwithstanding the importance of literary sources for filling gaps in historical research, textual material cannot be fully relied upon as sources without critical scrutiny. As such, mythological narratives may be used as complimentary sources only when compared with other reliable materials. The roots of social formation in Early Assam (4th-12th centuries CE) are necessarily intertwined with the long history of migration and the interaction of multicultural ethnic groups with linguistic diversity which have gradually settled in various parts of the present eight states of Northeast India. It is generally accepted that the

Mongoloids, mentioned as the Kirātas in ancient Sanskrit literature, once occupied practically the whole of Northeastern India. Along with the Kirātas, the demographic profile in Assam also included many social groups, such as the Brāhmaṇas, Kayasthas, and Kalitas. The Brāhmaṇas who migrated to Kāmarūpa were given revenue-free lands by the kings, which led to their settlement in large numbers and influenced the emergence of the Brāhmaṇical faith as the predominant religion in Early Assam.

Chapter Two: ***Śaivism and Śaktism*****,** discusses the cults of Śiva and Śakti in the context of the rich material remains that have been discovered from the Pre-Ahom period. The majority of the kings of Early Assam invoke Śiva, as revealed by the inscriptions of the period. Śiva was worshipped in Kāmarūpa in the iconographic and *liṅga* (phallic) representations, and in composite forms such as Uma-Māheśvara and Hari-Hara. Śaivism was patronized by the kings of Kāmarūpa, and occupied an important position in the pantheon of the Brāhmaṇical deities. The worship of Śakti was associated with its famous shrine at Kāmākhyā. There are very few architectural remains of temples associated with the goddess belonging to the pre-Ahom period. The worship of Śakti in the *yonī* (female principle representing the Mother Goddess) form may explain the comparatively lesser popularity of the iconographic representation of the goddess. Epigraphic references to Śakti worship are also found only by implication, such as in the inscriptions of Vanamāla and Indrapāla, which refer to the temples of Mahāgauri, another name of the goddess. Śakti worship seems to have gained greater predominance over Śaivism by the time of Indrapāla, that is, around the 11th century CE.

Chapter Three: ***Vaiṣṇavism*** deals with the worship of Viṣṇu, one of the gods of the 'Hindu Triad' of the Brāhmaṇical faith. Mythological narratives in traditional accounts mention that the ruling houses of Prāgjyotiṣa and Kāmarūpa traced their lineage to Viṣṇu through Narakā, the mythological king of Prāgjyotiṣa. The *Mahābhārata* mentions that Viṣṇu is called Prāgjyotiṣa Jyestha. The earliest reference to Viṣṇu worship in Assam is recorded in the Umāchal inscription of the 5th century CE. The temple ruins dedicated to Viṣṇu and his *avatāras* (incarnations), and icons of the deity discovered throughout Assam, prove that Vaiṣṇavism was prevalent, and that it was not far behind Śaivism in its popularity.

Chapter Four: ***Miscellaneous Cults: Sūrya and Other Minor Deities,*** examines the archaeological sources related to many other gods and goddesses worshipped in Early Assam. It may be noted that the existence of a variety of deities is a marked feature of the history of religion during the

period. Śiva, Viṣṇu and Śakti were worshipped as major deities under the patronage of the kings belonging to the Varman, Salastambha and Pala dynasties, who ruled from the 4th to the 12th centuries CE. The miscellaneous cults belonged to Brāhmaṇical as well as non-Brāhmaṇical faiths. These deities did not rise to the position of independent cults, but were popular nevertheless, since their images were found in several places in Kāmarūpa. Independent representations of the deities are rare, though not altogether lacking in Assam. The minor deities were represented mostly as consorts and associates of the chief god or goddess. The deities which are categorized as minor deities include Sūrya, Indra, Gaṇeśa, Kārttikeya, Agni, Kuvera, Manasā, and Brahmā. The archaeological sources reveal that there was an overwhelming predominance of Brāhmaṇical gods and goddesses prevalent in Assam during the period, and there is evidence to suggest that Buddhism and Jainism were not altogether absent.

Chapter Five: ***Religious Heritage and Conservation****:* ***Kāmākhyā*****,** discusses issues of the past in the present, concerning religious heritage sites which are facing the impact of rapid urbanization accompanied by migration and the growth of cities. The Kāmākhyā temple located at Guwahati city in the Kāmrup metropolitan district of Assam, which has emerged as a major destination for tourists and pilgrims alike, exemplifies the challenges of conservation of religious heritage sites in urban settings. Religious heritage sites are popular as tourist destinations, since they offer visitors an insight into the history and identity of a community. The study of sacred landscape involves examining the relations between monuments and landscape, and the ways in which they are connected to the communities in everyday lives. Urban conservation lies at the very heart of urban planning, and conservators need to ensure the long-term protection of urban historic sites, which necessitates re-examination of linkages between sacred space and the secular city. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has been playing a principal role in the protection of cultural heritage in all its forms. The Archaeological Survey of India, the Assam Circle, and the Directorate of Archaeology of the Government of Assam have been maintaining and regulating archaeological activities at the state level, and have declared some of the sacred sites as protected monuments of national importance. The chapter draws attention to the urgent need to formulate a sustainable management plan for the conservation of religious heritage sites in Assam, by engaging various stakeholders in the field of heritage, including academics, managers, architects, local communities, and market forces.

Chapter Six: ***Conclusion*****,** reviews the material dimension of religion based on a coherent analysis of archaeological evidence relating to the period from the 4th to the 12th centuries CE. The migration of Brāhmaṇas to Kāmarūpa in large numbers, and the land grants given to them by the kings, facilitated the spread of the Brāhmaṇical faith. There are references to the kings of the period performing *yajñas* (sacrificial rituals of Vedic tradition) for various purposes, and this required the specialized guidance of the priests. The two deities that emerged as prominent in the hierarchy of the Brāhmaṇical pantheon during the period were Viṣṇu and Śiva, although Sūrya and Gaṇeśa also occupied an important position, as compared to the other miscellaneous deities. The temple ruins indicate that the people also worshipped minor deities such as Indra, Kārttikeya, Agni, Kuvera, Manasā, and Brahmā. Yet, not a single temple ruin dedicated to the minor deities has been found, since they did not develop as independent cults. That Brāhmaṇical religion was the dominant faith in Early Assam can be surmised from the rich material remains discovered in the form of epigraphs, sculptures, temple ruins, coins, etc. Śaktism influenced both Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism. Buddhism and Jainism attracted a section of the population. It may be noted that the Kāmarūpa kings were tolerant in their approach towards the various religious faiths and their adherents. A king may support and patronize a deity while at the same time eulogizing another, without any apparent distinction. A characteristic feature of the history of religion in Early Assam was that it was not unusual to find the worship of many deities belonging to different cults, such as Viṣṇu, Śiva, Sūrya, Gaṇeśa, etc., in a single temple. Such types of temple are rarely found in other parts of India.

It is apparent that religion in Early Assam was rooted in, and sustained by, the material practice of divine representations, with the active support of the kings. The available archaeological evidence throws a flood of light on the religious history of Early Assam from the 4th to the 12th centuries CE. It is hoped that, through an intensive study of the materials at hand, a more meaningful understanding of the religious condition that prevailed in the period will emerge.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book has been a long time in the making and I am grateful to a considerable number of individuals who gave me indispensable advice and constructive criticism. This study represents not only my work, but the support of many whom I would like to acknowledge at the publication of this book.

I am deeply grateful to Professor Kunal Chakrabarti, Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi who evinced keen interest in the subject and initiated me into the exciting field of research in the study of religion. It has left an indelible mark on gaining insights into the ways in which religion can be perceived from various perspectives according to the vantage point and histories of communities. The process of learning from, and inspiring, people of a different faith has far-reaching implications even outside the strictly religious realm, and this has remained my field of scholarly interest in my academic career.

I must express my gratitude to the scholars who have shared their knowledge on this specialized field of archaeology in Northeast India. I have benefitted from the interactions with them, particularly on aspects of archaeology and religion in Assam, the area of study under review. Mr. R.D. Choudhury, former Director, National Museum, New Delhi and former Director, Assam State Museum, Guwahati, provided me with the opportunity to use the museum and library facilities at the Assam State Museum. Dr. Gautam Sengupta, former Director General, Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi, was of great help in the collection of data at the North Eastern Hill University, Shillong. I am thankful to them.

The contributions made by the Kāmarūpa Anusandhāna Samiti, also known as The Assam Research Society, established in 1912 CE, towards the history and culture of Assam, are commendable. This institute functioned as a museum long before the establishment of the Assam State Museum at Guwahati and is a rich resource centre for subjects on the erstwhile kingdom of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa and neighbouring places. The reports on excavations conducted in archaeological sites in Northeast India, and studies on the sources of Assam history, are particularly valuable. The Samiti continues to provide library facilities for scholars interested in the

study of the cultural heritage of Assam, on subjects ranging from inscriptions, sculptures, objects of religious importance, relics and temple ruins, to indigenous manuscripts. I thank the staff and members of the Samiti for allowing me to use the library facilities and making available the rare volumes of the *Journal of the Assam Research Society*.

The collection of data from libraries and institutions in Assam, Meghalaya, and New Delhi, have been facilitated by the help and support of the staff, for which I am thankful. In Assam, the libraries consulted include: The Assam Institute for Tribal Research and Scheduled Tribes, Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Directorate of Archaeology: Guwahati, Indian Council of Historical Research: North East Regional Centre, K. K. Handique Library of Gauhati University, OKD Institute of Social Change and Development, and Directorate of Library Sciences, Government of Assam. I also had the opportunity to utilise library facilities at North Eastern Hill University, Shillong and Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

I will be failing in my duty if I do not acknowledge with thanks, the many individuals, especially students and faculty members at the Department of History, Gauhati University, with whom I have had a long association. The ongoing process of learning through interactions and discussions on the history of the region have widened my understanding of the subject. My interest in the history of Assam was enthused with visits to sacred sites in the state, which were later to form part of my field study experiences. It is essential to have a knowledge of the social demography of Northeast India where the majority of the ethnic communities do not possess a script of their own, and as such, do not have a 'documented history'.

The modern city of Guwahati, or Gauhati as it was known in early times, is a rich field for research on history and archaeology. Being a resident of the city for almost two decades has enabled me to visit sites in and around the city, for work and pleasure, and to observe the expanding city from the perspective of a historian, and a tourist. I have also benefitted from my participation in seminars, conferences and workshops, which has changed my outlook towards the seeming divide between the disciplines of history and archaeology. I would like to mention two events held in Guwahati: *The Regional Conference on Archaeology of North-Eastern India*: *150th Anniversary Celebrations, Archaeological Survey of India* (ASI), organized by ASI, New Delhi, July 20-21, 2012, and *The National Workshop on Archaeological Ceramics and Stone Tools*, organized by IIT-Guwahati, Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) and Centre for Archaeological

Studies and Training Eastern India (CASTEI), Kolkata, November 10-14 2008. It will not be out of place to note that the majority of the available works on archaeology and religion in Assam are descriptive in nature, which fails to contribute to theoretical perspectives on the interlinkages between history, archaeology, and religion. This book, titled *Religion in Early Assam: An Archaeological History*, is a concerted attempt towards exploring this perspective in the context of Early Assam.

I remember with deep respect my parents Laisram Gopal Singh (*Pabung*) and Rajkumari Kadambini Devi (*Ima*) who instilled in me the value of diligent and earnest hard work, which has always given me the motivation in my journey of research.

Jasendra kindly typed this manuscript during his trying days at Mumbai, and it is with gratitude that I acknowledge his contribution to this work.

Last, but not least, this book would not have seen the light of day without the constant encouragement from Jeevan, my husband, whose appreciation for research has been reassuring during some trying times. To balance professional and personal commitments requires the patience and understanding of family members. The support of my sons, Bani and Kris, in their own ways, throughout the journey of this book is acknowledged with affection.

The final stages of this work were put together during my stay at Doha, Qatar, a modern city with a rich historical past. The extraordinary desert calm has been an inspirational experience.

I take this opportunity to thank Cambridge Scholars Publishing for their active cooperation towards this publication, and for giving me a platform to present my research work to a wider audience.

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II. Sacred Landscapes

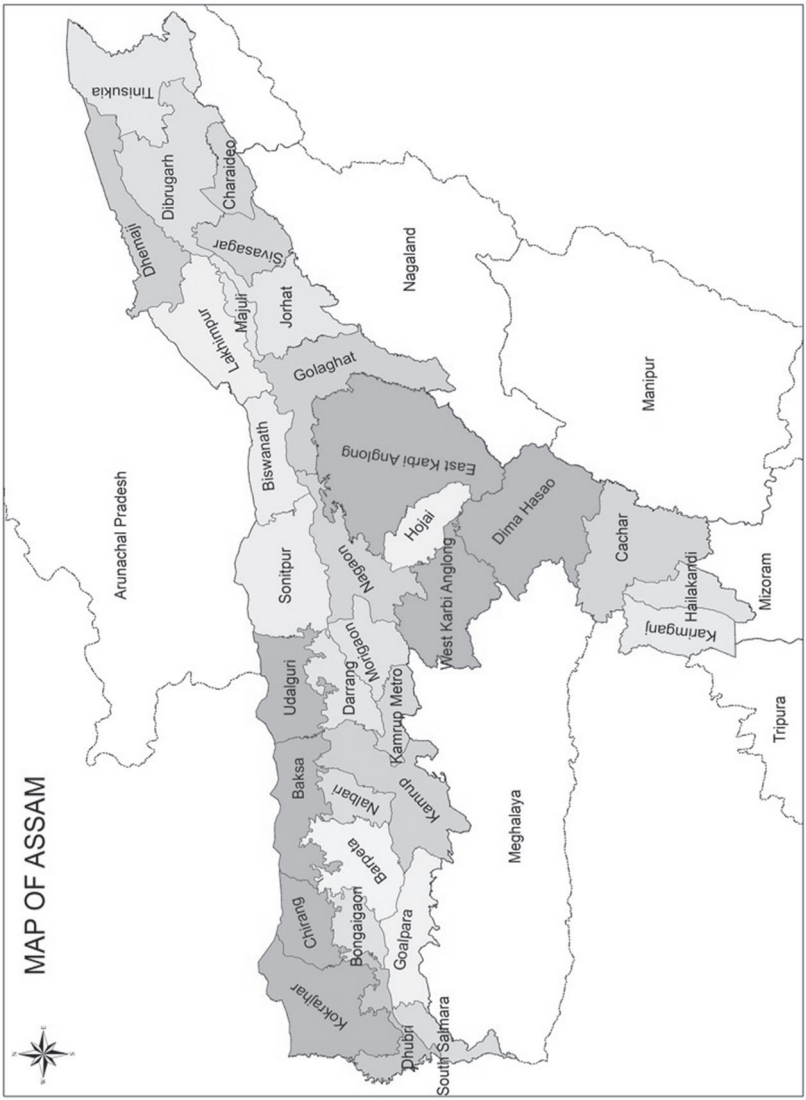
A Note on the Maps

An attempt has been made to locate as many sites of religious importance in Early Assam as possible, in the context of the material culture discovered so far. The outlines used for Maps 3, 4, and 5 in this study are taken from P.C. Sarma's book, titled *Architecture of Assam* (1988), on early medieval sites of Assam. It may be noted that Ancient Assam is coterminous with Early Assam, a period of Assam history from the 4th to about the 12th centuries CE. A study of the archaeological remains of the period under review shows that most of the sites which have been possible to locate come within the boundary of the modern state of Assam. The site of Malinithan, now in Arunachal Pradesh, bordering Assam, is the only exception. Therefore, for all practical purposes, the outline of this map serves the requirement of the book.

Map 1: Map of India: Location of Assam

Source: emapsworld.com, Accessed July 12, 2018.

Map 2: Map of Assam: Districts and Neighbouring States



Source: https://assam.gov.in/. Accessed July 27, 2018.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Context

The material dimension of religion is a comparatively unexplored area of study, particularly in Northeast India,[1] although sites of religious importance and artefacts constitute a major component of archaeological history. Religion, as commonly understood, is a system of beliefs which evoke a sense of reverence and awe, and are linked to doctrines, myths and rituals. Given the centrality of ideology in religion, archaeology, with its focus on material culture,[2] is generally considered as an incomplete method for its study. As such, mythological narratives make up much of the background of religious studies, and there is the challenge of defining and theorizing religion in archaeology and dealing with the methodological issues of how to *do* the archaeology of religion. In traditional societies,[3] religious symbols and rituals are often integrated with material culture, and religious places represent extensions of an interdependent socio-economic system.[4] It is well recognized that the distinction between secular and religious dimensions is an artificial one, often blurred in real life situations. 'Sacred Spaces'[5] are a key element in understanding how religions operate, and under what context the believers participate in the religion. These places are set aside according to various mythological, symbolic, and shamanic factors. It may be noted that, with the pace of development across the globe, a large number of historic archaeological sites are lost every year. An important aspect of archaeology in contemporary history is that, often, ethnic movements and issues of nationality have begun to involve archaeology, and the assumptions drawn from it, to justify their aspirations. As such, archaeology can be a powerful tool in proving or refuting claims of a community's identity.

This study attempts at an objective reconstruction of the history of religion in Early Assam (4th-12th centuries CE),[6] based on archaeological evidence, viz., architectural remains, inscriptions, coins, sculptures, and other artefacts discovered so far. It is an endeavour at a departure from earlier

works, in that its purpose is to gain insights into the interlinkages between history, archaeology, and religion, in the light of the divine representations in art, and architectural remains, etc. The importance of material evidence in the reconstruction of religion in Early Assam can hardly be over-emphasized, particularly when scholars must rely largely on such evidence to rediscover Assam's ancient past. Literary sources, such as the *Kālīka-Purāṇa* (11th-12th centuries CE),[7] and *Yoginī-Tantra* (16th century CE), contain much information about the myths and meaning of the sacred history, but the authentication of them is a difficult task. Yūan Chwāng's[8] (Hiuen Tsang's) accounts of his visit to the Kāmarūpa kingdom in the 7th century CE is a valuable record, but cannot be entirely relied upon, as it is written through the eyes of a traveller. It is crucial to mention here, that in the context of religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, etc., with large corpuses of literary sources, texts have often determined the nature and form of archaeological research.[9] However, in spite of the challenges relating to the reliability of using such sources, text-aided archaeology, when used in a critical manner, can offer clues for the identification of sculptures and sacred ruins within a historical context. The practice of idol worship promoted the positioning of the representation of deities inside temples, and the ruins of the sacred sites are now treasured as part of the cultural fabric of the society. The sacred archaeology of the period acquires significance, in that it marks the gradual formation of cult worship of Śiva and Viṣṇu, and also the worship of several deities, such as Śakti, Sūrya, Indra, Gaṇeśa, Kārttikeya, Agni, Kuvera, and Brahmā. The absorption of the various religious ideologies by the people of Assam, with a spirit of mutual tolerance, is a distinctive characteristic of the period. Early Assam witnessed the coming of the *Purāṇic* Hindu faith, and the Brāhmaṇas played a crucial role in the gradual dissemination of the Brāhmaṇical ideology.

The modern state of Assam,[10] situated in Northeast India, acquired its name in the 13th century CE, when the Ahoms,[11] belonging to the Tai[12] group of people having migrated from Southern China, crossed the Patkai range and settled in the Brahmaputra valley. Its most ancient name is Prāgjyotiṣa,[13] and this finds mention in the two epics: the *Rāmayana* and the *Mahābhārata*, and also in the major *Purāṇas*.[14] According to the *Kālīka-Purāṇa*, the kingdom changed its name to Kāmarūpa due to the association with the presiding deity, Kāmākhyā, and was often referred to as Kāmarūpa-Kāmākhyā.[15] However, in epigraphic records, the name Kāmarūpa was first mentioned in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta of 350 CE, along with the kingdom of Davāka, as a frontier kingdom of the Gupta Empire.[16] The mention of Lauhitya in the *Arthaśāstra* authored by Kautilya is taken to be a reference to the river Brahmaputra, indicating knowledge of

this region.[17] The *Yoginī-Tantra* and the *Kālīka-Purāṇa* give an indication of the geographical boundary of the erstwhile kingdom, and mention that the western boundary of ancient Kāmarūpa was marked by the river Karatoya in Koch Behar.[18] The kingdom of Kāmarūpa once included almost the whole geographical region of Northeast India, including Bhutan and Sylhet in Bangladesh, except Manipur and Tripura, which existed as independent kingdoms for a greater part of their history. During British rule in India, the erstwhile kingdoms of Manipur and Tripura were given the status of princely states and were finally merged with the Dominion of India in 1949 CE.

The roots of social formation in Assam are necessarily intertwined with the history of migration of Northeast India, which is characterized by a multi-ethnic population which now inhabits different parts of the present eight states of the region. It is generally accepted that the Mongoloids, mentioned as the Kirātas[19] in ancient Sanskrit literature, once occupied practically the whole of Northeastern India. B. C. Allen[20] noted, in the *Census of Assam 1901*, that, "North West China between the upper waters of the Yangtse Kiang and the Ho-ang-ho was the cradle of the Indo-Chinese race, and that, from the starting point, successive waves of emigrants entered Assam and India. A branch of them came southwards down the Chindwin, settled in the Chin hills, and were compelled by the pressure of population to move northwards into Cachar, Manipur and even the Assam range."

S. K. Chatterjee[21] has studied various tribes from the linguistic point of view, and inferred that, "The great Sino-Indian speaking people, who had their origin within Yangtse-Kiang and the Huwan-Ho rivers of north-west China, had migrated in a southerly direction, probably in 2000 BC, and appeared in the mountains of the north of the Brahmaputra plains, where the Bodos had already established themselves." From an archaeological perspective, M. K. Dhavalkar[22] explains the cultural diversity of the region, thus: "Geographically, the region provided links between China and Burma. It may be mentioned that the pre-historic cultures of Assam have more in common with East Asian and Southeast Asian tradition than with those of the (Indian) subcontinent." The Mongoloid groups spread over the entire Northeastern region, and, having experienced cross-cultural contact, eventually settled in different ecological settings and formed various ethnic communities.[23] Along with the Kirātas, the social composition of the population in Assam also included many social groups, such as the Brāhmaṇas, Kayasthas, and Kalitas. It may be mentioned that the Northeast states, except Sikkim, share a common historical experience, the British

having administered the region during a greater part of the 19th century CE. The coming of the British, associated with modern education and the market economy, brought about dynamic changes in the socio-cultural milieu of the communities.

Northeast India exhibits a rich ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic, diversity, with more than four hundred distinct tribal and sub-tribal groups, speaking more than a hundred dialects, and a large and diverse non-tribal population. Linguistically, the population may be broadly classified into speakers of three groups of languages, viz., Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burman, and the 'Indo-Aryans'. The first group is represented by the Khasi, Jaintia and War languages (Meghalaya), and the Tai languages of the Ahoms, Tai-Phake, and Tai-Khamti (Assam). The speakers of the Tibeto-Burman group of languages include: the Bodo, Rabha, Karbi, Mising, Tiwa, Deori (Assam); Ao, Angami, Sema, Lotha, Konyak (Nagaland); Mizo, Hmar (Mizoram); Nyishi, Adi, Abor, Nocte, Apatani, Mishmi, etc. (Arunachal Pradesh); and Manipuri, Mao, Maram, Rongmei, Tangkhul, Simte and Paite (Manipur). Some of the 'Indo-Aryan' languages spoken in the region are Assamese (Assam), Bengali (Assam and Tripura), Tripuri (Tripura), and Nepali (Sikkim). While there is no denying that there are considerable diversities among various ethnic groups, certain common traits are discernible, since the communities, presently at different stages of cultural transformation, are essentially clan-based societies. Clans and lineages are central to the social organization of the tribal societies, thereby forming the basis of the various stages of development of religious philosophical thoughts. The Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia, inhabiting the present state of Meghalaya, are matrilineal, tracing inheritance and descent through the female line, but authority is vested in the mother's brother. The Tiwas (formerly called Lalungs) in Assam used to be a matrilineal group,but are now in the process of transformation to patriliny. The Dimasa-Kacharis in Assam have a unique form of dual female and male descent, daughters tracing lineage through the mother, and sons through the father. The society of all other communities in the region are patrilineal and patrilocal. Most communities are monogamous, but polygyny is also practised. A few groups are polyandrous.

The history of the region reveals that the different ethnic groups at different periods of history began to gradually figure within the ambit of the pan-Indian culture continuum, with Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism, being followed by different sections of the population.[24] Birendranath Datta[25] gives a broad categorization of the people into three groups, viz., tribal communities not influenced by institutionalized

religions; tribal communities at various levels of acculturation[26] due to contact with the institutionalized religions; and societies which have been influenced by Sanskritization. Among the Plains' Tribes in Assam, which are undergoing different stages in the acculturation process, mention may be made of the Sonowal Kacharis of Upper Assam, the Lalungs of Nagāon, the Barmans of Cachar district, and the Bodo Kacharis of Kāmrūp, Goalpārā and Darrang districts. It is crucial to note that, although the process of acculturation leads to changes in the traditional culture, the indigenous culture is not always replaced in its entirety. As Dennis O'Neil[27] explains, "There is often a syncretism, or an amalgamation, of traditional and introduced traits. The new traits may be blended with, or worked into, the indigenous culture to make them more acceptable." This is particularly true in the context of cultural interactions and assimilation of the various ethnic groups in Northeast India.

The recorded political history of Assam begins with the Varman dynasty (4th-7th centuries CE), established by King Pushyavarman in the 4th century CE. He was a contemporary of King Samudragupta (350-380 CE) of the Gupta dynasty. The most famous, and last, king of the Varman Dynasty was Kumar Bhaskaravarman (594-650 CE), a contemporary of Harsavardhana. Since Bhaskaravarman was a *Kumar* (bachelor) and left behind no heir, the Salastambhas (7th-10th century CE) established a new dynasty which ruled until about the middle of the 10th century CE. The kingdom then passed into the hands of a new line of kings, namely the Pala dynasty (10th-12th centuries CE) which was established by Brahmapāla and lasted till about the middle of the 12th century CE. It may be mentioned that Assam, in its formative period, witnessed the prevalence of several religions such as Vaiṣṇavism, Śaktism, Śaivism and Buddhism. The kings of Early Assam claimed themselves to be upholders of the *varṇāśramadharma*,[28] and the Brāhmaṇas played a crucial role in legitimizing their position.

The Brāhmaṇas migrated to Kāmarūpa from at least the 7th century CE, and contributed to the emergence and development of the *Purāṇic* Hindu faith.[29] The emerging political influence of Kāmarūpa in the region, around the later part of the 5th century CE, coincided with the period of downfall of the Imperial Guptas. Romila Thapar[30] explains the development and spread of the *Purāṇic* worldview thus:

> "The corpus of literature called the *Purāṇas* which evolved out of the interaction between Brāhmaṇical tradition and many local traditions created composite religious systems reaching areas hitherto peripheral to Brāhmaṇical influence. Large scale Brāhmaṇa migration from the post-Gupta period, to various places, facilitated the incorporation of diverse

> rituals carrying with them a *Puranic* world-view which became recognized as part of the Brāhmaṇical tradition. A major part of each *Purāṇa* focuses on a deity and its sects, and these texts therefore are essential to the evolution of what has come to be called *Purāṇic* Hinduism."

The Bargaṅgā Rock Inscription of Bhutivarman records that the Brāhmaṇas came to settle in the Kāmarūpa kingdom as early as the 6th century CE.[31] The inducement offered to them by way of land grants, or *agrahāras*, must have led to their large-scale migration to the kingdom. The learned Brāhmaṇas were brought to Kāmarūpa for the performance of the *Asvamedha,* or horse sacrifice, and also for educational and cultural purposes, for which they were gifted the revenue-free land by the kings, and in large measure during the reign of Mahabhūtivarman.[32] The Nidhanpur Grant confirms the systematic policy adopted by the kings to settle the Brāhmaṇas in the kingdom by donating land to further their religious pursuits.[33] The increasing influence of the Brāhmaṇical religion during the period is also indicated by the performance of *yajñas*, or sacrificial rituals, by the rulers, under the specialized guidance of the priests.

It seems likely that the Brāhmaṇas who migrated to Assam belonged mainly to Madhyadesa and Mithila. A section of them came from Kathiawar of Gujarat and were known as Nagar Brāhmaṇas. The Brāhmaṇas of Assam today follow the Mithila School in matters of social law, and trace their descent from the Brāhmaṇas of Kanya-kubja (Kanauj). They claim that they migrated to Assam during the time of the legendary king Narakā.[34] Local scholars, such as P. C. Choudhury, suggest that the original four *varṇās*, i.e. Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, and Śūdras, did not remain in their traditional position of the *varṇāśramadharma*, and that even the Brāhmaṇas had inter-caste marriage.[35] According to Thomson,[36] "Assam has always been linked with Bengal as a centre of Tantric Hinduism, and, up to the 16th century CE, most kings appear to have been Śaktas, paying great attention to the worship of Śiva and Durga." There are some references to migration of the Brāhmaṇas to Kāmarūpa, especially in the 11th century CE, although their existence in Assam prior to this date is known by the reference in the Nidhanpur Grant and the Bargaṅgā epigraphs. The Guwākuchi Grant refers to a donee by the name of Vāsudeva who is said to have come from Vainagrāma in Savathi, identified with Śrāvasti, situated in the border of North Bengal. He was granted land at Mandi-Visaya, located in the present modern Goalpārā district.[37] Similar references regarding migration of Brāhmaṇas to Kāmarūpa are also recorded in the Khānamukh Copper Plates,[38] the Subhaṇkarapāṭaka Grant,[39] and the Kamauli Grant.[40]

The year 1228 CE marked the advent of the Ahoms to the Brahmaputra valley, and the beginning of the gradual political integration and socio-cultural amalgamation of many ethnic groups, such as the Morans, Borahis, Chutiyas, Kacharis, Misings, and Rabhas, etc., under their rule, which was to transform the history of Assam in the next six hundred years (1228-1826 CE). The Ahoms also underwent a process of acculturation,[41] when they gradually abandoned their native language in favour of the Assamese language, as indicated by the court chronicles known as *Buranjis*, which were initially written in Tai-Ahom, and later in Assamese languages. It is worthwhile to mention that the tradition of chronicle writing was also practised in Manipur (*Cheitharol Kumbaba*) and Tripura (*Rajmala*). It is believed that they learnt the tradition of record-keeping from their cultural interaction with the people of Upper Burma, Southeast Asia, and China. There are also 'local-level texts' known as the *Puyas*, in Manipur, which have five characteristics like the *Purāṇas* and were written after the coming of the Brāhmaṇas to Manipur.[42] The challenge of using these texts as sources of history lies in the fact that the works are silent on authorship and the period when they were written.

Religion, Archaeology and History: Concept and Definition

Every known society has a religious belief system, although the nature and practice has differed from one society to another. ***Religion*** is a phenomenon that is as complex as it is paradoxical. As a component of human behaviour, religion has interested, fascinated, confused, and confounded, scientists from an early period of history. Indeed, expressions and functions of religion in human societies are so varied that scholars have contended with the effort to define religion. Sometimes religion was equated with the sacred, i.e. whatever inspired awe, respect, fear, or trust, while at other times it was thought of as a social institution or a social and cultural system. Religion as a tradition naturalizes relationships of domination-subordination, together with the processes and forms of inequalities and exclusions. To view religion simply as a benign 'sacred canopy' over society is to ignore the ways in which religion can, and does, play an active role in everyday lives. Religion can function primarily in two ways: 1] as a legitimizing force, reinforcing dominant power interests; and 2] By providing stimulus and support to individuals and families, helping them to face challenges in a spirit of confidence and bold faith, unafraid to ask questions and seek new directions.

The word *religion* itself is of Latin origin: *religare*, and means, 'to bind together, to rehearse, and to execute painstakingly', which suggests both group identity and ritual.[43] According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, religion relates to the "recognition on the part of man of some higher unseen power as having control of his destiny."[44] In the Indian context, there is no distinctive Sanskrit word for 'religion.' It is generally explained by the term *dharma,*[45] i.e., what is established, law, usage, and right conduct. The implication is that all religions are founded on basic premises that are ultimately not subject to the scrutiny of reason. Depending on what one chooses to isolate for study, religion can refer to rituals, belief systems, kinships, magical cults, shaman and priestly activities, ceremonial calendars, or states of mind called 'the religious experience'. All these aspects overlap, though they differ too; but which aspect is more important depends on whether one approaches the field from the viewpoint of history, anthropology, sociology, or psychology, etc.

There are, broadly, two approaches to the study of religion.[46] The first, following the 20th century works of classical sociologist Emile Durkheim[47] (1858-1917 CE) defines religion in terms of its social functions, thus: "religion is a system of beliefs and rituals, with reference to the sacred, which binds people together into social groups." The second approach, following Max Weber[48] (1864-1920 CE) and P. Tillich[49] (1886-1965 CE), explains religion as any set of coherent answers to human existential dilemmas, such as birth, sickness or death, which make the world meaningful. Religious traditions and beliefs contribute to the organisation of societies but are often understood to support existing power structures. Conversely, how people understand 'religion', or, indeed, construct religion, depends on the context and their socio-political or economic agenda. Hence, any discussion on the 'archaeology of religion' first encounters the challenge of defining 'religion'. It is crucial to note that the study of religion has traditionally been a textual discipline, and that the definition of religion has thus remained conventionally text-based.

Archaeology is the study of past cultures through the material (physical) remains preserved from the past, which range from small artefacts to large monumental buildings. But the main aim of the archaeologist is not simply to generate empirical data of specific sites or cultures, but also to investigate the broader intellectual questions, including the role of religion in society, the importance of material culture to religious experience, and the forms of agency employed by both humans and objects. Modern archaeological studies have three major goals, viz., chronology or time perspectives, reconstruction, and interpretation. The inter-linkages between the sacred

and the mundane spaces yield information regarding the way people organize themselves in relation to how they perceive their cosmos.

History may be defined as a chronological and coherent reconstruction of the past to understand the continuity and change of human societies. In general, the sources of historical knowledge can be grouped in three categories, viz., what is said, what is written, and what is physically preserved, and historians often consult all three aspects. The aim of history writing should be to reconstruct objective history that does not have a hidden class, patriarchal, or cultural-political agenda. However, it is important to mention that history is necessarily affected by the circumstances of the age and the society in which it is written. History is a dynamic discipline, and perspectives and interpretations tend to change with new theories, the influence of other disciplines, new methods of analysis, the availability of new sources, and changing contexts. New histories are being written, a variety of sources outside the archives are being looked at, and the discipline is now moving towards a direction of interdisciplinary research and a more 'total history'. Interdisciplinary approaches to history began in the 1960s, and history departments began to encourage a high degree of sub-specialization in varied fields, such as military, gender, economic, social, environmental, intellectual and cultural, etc.

The distinction between 'history' and 'myth' is well recognized. Myths are, in a way, the opposite of historical facts, in the sense that, unlike historical facts, what constitutes a myth is not verifiable. Despite this, myth and history cannot be counterpoised as true and false. As such, myths represent reality, but symbolically and metaphorically. Yet, myth is not reality. Mythological narrative is now accepted as one of the necessary complementary sources for reconstructing the past. Historians are increasingly becoming sensitive to the need for a meaningful dialogue between folklore and historiography in the interest of a better comprehension of the past. Yet, the duty of a historian is to examine the acceptability of the myth as source, through a critical reading of the narratives in historical context.

Historical archaeology, as a discipline, addresses the link between archaeology and history. Archaeology, by discovering history first-hand through the mass of physical artefacts left behind from past human activities, has raised the consciousness of the public with respect to the tangible cultural heritage of a community. Intangible cultural heritage, which includes traditions and customs, is also preserved through collective memories, and oral history has emerged as one of the tools to collate these

memories, especially of communities which have been marginalized from history. Oral history, as a discipline applied within archaeological investigation, is growing in popularity in the form of public archaeology. A point of difference between oral historians and oral traditionalists is that the latter are more interested in fables, legends, and stories beyond living memory. It has been increasingly felt that there is a potential for combining oral history testimony with physical archaeological evidence, to enhance the understanding of a community.

Archaeological History: Trends and Possibilities

Excavation is often the public face of archaeology, although it plays a wider role in the discipline with its dynamic methodology, which constantly changes to reflect current thinking and improving technologies. Although there is no single overarching archaeological theory of religion, it will be worthwhile to gain insights into some of the dominant traditions of archaeological theories,[50] viz., cultural-historical archaeology, processual or new archaeology, post-processual archaeology, or interpretative archaeology, and Marxist archaeology. Early formulations of archaeology in the 19th century CE were based on the empirical methods of collection, description and classification of a body of data. Cultural-historical archaeology, inspired by Charles Darwin's Evolutionary Theory, brought a sense of scientific investigation to construct historical narratives of the past and develop chronologies. It was not until the 1960s that archaeologists such as Colin Renfrew,[51] Lewis Binford, and others, began to move away from the discipline's focus on description and documentation, to one that attempted to discover cultural complexity and change in societies. Artefacts in isolation were considered insufficient indicators for formalised religious practices.[52]

Processual archaeology, also called new archaeology, examined environmental adaptation as an agent for societal change. The methodology was an endeavour to catch up with the social theory of the social sciences. Thus, there was an attempt to identify universal laws of human behaviour, through which the findings could be interpreted. Post-processual archaeology, or interpretative archaeology, began in the 1980s as a critical response to a set of perceived failings of processual archaeology. The 'postmodern turn' places stress on human agency, the importance of human subjectivity, and lived experience in the past, and maintains that the theory and practice of archaeology can never be separated from its cultural and political context. Renfrew developed a methodological approach, termed cognitive

archaeology, which suggests that religion is a product of the human mind and is only partially manifest in material remains, and that archaeologists must recognize the mystery, power and experience embodied in religious belief systems. An influential theoretical tradition in archaeology is the approach derived from the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and their followers. The Marxist approach focuses on the role of conflict, especially economic and political conflict (e.g., class, gender), as the agent of social change. The strategies of domination and resistance often evolve into cultures that have a distinctive material expression which is discernable in the archaeological record.

Religion is intricately connected to culture, which influences the everyday lives of the people and therefore leaves traces in their material culture. In the 2000s, the new concept of 'the archaeology of religion' emerged because of multiple studies with wide-ranging perspectives, which include, among others: behavioural archaeology, cognitive archaeology, the direct historical approach, ecological archaeology, evolutionary archaeology, gender archaeology, historical archaeology, and landscape archaeology. Historical archaeology contrasts with pre-historic archaeology, in that it focusses on the study of societies with written records, including non-literate peoples recorded by their literate neighbours. However, in the last few decades, it has broadened its scope to include the study of past lifeways and social processes. P. P. A. Funari, S. Jones, and M. Hall[53] have drawn attention to the 'archaeologies of domination and resistance, and issues of identity, nationalism, and ethnicity,' to understand the role of material culture in the expression of power and identity, cross-cultural perspectives on colonialism, and the tension between the *global* and the *local.* The theoretical basis of this perspective has been attributed to the Marxist and the Post-Structuralist influences on archaeology. Lars Fogelin[54] identified five primary areas relevant to the archaeological of religion, viz., ethnohistory and history, ethnoarchaeology, sacred architecture, sacred landscape, and iconography. Thus, archaeologists have borrowed analytical techniques and concepts from other disciplines, including ethnography, sociology, and critical theory, to explore religion and ritual. *The archaeological history of religion explores the complex interactions between people, objects, and ideas.*

Literature Review

An overview of the existing and emerging body of knowledge is helpful in identifying gaps in the research undertaken, and situates the subject

within the larger theme of religion and archaeological history. The literature review is categorized as follows:

I. Secondary Sources: Books

Studies on the history of religion in Early Assam, so far, have largely been literary accounts incorporating myths and legends without critical scrutiny, or descriptive archaeological finds of religious materials. There are a few books which serve as a good background to the study of religion and archaeology for the pre-Ahom period. The contribution of Edward Gait to the development of modern regional historiography in Northeast India is well recognized. His seminal work, titled *A History of Assam*[55] is generally considered by scholars as the first comprehensive and systematic history which made use of varied extant sources, such as the epics, *Buranjis*, Persian chronicles, coins, etc. However, it passes lightly over the early period of Assam history, with only a few pages dedicated to the socio-religious aspects.

History writing in Assam has generally been limited to reconstructions of dynastic history, emphasizing a unilineal political continuity of Assam from its earliest times.[56] The works, which contain some information on religion, but mainly focus on the dynastic history of Kāmarūpa, include: H. C. Ray's book, titled *Dynastic History of Northern India*;[57] R. B. K. L. Barua's book, titled *Early History of Kāmarūpa;*[58] and R. G. Basak's work, *History of North-Eastern India*.[59] Some works which are useful in order to understand the socio-cultural and religious aspects of the pre-Ahom period, and were written by local scholars, include: B. K. Barua's book, titled *A Cultural History of Assam: Early Period*;[60] Nagendranath Vasu's book, titled *Social History of Kāmarūpa*;[61] S. N. Sarma's work, *A Socio-Economic and Cultural History of Medieval Assam (1200-1800 A.D)*;[62] and P. C. Choudhury's book, *The History of the Civilisation of the People of Assam from the Earliest Times to the 12th Century*.[63] The cultural history of Assam is dealt with by R. M. Nath,[64] in his work, titled *Background of Assamese Culture*. The book titled *The Mother Goddess Kāmākhyā,*[65] by B. K. Kakati, is a good introduction to the history of the mother goddess and a valuable introduction to the religious history of Assam. However, it deals with the goddess alone and is, therefore, only of partial use to the present study. A significant study from the point of view of understanding the religion and archaeology of Assam during the period under review is Nayanjyoti Lahiri's[66] book, titled *Pre-Ahom Assam: Studies in the Inscriptions of Assam between the Fifth and the Thirteenth Centuries A.D.* The study is,

however, based solely on inscriptions, and as such, offers much scope for the use of other sources for a comprehensive understanding of the subject.

The archaeological finds belonging to the pre-Ahom period, and also of the Ahom period, have been documented in various works, such as that of R. D. Choudhury[67] in *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley*, N. D. Choudhury[68] in *Historical Archaeology of Central Assam from the Earliest Period to 12th Century A.D.,* P. D. Chaudhury[69] in *Archaeology in Assam: An Introduction,* and Arun Bhattacharjee,[70] in *Icons and Sculptures of Early and Medieval Assam*. Despite being rich sources for archaeological data, these works do not offer much in terms of methodological approaches, or in understanding the linkages of history, archaeology and religion of the pre-Ahom period. P. C. Sarma's[71] book, titled *Architecture of Assam,* and B. N. Mukherjee's[72] work, titled *East Indian Art Styles: A Study in Parallel Trends,* are useful for understanding the trends in art styles in the eastern region of India. M. M. Sharma[73] has made a valuable contribution to the religion and archaeology of Assam, with the publication of the book titled *Inscriptions of Early Assam,* which has brought together all the available epigraphical materials in Assam, from earliest times up to the end of the 12th century CE, with a complete list of the inscriptions and their translations. A few inscriptions, discovered after this work was published, are available in the articles published in the volumes of the *Journal of the Assam Research Society*. P. N. Bhattacharya's[74] work, titled *Kāmarūpa Śāsanāvalī*, is also an indispensable source for the study of epigraphs and the cultural history of Assam in general.

II. Journals /Reports/ Proceeding Volumes

The establishment of the Archaeological Survey of India, and its exploratory works in Assam, brought to light impressive material remains of the early period, which are available in the form of memoirs and annual reports. A very significant development for studies in history and archaeology in Assam was the establishment of the Kāmarūpa Anusandhāna Samiti (Assam Research Society), in Guwahati, in 1912 CE, with the explicit purpose of promoting research in history, archaeology, and ethnography. A mine of information is contained in the reports and articles published in the *Journal of the Assam Research Society*, in more than thirty volumes. The journal has been extensively used, and has formed an important base for the study under review. The relevant articles on religion and archaeology from other journals have also been consulted, and these include the *Annual Reports of the Archaeological Survey of India*, *Epigraphia Indica*, *Indian Historical Quarterly*, *Journal of Anthropological*

Research, Journal of the Assam Sanskrit College, *Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India,* and *Social Scientist.* The volumes of the *Proceedings of North East India History Association (NEIHA)* contain articles on various aspects of the ethnic communities of Northeast India, and have helped in broadening knowledge on the history and people of the region. The publication, which is an outcome of the annual conference, covers a wide range of subjects, including art, archaeology, customs, and religion. Gautam Sengupta's[75] article, titled *Recent Trends in the Art of Assam,* for example, is a relevant article published in the *NEIHA* volume, which provides an overview of the studies on the art of the pre-Ahom period, and draws attention to the need for art historians to go beyond collecting data or re-interpreting existing evidence. Among the theses and dissertations consulted, mention may be made of Mignonette Momin's[76] M.Phil dissertation, titled *Aspects of Political Institutions and Social Structure in Kāmarūpa c. A.D. 600-1200,* and the PhD thesis by the same scholar, titled *Polity and Society in Assam Circa A.D. 600-1200,* which are both valuable for a critical understanding of polity and social formations in Assam, which is crucial for examining the emergence and development of different religious beliefs and practice during the period of study.

III. Literature on Theoretical Framework

In the past few decades, the discipline of archaeology has widened its scope to include the emerging interest on the materiality of religion, and the methodological issues for its study. Contemporary works which have contributed to the discussion on the interaction between archaeology and religion include: Lars Fogelin's[77] edited volume, titled *Religion, Archaeology and the Material World,* Mathew Engelke's[78] work, *Material Religion*, Timothy Insoll's[79] book, titled *Archaeology, Ritual and Religion,* and David Morgan's[80] edited volume, titled *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief*. Studies of iconography are concerned with the investigation of the contexts in which different art objects were located, and the way the images were conceived and detailed according to sacred scriptures or mythological descriptions. In Erwin Panofsky's[81] work, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance,* the scholar explains that all art has some underlying principles which reflect and reveal the intrinsic meaning of the work, and the choice and presentation of motifs, interpretation of images, stories, and allegories.

Texts have often determined the nature and form of archaeological research, and the lack of archaeology in the investigation of Hinduism has

been emphasized by D. K. Chakrabarti,[82] in an article titled *The Archaeology of Hinduism.* The dichotomy of the sacred and the secular world in architecture has been explained by Edmund Leach,[83] in his work, titled *The Gatekeepers of Heaven: Grandiose Architecture.* In most cultures, a boundary and a gateway separate the secular and the sacred. However, in Hindu tradition, this is discarded in favour of an open and diffusive architecture, where the secular world does not separate from the sacred, but flows into the sacred. The context of material remains, religious ideas and symbolism, and the theme of the sacred space is useful to study the temple ruins in Assam, such as that of the Dāh-Parbatiyā temple.

An interdisciplinary approach to the study of religion requires an understanding of terms and concepts adopted from various disciplines. The encyclopaedias and dictionaries consulted for this study include: *Dictionary of Concepts in Cultural Anthropology; Encyclopaedia of Religion; Encyclopaedia of Comparative Iconography: Themes Depicted in Works of Art; Indian Epigraphical Glossary; Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend; The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology;* and *The Encyclopaedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology.*

Sources and Methodology

Epigraphic records constitute by far the most important foundation on which a reliable framework of the archaeological history of early Assam can be based.[84] These records have revealed an almost unbroken genealogy of the kings, from about the 4th to the middle of the 12th centuries CE, a period that covers about eight hundred years. No fewer than twelve copperplate inscriptions, inscribed seals, and rock inscriptions, recorded by various kings of Kāmarūpa during this period, have been discovered and deciphered. The language used for the inscriptions is Sanskrit, and the style is in prose and verse form. There are instances of inclusion of local word forms incorporated in several writings, and the entry of such word forms can be attributed to the influence of the local dialects. The inscriptions are both religious and secular in nature. The secular epigraphs were issued as royal notices given by the kings or the local authorities. There are short inscriptions, which are commemorative-cum-donative type, and bear the names of the donor and donee. The royal decree inscriptions contain inscribed instructions, and rules and regulations for different sections of people. The opening lines of the long inscriptions have been addressed to Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Gaṇeśa. Some of the inscriptions record political events, such as the battles fought by the kings, and descriptions of capital cities, such as Prāgjyotiṣa, Hadappesvara, Durjjaya, and Kāmarūpanāgara.

The epigraphical records used for this study may be categorized into two groups, viz., local, and those composed outside Kāmarūpa. The local epigraphs are of a religious nature, and the majority of them start with an invocation to a deity. The epigraphs classified as those from outside Kāmarūpa are mainly of a political nature, and, therefore, are of not much use in the present study. The local variety have come down to us in the following forms: rock-engravings, copperplates issued by kings, engravings on clay or metal seals, and inscriptions on the bodies of stone idols. There are size variations in both the copper and the stone inscriptions. The majority of the extant icons belong to the Brāhmaṇic faith. Only a few images of the Buddhist pantheon, and only two Jaina icons, have been noticed in Assam so far. The sculptures belonging to the pre-Ahom period are mostly mutilated, and lie scattered in many sites in Assam. These sculptures served as ornaments of the architectural constructions, and are not found in their original places, as those works do not survive to this day. Regarding coins, two hoards belonging to the pre-Ahom period have been discovered so far.

Not a single standing temple belonging to the pre-Ahom period has been found, although the ruins of several temple structures, and the reference to sacrifices recorded in the inscriptions, reveal that temples were constructed for the deities during the period. The material remains have been recovered in the form of scattered objects and mounds in some sites, such as Gauhati (modern Guwahati), Tezpur, Nagāon, Sibsāgar, and Sadiyā, rendering it difficult to reconstruct the history of sacred architecture in Early Assam. An important aspect of the remains discovered so far is that there is no clear distinction between shrines dedicated to single deities, whether they are of Śiva or Viṣṇu. An example of this type is the temple remains at the site of Bargaṅgā. In Early Assam, the three dynasties that ruled during the period, viz., Varman, Salastambha, and Pala, were patrons of art and architecture, as revealed by both material remains and textual references. The Gachtal Copper Plate Grant of Gopalavarman[85] indicates that the kings developed temple architectures, and contributed aesthetic creations, through sculptural motifs of various deities which were installed in the sacred sites.

Iconography as the description, classification, and interpretation, of the subject-matter of a work of art, expresses certain themes characteristic of a philosophy of an era. In Early Assam, the majority of the temples were dedicated to Śiva and Viṣṇu, although other deities of the Brāhmaṇical pantheon are also visible in many of the ruins. Buddhism and Jainism also made their presence felt in the history of religion in Assam, since a few images associated with them have also been discovered. A characteristic

feature of the temple ruins, and the sculptures discovered, show that it was constructed of stone, which was largely influenced by Gupta art style, though with regional variations. Notable temple remains discovered include the Dāh-Parbatiyā temple, the Deoparbat temple, the Hayagriva Madhava temple, the Kāmdeva temple, the Kāmākhyā temple, and the Madan Pingaleswar temple. The restoration of the temple ruins has been initiated at different sites by the Archaeological Survey of India and the Directorate of Archaeology, Government of Assam, and the material remains discovered include plinths, door frames, sculptural images, animal figures, celestial figures, flora, and geometrical features, etc.

Protected sites are today no longer considered as merely attractive and/or historically significant groups of buildings and monuments, but as social environments, which should be conserved in accordance with their natural settings and through mobilization of the residing communities. There is a new focus given to cultural heritage, which includes both natural and man-made environments. According to Shaw:[86]

> "A sacred landscape is likely to be made of a composite tapestry of *continuities* which may include elements of place-bound sacrality and recognition of its inherent power preserved in the material or temporal sphere or abstracted into oral history; the invention of antiquity in order to legitimize a religious or political discourse; the assimilation of ancient cult spots as part of the conversion process; all intermingled with the discourse of archaeology itself."

A case for the importance of setting has been made by Edmund Leach,[87] who argues that, "works of art are not just things in themselves, they are objects carrying moral implications…. What the moral implication is, depends upon where they are." There is the underlying assumption that loss of territory erases history, jeopardizes historical and cultural self-consciousness, and renders identities invisible.

From the perspective of sacred landscapes in Assam, two major archaeological excavations of historical importance may be mentioned, viz., the Ambari Archeological Site, and the Dhansiri-Doyang Valley. The earliest period of the historical phase at the Ambari site, situated at the heart of Guwahati city, is dated to around 4^{th}-5^{th} centuries CE, and the iconographical remains mainly conform to this period. The site of Ambari, which was discovered in 1968 CE, has been identified with the city of Prāgjyotiṣa, the capital city of Kāmarūpa, although no absolute dating, or any typifying artefacts which could prove the inferences beyond any doubt, have been obtained. The settlement at the Ambari Site has two cultural

periods, viz., the early cultural phase dated 200 BCE, and the later cultural phase, which continued, after a brief cultural gap, from 1100 CE to the late medieval period. Of the early phase, the remains of a tank of burnt bricks, a drainage system, brick-paved pathways, brick-paved floors, and foundation walls, have been unearthed. The excavation work during 2002-3 CE revealed the existence of a square structure, which was a living apartment divided by an inner corridor. This dwelling apartment was found laid within a north-south and an east-west brick wall. In another phase of excavation, during 2008-9 CE, there was evidence of some remarkable ceramic ware, such as glazed terracotta potteries, kaolin pots, and celadon ware, which indicates that the site perhaps served as an important centre for trade in early history. This is confirmed by the discovery of terracotta clay sealing, and evidence of a brick-built tank datable to the Sunga-Kushana period of Ancient Indian history.

The rich archaeological finds at Ambari include many stone sculptures, Śiva-*liṅgas*, terracotta images, kaolin pots, oil lamps, beads, and ornaments, etc., suggesting that perhaps there existed an artists' guild and a production centre of sculptures (atelier) with distinct local art-forms, sometimes referred to as the Kāmrūpa School of Art. A sculpture of Naṭarāja (cosmic dance of Śiva) positioned on his vehicle (*vāhana*) Nandi (the bull) found here, is unique, and stylistically conforms to the Kāmrūpa School of Art. Stone sculptures of various divinities of the Brāhmaṇical faith, and terracotta human figurines from Ambari, are now preserved in a museum *in situ*, and at the Assam State Museum.

The Doyang-Dhansiri Valley is located about 60 kms from Jorhat, and 240 kms from Guwahati. It covers the geographical area of Deopāhār, Baksapāhār, Nakshapāhār, Kasomari, and the Nagajan Khanikor village of Sarupathar. H. N. Dutta of the Directorate of Archaeology, Assam Circle, opines that the excavation at the sites revealed that it must have served as the trade link between the Indian mainland and Southeast Asia from around the 2nd-3rd centuries CE. At Dubarani, Barpathar, in the valley, a clay seal inscribed in the Brahmi script refers to a king named Vasundhara Varman. The site also yielded the imprint of a pair of feet on terracotta, and a plinth of a temple.

The Pāglātek and Dhulāpadung coins discovered in Assam are imitated coins, and may have found their way to Assam from Bengal. Apart from these, no coins belonging to the Kāmarūpa kings during the period under review have been found, since they were largely melted into bullion, or used in ornaments. This explains the absence of numismatic evidence to

corroborate the religious history of the early period. Archaeologists have become increasingly concerned about the future of the past, and many have turned their attention to problems of conserving and managing the archaeological record of cultural heritage. Public archaeology, or cultural resource management (CRM), provides the long-term strategic framework for the protection (ideally preservation *in situ*) of archaeological sites and other cultural monuments. The safeguarding of cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, is significant in terms of strengthening cultural identity and a sense of national integrity. Cultural heritage plays a powerful role in many communities, and any development or regeneration scheme requires conservation-based, informed analysis of the historic environment, and appropriate management plans for sustainability. The documentation and retention of historic features, and integration with the public realm, contribute to the possible success of new developments.

Religion is based on a combined system of beliefs and practices, which is open to various interpretations. As such, there is no single 'theory of religion'. However, in exploring the material and historical basis of religion in Early Assam, this study endeavours to find common ground between archaeological methods, and theories of religious and cultural interpretation. The validity of both processualism and post-processualism theories is still debated among scholars of various disciplines. The present work draws ideas from *New Archaeology*, in the way that it attempts to establish a more scientific and comprehensive approach to the study of man and culture. As Lewis R. Binford proposed:[88] "Artefacts should be seen as products of whole cultural systems, composed of subsystems functionally associated with one another, and that can provide insights into the social structure and religious beliefs, among other aspects of their producers' lives." A critical reading of appropriate sacred texts in historical context helps to understand the subject from a wider perspective. The available archaeological data throws a flood of light on the religious history of the period from the 4th to the 12th centuries CE. It is hoped that, through an intensive study of the materials at hand, a more meaningful understanding of the religious condition prevailing in Early Assam will emerge. The study is organized into six chapters, titled: Introduction, Śaivism and Śaktism, Vaiṣṇavism, Miscellaneous Cults: Sūrya and Other Minor Deities; Religious Heritage and Conservation: Kāmākhyā; and Conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO

ŚAIVISM AND ŚAKTISM

A: Śaivism

The worship of Śiva[89] in Early Assam is confirmed by the extensive archaeological remains discovered in at least thirty-five sites all over the state. These remains have been found in the form of icons and door frames, where the deity is depicted with, or without, consorts, in association with other deities, while many of them are found in the *liṅga* (phallic symbol) form. Literary and archaeological sources indicate that Śiva was a prominent deity in Kāmarūpa from antiquity, and that all the kings of Kāmarūpa patronised Śaivism.[90] In epigraphic records, the earliest reference to the deity occurs in the Tezpur Copper Plates of Vanamāla, of the middle of the 9th century CE, which informs that: "Bhagadatta attained the illustrious position of the monarch of Prāgjyotiṣa, and having come there, worshipped Śiva with penance and politeness."[91] There are many references in the epigraphs of the pre-Ahom period which reveal that the kings were great patrons of Śiva. Bhagadatta is mentioned as being very devoted to Kṛṣṇa, but he also worshipped Śiva with great penance.[92] Vajradatta too, is said to have had a single-minded faith in Śiva.[93] The Nidhanpur Grant describes Susthitavarma's devotion for Śiva,[94] and Harjaravarman is described as Parama-Māheśvara, invoking the "unquestionable greatness of Śiva."[95] King Balavarman III opens the Nowgong Grant with an invocation to Rudra (Śiva).[96] The Gauhati Grant opens with an invocation to Sambhu and Pasupati, and their consorts Gauri and Ganga.[97] Śiva has been eulogized in a variety of ways. For example, the Bargāon Grant gives a description of Śiva's *tandava* (cosmic dance), stating that "the water of the Lauhitya river was made beautiful by the reflection falling on it from the dancing figure of the deity in his many forms."[98] A reference in the *Mahābhārata* of Bhagadatta being eulogized and called 'a friend of Śiva' may perhaps indicate the predominance of Śaivism in the history of religion in Kāmarūpa.

Śiva was generally worshipped in the phallic symbol (*liṅga*). The *Liṅga Purāṇa* text prescribes the ways to worship the *liṅga* with ablutions of ghee,

milk, honey, and curd.[99] If the *Yoginī-Tantra* is to be believed, the number of *liṅgas* in Kāmarūpa 'exceeds a million'.[100] This would almost justify the claim in the *Kālīka-Purāṇa* text that the land was reserved by "Sambhu (Śiva) for his own domain."[101] Kāmarūpa houses a good number of temples, though there are not many Śaiva images in them, since Śiva-*liṅgas* were enshrined inside them as the central object of worship. The type of *liṅga* concerned here is the *mānusa-liṅga* (made by man), of *acala* (immovable) type only. They are classified into six types, on the basis of the materials used, viz., copper, clay, jewel, rock, sand, etc.[102] The highest Śiva-*liṅga* discovered in Assam so far, is at Ketakibari, Tezpur.[103] Sculptural representations of Śiva in temples are rare, and one of them is that of Maheśvara, discovered in Gauhati.[104] There are doorkeepers of Śaiva temples at Gachtal, Nowgong, known as *dvarāpala* and *dvarāpalikā*, and they hold Śaivite symbols, such as *śūla* (spear) and *pāśa* (noose; trap). The *dvarāpalas* and *dvarāpalikās* are depicted as semi-divine beings, and placed at the exterior of the entrance of a temple. As minor deities, they are part of the entourage of the main deity they serve. A sculptural representation of Nandī (bull), the vehicle of Śiva, has been found on a stone slab in Ākāsigaṅgā. It can be seen from the temple ruins that most of the sculptures may have served as ornaments of architectural construction. There is a depiction of Śiva in association with some mythological episodes, which is now housed in the Assam Provincial Museum. It illustrates the story of Śiva killing the demon Andhakāsura. The deity is shown with four hands. In two of them, he bears a *triśūla* (trident), at the end of which is pinned the body of Andhakāsura. The left lower hand holds the *kapāla* (ritual bowl). The third eye here is prominent.[105] The construction of a good number of Śiva temples by the kings of Kāmarūpa is proved beyond doubt by the reference in epigraphs. It is said that King Vanamāla (832–55 CE) repaired the fallen lofty temple of Hāṭakāśūlin Śiva, which was endowed with danseuses, or 'public women'.[106] There are also references to the construction of Śiva temples in the Gachtal Copper Plate Grant of Gopalavarman,[107] and the Assam Plates of Vallabhadeva.[108]

The earliest representation of Śiva in iconographic form is seen on the panel of the Sun temple at Tezpur.[109] It may be mentioned that the Śiva images that have been discovered are of two types:[110] 1] *saumya* (mild) type, e.g., of the single Nataraja and Sadāsiva, and syncretistic images such as Hari-Hara (Viṣṇu-Śiva) and Uma-Māheśvara (Śakti-Śiva); and 2] *ugra* (aggressive) type, e.g., Bhairava and Tripurāntaka. Of the *ugra* (fierce) images of Śiva in Assam, those of Bhairāva are by far more present in large numbers. Seven icons of this representation have been identified so far, of which the first image was found in the Kāmākhyā temple complex. The

same site depicts three images, of which two are dated to about the 9th-10th centuries CE, and the third belongs to the 10th-11th centuries CE. A solitary image of this *ugra* aspect of Śiva at Deul-Govinda is dated to about the 8th-9th century CE. It has four hands, and the deity is shown holding a long *triśūla* (trident) with his right front and left back hands. The right back hand holds a *daṇḍa* (staff), while the left front hand holds a *kapāla* (ritual bowl). Above the *triśūla*, a miniature human figure is visible. The *muṇḍamālā* (garland of skulls), worn by the deity, is very prominent, and adds an uncanny feature to the fierce-looking deity. Other forms of Śiva images which have been found include the Lakuliśa, or the twenty-eighth *avatāra* (incarnation) of the deity. Though rare, two miniature images of this form have been found in Assam. The most important aspect of Śiva is Maheśa. Maheśa-*mūrtī*, as mentioned in the *Śaivāgama* text, is the fully manifested form of the deity. A sandstone image in *vajrāsana* (meditating) pose, with ten arms, five heads, the faces of just four of which are visible, has been found. The heads bear *jaṭāmukūṭa*, which is the characteristic headgear of Śiva. Nandī, the bull vehicle, is represented below the icon.[111]

Inscriptional records constitute an important source for the study of Śaivism in the context of the pre-Ahom period. The majority of the inscriptions start with an invocation to a deity, and almost all of them, except for a few, are made to Śiva. It eulogizes various attributes of power and valour of the Kāmarūpa kings, and compares them to the qualities of divinities, such as Indra, Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Varuna. The queens are compared to Śacī, Aditi, Padmā, Pārvatī, and Lakṣmī. The epigraphs clearly indicate the pre-eminence of Śiva, in comparison to other deities who were worshipped in Early Assam, as can be inferred from the many invocations made to him in the Copper Plates. Dimbeswar Sarma[112] mentions that the kings of Kāmarūpa were great votaries of Śiva, and that some of them described themselves as Parama-Māheśvara. In fact, all the kings of Kāmarūpa, from earliest times to the 12th century CE, are depicted as having patronised Śaivism. The many references in the epigraphs of the pre-Ahom period to Śiva reverence and worship also includes the mythical king Bhagadatta who is mentioned as being a devotee of Śiva.[113] The other kings whose names are mentioned in inscriptions and who claim to have unwavering faith in the deity are Vajradatta,[114] Susthitavarma,[115] and Harjaravarman.[116] That Vanamāla patronised Śaivism is referred to in the Tezpur Grant of the king, in which the epigraph opens with an invocation to the same deity.[117] It mentions a Śiva temple which was "endowed with matchless villages, people, elephants and courtesans."[118] The king also reveals his deep faith in Bhava (Śiva).[119] The tradition of eulogizing Śiva continues with King Balavarman III's Nowgong Grant which opens with an

invocation to Rudra (Śiva).[120] The Gauhati Grant records invocation to Sambhu and Pasupati, and also to the consorts Gauri and Ganga, exemplifying the divine principle of Śiva-Śakti.[121] Śiva's *tandava* dance is the subject of praise in the Bargāon Grant."[122] That king Bhagadatta is referred to as 'a friend of Śiva' in the *Mahābhārata* indicates that Śaivism was predominant in the history of religion in Kāmarūpa. Śiva, probably under the influence of Tantric Buddhism, came to be conceived as *ardhayuvatīśvara*, the embodiment of two unifying principles, Śiva and Śakti.[123] The *Liṅga Purāṇa* text comments that the concept is a popular sculptural representation in ancient India, which has its basis in the Puruṣa-Prakṛiti dualistic system of Samkhya doctrine in Vedic philosophy. It is associated with the masculine principle of consciousness represented by Puruṣa, and the feminine energy represented by Prakriti.[124]

The inscriptions left by the kings of Kāmarūpa bear undeniable proof of their deep faith in Śiva. In the Copper Plate of Bhaskaravarman, he salutes the *iṣṭadeva* ('deity of his choice'), who is the 'holder of *pināka*' (bow). Besides this record, the ambassador sent by King Harsavardhana to his court talks about his reverence for Śiva thus: "Even from childhood, this is his firm resolve, that he would not bend his head before anything else other than the pair of lotus-like feet of Śiva."[125] The Copper Plate of Harjaravaraman which records the adjective 'Parama-Māheśvara', that is, 'a great devotee of Śiva, reaffirms the singular devotion to the god.[126] The inscription of Vanamāla has the *anji* sign on it, and the temple mentioned in the same inscription indicates that it may have existed since the time of his ancestors, so that the descendants continued to be devotees of Śiva from generation to generation. The capital Hārūppeśvara could have been a name taken after the name of a Śiva-*liṅga*.[127] That Balavarman III was a devout follower of Śiva is known from his inscriptions. The Copper Plate inscription of Ratnapāla also opens with a verse in praise of Śiva.[128] King Indrapāla expresses his reverence for the deity in his second Copper Plate Grant, where he is referred to as having "his head painted with the pollens of the lotuses of the feet of Hara (Śiva) and Girijā (Pārvatī)."[129] Of the last king, Dharmapāla, two Copper Plate Grants have been discovered; the first one opens with a verse which is an obeisance to Śiva in his half-male, half-female form (*ardhayuvatīśvara*). In the second Copper Plate inscription of the same king, however, there is no reference to Śiva. Only the sign *anji* occurs at the beginning, which indicates obeisance to the same deity. This reveals that Dharmapāla may have become inclined towards Vaiṣṇavism at a later stage of his life. Yet, it would not be correct to surmise that he became fully converted to this faith, as the sign *anji* would not have appeared in that case.[130]

Deep reverence was shown not only to kings, but also to Śiva, by the Brāhmaṇa priests. The Kamauli Grant refers to a Brāhmaṇa called Sridhara, who took a vow to undergo penance and starvation to propitiate Lord Somanātha (i.e. Śiva).[131] Various epithets are attributed to Śiva in several inscriptions, which bring before us almost a complete picture of his attributes, as described in the *Purāṇa* texts. That Śaivism was fully developed as a religious faith in Early Assam is seen in the way the deity was invoked in the *praśastis* (eulogies), and in the case of epithets such as Parameśvara,[132] Parama-Māheśvara,[133] Ādideva (the first God),[134] Mahādeva,[135] Māheśvara[136] and Mahāvarāha (the great boar). His beneficent nature is indicated by the terms of address, such as Sambhu ('the benign one'), [137] Śaṇkara ('the beneficent one'),[138] and Prajādhinathā ('lord of the people'). Pināki̇n is another name of Śiva, and is mentioned in the Nidhanpur and Tezpur Plates. The Bargāon Grant of Ratnapāla describes him as "one who resides in the region of the Kailāśa mountains".[139]

The archaeological remains of the period reveal that Śiva was conceived both in the abstract, and concrete divine form. In his anthropomorphic (abstract) form, he appears with familiar myths and legends woven round him. Śiva has many names, which include Hāṭakāśūlin, Hara, Kāmeśvara, Ardhayuvatiśvara, Paśupati, Gaurīpati, and Somanātha. Epigraphs mention that Śiva is offered loving adoration by the kings, who visualise the deity even surpassing God Kāmā in beauty. The Gachtal Copper Plate Grant of Gopalavarman (1080 CE) makes a comparative assessment of beauty between Lord Śiva and the river Lauhitya. Both in the Subhaṇkarapāṭaka and Khānamukh Grants he is conceived of as, "having half his form as woman and having on the neck a blue lotus, lofty breasts, and appearing in dreadful sentiments." The Nidhanpur Grant[140] alludes to his overcoming *kāma* (cupid) by mere sight. He is further described as having his usual weapons, *khaṭvānga* (ritual staff), *paraśu* (battle-axe), *pināka* (bow) and *śūla* (spear), with the bull (Nandi) as the vehicle, and having a girdle of snakes. He is believed to reside on the peak of the mountain Kailasa,[141] and having the Ganges River on his head.[142]

Śiva claims the highest temple in Assam. The ruins of a Śaiva temple dating about 600 CE, resembling the Gupta temples at Bhumra, Nachna-Kuthara and Deogarh, have been unearthed at Tezpur.[143] There are ruins of two ancient Śiva temples near Dhanukhāna Hill on the north bank of the river Brahmaputra. K. N. Dikshit opines that this may be associated with the reference recorded in the Tezpur Grant of Harjaravarman of 829 CE.[144] Many monuments related to this deity, which are now in ruins, offer little clue for dating. Some of the undated temple ruins which have been

discovered, and which have images of the deity or presence of Śiva-*liṅgas*, include the Dudhnāth temple in Dhubri, Nandeśwar temple, Bhumiśwar Śiva temple, Chengal Mahakal, Bhairabthān, and Sri Sūryapāhār in the Goalpārā sub-division.[145] The temple ruins in Nowgong include sites such as Ākāsigaṅgā, Gachtal, Baneswar, Swathan and Nagsaṅkara, whereas in the Darrang district of Tezpur, the ruins have been discovered in Dāh-Parbatiyā and Mahā-Bhairava Mandir.[146] Śiva images are also noticed in North Lakhimpur and Bura-Burdhan.[147] Madankāmdevthān and Chaigāon Merghar ruins in Gauhati are datable to about the 10th century CE. The Dāh-Parbatiyā ruins are considered the best and earliest specimen of sculptural art of Assam, where the remains of a Śiva temple exist. At Numaligarh, about 22 miles from Golaghat town, are found the remains of an old Śiva temple. There is a small shed in this Śiva Dol[148] monument enshrining a Śiva-*liṅga*, which is still regularly worshipped by people today, and is believed to belong to the 9th century CE. At Mālinithan in Dibrugarh, and Phulbari ruins in the Garo Hills, Śiva was worshipped in the *liṅga* form.[149]

The icons of Rudra and Śiva discovered so far, depict the deity in an aggressive form, although there was a tendency to portray an auspicious attitude, with certain good attributes at the same time. An attempt to change the character of Rudra from an aggressive to a gentle one is found in the Uttarbarbil Copper Plates and the Nowgong Plates of Balavarman III.[150] It tells of Lord Rudra, who is "capable of dispelling the darkness of the world and at the same time be the cause of peace of the world." Śiva came to be worshipped with many other deities during the pre-Ahom period. The belief and worship of the 'Hindu Triad', i.e., Brahma, Viṣṇu, and Śiva, saw a modified form in the combined worship of the five cult gods of Viṣṇu, Śiva, Śakti, Sūrya, and Gaṇeśa, with the chosen deity in the centre, and the remaining four deities around them. Another form of fusion was the representation of a composite deity, or *ardhanīśvara*, in which the twin images of Śiva and Śakti, and Viṣṇu and Śiva, were worshipped. The idea of such worship was probably to enhance the spirit of tolerance and understanding among the devotees of different cults. It was not uncommon for the kings of Kāmarūpa to show their reverence to more than one deity. Bhāskaravarman, a devotee of Śiva,[151] claimed to have descended from Viṣṇu, and was linked to the Vaiṣṇava family.[152] Though Vanamāla was devoted to Śiva,[153] it is not unlikely that he was influenced by later Buddhism. Dharmapāla showed this devotion, not only to Śiva, but also to Devī, or the composite form of Ardhayuvatīśvara,[154] and Viṣṇu.[155] Vaidyadeva himself worshipped Viṣṇu besides Śiva.[156] He is described as the great devotee of Śiva, as well as that of Viṣṇu.

R. D. Banerji opines that the ruins of the Śiva temple, dating around 600 CE, at Dāh-Parbatiyā, is the 'oldest temple' in Assam.[157] The figure of Śiva here is shown in the Lakuliśa seated form, with a rope tied round his leg. Lakuliśa, as is his usual representation, is seen here seated on *padmāsana*, holding a *matuliṅga* (citron fruit) in the right hand and a staff in the left. From Ākāsigaṅgā was found an icon of Nandī, his vehicle, dated to about the 9th-10th centuries CE, which is carved in stone along with a dwarf Śiva-*gaṇa* (spirit accompanying a deity). The Śiva-*gaṇas* are sometimes depicted along with the figure of Śiva. A beautifully sculptured image of a *yogi* (person proficient in *yoga* philosophy and practice), or a *bhakta* (devotee) of Śiva, in relief on a plaque of terracotta, has been found at Kukurmuta,[158] in Gauhati, and is now preserved in the Assam State Museum. At Āmbāri,[159] there is a beautiful image of Naṭarāja (Śiva in the dancing posture). Twelve Śiva-*liṅgas* and four images of Nandī are also found here in a group of large-sized images, along with many other deities. Another icon of Śiva in dancing pose with six hands was found in Bāmuni Hill.[160] The same site also has an image of Bhairava[161] in the *sthānaka* (standing) posture. The icons of the Gajāsurasaṁhāra Tripurāntaka form of Siva[162] is noticed at Deopānī and the Bāralimārā-*Satra*, and at Deopānī,[163] the image has two hands.

Gauhati is one of the most important archaeological sites in Assam, where Śiva images and other ruins related to the deity have been unearthed. On the banks of the Brahmaputra River, an icon of Śiva in the Naṭarāja pose was discovered, which is now preserved in the Assam State Museum.[164] Carved out of a round block of granite, the deity is seen dancing on the back of his vehicle, the bull. It has ten hands, and the body of the deity is in the *atibhaṅga* (*tandava* dance form with extreme flexion) dancing pose. The *āyudhas* (instruments, weapons) of the hands which have been depicted are the *triśūla*, *bāna*, *daṇḍa*, *khetaka* (shield), *khadga*, *akṣa-sūtra* (string of beads), *sarpa* (serpent), and an unidentified *āyudha*, which is broken, probably held in *abhayamudra* (fearless form). The usual *alaṁkāras* (ornaments) deck the body of the deity. The image is dated to the 10th-11th centuries CE, and is one of the excellent *nṛtyamūrtīs* (sculptures in dancing form) of Śiva. Another Naṭarāja image, dated to the 9th century CE, was found in Gauhati and is now preserved in the Assam State Museum. The image is seen along with that of Kārttikeya and Nṛtya Gaṇapati on a slab of granite stone. The deity is ten-handed, shown in a dancing pose on the *vahana*, and Nandī looks at his master, turning his neck upwards. Another Śiva image in the form of Maheśa is found at the same site, which is now preserved in the campus of the Assam State Museum. The usual *alaṁkāras* deck the body of the deity. Maheśa is placed within a big circle and he is

seated in *vajrāsana*, or meditating posture, with both soles exposed to view. The image has five heads, the faces of just four of which are visible. Nandī, the *vāhana*, is depicted below the *āsana*.

Two images of Bhairāva[165] were found at Gauhati, one figure standing in a prostrate human form, holding a *khāḍga* (double-edged straight sword) and a *kapāla* (ritual bowl) in the hands. The god is crowned with *kirīṭamukuṭa* (a tall conical crown), which is an uncommon feature, and he does not wear a *muṇḍmālā* (garland of severed head skulls). The other image is in the dancing posture, like the image of *Nṛtya*-Bhāirava from Madankāmdev. It has four hands, but the objects in the hands are mutilated. At Hengrabari in Dispur is an icon of Bhairava in the *sthānaka* or standing posture, with two hands holding a *khaḍga* and a *kapāla*. Bhairāva images are also found in Kāmākhyā. A rock-cut, four-handed image from this site, in crude form, is dated to the 8th-9th centuries CE on stylistic grounds. This image is different from others, in that it stands on a prostrated figure with legs apart. Another eight-handed Bhairava image was found in the Kāmākhyā temple complex. Madankāmdev is another site where a Bhairāva image was found. Belonging to the 9th century CE, the *Nṛtya*-Bhairāva (dancing form) sculptured on a block of granite, has four hands, and a bull is shown below the *pīṭha*.

Gajāsurasaṁhāra Tripurāntaka is another representation of Śiva. At Gauhati, five such images were discovered, although some were found in a mutilated condition. A ten-armed Śiva on a stone slab was discovered in a private residence at Gauhati. The four-armed Śiva holds a *damaru* (a small hour-glass shaped drum), *trisula* (trident), *gadā* (mace) and *akṣamālā* in its hands, flanked by the figures of female attendants. A figure of Gajāsurasaṁhāra Tripurāntaka was also discovered at Gachtal, in the *yoga* pose with four hands, along with the worshipping figures of the *gaṇas* (spirits accompanying a deity, in this case Śiva). The deity stands with *akṣamālā* in the right hand and *triśūla* in the left hand, on door jambs and lintels. The ruins of at least two Śiva temples are seen here. The presence of a figure of Śiva and Śiva-*liṅga* amply proves that the temples were dedicated to Śiva. Along with the figures of Śiva on door-jambs and lintels, there are images of Gaṇeśa, *yogis*, and *gaṇas*, etc. Another image of Gajāsurasaṁhāra Tripurāntaka was discovered at Madankāmdev. There is a similar figure of Śiva seated on a bull, at Mikirāti. An unusual image of an *ugra* aspect of Śiva, preserved in the Assam State Museum was recovered from Numaligarh. The left front hand holds a *dhanu* (bow-arrow), which is distinct. The back hands are raised, and they hold the elephant behind the head of the deity, as in the case of Gajāsurasaṁhāra *mūrtī*. R. D. Choudhury

believes that it represents the Gajāsurasaṁhāra-cum-Tripurāntaka *mūrtī,* i.e., *Sanghatamūrtī* (composite image) of Śiva, which makes it a rare representation. At Śri Sūryapāhār, the Gajāsurasaṁhāra Tripurāntaka figure of Śiva is found. A similar type of sculpture, dated to the 11th-12th centuries CE, and seated in the *yogāsana* pose, was found in Uzan Bazar, Gauhati.

As far as the icons of Nandī,[166] the bull vehicle of Śiva, are concerned, many of them have been discovered in Kāmarūpa. In Hājo, there is an image of *vṛṣabha-vāhana* of Śiva, depicted in a sitting posture, with a distinct hump, with no bell around the neck, and without any decorative garment on the body. Dated to the 9th-10th centuries CE, the *vāhana* is depicted independently with a *mālā* (garland) around the neck and a rope fitted to the nose. At present, the image is kept in front of the Numalīgarh temple. There is another image of the bull vehicle in a temple at Mornoi in Goalpārā district. The *nāmghar* (large prayer hall of Neo-vaiṣṇavite tradition) has kept an image of Śiva and a Śiva-*liṅga* of the pre-Ahom age. Both the images found in Mājgāon, Tezpur, are carved with the images of Gaṅga, and Yamuna in another case, along with Dvārapālas (door-keepers) which are dated to the 9th century CE. In both cases, he stands in *tribhaṅga* posture. At Gharpora Cuburi of Mājgāon village, the archaeological ruins brought from a site of a temple are noticed. At the bottom of the two *śaṅkhas*, one preserved in sanctuary and the other lying near the ruined temple, Nandī, in anthropomorphic form, is seen. A study of the *dvārasākhās* and the *sirapaṭṭis* reveals that the temples were possibly dedicated to Śiva. This temple is assigned to the 9th century CE. Another icon of Nandī is recovered from Renbeng near Nagāon.

The ruins of Śiva temples are found in at least nine sacred sites in Assam. At Pāgtlātek, a temple ruin of the post-Gupta period was discovered by the Directorate of Archaeology, Assam Circle. This site has a single rock-cut cave facing the Brahmaputra River. Components of a stone temple, carved temple relics, and a *yonī-pīṭha* (*yonī*: female principle representing Mother Goddess; *pīṭha*: seat), are dated to 1100 CE. The excavation conducted at the site revealed a massive brick-built wall, laid out in a north-south direction. The report suggests that there is a possibility of the continuity of this brick wall further south, since salvage digging in the hillock revealed traces of brick structures in the southern Pāgtlātek Hills, adjacent to the site. There is a modern temple constructed at the sacred site, where the Śiva-*liṅga* belonging to the old temple has been installed and is being worshipped in present times. Pāgtlātek is well known for the discovery of gold coins dated to 700 CE, and it has been suggested that perhaps the place was a centre for trade activities in Early Assam.

The site of Kendugiri has revealed remains of temples constructed of both stone and brick. The most prominent among the group of brick temples is that of Nā-Nāth. In each of the cells of the temple is placed a Śiva-*liṅga* with a *yonī-pīṭha* at its base. These ruins are assigned to the 11th-12th centuries CE. In Pañcaratnaghāt, on the banks of the Brahmaputra River, is found a temple in ruins with stone carvings. The huge Śiva-*liṅga*, which might have been installed in the *garbhagriha* (sanctum sanctorum) of the temple, is still *in situ*. The peculiarity of the *liṅga* lies in the fact that the *liṅga* portion is quite short, compared to the height and circumference of the *yonī-pīṭha*. Two huge votive stupas are seen, cut from two solid rocks, almost in the style of the Śiva-*liṅga*. At Jogijan,[167] extensive material remains of temples, at least five dedicated to Pañca-Rudras, have been found, which indicates that it must have been a place of Śiva worship. A Śiva temple, probably of the pre-Ahom period, is found at Numalīgarh.[168] Ruins of a similar nature were discovered at Tezpur, at the archaeological site of Bamuni Hill, and Dāh-Parbatiyā, which is ascribed to the reign of King Harjaravarman, as has been proved from a stone inscription on the banks of the Brahmaputra at Tezpur dated to 829-830 CE. There is an archaeological site at Tezpur dated to about the 10th century CE, which has revealed five miniature temple ruins which have the phallic representation of Śiva in each of their stone door frames. To the west of Tezpur, on a hillock, are the ruins of another Śiva temple; the *liṅga* there is still being worshipped by the people. The name of the deity is Tiṅgeśvara,[169] and was probably set up by the king of Kāmarūpa, named Tiṅgyadeva, of the 12th century CE. In some of the niches are seen figures of Sarasvati, Śiva, and Durgā, seated in their conventional style, so common in North India. Śiva temple ruins were also found in Madankāmdev Hill.[170] The dominance of Śaivite sculptures in the temple indicates that it was a centre of Śiva worship. Among the assortment of sculptures discovered there were the six-handed Bhairāva, four-handed Śiva, Natarāja, and Sūrya. Dated to the 12th century CE, the surviving portion of the Pañcaratha (plan with five recesses) temple indicates that this must have been one of the finest temples ever built in the Brahmaputra valley.[171]

The remains of a Śiva temple belonging to a slightly later period, i.e. the second quarter of the 13th century CE, were found on a small hill at Negritting in the Golaghat sub-division of Sibsāgar district. The presence of a *banaliṅga*, i.e., a phallic symbol in stone which is not man-made, but present naturally, about three feet in height, was discovered during the reign of an Ahom king. A rare *liṅga* made of bronze, which is the only one of its kind has been found at Kahilipārā in Gauhati.[172] There are few other archaeological finds which are associated with Śiva. The terracotta images

of Bhaitbari (Garo Hills), include a variety of deities. The image, which is seen seated in the Mahārājalīlāsana pose on the bull vehicle, with the head adorned with *jaṭāmukūṭa* (matted hair), is identified as Śiva.[173] Recent excavations have revealed more sacred sites connected to Śiva. At Upper Langtha, near Barpathar, there is a large and heavy stone outlet believed to be part of a Śiva temple.[174] Still lying *in situ*, it was learnt from the local people, that a Śiva-*liṅga* was removed from the site and handed over to the management of the Śiva temple situated near Dubarani. A stone idol considered sacred, and perhaps associated with Siva worship, was found from the Pabhajan Tea Estate around Barpathar.

Śiva is associated with Śakti, who is worshipped as the primordial cosmic energy of creation and feminine energy of Śiva. In the Brāhmaṇical philosophical tradition, goddesses were imagined as nurturers, protectors, purifiers, life givers, and mothers; yet also sometimes represented as aggressive, fierce, or even malevolent.[175] The Sign ζ (anji),[176] found at the commencement of the inscription of Vanamāla, even before *svasti* (also found in the subsequent Copper Plate Grants, except for the first and the second Copper Plate Grants of Ratnapāla), is interpreted by Vidyavinod as the "form of the snake-shaped *kula-kuṇḍalini* that resides in *suṣumnā*." This is a distinct Śaivite symbol, and the *kula-kundalini*, according to him, is the Śakti (female principle) of Śiva that remains "coiling round the Svāyambhu *liṅga* at *mulādhāracakra*."

It is evident that the early kings of Assam in the pre-Ahom period were mainly exclusive devotees of Śiva. This god seems to have been regarded as the guardian deity of the kingdom. As can be deduced from the archaeological finds, Śiva was worshipped in Kāmarūpa, both in iconographic and phallic representations, and also in composite forms, such as Uma-Māheśvara and Hari-Hara. In the Copper Plate inscription of the families of Pushyavarman, Sālastambha and Brahmapāla (4th-12th centuries CE), Śiva emerges as the only god to be worshipped by all the kings, since the other deities like Viṣṇu and the Devī were not represented in as large a scale as that of Śiva. It may be noted that the legends of Narakā, Bhagadatta, and Vajradatta, were popular, as the kings derived legitimation from them as the divine representatives of the gods on earth. Yet, the latter two kings were themselves depicted in the inscriptions as votaries of Śiva.[177] Śaivism was very popular and had various sub-cults, as seen in the way Śiva was invoked in the eulogies. The prevalence of *naṭīs* or 'dancing women', who were variously referred to as 'public women', 'temple women', or *dēvadāsīs,*[178] were also not uncommon in the Śiva temples. King Vanamāla of Kāmarūpa (Haruppesvara) of the 9th century CE is said to have built a

temple dedicated to Hāṭakāśūlin Śiva, and endowed it, among others, with *vedyās* or 'temple women'. The inscriptions reveal that as early as the 5th century CE, if not earlier, Śiva was worshipped in temples and patronized by the kings of Kāmarūpa. Śiva continued to be a popular deity during the time of the Ahoms, so that even after the adoption of the Brāhmaṇical faith, the monarchs erected more temples to Śiva than to any other deity, until the later part of the 18th century CE.

B: Śaktism

Śaktism has been defined by Sir Charles Eliot as the "worship of a goddess of many names and forms who is adorned with sexual rites and the sacrifices of animals or, when the law permits, of men."[179] The birth place of Śaktism is considered to be in the north-eastern region of India (Assam and Bengal), where it still holds ground.[180] In fact, Assam, has long been regarded in the Sanskrit texts, and the works of Western scholars as the symbolic and/or literal heartland of *Tantra* (esoteric practices of some Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain sects).[181] *Tantras* are central to Śakti worship, and Tantricism[182] became almost a synonym for Śaktism. This sect is believed to have been widely popular in Kāmarūpa by the 12th century CE, to which period is assigned its chief scripture, known as the *Kālīka-Purāṇa*.[183] Tantricism, as such, has four principal ramifications: Śaktism, Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism and Buddhism. The association of Śaktism with Tantricism has been emphasized in many a study of the 'female cult'. It is important to distinguish between the two for a deeper understanding of Śaktism. It means, rather, the use of spells, gestures, diagrams, and various sacramental rites which accompany Śaktism, but may exist without it.

Kāmarūpa is better known as a land of magic and witchcraft, with the famous shrine of Kāmākhyā, with which it is frequently associated: Kāmarūpa-Kāmākhyā.[184] One of the best known Śakta shrines in India, the Kāmākhyā temple, is known for Tantric sacrifices, mysticism, and sorcery. The two principal Sanskrit texts, viz., *Kālīka-Purāṇa* and *Yoginī-Tantra*, are important literary sources for Śakti worship in Assam. There are references to iconographic descriptions of several Śakti goddesses in the texts; yet, archaeological data of the goddess belonging to a period earlier than 9th-10th centuries CE, is rare. If the *Kālīka-Purāṇa* gives a mythical interpretation of the origin of the goddess, the *Yoginī-Tantra* takes no notice of the myth, and gives a different account, stressing the creative symbol of the *yonī*. The mythological narrative[185] of the goddess Kāmākhyā makes us believe that the worship of the deity in Assam goes back to antiquity, and under the

banner of this goddess, the earliest kingdom in Early Assam was supposed to have been established. Tradition has it, that it was over her emergence and recognition as the presiding deity of the kingdom that the Śaivites and Vaiṣṇavites went into a silent conflict, and that the mythological King Narakā, referred to as the 'first builder' of the kingdom, lost his life. The texts mention that Narakā was brought up in Śakta surroundings, and that the mother goddess, Kāmākhyā, was conceptualised as a primordial deity, associated with, and patronized by, Viṣṇu. The worship of the goddess is said to have been introduced by Narakā.[186] However, it is important to mention that there is no archaeological or inscriptional record to support this claim. The myths woven around the Narakā legend also claim that the mythical king changed the name of the kingdom from Prāgjyotiṣapura to Kāmarūpa, in conformity with the name of Kāmākhyā. It may be noted that literary sources are silent about the goddess Kāmākhyā prior to the 9th century CE. The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang, who lived for some time at the court of King Bhaskaravarman (600-50 CE), did not mention Kāmākhyā, and the reason could be that the goddess did not quite attain her pre-eminence during that period of Assam history.[187] In the land grants, the earliest reference to Mahāgauri (Devī) is found recorded in the Tezpur Copper Plate of Vanamāla, of the middle 9th century CE.[188]

The temple of Kāmākhyā, near Gauhati, is now the chief centre of Śakti worship in Assam. The original Kāmākhyā temple was destroyed during the Muslim invasion in the 16th century CE, and the present temple was re-built. Within the temple there is a cave, in a corner of which stands a block of stone, on which the symbol of a *yonī* (female principle representing the procreative principle of the Mother Goddess) has been sculptured. The stone is kept wet from the oozing of a natural spring within the cave.[189] The temple contains no image, and the presence of *yonī* distinguishes this temple of the Devī from other sacred sites of Śakti in India.[190] In terms of respect for antiquity and importance, Kāmākhyā surpasses most of the shrines of the Śakti in different parts of India, numbering at least fifty.[191] Kāmarūpa is a well-known *pitha,* or *āsana* (holy seat of the Mother Goddess), where goddess Durgā is omnipresent. A popular legend explains that the origin of *pīṭhas* is associated with the death of the goddess Sati. In a moment of grief, Śiva is believed to have carried Sati's body, and roamed around the universe with the corpse. The narrative has it that Viṣṇu had cut her body into fifty-two body parts, and the places where pieces of Sati's dead body have fallen are said to have become the holy seats of the goddess. In each of the *pīṭhas* she is believed to be constantly living in some form, together with a Bhairāva, i.e., a form of her spouse, Śiva.[192]

The history of the origin of the Śakti-*pīṭhas* is associated with the emergence of early Tantricism. The four main *pīṭhas* represent the four cardinal points of the earth, and Kāmarūpa enjoyed a privileged position among the four sacred sites. The name of the hillock where Kāmākhyā stands is Nīlācala, or the blue mountain. The myth has it, that the mountain is believed to represent the body of Śiva himself, and at the time when the female organ of Śati fell on it, the mountain turned blue in colour. The goddess acquired the name Kāmākhyā because she came here secretly to satisfy her amorous passion (*kāma*) for Śiva. It cannot be confirmed from the sources available at hand whether the inhabitants of Early Assam, i.e., the Kirātas, were votaries of the Śiva or of the goddess, his consort. The *Kālīka-Purāṇa* mentions Kāmarūpa, Tripura, Kameśwari, Śiva, and Sāradā, as the five forms of Devī. Tripura is the original form (Kumarī), and is also known as Tripura-Bhairavī, associated with Śiva. However, this form of Kāmākhyā, as a spouse of Śiva, belongs to later periods. Other composite representations with Śiva include Umā-Maheśvari, and as Pārvatī, Śiva's wife. The Devī is believed to assume different forms according to her wishes. Cāmuṇḍa is one of the fierce aspects of the Devī, Goddess Kālī being the other form. The Siṁhāvahinī Durgā represents the goddess in a benevolent mood. Mahiṣamardini is the *ugra* (fierce) form of Durgā and one of the principal forms of the goddess. Sometimes, she is presented in the *śānta* (pacific) form also. Umā, Kālī, Kārata, and Cāmuṇḍa came to be regarded as manifestations of Kāmākhya or Durgā, in different circumstances.[193]

There are very few architectural remains of temples associated with Devī belonging to the pre-Ahom period. The worship of Śakti in the *yonī* form may explain the comparatively lesser popularity of the iconographic representations. The architectural remains associated with the Devī are about nineteen in number, where the goddess is worshipped individually, and sometimes in connection with Śiva. The remains belonging to the period are the Viṣṇu-Janardana monument in Gauhati, which is dated to the 9th century CE. Here, the image of the Devī is depicted along with Śiva, Gaṇeśa, Sūrya, and Viṣṇu. At the site of Madankāmdev,[194] the images of Śiva-Parvatī were discovered in a temple which is dated to about the 9th and 10th centuries CE. At Devīthān, there is a shrine belonging to the 9th century CE, where the principal image is suggested to be that of a goddess, possibly that of Mahiṣāmardinī Durgā, although the identity has not been confirmed yet. Na-Bhanga Cāmuṇḍa temple ruins in Nowgong subdivision, and the Umā-Māheśvara image at Deoghar, Sibsāgar sub-division, are dated to the 10th century CE. Quite a few images of the goddess Kalī have been discovered, although they cannot be dated with any degree of precision. Some sacred sites where the goddess was worshipped include Mangaldoi

and Kalibarithān in Sibsāgar, and Kotshāguri Dol in Golaghat.[195] Images of Durgā have been found at temples of Mahāmāyāpīth in the Dhubri sub-division, and Bagheswari temple in Goalpārā. The other sites include Candika Mandir in Gauhati, the Bhoiparvat[196] hill image of Mahiṣāmardinī Durgā at Nowgong, Parjat Mandir in Mangaldoi, Kotshāguri Dol in the Golaghat sub-division, and Sarhi Devālaya in North Lakhimpur. [197] Combined images of Śiva-Parvatī have been discovered from Bhairabthān in Goalpārā and Mahādev Math of the same sub-division. At Sanpara Devālaya in the Mangaldoi sub-division, the archaeological ruins enshrine images of Śiva and Durgā.[198]

The Hatimura temple is dedicated to the goddess Mahiṣāmardinī, and is assigned to the period of about the 9th-10th centuries CE. This temple, which is in Nowgong, was probably re-built over the stone temple by an Ahom king around the 18th century CE after the original temple was demolished by an earthquake. A big sword has been recovered from this temple, which is believed to have been used for human sacrifices.[199]At Rājbarī in Goalpārā there is temple No. 5, which is presumed to be a Devī temple, where the image of a goddess is identified tentatively as that of Tripurā-Bhairavī.[200] An unidentified Devī image, dated to the 11th-12th centuries CE, has been recovered from a temple at Cāndor Merghar in Kāmarūpa.[201] There was a temple of the 3rd century CE, known as the Copper temple, of Tamreśvara (*tam:* copper), in Kundlinagar (near Sadiya), where human sacrifices were supposed to have been performed. It is an important centre for Śakti worship, and finds mention in the *Kālīka-Purāṇa*.[202] At Singri, in Darrang, the material remains at the sacred site consist of carved and sculptured stones, a door frame, pillars, a capital, lotus-engraved slabs, and heaps of chiselled stones of various sizes and dimensions, originally prepared for a stone structure presumed to be that of a temple. The ruins do not contain any epigraphic records. The object of worship of the temple has not been completely ascertained, but it can be surmised that the temple was dedicated to Durgā,[203] since the lion which is her *vāhana* is sculpted on the upper door frame, where the *vāhana* of a god or a goddess is usually engraved. The ruins of this temple have striking similarity with those of a Śiva temple at Numalīgarh (9th century CE). This temple, therefore, may perhaps have been constructed around the 9th century CE. In a village named Sagarkuchi,[204] in the Paschim Bonbhag Mauza,[205] there is a Kalī temple on the west side of Pagladia. A small stone temple, known as the Mahāmāyā (another name of the Devī) temple, at the archeological site of the Kapili-Jamuna valley, has also been discovered. [206]

By far the most popular form of the Devī is the ten-armed Durgā, depicted as the 'destroyer of the buffalo demon'. This Śakta goddess is also known by the name Mahiṣāmardinī, and is a popular form of the goddess worshipped in other parts of India, particularly in West Bengal. Some archaeological sites which have revealed images of this representation of the deity are Bhoiparvat, Gaṇeśhparvat, and Teteli-Pukhuri.[207] Mahiṣāmardinī has different names, according to the number of hands. The ten-handed image, found in large numbers, is called Kātyāyanī, and the eighteen-handed form is known as Ugracaṇḍā. Three Kātyāyanī images have been found in Assam belonging to the pre-Ahom period, one of which is from Tinsukia in Lakhimpur district, and is dated to the 9th century CE. An eighteen-handed Ugracaṇḍā, carved on a rock, has come to light from Uzan Bazar in Gauhati, which is dated to the 10th century CE. Most of the extant images are rock-cut, although stone slab images have also been found.

The icons of Durgā[208] discovered at Śirājulī, Hājo, Ulubāri, and Soālkuchi, are seen with the right leg placed on the back of her *vāhana* while the left leg rests on the beheaded *mahiśasura* (demon). The *siṁha* (lion) and *mahiśasura* are depicted facing each other in all the representations of the deity. Most of the *āyudhyas* here are common, except for minor differences. Other sites where Durgā images were found include Southwest Kāmrūp, Singri, Bamuni Hill, Rangmahal, and Kukurmuta. Almost all the icons of Mahiṣāmardinī so far discovered portray the deity with the *vahana*. The distinctive feature of the image from Kukurmuta, now preserved in the Assam State Museum is that it is the only icon of the deity belonging to the pre-Ahom period which does not depict a *vāhana*. Mahiṣāmardinī icons with four, eight, ten, and eighteen hands have been found in Assam, the ten-handed ones being the most popular. However, at Śri Sūryapāhār near the Goalpārā ruins, there is a prominent figure of the twelve-armed Durgā, cut out of a single rock, amid Śiva-*liṅgas* and rows of Viṣṇu images. This is a singular instance of the twelve-armed goddess hitherto discovered in Assam.[209] The popularity of this form of Devī may be supported by the discovery of a gold locket, the adverse side of which shows an image of Mahiṣāmardinī. Probably this item was used as an ornament by the ladies of some royal family.[210] The best image of the deity comes from Śirājulī, which is depicted in *atibhaṅga* (cosmic dance form with extreme flexion), where the demon fights with the Devī with a *khaḍga* (double-edged straight sword).[211] The image displays excellent proportions in execution.

Cāmuṇḍa[212] is one of the aggressive manifestations of the Devī, and there are five images which have come to light belonging to the early period of Assam history. The icons are carved on stone slabs and are

svayampradhāna-mūrtīs (independent images). Generally, Cāmuṇḍa images occur in the panel of the Sapta Mātrikās (Seven Divine Mothers). Two figures of Cāmuṇḍa have been discovered from Kāmākhyā, dated to about the 10th-11th centuries CE, and another one from Nā-Bhāṇgā. The latter is carved on a stone slab. The seat of the squatting image is that of a human body lying in a prostrate position. It depicts her in an aggressive manifestation with a grim appearance. The visible *āyudha* (instrument) held by the deity in one of her hands is a *śūla* (spear). She is depicted with a vulture to the right and a jackal to the left. A four-handed stone image of the deity in the *natamaṇḍapa* (hall) of the Kāmākhyā temple, and another small image of the goddess on the way to the Kāmākhyā temple have been discovered. The latter is noticed along with the image of Umā-Maheśvara and a Śiva-*liṇga*. At Karbi Anglong, an image of the Devī was found, which is now preserved in the Bharati Museum, Nalbāri.

Mahākālī is one of manifestations of goddess Śakti, and the iconographic details of the deity are described in the Candi portion of the *Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa* text. The goddess is described as holding a *khaḍga* (sword), *kapāla* (skull), *muṇḍa* (skull), and *kheṭaka* (shield). According to the specifications of some sacred texts, she carries a *pātra* (vessel) instead of the *muṇḍa*.[213] An image of a goddess, believed to be Kālī, with four hands, is noticed among the archaeological finds at the Telisal site.[214] Deopānī and Davāka are two sacred sites from where icons of Mahākālī have come to light. The icon from Deopānī is flanked by two female figures in the *sthānaka* attitude. A *prābhavalī* (decorative stand) is arranged just behind the head of the goddess. At Davāka there is only one medium-sized stone icon which has been recovered. The deity stands on a *pretāsana*. Its unique feature is that the back of the prostrate human body is shown turned upwards.

Tripura Bhairavī, which is the form of the dreaded virgin goddess (Kumārī), though not common, was not totally absent in Early Assam. A rare icon of this form, brought from Nowgong, is on display at the Assam State Museum. The goddess here is seen in *padmāsana* attitude on a lotus seat.[215] Independent images of Gaurī and Umā have not been found in Assam so far.[216] Images of Parvatī adorning temple walls have been discovered from Gauhati and Dibrugarh. A fine sculpture, probably that of Parvatī, with a sword on her right hand and mirror on her left, was unearthed from a private residence in Gauhati.[217] However, R. D. Choudhury raises some questions regarding its identification, and opines that the *khaḍga*, which is held by the deity here, is unusual, and that it is usually associated with the *dvārapālikās*.[218] Unidentified Devī images have also been

discovered, e.g., the composite images from Hahara, which are datable to about 10th-11th centuries CE.[219]

The epigraphic references to Śakti worship are found only by implication, such as in the inscriptions of the Vanamāla and Indrapāla, which refer to temples of Kāmeśvara and Mahāgauri. It may be noted that the sacred site of the god Kāmeśvara and the goddess Mahāgauri is situated on the Kāmākuṭa Hill.[220] The Guwākuchi Copper Plate grant of Indrapāla, of the 11th century CE, mentions a plot of land belonging to Mahāgauri and Kāmeśvara.[221] The goddess Kāmākhyā, and her spouse Śiva, also find mention in the Pārbatiyā Copper Plate of Vanamālavarmadeva, from the middle of the 9th century CE. Here, Mount Kāmākuṭa is referred to as the abode of both the deities.[222] Other references in the inscriptions in connection with the Śakti goddess are the manifestations of the goddess which include Parvatī, Gaurī, Gaṅgā, and Girijī. The kings of the Sālastambha dynasty (7th-10th centuries CE), were worshippers of Kāmeśvara-Mahāgaurī, and this is mentioned in the inscription of Vanamāla. When the Sālastambha dynasty was succeeded by the dynasty of Brahmapāla, and the capital shifted to the vicinity of Gauhati, the same tutelary deities mentioned in the inscription continued to be worshipped by the kings.[223] King Indrapāla worshipped both Hara (Śiva) and Girijā (Pārvatī), as recorded in the second Copper Plate Grant issued by the same king.[224]

Śakti in association with Śiva occurs in iconographic representations, of which the most common form is that of Umā-Maheśvara. [225] Images of this type are noticed in several places in Kāmarūpa. In Bargaṅgā, an image of Maheśvara is depicted in the *lalitāsana* (sitting position), and a consort sits gracefully on the left leg of the deity. Both the figures are two-handed. Another image of Śiva and Umā, seated in the same position as that found in Bargaṅgā, was found in Devasthān, which is dated to about the 8th or 9th century CE. The front left hand of Śiva is poised tenderly and touches the left bosom of Umā, while the left hand holds a *darpāṇa* (mirror). Śiva is depicted with *jaṭā* (matted hair), while Umā is depicted with a *karandamukūṭa* (crown hairstyle). Her right leg rests on a lion, the vehicle of the goddess, while the right leg of Śiva rests on his vehicle, the bull. The Deopānī archaeological ruins also reveal an image of Umā-Maheśvara,[226] which is dated to about the 8th century CE. It is seen along with other deities, viz., Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Durgā. This is probably the only site in the whole of Northeastern India where the sculptures reveal distinct local elements, free to a large extent from the influence of the North Indian schools of art. In the Assam State Museum, an image of Umā-Maheśvara from Mikirāti is preserved, which shows Umā as seated on the left leg of Śiva. Both the

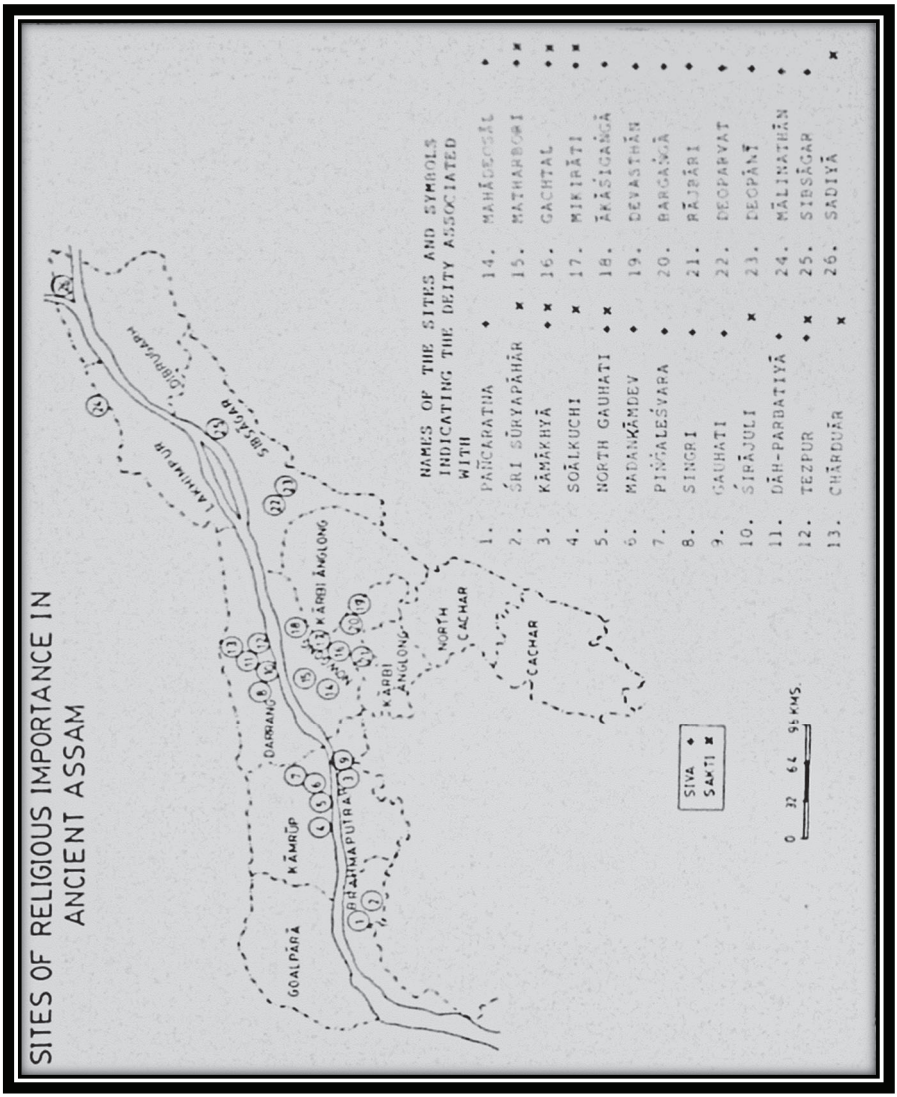
deities have two hands each. Śiva and Śakti are depicted embracing each other, and their vehicles are shown below the figures of the divinities. Another site where the same deities have been depicted is at Gauhati, and the figures of the deities were carved out from a block of granite (10th century CE). The stone is divided into nine equal squares, which also depict other deities, such as Gaṇeśa and Kārttikeya, along with Umā-Maheśvara. Here, Śiva is shown with four hands, and his right front hand rests lightly on the left side of Umā's bosom. Another icon, where Śiva figures with four hands and Umā with two hands, was discovered from Mahāmayathān in the Karbi-Anglong district. Rājbāri reveals an Umā-Maheśvara icon dated to the 10th century CE, and the two-handed Śiva image sits in the *lalitāsana* pose, where Uma is depicted seated on the left lap of Śiva. Unlike the other representations, the goddess is shown with her legs on the *āsana* stretching to the left. A figure of *siṁha* is depicted as the vehicle of the goddess in both the images recovered from Mahāmayathān and Rājbāri. The sacred site of Mikirāti brings to light two images of Umā-Māheśvara. The first one, dated to the 10th century CE, is now preserved in the Assam State Museum, and the other belongs to the 11th century CE. The manner of presentation of both the images is similar. Other sites where such images are noticed are at Visvanathghāt and Kasosolapāhār. The upper part of the image from Visvanathghāt of the Umā-Māheśvara sculpture is broken. The other image is of the rock-cut variety.

It may be noted that the worship of Śiva-Śakti, which was prevalent in Early Assam, was a phase of Śaivism, and appears to be quite distinct from the later Tantricism. It is neither Śaivism, where Śiva appears as the supreme deity, nor Śaktism where Śiva's spouse Umā is deemed as the supreme power, ordaining the creation and movement of the world. The idea of Śakti, or a power of Sambhu (Śiva), is brought out in the epigraphs. The first verse of the inscription of Balavarman III of the 9th century CE indicates this idea of Śakti.[227] It states: "Lord Rudra, capable of dispelling the darkness of the world (i.e. of the period of birth and re-birth) …." The Copper Plate Grant of Ratnapāla[228] articulates all the qualities of "Lord Śaṇkara (Śiva)… who like the supreme self assumes plurality while remaining essentially one." It may be significant to note the distinct evolution of Śiva-Śakti worship towards a monistic path, as indicated in the later inscriptions, when the duality acquires a unity, and "both were coalesced into one."[229] The amalgamation of Śaivism and Śaktism in Assam during the later period (about the 12th century CE) show that both the cults were popular. In the Subhaṇkarapāṭaka and Khānamukh Grants of King Dharmapāla, Śiva is conceived in a composite form, i.e. *ardhayuvatīśvara*. The half-male and half-female forms are represented split down the middle.

The right half is the male form, i.e., Śiva, illustrating his traditional attributes, and the left is that of his consort, i.e., Pārvatī. The concept emphasizes not only the fusion of male and female principles, but also complete parity in the sharing of power relations between the two deities. It needs to be determined whether the two developments, namely the emergence and growing prominence gained by the Sakti cult, and the changing gender equation as revealed by the *Purāṇas*, had any symbiotic connection. Further, it is of importance to examine whether the very concept of Śakti, especially in her manifestation as Durga Mahiśasuramardinī, was essentially a mythic representation of an empowered womanhood, or whether it represented a prominent tribal cult that found its way into the *Purāṇic* pantheon.

The inference drawn from the archaeological sources indicates that the rulers of Kāmarūpa from the 4th to the 12th centuries CE patronised Śaktism, although Śiva may have been their tutelary deity. Kāmarūpa emerges as the favourite place of the Devī, and she is believed to dwell in every house.[230] Every woman in Kāmarūpa is said to be a miniature incarnation of the goddess. She is believed to dwell in her real self in three places, viz., Kāmāgiri (Kāmākhyā Hill), Jalandhara, and Purnagiri. In spite of iconographic representations of the Devī in Assam, though not in very large numbers, strangely enough, in the inscriptions there is no trace of Śakti worship except the veiled references in the inscriptions of Vanamāla and Indrapāla, mentioning the temples of Kāmeśvara-Mahāgauri and Mahāgauri-Kāmeśvara. The silence may, however, be explained by the fact that Śaktism represents an aspect of *Purāṇic* Hinduism which is, in the main, personal and esoteric. As B. K. Barua comments: "Consequently, it had little connection with any public religious order or establishment."[231] Śakti worship seems to have gained greater predominance over Śaivism by the time of King Indrapāla, that is, around the 11th century CE. The mention of Mahāgauri in Vanamāla's epigraph of about the middle of the 9th century CE is significant, as it gives a place of prominence to the deity. There was no sharp distinction in the worship of Śiva and Śakti, as indicated by the twenty-fourth name of Indrapāla, viz., *Hara-girija-carana-pankajaraj-oranjitottamanga*, which is translated as, "one whose head is decorated with the dust of the feet of the god Śiva and the goddess Durgā."[232] Archaeological data pertaining to the goddess of the period before the 9th-10th centuries CE, is very scarce. However, the existence of the Śakta *pīṭha* at Kāmākhyā, the several images of Mahiṣāmardinī (both Durgā and Siṁhāvahinī Durgā), Cāmuṇḍa, and joint images of Umā-Maheśvara conclusively prove that Śaktism was practised and popular in Early Assam.

Map 3: Sites of Religious Importance in Early Assam: Śiva and Śakti



CHAPTER THREE

VAIṢṆAVISM

Vaiṣṇavism signifies the theistic religion of which Viṣṇu is the chief deity of worship, and Prāgjyotiṣapura was one of the chief Vaiṣṇava centres in Eastern India.[233] In Brāhmaṇical philosophy, Viṣṇu is one of the principal deities forming the 'Hindu Triad', along with Śiva and Brahmā. As manifestations of the Ultimate Reality, the cosmic functions of creation and destruction are personified by Brahmā and Śiva respectively. Viṣṇu is imbued with the qualities of *satta-guna,* that is, mercy and goodness, with which he is believed to preserve the world. Iconographically, the Triad is represented as a three-faced human figure, and this unified concept of divinity is interpreted in different ways by the various cults of the Brāhmaṇical faith. Vaiṣṇavism recognizes Brahmā and Śiva as the manifestations of Viṣṇu. If mythological narratives are any indication, the worship of Viṣṇu seems to have been prevalent in Kāmarūpa from very early times, as mentioned in the two principal texts, viz., *Kālīka-Purāṇa* and *Yoginī-Tantra*. The *Kālīka-Purāṇa* refers to five places in Kāmarūpa which are sacred to Viṣṇu.[234] The *Yoginī-Tantra* refers to a Viṣṇu-*pīṭha* in the list of nine *pīṭhas*, or sacred regions, in Kāmarūpa.[235]The association of Vaiṣṇavism with Kāmarūpa is well attested by traditional accounts, which mention that the ruling houses of Prāgjyotiṣa and Kāmarūpa claimed to have descended from Viṣṇu in his Boar incarnation by the Earth Goddess. According to the myth, the son of Viṣṇu and the Earth Goddess was Narakāsura, and Bhagadatta was Naraka's son.[236] The *Mahābhārata* mentions that Viṣṇu is called Prāgjyotiṣa Jyestha.[237]

The archaeological evidence of temples dedicated to Viṣṇu and his *avatāras* (incarnations), and icons of the deity throughout Assam, prove that Vaiṣṇavism was prevalent during the pre-Ahom period, and that it was not far behind Śaivism in its popularity. Suvira Jaiswal[238]explains that, during the Gupta period, Vaiṣṇavism secured its foothold in the region of Assam, and that it appears to have spread during the rule of the feudal chiefs under the influence of the Guptas. The earliest inscription issued by the kings of Early Assam is the Rock Inscription of Surendravarman, dated to the 5th century CE, which is also the first recorded evidence of the prevalence of

the Viṣṇu cult in Kāmarūpa. The epigraph refers to the construction of a cave-temple of Lord Balabhadra (also known as Balarāma, the eighth incarnation of Viṣṇu) by this king.[239] It is generally assumed that, even if Balabhadra is identified with an individual of the time, the familiarity with the name of a Vaiṣṇavite deity gives an indication of the early history of Vaiṣṇavism in Assam. What is of relevance is the inference that can be drawn from the record, in that Viṣṇu was patronised by a king, and that the origin of Vaiṣṇavism in Assam can be traced to the 5th century CE. The worship of Viṣṇu in Kāmarūpa is confirmed at least by the 6th century CE, by an inscription of King Bhutivarman, which hails Viṣṇu as '*Parama-daivata Paramabhaṭṭāraka* (supreme god).'[240]Although the majority of the epigraphic records discovered so far invoke Śiva, there are also a few Copper Plates which invoke Viṣṇu in the opening verses. King Dharmapāla opens his *praśasti* of the Puṣpabhadrā Grant (12th century CE) with an adulation of Viṣṇu.[241] The record refers to a donee, a Brāhmaṇa, who was "from birth, a worshipper of the lotus-like feet of Mādhava."[242] Lord Vāsudeva[243]is offered salutation in the opening lines of the Kamauli Grant of Vaidyadeva (1142 CE) and the Assam Plates of Vallabhadeva (1185 CE). The opening verse of the Kamauli Grant brings out the qualities of Lord Hari (Viṣṇu) in the Boar form.[244] The Copper Plate Grant of Indrapāla makes a rare attempt at identification of Viṣṇu with Śiva, thus: "Victorious is the Lord Mahāvarāha of worshippable and most glorious form, who is Pasupati and the Lord of the whole mankind." [245]

The adoption of the many names of Viṣṇu as personal names by the devotees was not uncommon in Kāmarūpa. The Brāhmaṇas took personal names such as Saṁkarṣṇa, Mādhava, Govardhana, Gopāla, Sudarśana, Keśava, and Janārdhana, etc.[246] Some popular names of Viṣṇu which came to be adopted by the followers of the cult included Acyūta ('unfallen, imperishable'), Nārayaṇā ('one who moves in the water'), Puruṣottama ('the highest of men, the supreme spirit'), Hari, Upendra, Vāsudeva, Kṛṣṇa. That some of the pre-Ahom kings were devoted to Viṣṇu is shown by the epithets Varāhā attached to their names, such as Dharmapāla in the Puṣpabhadrā Copper Plate Grant, and Harṣapāla in the Khānamukh Copper Plates of Dharmapāla. The Kamauli Copper Plate Grant of Vaidyadeva records that King Vaidyadeva was a devout Vaiṣṇava, who always meditated at the feet of Viṣṇu. The Grant opens with an invocation to Viṣṇu in his Varāhā form.[247] Bhāskara is said to have "been created by the holy lotus, emerging from the navel of Viṣṇu."[248] Bhagadatta was particularly devoted to Kṛṣṇa, which is confirmed by the Tezpur Grant.[249] King Vanamāla is referred to as devoted to the faith of Bhava (Śiva), but his name

was an epithet of Viṣṇu, and may indicate his devotion to the god. Further, King Ratnapāla is compared to Rāma and Kṛṣṇa.[250]

Sculptural representations of Viṣṇu found in Early Assam show stylistic affinity to some traits of the Pala School, such as those found in Narakāsura hoards.[251] As Erwin Panofsky[252] explains, art is concerned with how an image is conceived and the meanings attached to it. There are two varieties of Viṣṇu images; *sthānaka* (standing), and *āsana* (sitting). The former type outnumbers the latter variety.[253] Viṣṇu is also believed to have twenty-four incarnations, each having different attributes.[254] The specimens from Assam include most of these forms.[255] Symbolically, Viṣṇu stands for *ākaśagarbha*, or 'the sun at midday and midnight, resting on the coils of the eternal serpent Śesa'. He is often represented as a warrior with his usual weapons, and with the Garuda as the *vāhana* (vehicle). His active principle is Lakṣmī, or Usa. In the *sthānaka* posture, the deity symbolises the pillar of the universe, or the holy mount, Meru. Viṣṇu is depicted as four-armed, and he holds a *śāṅkha* (conch-shell) symbolising pride and destroying ignorance, a *cakra* as the wheel of life and destroyer of all enemies, a *gadā* (mace) which stands for intelligence, and a lotus, which stands for a *viśvapadma*, pedestal.

The *avatāra* form of worship was a notable feature of Vaiṣṇavism in Early Assam, and this is attested by both archaeological and inscriptional evidence.[256]The epigraphs mention Jāmadagnya Rāma,[257]who 'washed his blood-stained axe in the water of Lauhitya', and Narasiṁha and Rāma, 'who, crossing the ocean, killed Rāvana.'[258] By far the most frequently mentioned *avatāra* is the Boar incarnation of Viṣṇu.[259] The inscriptional records of Vanamāla, Balavarman, Ratnapāla, Indrapāla, and Dharmapāla, refer to this form of Viṣṇu as having "… lifted the earth from the depths of the lower region." The Kamauli Grant begins with an invocation to Hari in the form of Varāhā.[260] The Guwākuchi Grant mentions the *avatāra* Kṛṣṇa,[261] recounting in detail how he was born of Devakī, his sportive childhood as Gopāla, how he was brought up by Yasoda, and was "the delight of the *gopīs* during his playful childhood as Gopāla."[262] It is to be noted that Kṛṣṇa assumed the most important position among all the other *avatāras* of Viṣṇu in the history of Vaiṣṇavism in Assam, although it developed at a late stage. The Hayagrīva-Madhava temple at Hājo is an important site for Viṣṇu worship.[263] Hayagrīva (Viṣṇu with horsehead) is another incarnation of this deity, under which name he is especially worshipped in Assam, even today.[264] The worship of Viṣṇu in this form is originally believed to have been associated with Agni and along the temple of Hājo, and is also probably prevalent at Kāmākhyā.[265] The images of all ten major incarnations, viz., Kurma, Varāhā, Narasiṁha, Vamana, Parasurāma, Rāma,

Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, Buddha, and Kalki, are found in central Assam.[266] However, they are not found in complete sets of images, since the majority of the images are broken pieces of the original panels. Such panels of *avatāras* are noticed, particularly at Tezpur, Mornoi, Hājo, and Urvaśi. The material remains indicate that independent images of Viṣṇu *avatāras* may also have been worshipped. The panels must have been at one time a part of a temple-edifice. At the Viṣṇu Janārdhana temple in Gauhati, and dated to the 9th century CE, the rock-cut image of Viṣṇu is found alongside that of deities such as Śiva, Sūrya, Devī, etc.[267] Temple ruins of Viṣṇu belonging to the 10th century CE have been found at Gosāinguri, Nowgong, and at Matharbāri. A fine image of the deity, along with Lakṣmī and Sarasvati, was found among the Davāka monument ruins. A stone image of Viṣṇu has also been discovered at Chariduar in Tezpur, which is assigned to the 11th-12th centuries CE. However, not a single image of Trailokyamohana, Vaikuṇtha, Garuda, Nārayaṇā, and Viśvarupa, has been found belonging to the period under review.

The representation of Viṣṇu in *avatāra* (incarnation) form was quite common during the pre-Ahom period. A rare representation of Viṣṇu incarnation is the Matsya-*avatāra* form, and only three such images have been noticed so far. Some icons of the Narasiṁha form have been recovered from the Old Water Supply, Gauhati and Bamuni Hill, all of which are stylistically placed between 9th and 10th centuries CE. The fifth *avatāra* of Vāmana[268] is found in two forms, viz., dwarf (*vāmana*), and the image as a huge colossus (*virāṭarūpa*), in which form it is depicted as about to take the 'three steps' (*trivikrama*). Only three images of Vāmana belonging to the pre-Ahom period have been noticed so far. Parasurāma images have been found here represented in panels. Rama, the seventh *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, and Balarāma, the eighth, also occur in the panel representations. The Buddha is taken by some authorities to be the ninth *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. The first image of this incarnation is carved along with that of Balarāma and Kalki in a panel representation. The last *avatāra* of the deity is Kalki. Only three such images have been discovered so far, one of which is found along with the images of Buddha and Balarāma in a panel. Viṣṇu-*avatāra* images have thus been found independently, as well as in panels. The panels include representations of Varāhā, Narasiṁha, and Vāmana. Deopānī has produced a Kevala-Narasiṁha and Vāmana image. The sacred site of Urvaśi is well known for the only rock-cut panel of Viṣṇu *avatāra-mūrtīs* found which belongs to the period under study.

In terms of representations in temples, Viṣṇu seems to be the most popular god among the 'Hindu Triad'.[269] Not only were temples specially

dedicated to him, he even found a prime place in Śakti and Śiva shrines. From the archaeological remains connected to Viṣṇu, it can be concluded that the deity was worshipped, at least in the whole of the Brahmaputra valley. In Āmbārī, out of five icons of Viṣṇu discovered, one image bears inscribed letters, which read as Mādhava and Vāmana, and is supposed to bear the style of 13th-14th centuries CE.[270] At Buḍā-Gosaithan,[271]three small figures of the deity were discovered. There is a *dvāra-śāṅkhā*, which carries these three images, along with the figures of their consorts. Bāmunipāhār[272] at Tezpur is an important archaeological site which has brought to light several icons related to the deity. Here, a Varāhā-*avatāra* icon is seen in a panel of some Viṣṇu-*avatāras*. An image of Narasiṁha, dated 10th century CE, is also noticed, and the figure stands on the right leg while the left leg is kept horizontal to the *pīṭha*. This figure, which has a fierce appearance, is a rare type of the Narasiṁha image. An image of Parasurāma, placed on a slab of granite, is seen along with the other three *avatāras* of Viṣṇu. The *vāhana* of the deity is absent. Rāma also finds its place here. The first image of Balarāma is recovered from the same site. That the biggest of the Bāmunipāhār temples was dedicated to Viṣṇu can be inferred from the position of a Viṣṇu image in *sthānaka* posture, placed at the *lalatabimba* of the massive lintel. Probably, the large image of the Narasiṁha lying in the ruins also points to a Viṣṇu temple. The building complex thus formed a *pañcāyatana* temple, with Viṣṇu as its presiding deity.

Trivikrama[273] is an embodiment of Viṣṇu, and in Assam, an image dated to the 12th century CE was found in the *samapadasthānaka* standing posture, with four hands, and depicted with Garuḍa and consorts, Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī. This image is like the one found at the site of the bed of the Tihu river,[274] except that the former is in round-cut form and the latter is in relief. An icon found at the site of Bargaṅgā has not been identified with certainty, but is probably that of Viṣṇu, his consort, and the associates Jaya and Vijaya.[275] At Chārduār, figures of Matsya-*avatāra* were found, along with some other *avatāras*, such as Kṛṣṇa.[276] The figure of Kṛṣṇa at this temple ruin site is that of Muralīdhara, or Venugopāla, playing the flute and accompanied with the figures of attendants on both sides. The site of Deopānī[277] has unearthed several iconographic representations of the deity. There were three icons of Vāmana in the *sthānaka* attitude, with similar stylistic features, and one of Govinda dated to the 9th century CE, which have been preserved in the Assam State Museum. All of them are four-handed. The image of Narasiṁha dated to the 8th-9th centuries CE, has two hands, and represents the face of a lion and the body of a man. This rare icon, which is slightly carved, is called Kevala-Narasiṁha *mūrtī*.[278] At present, it is preserved in the newly constructed Mukhamaṇḍapa of the

Deopānī temple. An inscribed image of Nārayaṇā stands on a pedestal which has been assigned to the 9th century CE, based on the palaeography. It refers to the icon as an image of Nārayaṇā.[279]

Davāka[280] has revealed an image of Viṣṇu of the 9th century CE, which is depicted with *vaijayanti* (a garland), and the distinctive feature is that the prominent *alaṁkaras* (ornaments) of Viṣṇu are absent. The absence of a round *prabhā* (light) behind the head of the image is taken to be possibly a local variation. The image is identified to be either Śrīdhara or Hṛṣikeśa. Other sites where Viṣṇu-*avatāra* images have been found include Choudhary-*pārā* in Mornoi, Cole Park in Tezpur, Changchauki, and Chandmari. A controversial bronze figure of the deity is obtained from Dibrugarh, which may belong to the 11th or 12th centuries CE.[281] Here, the *vāhana* of the deity is not shown. The absence of any *āyudha* (instrument) in his hands makes it difficult to identify the deity as Viṣṇu. R.D. Choudhury[282] suggests that this icon may belong to a much later date, and possibly to the 16th century CE. Three images of Viṣṇu were found in Dulal Mādhab, Gopāl Mādhab, and Saubhāgya. The Dighalpāni images[283] are of three sets, raised in three panels, where Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī flank the central figure.

Gauhati is indeed one of the few early sites in Kāmarūpa which possesses a rich collection of archaeological remains. An icon of the deity in *yogāsana* attitude, dated to the 10th-11th centuries CE, is now preserved in the Assam State Museum. The same site has revealed three images of the Narasiṁha form. A Balarāma image[284] is carved on a broken slab of basalt, which also has images of Buddha and Kalki *avatāras*. An image of the deity, with *āyudha-puruṣa* form, from Khāramadhi-pārā, Dudhnoi, has been recovered, where the *vāhana* is not shown. This is the only image of Viṣṇu showing an *āyudha-puruṣa* (anthropomorphic depiction of a divine weapon) which has been discovered from Assam so far, and is dated to about the 6th-7th centuries CE. The Anantasayin Viṣṇu,[285] in the Asvakranta temple, North Gauhati, is a reclining statue. Gosāinguri in Nowgong district, Hojāi, and Hājo, also produced icons of Viṣṇu. The icon from Hājo is that of Buddha, also sometimes referred to as the last and tenth incarnation of Viṣṇu.

At Kāmākhyā temple, the earliest image of Kṛṣṇa[286] shown playing a flute, has been found on the western gate of the temple. Dated to the 10th century CE, it is a small-sized image carved on a block of granite. The second image of Kṛṣṇa is found on a huge rock behind the western gate of the temple. Here, the *sthānaka* deity is in the *tribhaṅga* posture, and *gopīs* (cowherd girls) are seen on both sides of the deity. Images of Kṛṣṇa are also

noticed from the temple ruins at Chārduār. At Kāwaimāri[287] there is an icon of Viṣṇu in the *sthānaka* posture, along with Garuḍa in the usual posture. These objects are found among the ruins of a large temple in the centre, with small ones in its four corners. The tortoise incarnation, or Kūrmā-*avatāra* images,[288] sculptured in three panels, was discovered from Mornoi. Each of the images is depicted with four hands, holding *cakra*, *gadā*, *śāṅkha*, and *padmā*. Two female attendants are seen on either side of each deity. This is like the images that are preserved in the Assam State Museum, Gauhati, and Tezpur. The Numalīgarh stone pillar[289] carries an image of Viṣṇu in *mahārājalita* attitude, in *padmāsana* (seated in lotus posture). Another image at the same site is seen on the side of a cubicle part of a *stambha* (pillar). A hoard of metal icons, conches, and bells, etc., was discovered in a hole in Kahilipārā at Narakāsura Hill.[290] Four out of the twenty-two icons belong to the 9th century CE, and they are identified as Śrīdhara, the ninth form of Viṣṇu, or Hṛṣikeśa, the tenth form of the deity. The third image is dated to the 8th century CE, and quite like the one from Deopānī, which is now preserved in the Assam State Museum, Gauhati. The fourth image is a mutilated one. Trivikrama images find their place in the sites of Netaidhubunighāt, Hājo, and Rengbeng near Nagaon.[291]The Rengbeng image of the 12th century CE finds other similar ones in Kāwaimāri, Hātisung-Gedāvari village, and in the house of one N. Sharma Bhagavati of Gojpuria village. A small image of Narasiṁha, which is in a standing position and holding the body of Hiranya, the demon, horizontally, was found at Hājo.

Two varieties of Viṣṇu image have been found at Sukreśvar at Gauhati. One of the images measure 217cms x 186cms and is the biggest of all Viṣṇu images found in Assam. The exact identity of the image is debated, and the suggestions are that it is either of Nārayaṇā,[292] or Viṣṇu Janārdhana.[293] Another image of Viṣṇu, recovered from the same site, is that of Govinda, which is an *āsana* variety fitted on the western *bhiṭṭi* (wall) of the Sukreśvar temple at Gauhati. Cross-legged, the deity is seen seated on a coiling serpent identified with Ādiseśa, and is a rare representation of the deity.

At Śri Sūryapāhār,[294] a row of five rock-cut sculptures of Viṣṇu are seen, but the usual four hands of the deity are absent. The Varāhā-*avatāra* from Sibsāgar is the only *svayampradhna-mūrtī* (independent image; standing alone) of the Viṣṇu form discovered in Assam. There is another Varāhā image at Viṣṇupārā, and the same site has yielded a Rama-*avatāra* image. The sites of Tarabasa, Mangaldoi, and Urvaśi, have brought to light several Viṣṇu images, some of them in rock-cut form. A miniature rock-cut image of a two-handed Vāmana, without any attendant figures, is found in a Viṣṇu-

avatāra panel at Urvaśi. Another icon found here is that of Kurma-*avatāra*. This is also a rock cut one, represented in a hybrid form. A miniature rock-cut image of Vāmana in the form of Visnu-*avatāra* is also found at the same site. Two-handed, the deity has no attendant figures. There is an image of Visnu preserved in the Assam State museum, which is depicted as a dwarf figure of Vāmana holding a *chattra* (canopy) in one of its two hands. To the right of this sculpture, there is a miniature figure of Trivikrama, shown with the left leg raised upwards.

At the sacred site of Bamuni Hill, a two-handed image of Parasurāma in *sthānaka* attitude was discovered. The Assam State Museum possesses two more images of Parasurāma. One of them is depicted in a *dvāra-śāṅkhā* in Choudhary-*pārā,* Mornoi, wherein the deity is made to stand holding *paraśu* in his left hand. Yet another image of Visnu-*avatāra* was found on the site, which was identified as that of Rāma. This image is dated to the 8th or 9th century CE. A Balarāma image in *samapadasthānaka* form is also noticed. It has two hands, and the *vāhana* of the deity has been depicted. The image on the rock-cut panel is small, and it does not have attendant figures. From the site of Urvaśi, two images of Buddha and Kalki, the last two of the ten incarnations, have come to light. Uzan Bazar revealed an image of Narasiṁha which is dated to the 9th or the 10th centuries CE. The image was found in the residence of one Rajendra Nath Choudhary. The deity is represented with four hands in the usual posture. There are few Viṣṇu images preserved in the Assam State Museum, although the original place where they were recovered is not known. Two miniature stone images of the 10th-11th centuries CE, both in *samapadasthānaka* attitude, are also preserved in the museum.

The prevalence of the cult of Vāsudeva[295] in Kāmarūpa, prior to the spread of Neo-Vaiṣṇavism,[296] is mainly inferred from references in the *Kālīka-Purāṇa*. The other important literary source of the religion of Early Assam, viz., *Yogini-Tantra,* a later text, does not give any prominent position to the cult of Vāsudeva. This perhaps indicates the changing dynamics of Viṣṇu worship with its various forms and incarnations. The existence of the archaeological site, by the name Vāsudevathān,[297] situated in present northern Lakhimpur, indicates that Assam was familiar with the worship of Vāsudeva. At this site, Vāsudeva images have been found along with those of many other deities, and the most common representation shows the deity under a canopy of an eight-hooded serpent, Ādiseśa.[298] Both legs of the deity are folded, and made to rest on the coiled body of the serpent. The back-hands hold a *gadā* (mace) and a *padmā* (lotus), and the front-hands hold a *cakra* (wheel) and a *śāṅkha* (conch shell).[299] Davāka also

has revealed a similar image of Viṣṇu, but here he is shown with his consorts, Lakṣmī and Sarasvati.[300] However, the image from the Ākāsigaṅgā ruins is shown seated, flanked on both sides by Lakṣmī and Sarasvati standing on either side.[301] A block of stone from Mikirāti has revealed a portion of the Vāsudeva figure with flying Vidyadhāras above him, with folded hands.[302] In Mahādeosal, there is a door-piece which has a carved figure of Vāsudeva.[303] Sets of Vāsudeva images are also found from Phulani and Dighalpāni, one of which is identified as Viṣṇu-Vāsudeva with his attendants. There are small panels in between the Vāsudeva panels, where the figure of Vāsudeva is seen, seated in a *padmāsana* position.[304]

Śakti worship was common to both the Śaiva and the Vaiṣṇava sects, and the most important goddesses associated with the Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa cult were Lakṣmī and Sarasvati.[305] However, it may be noted that these goddesses with Vaiṣṇava affiliation were rarely noticed in Early Assam, in spite of the fact that Viṣṇu images have been found in good numbers.[306] The plausible explanation is that it may be associated with the development of the *varṇā* tradition, the dynamics of social organization in Early Assam when women came to be relegated to the category of the *śūdrās*.[307] The inscriptions from the 9th century CE attest to the division of the society into the *dvija,* or twice-born, indicating the greater influence of Brāhmaṇical tradition in society. Of the eight different forms of Lakṣmī known as Aṣṭa Mahalakṣmī, the Gaja-Lakṣmī form is the most popular in Assam. The earliest representations of the Devī, known locally as Kamala-Kāminī, were discovered in the niche of a stone stab from Tezpur, in which two elephants are shown pouring water over the head of the goddesses Kamala and Kamini, from vases held by their trunks.[308] Some images of Gajalakṣmī were discovered, and most of them were not independent images. The sacred site of Devasthān revealed the remains of temples, in two rows of five each, where some figures of divine images were brought to light. In one panel, which shows several deities in seated positions, Gajalakṣmī occupies the central place. Other sites where images of the deity were unearthed include Sibsāgar, Mahādeosal, and Maudāṇga.[309] The two images of the deity from Maudāṇga[310] were recovered from a ruined *dvāra* of a temple. The perpetual abode of Lakṣmī is Nārayaṇā.[311] Tradition has it, that Lakṣmī came out from *samudra-manthana* (‘churning of the sea’) and then became the consort of Viṣṇu. At Cole Park is a figure of Lakṣmī dated to the 10th century CE.[312] The Lakṣmī image from Mahāmayathān[313] belonging to the 8th-9th centuries CE was found adorning the *sirapaṭṭis*, which were lying in a state of disorder. It has the usual *alaṁkaras* and *vastras* (cloth and garments), although most of them have become difficult to identify. A rare icon of Lakṣmī-Nārayaṇā[314] is found in Kāchumārī village, near Morān. A

miniature bronze image of Lakṣmī in the *lalitāsana* posture on a lotus seat, is seen seated on the left thigh of Viṣṇu. Below the feet of the deity is Garuḍa. Dated to the 9th-10th centuries CE, this icon of Lakṣmī-Nārayaṇā is a metal art, and is the only one of its kind noticed in Assam.

Vārāhi[315] is the sixth member of Sapta Mātrikās. In Assam, only one image dated to the 9th century CE has been discovered so far, which is now preserved in the Assam State Museum, Gauhati. The deity is represented as seated in the *lalitāsana* position and has two hands. Her *vāhana* is an elephant, although it is not depicted in this image. Another form of the Devī is Sarasvatī, who is depicted independently at times, and otherwise as a consort of Viṣṇu. At Chārduār,[316] an image of the deity is noticed. A figure of Vīṇāhastā Sarasvatī, as described in the *Agni-Purāṇa*, is seen in a niche of a stone slab found at Tezpur.[317]Another figure of the goddess in the *tribhaṅga* (standing pose with three bends) was recovered from Sibsāgar.[318] She wears a *ratni* (jewel), *kuṇḍala* (earring), *hara* (necklace), and girdle. Another image of Sarasvatī dated to the 9th or 10th century CE was found at Cole Park, and the figure is seated on a slab of granite in the *lalitāsana* posture. Both her hands hold the *veena* (musical instrument) in the usual way. From Buḍā-Gosaithan, sets of standing images of Viṣṇu, Lakṣmī, and Sarasvatī were discovered.[319]It has been noticed that the goddesses Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī occurred as associate figures of Viṣṇu. The archaeological site of Bamgāon, at Biswanath Chariali in Sonitpur District, was excavated during 2002-2003 CE, where the ruins of a brick temple along with sculptures and terracotta objects belonging to the period 800-900 CE were unearthed. The exposed material remains reveal floral designs, human and animal figures, etc. A modern Vaiṣṇava *nāmghar* (a large prayer hall) has now been constructed on the site.

Joint images of Viṣṇu with another deity were also found in Assam, although they are rare. The Hari-Hara *mūrtī* representing Viṣṇu and Śiva, emphasise the association of the two cults of Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism. The Brahmaputra valley has yielded a few icons of Hari-Hara (Viṣṇu-Śiva), and the first image was discovered from North Gauhati.[320] This sculpture has two attendants, one on each side, the left representing Viṣṇu and the right side of the deity has the emblem of Śiva, namely the *triśūla* (trident) and the *damaru* (small hourglass-shaped drum). A Hari-Hara combined image from Deopāni shows the two equal halves split in the middle by a line of demarcation between Hari and Hara. The right half of the image represents Hara, while the other half depicts Hari. The left side representing Viṣṇu can be identified by his *karandamukūṭa* (a hairstyle*)*, and the *gadā* and *cakra*, which he holds in his two hands. The consorts of both the deities are absent,

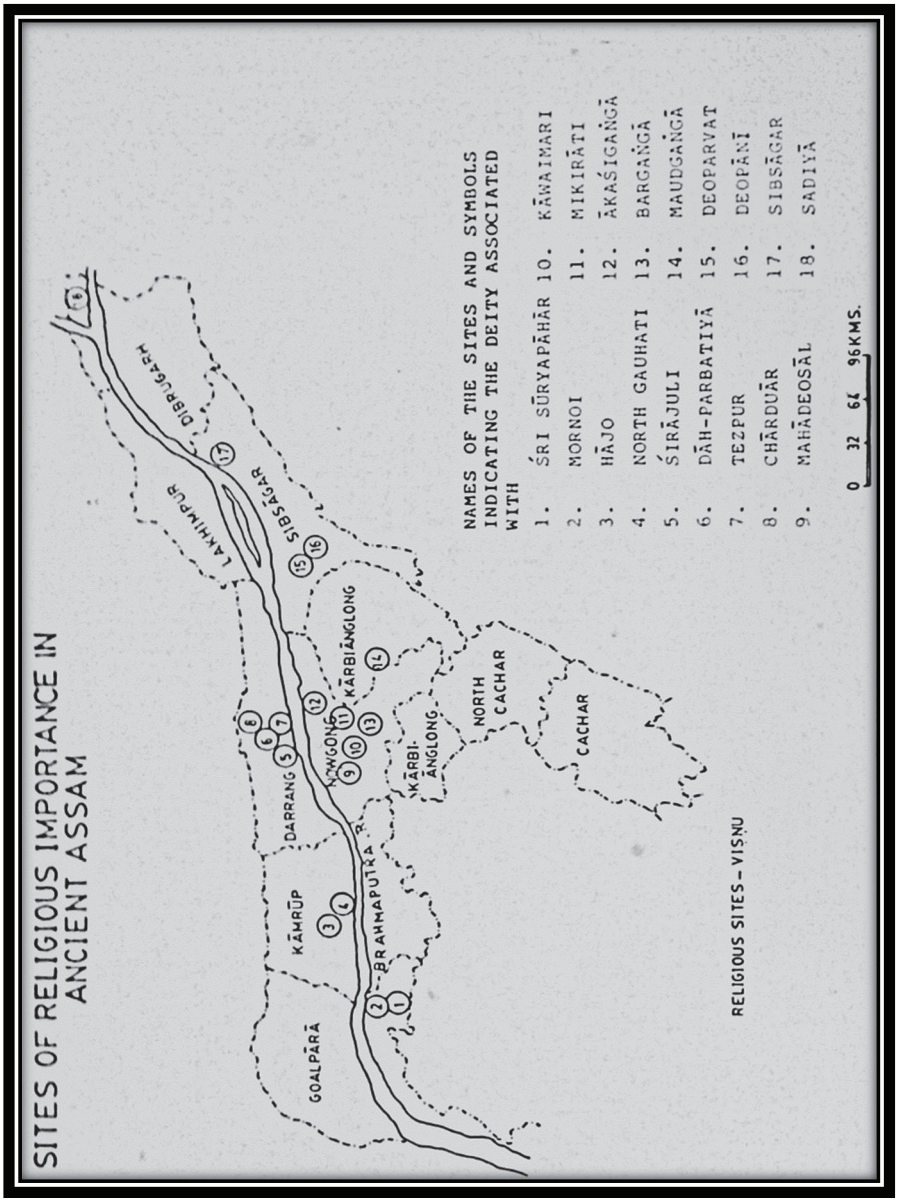
but the respective *vāhanas* of the god are seen. To the deity's right, Śiva's *vāhana*, the bull Nandi, and to its left Viṣṇu's carrier, Garuḍa, are clearly depicted. According to the iconometric texts, Hari or Nārayaṇā should be shown on the left side, and Śiva or Śaṇkara on the right, represented with their symbols in the respective halves.[321]

To understand the origin and development of Vaiṣṇavism in Assam, it will be worthwhile to examine the Umāchal inscription of the 5th century CE, which is the earliest recorded reference to Viṣṇu worship discovered so far. The inscription was found in the north-eastern slope of the Kāmākhyā Hill, and it tells of the first ever cave temple for Viṣṇu, constructed by King Surendravarman in the Brahmaputra valley.[322] The site, as it looks at present, does not contain any temples, except for two big rocks standing parallel, with a common passage in between them. Apart from its importance as a sacred archaeological site, Umāchal bears chronological significance in the context of the history of the Brāhmaṇical faith in general, and Vaiṣṇavism in particular. The use of the two words, *Bhāgayata* and *Balabhadrasvāmin*, in the Umāchal rock inscription have some significance. It may be noted that the Balabhadra cult, as an independent sect, remained dominant up to the 2nd century CE in North and West India, and is supposed to have declined with the rise of the Gupta dynasty. Its prevalence in Kāmarūpa in the 5th century CE indicates that it predates the Gupta period. P.C. Sarma[323] opines that it is likely that the followers of this cult, who were being driven away by other Brāhmaṇical sects under the emerging Gupta dynasty, took refuge in the "remote hilly enclave of the Brahmaputra valley".

It is crucial to examine the connection of this early Viṣṇu cult with that of Neo-Vaiṣṇavism, which was founded by Śaṅkaradeva (1449-1568 CE), and which gradually grew in importance in the history and culture of Assam. Śaṅkaradeva's Vaiṣṇavism was part of the larger pan-Indian resurgence of *Bhakti*, which established itself over different parts of India by the 15th and 16th centuries CE. The mention of the word *bhaktas*[324] in the Deopānī Viṣṇu image inscription dated to the 9th century CE is crucial, and points to the plausibility of the cult of *Bhakti* having already gained some ground in the religious life of Early Assam. Tantricism, with its use of spells, gestures diagrams, and various magical sacramental rites, was already prevalent in Early Assam, and this also influenced the emerging Vaiṣṇavite tradition. The prevalence of Tantric Vaiṣṇavism can be inferred from the archaeological evidence, such as that of the Mādhava temple.[325] This present temple was built in 1583 CE, over the ruins of an earlier shrine.

Vaiṣṇavism has always accommodated tribal features, as a carrier of the Brāhmaṇical faith in the peripheral areas.[326] That Vaiṣṇavism was popular from the 6th century CE onwards can be deduced, not merely from inscriptional evidence, but also from numerous sculptural representations. Kṛṣṇa seems to occupy an important place in Vaiṣṇavism only at a later period. By the 7th century CE, Kṛṣṇa's account became the main theme of early Assamese literature.[327] An important piece of archaeological evidence is the Deopānī-Viṣṇu image inscription of about the 8th-9th centuries CE, which clearly gives importance to Lord Nārayaṇā in comparison to the other deities. Therein, the goddess Bhagavati is identified with Viṣṇu (Guhya).[328] The Assam State Museum possesses two images of Hari-Hara recovered from the Deopānī site, and both have a few lines inscribed on them. There is a Śaṅkara-Nārayanā inscription, which brings to light some references to the *nāma-saṁkīrtana* form of worship, which was later popularised by Śaṅkaradeva. The mention of '*adau nama* Śaṅkara-Nārayaṇā-*kīrtan*,' gives the impression that chanting prayers to Śaṅkara and Nārayaṇā was done before the consecration of the idol in the temple concerned.[329] If this is accepted, the probability of the Viṣṇu cult having existed in Assam as early as the 8th century CE may be inferred. The centrality of Kṛṣṇa in Vaiṣṇavism was evident with the spread of the Bhakti movement introduced to Assam in the form of Neo-Vaiṣṇavism by Śaṅkaradeva around the 16th century CE. It is difficult to define the nature of early Vaiṣṇavism in Assam. However, from the materials available at hand, it may be surmised that it corresponded closely to the Bhagvatism of the Gupta period, which was a syncretism of the various cults of Viṣṇu, viz., Viṣṇu of Vedic Brāhmaṇism, Nārayaṇā of the Pañcaratrās, Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva of the Satvats, and Gopālā of the Ābhīra tribe.

Map 4: Sites of Religious Importance in Early Assam: Viṣṇu



CHAPTER FOUR

MISCELLANEOUS CULTS: SŪRYA, AND OTHER MINOR DEITIES

The existence of a variety of gods and goddesses is a marked feature of the history of religion in Early Assam. Śiva, Śakti and Viṣṇu were worshipped as the major deities under the patronage of the kings belonging to Varman, Salastambha and Pala dynasties, who reigned from the 4th century CE to the advent of the Ahoms, in the Brahmaputra valley, in 1228 CE. The miscellaneous deities of Brāhmaṇical, as well as non-Brāhmaṇical faiths occupied a subordinate position to the three major gods. It may be mentioned that Buddhism, along with Jainism, was not particularly popular in Assam, although it attracted a small section of the population. The deities which are categorized as minor in Early Assam are Sūrya,[330] Indra, Gaṇeśa, Kārttikeya, Agni, Kuvera, and Brahmā. The worship of Manasā was not totally absent during this period. Yet, these miscellaneous deities were popular, as can be seen from the archaeological finds recovered from many sacred sites in Kāmarūpa, although they did not rise to the position of independent cults. Independent representations of some of them have rarely been found, and the archaeological remains reveal that the minor deities occurred mostly as consorts and associates of the chief god or goddess. According to material evidence that has come to light, the miscellaneous deities may be classified into two groups, viz., A: Sūrya, and B: Other minor deities. Among the minor deities, the Surya cult was next only to Śiva, Śakti, and Viṣṇu in its importance. It is therefore reasonable to recognize it as a separate classification.

A: Sūrya

Sūrya is the presiding deity of the Saura sect of the Smārta affiliation in Brāhmaṇical philosophy, which considers the 'Hindu Triad' of Brahma, Śiva, and Viṣṇu, as the manifestations of Sūrya. The characteristic features of Sūrya iconography is described in texts such as the *Brihat Samhita, Agni Purāṇa,* and *Bhavisya Purāṇa*.[331] In the context of Early Assam, the antiquity of Sūrya is indicated by the very name Prāgjyotiṣa, by which the

kingdom was known in early times. Prāgjyotiṣa means 'light of the East' or 'Eastern astronomy'. As the 'centre of Sun worship' it finds mention in the *Gṛyhasūtra* texts. The 'Land of Sunrise' (Udayācala) finds mention in the *Mārkaṇḍeya-Purāṇa*. Udayācala was another name for Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa, where, according to the same *Purāṇa*, stood a temple of the Sun.[332] The term *āditya-bhaṭṭāraka*,[333] which appears in the Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla, is of importance, and the term has been understood to have an affiliation with the Sun-god.[334] The epigraphic records, however, do not indicate the prevalence of an independent Sūrya cult. There is no mention of invocation to this god in the epigraphs available till date. Nor is there any instance of the kings having patronized this deity. Yet, there are a fair number of Sūrya images that have been discovered in Assam belonging to the period under review. They are broadly divided into two types:[335] 1] *Sthānaka-mūrtīs* in standing posture, which is of two varieties, viz., Sūrya images with *ratha* (chariot), and Sūrya images without *ratha*; and 2] *Āsana-mūrtīs* in seated posture.

In Assam, the *sthānaka-mūrtīs* outnumber the *āsana-mūrtīs*. However, Assam has revealed only a few *sthānaka* images of Sūrya without the *ratha.* The earliest representation of Sun worship in Assam is traced to an image dated to the 8th century CE, which was found in Tezpur. [336] The remains of the ruins of the temple structure reveal that there was a panel representation of several gods, which included Brahmā, Śiva, and Sūrya. Some scholars surmise the possibility of the existence of a huge temple at the site, which was dedicated to the Sun-god. At Dāh-Parbatiyā,[337] in a temple ruin perhaps dedicated to Śiva, a medallion containing a beautiful image of the Sun-god has been found. The god is shown seated cross-legged and holding lotus flowers in both hands. He has two attendants on either side. This sacred site was a great centre of Brāhmaṇical culture, especially of Śaivism in Assam, though the Sun-god was also highly revered.[338] Another important place of Sun-worship was Negritting,[339] and here a shrine was dedicated to him. It must be mentioned that, in spite of Sūrya occupying a subordinate position to Śiva, Śakti and Viṣṇu, a separate shrine was built for him, which indicates that the deity also occupied an important position in the Brāhmaṇical pantheon. At Gauhati,[340] there is a temple dedicated to all the nine *grahas* (planets) where the central pillar represents Sūrya, the Sun, which is surrounded by the planets. A Sun image[341] has also been found from around this archaeological site. The god is shown seated on a chariot which has one wheel and is drawn by seven horses. He is represented holding a lotus in each hand, wearing armour, and holding a shield over his chest. He is shown with beautiful straight hair and surrounded by a halo of light. The

representation at this temple reveals that, in Early Assam, the Sun-god was worshipped, both symbolically as well as in anthropomorphic form.[342]

A place of singular importance for the study of the Sun-god is Śri Sūryapāhār, located in Goalpārā town. This site may be called a picture gallery of artistically arranged archaeological remains. Śri Sūryapāhār, as the name suggests, was 'the perpetual abode of the Sun-god' and the deity must have been immensely popular here.[343] Arun Bhattacharjee categorized the Sūrya icons discovered at this site into five groups. The first group includes the Sūrya icons which are depicted along with attendants, such as Uṣa, Pratyuṣā, and Mahasvata, in addition to Daṇḍa, Piṇgala, Rajanī, and Nikśubā. Only one image from Davāka falls into this group.[344] Now preserved in the Assam State Museum, the image is dated to the 10th century CE. It is in *samapadasthānaka* posture and is placed on a chariot. The second category includes icons represented with four attendants, viz., two males and two females. An image of this type was found in the private possession of one N. Deka, in Paltan Bazar, and is dated to the 11th-12th centuries CE. Those with only two male attendants, i.e. Daṇḍa and Piṇgala, belong to the third group, and four images in this category have been discovered. An image, dated to the 10th century CE, is seen on the wall of the Siddheśwarī temple at Soālkuchi. Here, the deity stands on a *padmā*, in the *samabhaṅga* pose (standing straight without bending). This belongs to the *sthānaka* with *ratha* variety. The consorts Uṣa and Pratyuṣā do not feature in this image. Below the figure of Aruna, seven horses and the *ekachakra-ratha* are well depicted. From Āmbāri,[345] two of the same iconographic varieties belonging to the 12th-13th centuries CE have been recovered. Other pre-Ahom icons of this type are found in the Narakāsur Hill.[346] The next group of Sūrya images are those with two female attendants; Nikṣubā and Rajanī. Such images are found at two places. The first one is from Soālkuchi, found in front of the Siddheśwarī temple. This icon, which is dated to the 10th century CE, depicts the Sun-god holding *āyudhas*. Nikṣubā and Rajanī are made to stand on either side of the deity. Figures of Daṇḍa and Piṇgala are absent, while horses of the *ratha* are seen. The distinctive feature of this figure is that both the hands of the deity are kept on the heads of the consorts while holding the *āyudhas*. Another image was also discovered in the Sukreśvar temple, which is assigned to the 13th century CE. Sūrya images without the *ratha* form the last group. There are three images of this type. Two of them have been recovered from the Kāmākhyā temple, one of which belongs to the 9th-10th centuries CE, and the other is dated to the 10th-11th centuries CE. The third was recovered from the Narakāsur ruins (9th century CE). Belonging to the *sthānaka* variety, the

deity holds two *padmās*. No attendants are shown here. Neither Daṇḍa nor Piṇgala are depicted with the Sun-god.

Some more sites in Assam have brought to light icons of Sūrya. A slightly mutilated one is discovered from Bhogbari, Mangaldoi, and is now preserved in the Assam State Museum. This icon, belonging to the 9th century CE, depicts a *ratha*, and the seven horses, symbolically. Gahpur[347] has revealed an image of Sūrya where, below the deity, seven horses and a wheel are sculptured. Aruna is also depicted below. To the right is Daṇḍa, and to the left is Piṇgala, flanked by Chāyā and Rajanī. Uṣa and Pratyuṣā are also shown. The Assam State Museum houses two mutilated images of this deity assigned to approximately the 11th century CE where only the nicely carved seven horses and the wheel of the *ratha* are seen in both cases.

There is an image recovered from Kāhilipārā,[348] which is identified as Sūrya. Now preserved in the Assam State Museum, this deity is dated to the 9th-10th centuries CE. On the right stands Piṇgala, and on the left stands Daṇḍa. Placed on the *ratha*, the deity in the *sthānaka* attitude holds two *padmās*. Mālinithan,[349] now in the state of Arunachal Pradesh, bordering Assam, was an important religious place, and from here an image of Sūrya was recovered which is seen carved beautifully on a block of stone. Another site where an icon of the god is found is Mornoi,[350] in the Goalpārā district. The icon is preserved in a *nāmghar* (a large prayer house), along with that of Nandi. It features Aruna, the charioteer, an *ekachakra-ratha* (single-wheeled chariot), and seven horses. Like the image from Davāka, this also has a figure of Prithvi just behind that of Aruna. An icon recovered from Sadiyā[351] shows Sūrya sitting in *padmāsana* in the *ratha*. As usual, Aruna, and the reins of seven horses in the galloping position, can be seen. The icon is believed to be of pre-Ahom period, although no definite date has been assigned to it. At Ulubāri,[352] there is an image of the Sun-god, standing on a one-wheeled *ratha*, drawn and driven by Aruna. Piṇgala and Daṇḍa are present, while Uṣa and Pratyuṣā are omitted. Two male attendants are shown on both extreme sides, i.e. to the right of Piṇgala and to the left of Daṇḍa. Urvaśi produces three icons of the Sun-god. The photograph of yet another image of the Sun is reproduced in a book by B. K. Barua.[353] Stylistically dated to the 9th century CE, it resembles the Sūrya image found in a field near Sundia in West Bengal.

Sūrya images in Assam have been found alongside those of other gods of the Hindu pantheon. At Bamuni Hill, an image of the Sun-god was discovered, sculptured on a stone slab, in *samapada-sthānaka* attitude, and is dated to the 10th century CE. Three miniature images were found here,

each separate from the other. To the right of the figure of the deity is Brahmā on a slab of stone. This type of representation of the deity, with Brahmā and other identified divinities, is rare in Kāmarūpa. At Mahāmāyāthān, there is an icon dated to the 9th-10th centuries CE. The same block of rock which contains the image of Sūrya also carries images of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva. Pandu[354] has revealed an image belonging to the 9th century CE where Sūrya is seen portrayed next to Indra. The rock-cut image of Sūrya found at Sukreśvar, belonging to the 10th-11th centuries CE, features Sūrya along with Śiva, Mahiṣamardini, Viṣṇu, and Gaṇeśa. An interesting piece of stone with geometrical and floral designs was recovered from Barpathar at Golaghat.[355] The Tengani forest reserve[356] produced an image which resembles the Sun-god. Regarding this image, there is another opinion which suggests that, since the image was found along with a model of a stone conch-shell, it could be that of Lord Viṣṇu. An important characteristic feature of the deity is a chariot drawn by a group of seven horses, with Gaṇeśa and Kārttikeya depicted on the front and the left-hand sides of the deity respectively, and four female attendants at its four corners. It is to be mentioned that these images are engraved on a single piece of stone.

Syncretic images of Sūrya are not common in Assam. However, a recent study by Dharmeswar Chutia of Kāmarūpa Anusandhāna Samiti has brought to light an inscribed Sun image of the pre-Ahom period. Now preserved in Assam State Museum, this two-armed bronze Sun image forms a part of the hoard of relics found at the Narakāsur Hill, Kāhilipārā.[357] This image is different from others, in that flames are shown behind the deity's head, perhaps reminiscent of the Mārtaṇḍa aspect of the Sun-god.[358] In front of the principal deity is shown the figure of the charioteer. However, as against the normal practice of depicting the charioteer, who is normally Aruna (the uterine brother of Garuḍa), as legless, here he is shown sitting astride, like a rider. Another feature unique to the figure is that the charioteer has a pair of wings behind his arms. There is a short epigraph behind the head of the central deity, on the back of the sun-disc, or nimbus. The epigraph records the image as that of Āditya-Nārāyaṇā and is assigned to the reign of King Harjaradeva (9th century CE). The name suggests a composite image showing syncretic Śaura and Vaiṣṇavite iconographic features. In this case, Aruna's legs are completely visible. However, the identity of the human figure, having two wings and riding astride on a running horse, is not certain. In mythological narratives, Garuḍa is the co-uterine brother of Aruna. In the *Vedas*, Garuda is called *divya-suparna*, and due to his constant association with Visnu, as the latter's *vāhana*, came to represent Viṣṇu himself. Considering all these aspects, Dharmeswar Chutia

suggests that the rider of the present image should perhaps be taken as that of Garuda, and not of Aruna. The *sarpa-kuṇḍala* (*sarpa*: serpent; *kuṇḍala*: earring) worn by the figure for his ear ornaments, perhaps supports such an identification. Explained in this way, the divine personage appears as born of, or issuing forth from, the golden fiery egg-shaped disc, and served by the most divine of birds, i.e. Garuḍa in his stride over the universe, may well claim the composite name of Āditya-Nārāyaṇā.[359]

Ādityas are a class of minor gods, mentioned in the Vedic mythology, who belong to the circle of Varuṇa (Varuna-*ṛta*). Ādityas are so called because they are the sons of Aditi and generally counted as twelve in number. The word Āditya, later mentioned in the singular number, came to be reckoned as synonymous with Sūrya, the Sun-god. Sūrya and Visnu are also included in the traditional list of twelve Ādityas.[360] Śri Sūryapāhār has revealed some rock-cut sculptures of this deity. A round stone carrying twelve Ādityas has also been found. It is also called Āditya-*cakra*. The whole piece of sculpture represents the twelve Ādityas in the border, with their father, Kāśyapa, the husband of Aditi, in the centre.[361] On stylistic grounds, this sculpture of the Ādityas can be placed to the 10th century CE. This type of representation is very rare and is the only one of its kind so far discovered in Assam.

The material ruins of temples and the images of Sūrya which have been discovered indicate the popularity of the deity and reveal that it was widely worshipped in Assam during this period, although it cannot be compared to Śaivism or Vaiṣṇavism in terms of popular acceptance.

B: Other Minor Deities

Kāmarūpa witnessed the worship of several miscellaneous gods and goddesses, either as consorts, or associates of Śiva and Viṣṇu. Among the minor deities, Gaṇeśa emerged as a popular deity, next only to Sūrya in the pre-Ahom period. In Assam, art representations have always accorded a place of importance to Gaṇeśa. [362] Also known as Ganapati,[363] the deity is one of the best-known and most widely worshipped deities in the Hindu pantheon. In the pan-Indian tradition, Gaṇeśa appeared in his classic form, and emerged as a distinct recognizable deity with well-defined iconographic attributes by the 4th and 5th centuries CE, during the Gupta period, although he also inherited traits from Vedic and pre-Vedic precursors.[364] His popularity rose quickly, and, by the 9th century CE, he was formally included among the five primary deities of the Brāhmaṇical faith, viz., Śiva, Viṣṇu, Devi, Sūrya, and Gaṇeśa. The centrality of the elephant in the history

of Assam may be understood in the light of the dynasties of the pre-Ahom period, adopting the elephant-bust as the royal insignia. Though a son of Śiva, and a member of the Śaiva group of deities, Gaṇeśa has come to be honoured as the deity who bestows success and removes all obstacles. This is one of the reasons why his figure stands over the entrance door of a house, or in niches, and at the entrances of temples.

Epigraphic references to the Gaṇapati cult, or Gaṇeśa, are not significantly noticed in pre-Ahom Assam. Gaṇeśa is mentioned in the Dubi Plates of Bhāskaravarman.[365] The Kamauli Grant[366] bears the seal of Gaṇapati, and the Assam Plates of Vallabhadeva[367] invoke him as Lambodāra. However, a Copper Plate of a later period (1392 CE) opens its *praśasti* with an adoration of Gaṇapati.[368] According to R. D. Choudhury: [369] "No other God is so popular in Assam as Gaṇeśa, and almost all the temples of Assam have Gaṇeśa images, particularly on the door lintel." A good number of images of Gaṇeśa which can be assigned to a period between the 6th and the 12th centuries CE have been found. Besides icons, references found in epigraphs of a slightly later period indicate the popularity of the cult under the patronage of some of the Kāmarūpa rulers.[370] The opening verses of two Copper Plates of 1392 CE and 1401 CE, open with an invocation to Gaṇeśa. The majority of the images depict the deity in the *āsana,* seated posture. A few of them are seen in the dancing pose as well. The extant images occur in three ways:[371] a] Images on the *dvāra-sirapaṭṭis* (lintels); b] Images on the *bhiṭṭis* (walls) of temples, which have been found only in the Ahom period; and c] Independent images, either on rocks or on stone slabs. In terms of chronology, Gaṇeśa icons of the pre-Ahom period can be grouped into two categories, viz., 9th-10th centuries CE, and between the 10th-12th centuries CE.

Gaṇeśa images are usually sculptured as four-handed, holding in his hands a lotus, his own tusk, a battle axe, and a ball of rice-cake. He has three eyes. Gaṇeśa is the eldest son of Śiva and Parvatī and is represented with an elephant head. He is frequently attended by a mouse, sometimes riding on one, and depicted with six, eight, or only two, hands. There are *Purāṇic* myths which explain how he came to be associated with his appearance with elephant head. The most recurrent story is that Gaṇeśa was born with a human head and body, and that Śiva beheaded him when Gaṇeśa came in between Śiva and Parvatī. Śiva then replaced Gaṇeśa's human head with an elephant head. Another version has it that when Gaṇeśa was born, his mother, Parvatī, showed off her new baby to the other gods. Unfortunately, the god Shani, who is said to have an evil eye, looked at him, causing the baby's head to be burned to ashes. At this juncture Viṣṇu is said to have come to the rescue and replaced the missing head with that of an elephant.

Arun Bhattacharjee[372] made a classification of the Gaṇeśa images belonging to pre-Ahom period as thus: 1] seated and standing; and 2] the dancing pose. The dancing Gaṇeśa is a popular theme in the eastern Indian school of architecture. In Assam, all the standing images are of the dancing type. The figure of the four-armed deity on the wall of the Kāmākhyā temple, dancing on his muse vehicle, which looks up to the god, is a well-known and popular representation of the deity.[373] A rare icon of Gaṇeśa is the four-handed Nṛtya-Gaṇapati type, only one of which has been recovered from Kāmākhyā. Dancing on his *vāhana*, this image is dated to the 10th century CE. Both legs of the deity are in the *nṛtya*, or dancing, pose. The trunk of the deity seems to touch the *āyudha* of the left front hand. There are no attendants accompanying him. It may be noted that a sect of devotees, called the Ganapatiya, projects Gaṇeśa as its supreme deity. Gauhati has produced several Gaṇeśa images. There is an image of Nṛtya-Gaṇapati positioned on the *dvāra-śāṇkha* of the main entrance of the Asvakranta temple in North Gauhati. The site of Barpukhurīpār, near Tezpur, has also brought to light another Nṛtya-Gaṇapati image, and it has eight hands. With the usual *alaṁkāras*, the figure is depicted with two attendants on either side and playing musical instruments. The *vāhana* is absent in this case.

Terracotta figurines are regarded as the poor man's sculpture and have great value as a source of social and religious history. A rare terracotta figure of Gaṇeśa, of great iconographical interest, was obtained from Āmbāri.[374] The biggest image of the deity discovered so far in Assam is from Bahapāhār (Māyāng),[375] having a height of three meters. A *svayampradhāna* icon is seen on a block of stone in Deul-Govinda. At Gachtal[376] there are ruins of two Śiva temples where Gaṇeśa appears on the *dvāra-sirapaṭṭis*. At Gaṇeśaghat,[377]a rock-cut figure is discovered which is assigned to the 9th century CE. A Gaṇeśa temple[378] from the Goalpārā district exhibits certain unique features. The door jambs standing on either side of the sill are not in their original position. The sculptural representation consists of five figures, of which Gaṇeśa is one. The date of the temple is assigned to the 10th century CE. Gaṇeśpāhār also brought to light another image. The Assam State Museum possesses two images in the *āsana*, seated attitude, one from Bhaitbariand, the other from Yogijān.[379] The site of Jarasindhutola recovered two icons of Gaṇeśa dated to the 10th century CE. The image of the deity from Vasundhāri sits in the *mahārājalita* pose. The *muṣika* (mouse), which is his vehicle, is depicted below the figure, near his legs. Images of this type were also found at Basistha, Urvaśi, and Umananda. At Narakāsur Hill,[380] a four-handed miniature image of the deity was unearthed. The temple ruins of Singri, and the remains at Mahāmāyāthān, brought to light a few more images of Gaṇeśa. A four-

handed icon of the deity was recovered from Teteliā-Bargāon. Above the usual *alaṁkāras* (ornaments), he wears a *vanamālā* (garland of forest flowers). This representation shows some features that are associated with Viṣṇu. Dated to the 12th century CE, scholars opine that the image may perhaps have been associated with King Dharmapāla who ruled during this period. Since the king became a devotee of Viṣṇu during the latter part of his life, the image may have been influenced by the current religious developments of the time. The other sites where the images of Gaṇeśa were found include Paṇḍu, the ruins of the Mahāmāyā temple, the Śiva temple at Ākāsigaṅgā, the Teteli Pukhuri temple, and the Kāwaimāri temple.

Kārttikeya,[381] the brother of Gaṇeśa, was not popular. He is usually seen on his *vāhana*, the peacock, and holding in his hands a staff and a bow. Bhaitbari[382] has revealed an icon of the deity in the *mahārājalīlāsana* pose flanked by two figures standing in the *tribhaṅga* (a standing pose) attitude. The earliest image was found at Dāh-Parbatiyā. Another image, seated in the *lalitāsana* pose, is recovered from Deul-Govinda, and is dated to the 9th-10th centuries CE. At Gauhati, on a slab which carries the image of Gaṇeśa, there is also an image of Kārttikeya carved. Similarly, representations of Gaṇeśa and Kārttikeya have been found in Urvaśi. The sacred sites of Piṅgaleśwar and Devasthān have also revealed images of the deity. In the epigraphs it is mentioned that the kings of Kāmarūpa should possess the qualities of Kārttikeya, which reveals that reverence to the deity was not uncommon.

Indra[383] is regarded as the 'Guardian of the Eastern Quarter'. He is considered to be one of the *aṣṭadikapālas*, i.e., the deities who preside over the eight cardinal points of earth. A unique image of Indra, now preserved in the Assam State Museum, was recovered from a slit trench at Gauhati.[384] The peculiarity of the image is that, just above the head of the deity, and below the *kirīṭamukuṭa* (tall conical crown), there is a five-headed snake in the form of a canopy. Generally, this is seen in the images of Balarāma. However, the representation may be taken as a rare icon of Indra. The archaeological site of Mālinithan[385] revealed the presence of an exquisitely carved image of Indra. At Narakāsur Hill,[386] an image of the deity was found along with those of Viṣṇu, Sūrya, Gaṇeśa, Manasā, etc., which are dated to the 9th century CE. Scholars do not rule out the possibility of the existence of a temple at the site which may have been dedicated to Indra. A *ghaṇta* (bell) found here is said to have been donated by King Harjaravarman (9th century CE) for the worship of Indra. R. D. Choudhury suggests that Indra must have been installed as the chief deity of worship here, and that the other deities must have occupied a subordinate position. However, the find

of an image of Tārā, which is of Buddhist affiliation, has raised some doubts regarding the variety of deities that have been displayed at the site. The big copper bell has letters inscribed on it in two lines, and mentions Śri Kumāra, who is likened to Indra, or, became the protector of Indra. As Indra worship is especially mentioned here, it is surmised that the other deities were centred round this prime deity. The inscription is undated, and does not contain the name of the donee, if any. The donor was possibly Śri Kumāra, who flourished during the 8th century CE, and who may have introduced the worship of the deities centring on Indra for which the temple was constructed.[387] It may be noted that in many inscriptions issued in Early Assam, the kings were likened to Indra, and they include Vajradatta,[388] Harjaravarman,[389] and Ratnapāla.[390] There are epigraphic records of the pre-Ahom period, which mention Indra as having defeated Narakā.

Dikpālas or the 'Guardians of the Quarters' were frequently depicted on temple walls, though not worshipped as prominent deities. Agni and Kuvera adorned the walls and niches of many temples, although the images of Agni which have been found during this period are few. The sculpture of Agni in the Assam Provincial Museum[391] is seen having a long beard, standing in an erect pose. He has a long sacred thread, and wears a *kaupina*, the symbol of a Brāhmaṇa. The other images of Agni are found in Soalkuchi, which is dated to the 11th-12th centuries CE. The image found at the northern wall of Kāmākhyā temple is dated to the 10th-12th centuries CE.[392] Kuvera is the 'Lord of the Northern Quarters'. In Assam, there is only one image which has been recovered from Karbi-Anglong and is now preserved in the Assam State Museum.

No independent religious cult evolved out of Brahmā, an important member of the 'Hindu Trinity', and no temple was constructed exclusively for his worship. Nevertheless, images of Brahmā adorn the walls, ceilings and niches of many Śaivite and Vaiṣṇavite temples. The image preserved in the Assam Provincial Museum is seen having eight hands.[393] Here, he sits in a *padmāsana* pose, in a yogic posture. The panel from the Sun temple in Tezpur[394] also has an image of Brahmā with an attendant on either side. Another image, dated to the 8th-10th centuries CE, now preserved in the Assam Provincial Museum, shows Brahmā standing on a pedestal with two female figures on both sides.[395]

Kāmadeva, the 'God of Love', finds rare iconographic representation in Kāmarūpa. The only one belonging to this period was recovered from Sibsāgar and is now preserved in the Assam State Museum. The image is assigned to the 11th-12th centuries CE, and its distinctive feature is that it is

depicted without its consort, Rati.[396] In mythological narratives, Gaṅgā and Yamunā,[397] the two river goddesses, were derived from the *akshis* (tree spirits). These two river goddesses adorn the *dvāras* of temples as guardians and are seen standing with garlands in their hands. The first of this kind is seen in the exquisite Dāh-Parbatiyā door frame in Tezpur. In the temple, on the *dvāra-śāṇkha*, the goddess Gaṅgā is positioned on the left, while goddess Yamunā occurs on the right. Both the figures are seen positioned at a low level in the door frame. The residence of the late Prabodh Chandra Baruah houses the *dvāra* of a temple ruin from Mājgāon, where figures of these two goddesses are depicted. N. D. Choudhury noticed an image of Yamunā at Sankhādevi, near Rājbāri, which is quite different from the one discovered from Dāh-Parbatiyā and Mājgāon. It may be mentioned that *dvārapālas* as 'door guardians' were found in many temples, shrines, and monasteries of Buddhist and Brāhmaṇical traditions, in countries such as India, Burma, Tibet, Malaysia, Japan, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, and China**.** It may be noted that, as gate-keepers, they are always placed in pairs, at the entrance of temples and at the doorways of the sanctum sanctorum**.**

The depiction of a Ṛṣi (hermit)[398] among a row of sculptures representing Viṣṇu, Śiva and Hari-Hara from Śri Sūryapāhār, is a rare archaeological find. The figure of the Ṛṣi is thinly visible in the centre. Although the figure has not been identified with any certainty, its presence among other important deities of the pantheon is significant. Heavenly beings, or demi-gods, such as Vidyādhāras, Kiṇṇaras, Apsarās, and Dvārapālas, are depicted as attendants of their main deities.[399] As semi-divine beings they are common in the traditions of Brahmanical, Buddhism, and Jainism, referred to as 'spirits of the air'. Their sculptural representations are always in numbers of two, and rarely occur alone. Almost all the images of Brahmā, Indra, Viṣṇu, Umā-Māheśvara, and others, belong to a period ranging from the 9th to the 13th centuries CE, now preserved in Assam State Museum. They each have a pair of Vidyādhāras in flying attitude, accompanying them. So far, not even one figure of Kiṇṇara has been discovered.

Sculptural representations of the goddess Manasā,[400] the 'Snake Goddess', are probably only found in Assam and Bengal. The worship of Manasā is popular in Assam, especially in the present districts of Kāmrūp, Goalpārā, and Darrang.[401] Its worship in Kāmarūpa is accompanied with that of Gaṇeśa, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Durgā, Śitala, Lakṣmī, Suvacanī, and the four sages. This goddess is popularly called Marai in Assam.[402] A few images of the goddess from the Brahmaputra valley have come to light, of which the first one was found in Gauhati.[403] Stylistically, it is dated to the 11th century CE. It is depicted with two serpents (*sarpa*), one that coils around the right hand

and the other on the left hand. There is a 'canopy of serpents' seen over the head of the goddess. The second image is from Narakāsur Hill, and this figure is depicted with a seven-headed serpent forming a canopy over her head. This image of Manasā is now preserved in the Assam State Museum. A very fine specimen of the Manasā image in stone was discovered in Barangabari. Installed in the Kalyanidevālaya temple, the goddess is represented with the usual seven-headed serpent canopy over her head. Images of Manasā belonging to the 10th-11th centuries CE have also been recovered from Visnuthān and Lakshmithān. Another image of the goddess from Phulbāri Devālaya is depicted in the same style as that of Bangarabari. At Silghat, the Manasā is depicted in a different style, in which the usual places of the Vidyādhāras are taken by two serpents seen in hybrid forms, i.e., the upper part is depicted in human form and the lower part in snake form. Just above the head of the deity a five-headed *sarpa* forms the canopy. This unique image is assigned to a period of about the 12th century CE.[404] A miniature bronze image of the goddess, dating to about the 12th-13th centuries CE, was initially mistaken for that of Yasoda and baby Kṛṣṇa. This was later identified as Manasā, and this has added to the number of rare finds of the goddess in Assam.[405] Manasā is sometimes depicted with a child, Astika, on her lap. It may be noted that Manasā occupies a somewhat uncertain position in the pantheon of gods and goddesses of the pre-Ahom period. Thus, a study of the extant images discovered in Early Assam, reveal that the goddess was accommodated into the Brāhmaṇical fold during this period of Assam history, and came to be worshipped along with the other Brāhmaṇical deities.

Despite the overwhelming predominance of the Brāhmaṇical gods and goddesses in the Brahmaputra valley, traces of Buddhist worship were not altogether absent. The images of Buddha discovered so far are mainly of the portable type, and, therefore, there is the possibility of them having been imported from the neighbouring regions of Bengal where Buddhism was practised.[406] However, rock-cut relics have also been found in Assam. At Gauhati, two images of the Buddha have been found; the first one is assigned to about the 10th or 11th centuries CE, and the second image is assigned to the 11th century CE. The images bear a resemblance to those found in Tibet, Bihar and Bengal, and this may offer a clue to the history of Buddhism in Assam. S. Kakati noticed, in the Pańcaratna Hill,[407] two images resembling the Buddha in *bhūmisparśa-mudrā* (seated position). He further states that he could see a *cakra* (wheel) which could be a *dharma-cakra* ('Wheel of the Dharma'). In a *daśāvatarā* panel from Urvaśi, and on the way to Kāmākhyā, some more representations of Buddha were noticed.[408] R. D. Banerji discovered a torso of a terracotta figurine from

Dāh-Parbatiyā[409] at a ruined temple site, which is believed to be that of Buddha (6th century CE).

Tārā,[410] the Buddhist female deity, has a place in the religious history of Assam. The first image of Tārā is recovered from the Narakāsur Hill,[411] and is shown seated on a lotus in the *lalitāsana* pose. The same site has yielded another icon where Tārā is shown in *dvibhaṇga-sthānaka* (posture with bend at the waist) standing on a lotus. The head of a single snake is depicted as a canopy over her head. Relics of this image are not known to have been found anywhere else. It is identified as Janguli Tārā. Yet another image of Tārā was found at Buda Madhab Devālaya, sitting on a lotus, in the *lalitāsana* pose. Only three images of Bodhisattvas have been noticed in Assam so far. The first one, identified as Avalokiteśvara, is noticed among the group of finds at Narakāsur Hill, and is now preserved in the Assam State Museum.[412] It is important to mention that epigraphs are not very expressive in providing evidences to the prevalence of Buddhism in Assam. The expressions *dharma* and *taṭhagata*, which occur respectively in the Grants of Bhāskaravarman[413] and Indrapāla,[414] have led some scholars to believe that Buddhism existed in Assam in the early period. Tantric Buddhism, which was the result of a fusion between Śakta Tantricism and Buddhist philosophy, prevailed around the 7th century CE.[415]

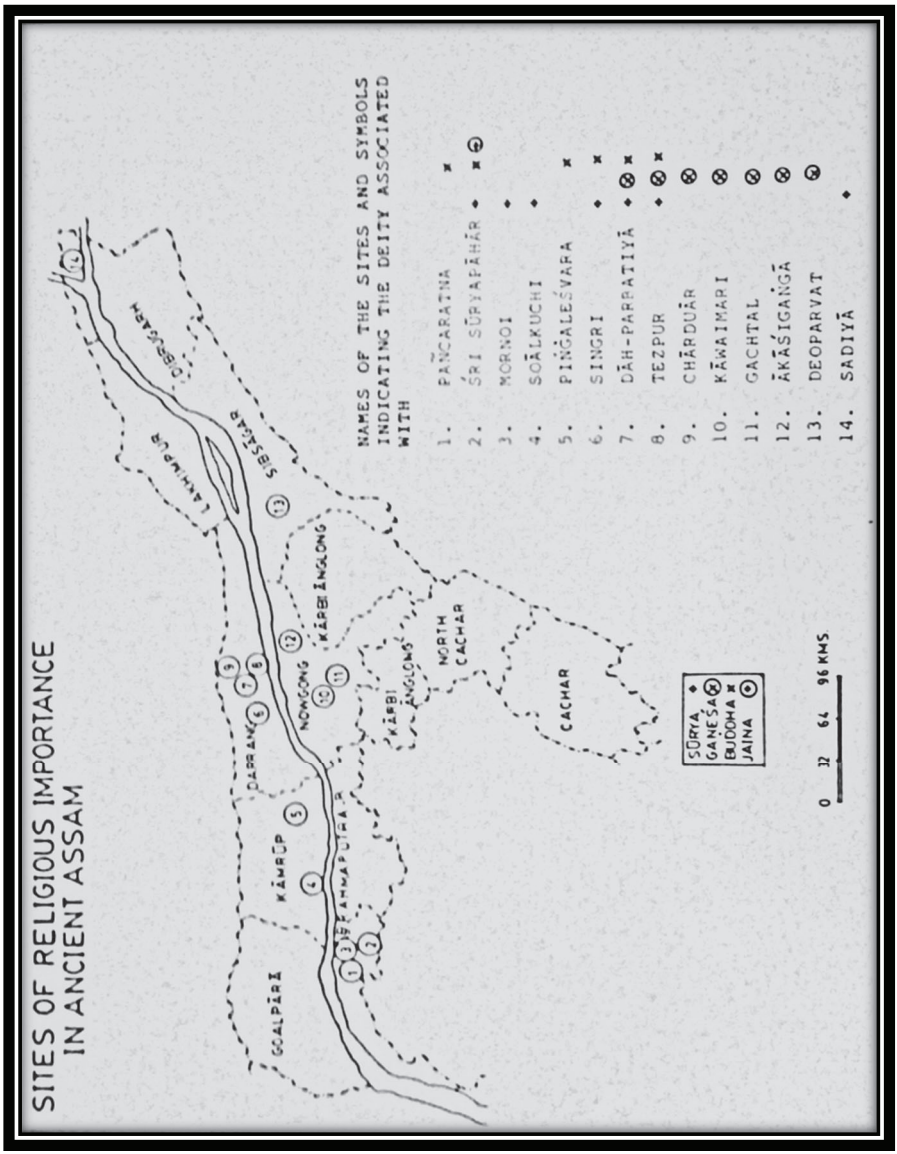
Various interpretations have been put forward by different scholars in their efforts to prove the existence of Buddhism in Assam.[416] The Puṣpabhadrā Grant,[417]referring to King Dharmapāla's declaration of the glory of *dharma*, has been interpreted by some as an indication of the influence of the tantric Vajrayana Buddhism on King Dharmapāla. The reference to the death of Vanamāla by 'religious suicide' in the Uttarbarbil Plates of Balavarman III,[418] and the abdication of the throne by King Jayamāla in favour of his son, as he considered 'the world to be vain and human life as a water drop', are interpreted as the king having come under the influence of later Buddhism. The kings of the dynasty of Sālastambha (7th-10th centuries CE) were perhaps more orthodox in their religious beliefs than their predecessors, since, in the inscriptions of these kings, we do not find the slightest reference to the Buddhist faith. Literary sources such as *Si-yu-ki* give accounts related to the existence of Buddhism in Assam from earliest times, although it is difficult to make any conclusions from these sources. The temple at Hājo,[419] which is supposed to preserve the relic of Buddha, has been often been referred to as a great religious centre of Buddhist belief and practices by the adherents of Buddhism. A section of the Buddhists holds the view that Buddha attained *nirvana* at this sacred site itself. There is a tradition that the western part of Assam, the present

Goalpārā and Kāmrūp districts, was known as Dhekor country, and considered to be a great centre of Buddhism. A Copper Plate Grant (12th century CE) and the Ahom chronicles refer to it as Dhekkar, which is identified with the same place. Therefore, it may be reasonably inferred that Buddhism was not absent in early Kāmarūpa, although there is very little material at hand to assess the extent of its influence.

Jainism was limited to extremely small pockets in Early Assam, and only two rock-cut sculptures[420] stand to prove its existence during the pre-Ahom period. One sculpture depicts a Ṛṣabha, and the other has a *dharmacakra* below the *pīṭha*. These images, recovered from Śri Sūryapāhār, represent Adināth or Ṛṣabhanāth. Apart from these rare finds, there is no clue to the prevalence of this faith during this period of Assam history. Inscriptional records are silent about Jainism, and there are no architectural remains to support it.

Archaeological remains of the sacred sites in various parts of the Kāmrūpa kingdom testify to the worship of several gods and goddesses associated with Brāhmaṇical, Buddhist, and Jaina traditions. The 'Hindu Triad' of Brahmā, Śiva, and Viṣṇu, were worshipped, although Śiva and Viṣṇu emerged as the major gods in the pantheon, and Brahmā was worshipped along with other gods, without even a single temple dedicated to him. Śiva emerges as the most popular god, and Śakti was worshipped by both the devotees of the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava faiths. The icons found in many temple ruins of Sūrya and Gaṇeśa indicate their position of eminence among the minor deities in the pre-Ahom period. Their images outnumber that of the other miscellaneous deities. The importance attached to elephants in Assam may perhaps explain why Gaṇeśa became a prominent deity, and its images were installed at the entrances of temples. Yet, these are not in any way supportive of the possibility that all kings in Kāmarūpa were associated with the elephant-headed god.[421] Indra also deserves mention next to these two minor deities. The door keepers and Vidyādhāras that have been discovered may be understood within the mythological narratives of Brāhmaṇical faith. The distinct characteristic of religion, as deduced from material remains, indicate that Brāhmaṇical deities existed in harmony with the non-Brāhmaṇical deities. Buddhism must have entered Kāmarūpa from the neighbouring regions, but could not get royal patronage. This was also the case with Jainism, and is reflected in the negligible number of archaeological finds related to Buddhism and Jainism.

Map 5: Sites of Religious Importance in Early Assam: Sūrya, Gaṇeśa, Buddha, Jaina



CHAPTER FIVE

RELIGIOUS HERITAGE AND CONSERVATION: KĀMĀKHYĀ

The Kāmākhyā[422] temple, located at Guwahati[423] city in the Kāmrup metropolitan district of Assam, has emerged as a major destination for tourists and pilgrims alike, and exemplifies the challenges of conservation[424] of a religious heritage site in an urban setting which bears the burden of numerous visitors every year. Indeed, rapid urbanization, accompanied by migration and the growth of cities, has transformed human settlements and influenced the world of the 21st century CE. It is well recognized that sacred sites[425] are among the world's most popular visitor attractions, while religious heritage in general is estimated to constitute perhaps the largest single category of heritage property to be found in most countries around the world.[426] Culture and heritage[427] have, in large measure, been underpinned by tourism and market-led development to enhance the historic[428]setting for leisure, business, and investment.[429] The global resurgence of travel, and visits to such pilgrimage centres in the last few decades, have been facilitated by better communication and mobility, which, in turn, is linked to the increasing attention given to the tourism industry. One of the best-known shrines of Śakti worship in India, the Kāmākhyā temple complex, attracts the maximum number of visitors during the four-day annual Ambubachi festival, held in honour of the presiding deity, and the number has seen a sharp increase in the recent years.[430] Management problems have arisen because of the rise in the number of tourists who visit sacred sites, in most cases outnumbering pilgrims. As such, cultural heritage/site management is a worldwide issue, at both the theoretical and practical levels, being acknowledged as a key to sustainable urban development. Religious heritage sites such as the Kāmākhyā have developed as popular tourist destinations, since they offer visitors an insight into the history and identity of a community.

The concept of religious heritage includes both the sacred material culture, including art and architecture, and the belief system, which has produced the artefacts and the worldview of those worshipping it. The

layering of values of a religious tradition is not fixed by time and place, and it is imperative to keep in mind the historical context of the sacred space. Because of their tangible and intangible associations and meanings, and their potential active use for religious or other purposes, sacred sites demand attention, and their conservation and preservation often require special treatment and sensitivity. The crucial issue concerns the transformation of a material religious site to a secular cultural heritage, free from religious meaning and context. It may be mentioned that monuments of religious importance may be understood as collective memories in stone. Therefore, the conservation of a religious heritage site, such as that of Kāmākhyā, involves examining the relationship between the monument and the sacred landscape, and the ways in which the temple complex is connected to the everyday lives of the community associated with it. The urban governance of Guwahati city[431] has been managed by municipal authorities and government departments, such as the Guwahati Municipal Corporation (GMC), the Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) and the Guwahati Development Department (GDD). Studies have shown that the city has been struggling to cope with the requirements of the growing urban population, in relation to issues such as viable housing, potable water, adequate sanitation, and employment which gives the people reasonable wages. The city's *Master Plan for 2025*, which has been prepared by the Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) states that degradation has occurred due to cutting into the natural slopes to make the land habitable, leading to loss of vegetation, soil loss and erosion, and vulnerability to landslides. The GMDA has, therefore, identified the hills as 'eco-sensitive zones', and the hill settlements on Reserve Forest lands as 'encroachments', requiring resettlement and rehabilitation.

In the context of Assam, the sacred landscape presents a myriad of information on various facets of cultural importance which must be understood against the background of cultural linkages with other parts of India and beyond.[432] The place was the meeting ground of many ethnic groups who migrated to the region from Southwest China or Southeast Asia *via* Burma (Myanmar) at various periods of its history.[433] Guwahati city experienced a massive population increase in the decades of 1971-81 and 1981-91. Like any other city, it has grown through immigration, and, according to the *Census of India: 2011*,[434] Guwahati had less than 10 lakh population, out of which 14.1 percent of the state's population was living in the urban areas. The highest migration was recorded in Kāmrup district (17 percent), which was the ward in which Guwahati was located at that time, thereby indicating high rural-urban migration from nearby places. In addition to such relocation, the problems of urban pressure were added to

by thousands of floating populations that do not come within the purview of census operations. It may be noted that the hill areas in Guwahati have gradually been occupied by settlers from various socio-economic groups.[435] These include people who have been displaced by development projects, or because of natural calamities, as well as people affected by ethnic conflicts in rural areas who subsequently migrated to Guwahati. The migrants from rural areas prefer to live in the hills because of their earlier lifestyle in the villages. There is also a group of low-income non-tribals who have increasingly settled in the hills, due to the high cost of land and housing in the plain areas. Thus, the high concentration of population in the foothills, as also on the steep slopes, have almost erased the dense vegetation cover in the hills within the metropolitan Guwahati city. Kāmākhyā on Nīlācala Hill recorded 4,837 household settlements in the year 2014 CE.[436]

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), as the premier organization for the archaeological research and protection of the cultural heritage of the nation, maintains ancient monuments and archaeological sites and remains, of national importance. Besides that, it regulates all archaeological activities in the country, as per the provisions of *The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958.* It also regulates the *Antiquities and Art Treasure Act, 1972.* For administrative convenience, regarding maintenance of the sites and remains of national importance, the entire country is divided into twenty-four 'circles'. The ASI has a large workforce of trained archaeologists, conservators, epigraphists, architects, and scientists, for conducting archaeological research projects through its various branches of excavation, prehistory, epigraphy, science, horticulture, building survey projects, temple survey projects, and the underwater archaeology wing.

Heritage conservation is not only an issue of preservation of the past but is also closely linked to contemporary issues of cultural identity. Indeed, archaeological sites have long been a part of heritage, playing crucial roles in a community's history even before the use of the term 'heritage' and the formal study of tourism. The Directorate of Archaeology, Government of Assam, has been working towards the preservation and maintenance of sites and monuments in Assam, and is guided by *The Assam Ancient Monument and Records Act, 1959,* and *The Assam Ancient Monument and Records Rules, 1964*. The list of *Protected Archaeological Sites and Monuments* belonging to the pre-Ahom period are as follows:[437]

1. Ambari Archaeological Site, Ambari, Kāmrup (Metropolitan) District,
2. Amtala Archaeological Site, Hojāi, Nagaon District,
3. Bagheswari Peeth, Mirza, Kāmrup District,
4. Bamgāon Ruins, Biswanath Chariali, Sonitpur District,
5. Bargaṅgā Rock Inscription, Dokmoka, Karbi Anglong District,
6. Bhairabeswari temple, Rangia, Kāmrup District,
7. Bundura Archaeological Site, Kāmpur, Nagaon District,
8. Burhagosain Than, Dokmoka, Karbi Anglong District,
9. Dirghesvari Devalaya, North Guwahati. Kāmrup District,
10. Gachtal Archaeological Site, Dabaka, Nagāon District,
11. Jaljali Archaeological Site, Jaljali, Darrang District,
12. Jorpukhuri Ruins, Hatigarh, Udalguri District,
13. Kāwaimāri Archaeological Site, Kāmpur, Nagaon District,
14. Madankāmdev Archaeological Site, Baihata Chariali, Kāmrup District,
15. Mahādeosal Archaeological Site, Mahadeosal, Nagāon District,
16. Matharbāri Archaeological Site, Baropujia, Nagāon District,
17. Mikirāti Archaeological Site, Dabaka, Nagāon District,
18. Nā-Nāth Archaeological Site, Kendugiri, Nagāon District,
19. Pāglātek Ruins, Pāglātek, Goalpārā District,
20. Piṅgaleśwar Archaeological Site, Karara, Kāmrup District,
21. Rājbāri Group of Temples, Rājbarī, Nagāon District,
22. Rudreśwar Devalaya, Maharipara, Darrang District,
23. Siddheśwarī Temple Archaeological Site, Soalkuchi, Kāmrup District,
24. Śiva Thān, Pańcaratna, Goalpārā District,
25. Śri Sūryapāhār, Goalpārā District.

In recent years, the United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has been playing a principal role in the development and promotion of influential action related to the protection of cultural and natural heritage in all its forms. The UNESCO guidelines and 'Historic Urban Landscape' (HUL)[438] (*Vienna Memorandum, UNESCO: 2005*)[439] is an approach that is aimed at assisting in the conservation and management of urban heritage sites around the world. It draws attention to the heritage management concerns of sacred sites, with the objective of examining the gap between existing local policy/management practices, and those recommended by the HUL approach, which is defined by four variables, viz., attributes (what), values (why), stakeholders (who), and strategies (how).[440] This approach, advocated by the HUL, learns from the

traditions and perceptions of the local community, while respecting the values of national and international communities. The concept of 'landscape'[441] is associated with the expansion of the notion of cultural heritage, which includes both natural and man-made environments, the broader urban context, and its geographical setting. While an 'area' is clearly delimitated by border lines, the landscape has no limits, as it follows the 'gaze of the observer'. It includes the site's: topography; geomorphology, natural features (both historic and contemporary); infrastructures above and below ground; open spaces and gardens; land use patterns and spatial organization; and all other characteristics of urban structure. Further, the concept encompasses layers of symbolic significance, intangible heritage, perception of values, and interconnections between the composite elements of the Historic Urban Landscape, as well as local knowledge, including building practices, and management of natural resources.

The *UNESCO Guidelines for the Conservation and Management of Sacred Natural Sites* defines the term 'sacred landscapes' as those areas where nature-culture linkages are represented by the spiritual values that communities assign to their holy environments. The *International Council on Monuments and Sites* (ICOMOS) has been working in consultation with the *International Scientific Committee for Places of Religion and Ritual* (PRERICO), which was formally established for research purposes on March 7, 2017. The objective of PRERICO is to focus on specialised interests in monuments and sites of religions and rituals, including places of world religions and local traditions and beliefs, religious heritage, and sacred places, including their intangible significance. There have been some projects taken up by the Directorate of Archaeology, Government of Assam, towards maintaining a healthy culture-nature link, for more effective conservation in a developing city like Guwahati. The *Park and Site-Museums* which have been maintained by the Directorate at places of religious importance include: Ambari (Guwahati), Madankāmdev (Baihata Chariali, Kāmrup District), Ākāsigaṅgā (Nagāon District), Nā-Nāth (Nagaon District), etc.

In its early history, Kāmarūpa which was known as a 'land of magic and witchcraft', with its famous Tantric shrine of Kāmākhyā, was also popularly known as Kāmarūpa-Kāmākhyā.[442] Mythological narratives explain that the worship of the goddess was introduced by Narakā, the legendary demon king, who is believed to have changed the name of the kingdom from Prāgjyotiṣpur to Kāmarūpa.[443] The first epigraphic reference to Kāmākhyā is recorded in the Tezpur Plates of Vanamāla, dated to the 9th century CE. The temple complex houses other individual temples dedicated to ten

Mahavidyas, viz., Kali, Tārā, Sodashi, Bhuvaneshwari, Bhairavī, Kamala, Dhumava, Bagalamukhi, and Matangi. In Early Assam, the temple management of Kāmākhyā was looked after jointly by the ruling dynasty and elders of the sectarian community.[444] During the period of Koch rule, around the 16th century CE, the priests took over the responsibility of the management of the temple property, and also played a central role in conducting the rites and rituals of the presiding deity.[445] At a later period, during the Ahom rule, king Śivasimha (1714-44 CE), introduced a well-organized system for the purpose of management, with the establishment of an office of a Superintendent, called *Sevacaloa*. He was entrusted with the duties and responsibilities of an intermediary functionary between the temple and the royal house. The immediate officer was the *Dolai*, called *Bardeori* (chief priest), who acted as manager of the priests. He was assisted in discharging the duties of temple management, by several subordinate officers and manual workers, such as *Goals*, *Paik's*, etc.

The name of the hillock where the Kāmākhyā temple stands is Nīlācala Hill, or the 'blue mountain', a site of immense archaeological importance, due to the presence of at least twenty temple ruins, with rock-cut images and many other sacred spots.[446] The hill is also the abode of temples dedicated to deities such as Lakṣmī, Sarasvati, Śiva, and Viṣṇu, etc. The pilgrims invoke the divine power of Śiva-Śakti by seeking blessings from Kāmākhyā temple and by offering obeisance to the Śiva temple. By far the earliest reference to Viṣṇu worship in Assam is found in the Umāchal inscription of the 5th century CE, discovered on the north-eastern slope of the Kāmākhyā Hill. Its significance lies in that it contains a record of the establishment of the first temple ever built in the Brahmaputra valley; a cave temple said to be constructed by King Surendravarman. [447] At present, the site does not indicate any ruins of temple structure, but two big rocks are seen lying in an east-west direction. A rare icon of Gaṇeśa is the four-handed Nṛtya-Ganapati type recovered from Kāmākhyā.[448] A few images of Agni have been found, of pre-Ahom Assam, one of them being recovered from the northern wall of the Kāmākhyā temple.[449] An image of Cāmuṇḍa[450] from the sacred complex has also been discovered.

In the present times, the tasks of management and functioning of the temple complex have been the responsibility of the Sri Kāmākhyā Debutter Board.[451] There have been initiatives from the Guwahati Circle of the Archaeological Survey of India to bring the ancient temple under the gambit of Protected Sites, though it has, as yet, not received a favourable response from the Debutter Board.[452] On its part, the Board has taken up the *Biodiversity Conservation and Management Project*, a master plan for the

protection of the temple complex, and also the conservation of biodiversity in the sacred landscape. The Board has also been carrying out charitable works through the Sri Kāmākhyā Śaṅkara Health Care Centre. Established in the year 1992 CE, the welfare works, assisted by the Sewa Bharati, Purbanchal, includes free medical consultancy and the distribution of medicines to patients. A research and development cell, named the History and Heritage Research Centre of Sri Kāmākhyā, which will help to advance interaction among the stakeholders, was established in the year 2001 CE. A detailed mapping of the land use/land cover of the Nīlācala Hill area under the Kāmākhyā Temple Complex, funded by the Debutter Board, was also taken up to serve as a base document for the integrated development of the area.[453] *The Urban (T) Department Government of Assam Notification*[454] recognizes the importance of heritage buildings, and states that its preservation is a vital component of urban revitalization efforts. It defines *heritage building* as 'a premise which requires preservation and conservation for historical, architectural, environmental, cultural, or religious purposes, and includes such portions of the land adjoining such buildings as may be required.' The same notification defines 'heritage zone' as: 'the area around such heritage building, as delineated by the Authority from time to time, for restricting the height of building and use of building.'

Since the Goddess Kāmākhyā is one of the most venerated deities in the erstwhile kingdom, vast tracts of land were settled in her favour throughout different periods of history by various rulers, for maintenance of the shrine. The quantum of such lands has been assessed at about 45,000 *bighas*, out of which an approximate area of 35,000 *bighas* were agricultural lands including fisheries; and the rest comprised the abode of the deity, i.e., Nīlācala Hill. It may be mentioned that the temple lands were broadly classified into three categories, viz., *devottara* (lands issued in the name of deities), *brahmottar* (lands issued to Brāhmaṇas), and *dharmottar* (lands issued for religious purposes, to individuals, and organizations such as the *satras*). The claimants of such grants were asked to substantiate their right by showing the relevant copper plate grants and other relevant documents to the Government. The *devottar* grants were exempted from taxation, while the *dharmottar* and *brahmottar* grants were brought under the provisions of *Assam Land Revenue Regulations of 1886* and levied a tax at half of the usual rate. The management of the temple used to operate on the income derived from these lands till the coming to force of the *Assam Act IX, 1961*: *The Assam Acquisition of Land Belonging to Religious or Charitable Institutions of Public Nature Act* on April 21, 1961.[455] The Sri Kāmākhyā Debutter Board was then directed to be handed over to the Deputy Commissioner of the District Collector. In July 2015, the Supreme Court of

India transferred the administration of the temple from the Sri Kāmākhyā Debutter Board to the Bardeori Samaj.

The Ambubachi Mela, which is the most important festival[456]of the Mother Goddess, is celebrated in Guwahati city, and frequented by about five lakh visitors every year. People in large numbers wait outside the temple on the fourth day, when the temple is opened to devotees, to receive the unique *prasad*, which consists of small pieces of cloth, supposedly moist with the menstrual fluid of the goddess, and considered as holy by the devotees. The temple is closed for the three days when the goddess is believed to go through her yearly menstrual cycle. Since Nīlācala Hill is also the abode of many other Hindu deities, religious activities take place throughout the year, particularly during celebrations of different festivals, such as Kalī Puja, Manasā Puja, Durgā Puja, Lakṣmī Puja, and Śivaratri, etc. The continuous flow of visitors has impacted the sacred landscape, with many shops and restaurants coming up, leading to problems of garbage, litter, graffiti, etc. The inadequate facilities and management of the festival event, with its large congregation of devotees, within and outside the temple complex, have often thrown the city out of gear. Apart from the religious aspect of the festival, developing countries tend to welcome foreign tourists for such events to generate income for the tourism industry, which relates to jobs, tax revenue, and other economic developments. The festivals and local events connected to the sacred sites sometimes contribute to the extension of the tourism season, in keeping with commercial interests.

Sacred places of religious importance, with architectural buildings and monuments, are important in the archaeology of religion, since they are products of the cultures that revere them; the choice of the locale being usually of economic significance, confluence of rivers, unusual rock, etc.[457] As in most traditional societies, forests were integral to the cosmovision of the history and culture of the people of Early Assam. Temple complexes as cultural spaces reflect the ethos of the community, in ways that preserve the traditional environment knowledge system. As such, the sacred landscape not only provides spaces for the veneration of the deities through a chain of rituals, but also indicates how the interface of environment and religion have sustained the community's livelihood. As Prescilla Field explains, "art and objects do not passively reflect ideas and messages but reflect back on the practices that instigated them, and can influence gender relations and attitudes connected to the 'manipulation and sensory perception' of particular forms." [458] It is well recognized that the public domain is 'the sphere where history is made', and even where the 'private' sphere was the subject of theoretical interest, it was its 'function' in relation to the public

world that was important. According to Flood,[459] "The history of Hinduism is the history of a male discourse…women's self-perceptions and experience have generally been 'written out' of the tradition…. Hinduism is concerned with all elements of society playing their correct role and remaining in their correct place; dharma, and the roles of men and women are distinguished; high-caste Hindu women, for example, must always remain subject to male authority, and their true place is in the home." MacLean comments, "Indeed, not only is Hinduism clearly gendered, but also sexualised."[460]

The *UNESCO Conventions and Recommendations* lays emphasis on the conceptual evaluation of the notion of the urban centre as a site of protection; the 'landscape' becoming the lens through which the contemporary city is represented, and the medium through which it is constructed. However, urban conservators are increasingly aware of the gap that exists between the 'Charters'[461] and implementation of the guidelines therein to cope with the new challenge of civic governance. In Guwahati, community organisations like *Unnayan Samitis* (development councils), *Mahila Samitis* (women's groups), and youth clubs, play an important role in the development of the neighbourhoods. An *Unnayan Samiti* is a broad-based organization, in terms of inclusion of members from all the households in the settlement area, thus involving all members of the ethnic and religious groups in the settlement. The organizations have been playing a significant role in the improvement of infrastructure and services in the neighbourhood, which is carried out through collective self-help, and by seeking the help of administrative departments of the Government of Assam. In the absence of adequate infrastructure and other essential services, these community organisations also take up active roles in initiating projects for improving the basic facilities relating to water, drainage, roads, and street-lights, etc. Funds are raised though the regular monthly fees collected from the members, which are then used for development, building a temple, or celebrating a festival. Sometimes, a one-time collection drive for funds from the members is resorted to, towards meeting the needs of a specific community work.

Urban conservation lies at the very heart of urban planning, and conservators need to ensure the long-term protection of urban historic sites, which necessitates re-examination of linkages between the sacred space and the secular city. In an era of globalization,[462] the pace of cultural interaction and change has significantly increased, and there is no denying the fact that a well-conceived tourism management plan has an important role to play in the protection of sacred sites.[463] In the context of Kāmākhyā, a crucial issue is the illegal encroachment and indiscriminate settlement in and around

Nīlācala Hill, which has drastically transformed the sacred landscape, posing a serious challenge to the protection of the religious heritage landscape, the missing sculpture of Bhairavī being a case in point.[464] In spite of preservation efforts undertaken by agencies such as the Archaeological Survey of India, the Sri Kāmākhyā Debutter Board, and the State Government, many invaluable artefacts are still lying unattended and scattered all over Nīlācala Hill. Indeed, the challenge to sustainable development lies in adopting a strategy that recognizes the dynamic nature of the heritage site, its setting and context, and the constant evolution of the value it carries. The HUL, with its community-driven inclusive approach, can go a long way to ensuring that conservation interventions at Kāmākhyā keep pace with the demographic shift taking place in Guwahati city, to achieve a balance between cultural values and urban growth.

It may be mentioned that the practices of archaeology and conservation appear, by their very nature, to be in opposition to each other. While archaeology involves the excavation of unavoidable 'destructive and irreversible' historic sites, the goal of conservation, on the other hand, is to safeguard the physical fabric from damage, based on the belief that material culture possesses crucial information of a community's history and heritage. There is a range of conservation techniques applied to archaeological sites, which include structural stabilization, reconstruction, reburial, protective shelters, and a myriad of fabric-based conservation methods. Like all disciplines and fields, archaeological conservation has been shaped by its historical context and contemporary concerns. Yet, the primary objective of conservation is to protect cultural heritage from loss and damage, and conservators make efforts to accomplish this, through both preventive and remedial types of intervention. Using this approach, conservation embraces the technical means by which heritage may be studied, displayed, and made accessible to the public at large. In this way, the issues involved in the conservation of archaeological sites and religious heritage sites are not much different from each other, since implicit in conservation's objectives is the basic requirement to remove or lessen the causes of deterioration of the selected site.

In recent decades, archaeologists have become increasingly concerned about the future of the past, and many have turned their attention to the problems of conserving and managing the archaeological treasures. Since material culture is concerned, in its broadest sense, with things that people make, and what they signify, its conservation implies the preservation of a community's past. There is a need to treat religious property in a holistic manner, combining tangible and intangible expressions together with the

cultural landscape, since the religious belief systems of a community are closely linked to their cultural identity, and other beliefs about themselves, or the world around them. The preservation of cultural resources, and justification of the unavoidable consequences of development, are thus seen as more crucial than any narrowly defined, short-term, academic interest in data collection in research. Cultural heritage belongs (depending on the level of jurisdiction) to the locality, the nation (national monuments), or, as in the case of UNESCO, to heritage sites. All archaeological fieldworks are now subsumed under what is known as Public Archaeology, or Cultural Resource Management (CRM), which provides the long-term strategic framework for the protection (ideally, preservation *in situ*) of archaeological sites and other cultural monuments. Given the antiquity and cultural significance of Kāmākhyā, there is an urgent need to formulate a sustainable management plan for conservation in the field of religious heritage, by engaging various stakeholders, such as academics, architects, local communities, market forces, and policy planners.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

The preceding pages are an attempt at a comprehensive reconstruction of religion in Early Assam, based on an exhaustive use of archaeological sources, viz., epigraphs, icons, sculptures, temple ruins, and coins, which have not been adequately examined so far. It explores the intersection of religion and material dimension relating to the history of the erstwhile Kāmarūpa kingdom from the 4th to the 12th century CE. The materiality of religion merits a scholarly treatment on its own, since it facilitates the study of sacred landscape, which is inextricably woven into the cultural practices and identity of the community that holds it to be sacred. Situated as it is, Assam inevitably formed a link, religious and otherwise, between India and Southeast Asia, a factor of some importance in understanding its historical developments. The demography of Assam, based on a linguistic profile, categorizes the inhabitants into three major groups, viz., Austro-Asiatics, Tibeto-Burmans or Indo-Mongoloids, and 'Indo-Aryans'. The history of migration of the inhabitants of Assam connects them to Southeast Asia, China, and the Indo-Gangetic Plains. In epigraphic records, the name Kāmarūpa was first mentioned in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta of 350 CE, as a frontier kingdom of the Gupta Empire. However, the city of Prāgjyotiṣa, by which name Kāmarūpa was known in ancient times, finds mention in the two epics: the *Rāmayana* and the *Mahābhārata*, and also in the *Purāṇa* texts. The *Kālīka-Purāṇa* suggests that the kingdom changed its name to Kāmarūpa in conformity with the name of the presiding deity, viz., Kāmākhya. The political boundaries of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa did not remain static, and at the height of its political glory, the Kāmarūpa kingdom included most parts of modern Assam, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Bihar, and North Bengal. Assam acquired its name in the 13th century CE, when the Ahoms, belonging to the Tai group of people who, having migrated from Southern China, crossed the Patkai range and settled in the Brahmaputra valley. The year 1228 CE marked the advent of the Ahoms to the Brahmaputra valley, and the beginning of the gradual political integration and socio-cultural amalgamation of many ethnic groups under their rule, which was to transform the history of Assam in the next six hundred years (1228-1826 CE). Literary sources such as Yūan Chwāng's

accounts, *Kālīka-Purāṇa,* and *Yoginī-Tantra*, contain much information on the socio-religious life of Early Assam, but the use of such literary sources poses the challenge of authenticity and sieving the facts from mythological narratives. This explains the significance of archaeological evidence as a source for reconstructing the history of religion in Early Assam.

The migration of Brāhmaṇas to Kāmarūpa in large numbers coincided with the emergence of the Kāmarūpa kingdom as a political power, and the disintegration of the Gupta Empire around the 5th century CE. The Brāhmaṇas came from places such as Madhyadesa, Kathiawar, and Mithila. The system of creating *agrahāras* by the kings of Kāmarūpa led to their settlement in the kingdom, and they played a crucial role in the spread of the Brāhmaṇical faith. There are many references in the epigraphs to the kings of the pre-Ahom period performing sacrificial rituals (*yajñas*) for various purposes, under the strict guidance of the priests. King Mahendravarman is said to have performed many *yajñas* and was 'the repository of all sacrifices'. King Indrapāla also performed many *yajnas*, and it is recorded in the epigraphs that he was the foremost among all kings who performed religious ceremonies.[465] That the kings were active participants in Brāhmaṇical rituals is known from the references to the kings taking part in the utterances of prayers and hymns recited in temples. The epigraphic records indicate that some of the rulers also performed rituals such as the *Asvamedha* or horse sacrifice, which was one of the most important rituals of the Vedic tradition. The Nidhanpur Copper Plates of Bhaskaravarman, of the 7th century CE, and the Bargaṅgā Rock Inscription of Bhutivarman of the 6th century CE, informs that the Brāhmaṇas were already making their presence felt in the kingdom, and there was absorption of the new social norms in the changing society. Yet, it may be noted that the four *varṇās*, i.e., Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, and Śūdras, did not remain in their traditional position, and even the Brāhmaṇas had inter-caste marriage.

Viṣṇu and Śiva emerged as the two prominent deities in the pantheon of gods in Early Assam. The widespread discoveries of Śiva-*liṅgas*, and the images of the deity all over Assam, indicate that Śaivism perhaps took deep roots in the minds of the people. The main reason for the popularity of Śaivism could be the royal patronage given to the cult by the kings of Kāmarūpa. However, there are many artistic and architectural remains associated with Viṣṇu which reveal that this deity was also worshipped widely and was not very far behind in popular acceptance. Iconographic representations of Viṣṇu outnumber those of Śiva. The reason is due to the form of worship of Śiva, which occurs mostly in phallic symbols (*liṅga*) and

rarely in the form of an image. However, anthropomorphic forms of the deity are not totally absent in the religious history of the pre-Ahom period. Of the Brāhmaṇical cults prevalent at that time, Vaiṣṇavism seems to have preceded Śaivism. In the inscriptional references at least, Vaiṣṇavism appears earlier than Śaivism. The Umāchal inscription of King Surendravarman, which is assigned to the 5th century CE, mentions Lord Balabhadra. On the other hand, as far as Śaivism is concerned, the earliest recorded reference occurs in the Dubi Plates of Bhaskaravarman of the 7th century CE. The discovery of iconographic representations before this date, however, pushes back the date to the 6th century CE. The Gaṇeśa depicted on the Dāh-Parbatiyā *dvāra* is of this period. In literary sources, frequent mention is made of the Kāmarūpa kings who traced their lineage to Viṣṇu through Narakā. Textual reference notwithstanding, almost all the kings of this period, up to King Dharmapāla (12th century CE) patronised Śaivism, and invocations were made to Śiva, as is evident from the inscription of King Bhutivarman. Vaiṣṇavism was introduced to the land at least by the 6th century CE, and it became more popular during the 10th-12th centuries CE, as indicated by the records in epigraphs, and also the predominant finds of Viṣṇu images in the sacred sites. Śiva and Viṣṇu were worshipped side-by-side in many temples, which is a distinct characteristic of the history of religion in Early Assam. Brahmā, who is the third deity of the 'Hindu Triad' did not gain prominence, as revealed by the very few images that have been recovered so far. It may be mentioned that Brahmā did not attain the status of a presiding deity, compared to Viṣṇu and Śiva.

That Brāhmaṇical religion was the dominant faith in Early Assam is attested by the rich material remains discovered in the form of epigraphs, sculptures, temple ruins, coins, etc. The kings of the three dynasties of the Varman, Salastambha, and Pala, who ruled during this period, were ardent followers of the Brāhmaṇical faith. The patronage extended by the kings in the pre-Ahom period facilitated and encouraged the development of art and architecture, which is supposed to have been influenced by the Guptas. The Gupta age marked the advent of a vibrant period of exquisite temple building and fine sculptural activities, and Kāmarūpa was connected to its history and culture as a frontier kingdom. The varied finds of the representations of the three Brāhmaṇical cults of Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism, and Śaktism, reveal that they were worshipped independently, or as composite deities, viz., Hari-Hara, Śiva-Śakti, and Umā-Maheśvara, etc. Śiva was worshipped both in iconographic and *liṅga* (phallic) representations. The majority of the epigraphs begin with a salutation to this deity. It emerged as the most important deity of the period, eulogized in inscriptions, venerated in temples, and worshipped by the majority of the kings of Kāmarūpa.

In terms of representations in temples, Viṣṇu seems to be the most popular god in Early Assam.[466] Not only are temples specially dedicated to him, he also finds a prime place in Śakti and Śiva shrines. From the archaeological finds related to Viṣṇu, it can be concluded that the deity was worshipped in the entire Brahmaputra valley. The *avatāra* form of worship was a notable feature of Vaiṣṇavism in the period, and this is attested by both archaeological and inscriptional evidence.[467] Vaisnavism has always accommodated tribal features as a carrier of the Brāhmaṇical faith in the peripheral areas.[468] That Vaiṣṇavism was popular from the 6th century CE onwards can be deduced, not merely from inscriptional evidence, but also from the numerous sculptural representations. Kṛṣṇa seems to occupy an important place in Vaiṣṇavism only at a later period. The centrality of Kṛṣṇa in Vaiṣṇavism was a later development, with the introduction of Neo-Vaiṣṇavism by Śaṅkaradeva by the 16th century CE. Another important piece of archaeological evidence is the Deopānī-Viṣṇu image inscription of about the 8th-9th centuries CE, which clearly gives importance to Lord Nārayaṇā, besides the other deities. Herein, the goddess Bhagavati is identified with Viṣṇu (Guhya). The Assam State Museum possesses two images of Hari-Hara recovered from the Deopānī site, and both are inscribed with a few lines. There is a Śaṅkara-Nārayanā inscription which brings to light some references to the *nāmasaṁkīrtana* form of worship, which was later popularised by Śaṅkaradeva (1449-1568 CE). It states thus: "*adau nama* Śaṅkara-Nārayaṇā-*kirtan*", where the word *ādau* gives the impression that the chanting of prayers to Śaṅkara and Nārayaṇā was performed before the consecration of the idol in the temple concerned.[469] If this is accepted, the probability of the cult becoming prevalent in Assam as early as the 8th century CE may be inferred.

Śaktism, with its famous shrine at Kāmākhyā, with which Assam is frequently associated, sowed its seeds in this region during the early period of Assam's history. Although we cannot confirm with certainty that it originated in Assam, it had occupied a very important place in its religious history. The king did not sufficiently patronise Śaktism, and this perhaps explains the reason why Śaktism never came to the forefront in the manner that Śaivism or Vaiṣṇavism did. However, in a later period, that is by the 18th century CE, there is a reference that King Rudra Singha embraced Śaktism, which may indicate the growing importance of the deity among the pantheon of gods. But this is not to say that it did not find a place in the history of religion in the pre-Ahom period. The goddess pervaded every household, and its worship was, in the main, personal and esoteric. In fact, Śaktism influenced both Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism alike, and continued to be worshipped alongside the major deities. The roots of Śakti worship in

Assam has to be understood against the religious beliefs and practices of the early settlers of Northeast India. It is generally believed that the Khasis and Garos of Meghalaya, who follow the matrilineal system of society, used to worship Kāmākhyā by offering animals for sacrificial rituals. There are some ethnic communities in Assam who do not follow patriarchal norms. The Dimasa-Kacharis, for example, have a unique form of dual female and male descent, daughters tracing lineage through the mother, and sons through the father. The son inherits the property of the father, and the daughter that of the mother. Another example comes from the Rabha community, which adopts the clan lineage of the mother, although property inheritance takes place in the patrilineal line. It is possible that there existed matrilineal societies in Early Assam which gave importance to mother-right, and which later was to transform to a patrilineal set up, because of the process of cross-cultural contact and acculturation.

Strange as it may seem, this place, renowned as a Śakta *pīṭha*, did not reveal a prime reverence given to female deities. Except for the images of Mahiṣamardini and Cāmuṇḍa, images of other goddesses have been rarely discovered in Assam. Lakṣmī and Saraswati occur mainly as consorts of the main deities. They are otherwise found in composite forms, such as Uma-Maheśvara and Lakṣmī-Nārayaṇā. The prevalence of Tantricism and its influence on various religious sects in Assam, especially Buddhism, Śaivism, and Śaktism, is well known. Prāgjyotiṣa and Kāmarūpa were prominent centres of the Tantric cult. A sword, believed to have been used for human sacrifices, has been recovered from the Hatimura Temple at Nowgong. This temple is assigned to about the 9th-10th centuries CE. It may be mentioned that Tantric tenets are against the two major principles of Brāhmaṇical religion, viz., the infallibility of the *Vedas*, and the social structure sustained by the *varṇāśramadharma*. Therefore, when Brāhmaṇical religion began to establish itself in this region, it had to combat the already existing Tantric influence. Brāhmaṇical religion came to be institutionalised, and eventually it took firm roots in the society and culture of the period. But Tantricism must have continued to exist as a lively undercurrent, so that gradually Kāmākhyā became a famous centre of Tantric sacrifices, mysticism, and sorcery. The worship of miscellaneous deities such as Sūrya, Gaṇeśa, Kārttikeya, Indra, Agni, Kuvera, Manasā, Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, etc., are confirmed by the images that have come to light in many archaeological sites of, and belonging to, the Pre-Ahom period. However, they were mostly found as consorts of the main deities, and rarely occurred independently. The female deities, such as Durgā, Lakṣmī, and Suvacanī, were always worshipped along with other male deities, viz., Gaṇeśa, Viṣṇu, Śiva, apart from others. In terms of the overwhelming

number of images discovered in different parts of the Brahmaputra valley, Gaṇeśa and Sūrya seem to have been more popular, as compared to the other minor deities. Sculptures of Gaṇeśa are met with in almost all temples. The serpent goddess, Manasā, was also worshipped, and icons have been discovered belonging to this period of Assam history, although it is not very common. The nature of archaeological remains relating to the period under review which have been recovered so far, indicates that there was no sharp distinction drawn between temples dedicated to Viṣṇu, Śiva, Śakti, or other deities. Fine examples are the archaeological remains discovered in the sacred site of Narakāsur Hill, which include the iconographic representations of a variety of deities, which include Indra, Viṣṇu, Sūrya, Gaṇeśa, Manasā, Tārā, and a *mukha-liṅga.*

Buddhism attracted a section of the population in Early Assam. The images discovered, of the Buddha, Bodhisattva, and Tārā, are of the portable type. This suggests that the idols may have been imported from neighbouring places, such as Tibet, Nepal, and Burma, and also Bihar and Bengal, where Buddhism was widely practised. In spite of some icons recovered from Assam belonging to the pre-Ahom period, it can be surmised with certainty that both the kings and their subjects did not pay much attention to Buddhism. The epigraphic references to *dharma* and *taṭhagata* are not enough evidence to prove that it was generally accepted by the people. Some scholars claim that the Kāmākhyā temple was originally a Buddhist stupa, and that Buddha died at Hājo, which makes interesting reading, but is not convincing.[470] Jainism finds mention in the study only because of two rock-cut images that have come to light at Śri Sūryapāhār. Thus, Jainism did not receive royal patronage, nor was it widely accepted by the people.

The trend seen in the history of religion in Early Assam is one of affirmation of the Brāhmaṇical faith. A single temple may not be dedicated to a deity alone, but may contain images of a variety of deities which belong to diverse cults, such as Śiva, Viṣṇu Sūrya, Yamunā, Gaṅgā, etc. At Cole Park in Tezpur and Mahāmāyāthān, for example, icons discovered at the same sacred site include Sūrya, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva. Śri Sūryapāhār, in Tezpur, has a rich collection of archaeological remains representing the three Brāhmaṇical cults of Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism, and Śaktism.[471] The sacred finds include Śiva-*liṅgas*, Viṣṇu icons, and a prominent figure of a twelve-armed goddess. It is of significance to note that there are other sites, such as Mikirāti and Bargaṅgā, which have produced Śiva-*liṅgas* and Viṣṇu icons from a single shrine.[472] The multiple deities worshipped at a single site also has a good example in the archaeological remains of Narakāsura Hill.[473] The

images of gods and goddesses which have come to light from this site are Indra, Viṣṇu, Sūrya, Gaṇeśa, Manasā, Tārā, and a *mukha-liṅga*. It is crucial to note, that temple structure in Brāhmaṇical philosophy reflects the worldview of the people associated with it. Thus, the nature of material remains recovered so far in Early Assam indicates that there prevailed a harmonious and tolerant atmosphere, and that there was no conflict among the worshippers of Viṣṇu, Śiva, Devī, or other deities. The reason for this attitude may be explained by the socio-cultural milieu of the time, which consisted mainly of clan-based societies such as the Bodos and the Misings. It is worthwhile to mention that the traditional societies of the two largest tribal groups in Assam were clan-based, as was the case with the majority of the inhabitants of the region. The clans and lineages must have sustained the social organization of the tribal societies, and maintained the largely egalitarian outlook, in spite of the influence of institutionalised religion of the Brāhmaṇical faith. This was reflected in the presence of a variety of deities which were worshipped side-by-side, in many sacred places, without any apparent conflict. However, by the 9th century CE, the inscriptions indicate that the *varṇā* system began to be introduced, with its norms of purity and pollution.

That the pre-Ahom kings were tolerant in their approach towards religion is proved beyond doubt, since the records in the epigraphs mention that the kings extended support to a cult, and at the same time, patronized a deity of another cult. An example is the inscription, which records that Bhagadatta, who was devoted to Kṛṣṇa of the Vaiṣṇava faith, also worshipped Śiva with due reverence. King Bhāskaravarman, who was a devotee of Śiva, also claimed that he was descended from Viṣṇu and belonged to a Vaiṣṇava family. King Vanamāla, who was devoted to Śiva, was initially a follower of the Brāhmaṇical faith, but, like Jayamāla, he is said to have later come under the influence of Buddhism.[474] It may be mentioned that all the Pala rulers claimed to be worshippers of Śiva, but at the same time declared their patronage for Viṣṇu, and the Devī. King Indrapāla invoked Śiva, who also claimed to be Viṣṇu. The Gauhati Copper Plate of Indrapāla interestingly reads: "Victorious is the Lord Mahāvarāha (i.e. the Great Boar) of worshippable and most glorious form, who is Pasupati and the Lord of the whole mankind." In the Guwākuchi Grant, though Indrapāla invokes Śiva, the plate bears the Vaiṣṇavite symbols. King Dharmapāla showed his devotion, not only to the composite deities of Śiva and Devī, or Ardhayuvatīśvara, but also independently to Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Tantric Buddhism. King Vaidyadeva was a devotee of both Śiva and Viṣṇu. The tolerant mind of Vallabhadeva is illustrated by his invocation to Vāsudeva

and Lambodāra, and this is quite different from the other kings, many of whom invoked Śiva.

The sacred texts, such as the *Kālīka-Purāṇa* and the *Yoginī-Tantra*, which have been used by many scholars as sources for reconstructing aspects of the religion of Early Assam, may be understood against the background of the spread of *Purāṇic*-Hinduism in Kāmarūpa. The Naraka legend, to which the kings of Early Assam traced their lineage, was an attempt at legitimization of the ruling dynasties. However, the distinction between historical kings and mythical characters, as given in the texts, need to be critically examined in historical context for an objective reconstruction of the history of Assam. The myths, no doubt, offer much scope for interpretation, and, as such, have been incorporated in many studies of religion of the period. Yet, myth is not history, and although such narratives provide a key to a society, the use of such sources in historical reconstruction is replete with difficulties, of which chronology remains largely problematic. It may be noted that the role of archaeology in the construction and legitimation of collective cultural identities is increasingly perceived as one of the most important issues in archaeological theory and practice.[475] In recent times, archaeologists have begun to focus on how religion affected the people practising it, rather than understanding whether the believers found meaning in the faith it adhered to. Although the theories archaeologists employ for framing questions of the past have changed over time, archaeology relies on cross-disciplinary research, and their primary goals, viz., reconstructing and interpreting past human behaviour and culture, have remained essentially unchanged. The practice and performance of rituals as part of the religious system reinforce their sense of togetherness and social cohesion. Therefore, the protected sites in Assam need to be understood and examined in the context of the setting, which includes buildings and monuments, habitation settlements, and the natural surroundings. The conservation and management of religious heritage sites must bring together all stakeholders, including the community and policy planners, if sustainable development is to be achieved.

It is evident that the religion in Early Assam was rooted in, and sustained by, the material practice which enjoyed the active support of the kings of Kāmarūpa. The sacred archaeology of the pre-Ahom period acquires significance, in that it witnessed the gradual formation of cult worship of Śiva and Viṣṇu as dominant forms of faith, while the other deities, such as Sūrya, Gaṇeśa, Kārttikeya, Indra, Agni, Kuvera, Brahmā, and Manasā, were worshipped side-by-side, with no visible sign of sectarian jealousy among them. Śakti worship seems to have prevailed as a lively undercurrent

throughout a major period of Early Assam history and gained greater predominance over Śaivism only around the 11th century CE. However, the importance attached to the Śakta *pīṭha* at Kāmākhyā, several images of Durgā and Cāmuṇḍa, and the joint images of Umā-Maheśvara, discovered in Kāmarūpa, conclusively prove that Śaktism was practised and was a popular cult during the period. Buddhism and Jainism were prevalent in the society but did not attract much attention. Assam emerged as a great centre of Neo-Vaiṣṇavism which was introduced by Śaṅkaradeva in the 16th century CE, although the earliest epigraphical reference to Viṣṇu worship is found in the Umāchal rock inscription of the 6th century CE. The nature of early Vaiṣṇavism in Assam is not certain due to the lack of adequate sources for its study. Yet, it is well recognized that the centrality of Kṛṣṇa in Assam's Vaiṣṇavism was a later development which was popularized with the introduction of Neo-Vaiṣṇavism by the 16th century CE. The available sources indicate that Vaiṣṇavism in Early Assam corresponded closely to the Bhagvatism of the Gupta period, which was a syncretism of the various cults of Viṣṇu, viz., Viṣṇu of Vedic Brāhmaṇism, Nārayaṇā of the Pañcaratrās, Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva of the Satvats, and Gopālā of the Ābhīra tribe. The spirit of tolerance shown by the Kāmarūpa rulers is a marked feature of the history of religion in Early Assam.

NOTES

Chapter One

[1] Northeast India represents both a geographic region and a political administrative unit, and comprises the eight states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura. The region is inhabited by the Austro-Asiatics, Tibeto-Burmans or Indo-Mongoloids, and 'Indo-Aryans', whose history of migration and ethno-linguistic characteristics has linkages with Southeast Asia, China, and the Indo-Gangetic Plains.

[2] Material culture refers to physical objects, resources and spaces that people use to define culture, like, artefacts, buildings, textiles, and utensils. Non-material culture includes ideas and symbols, viz., values, beliefs, and language that define a society.

[3] Traditional societies refer to those societies that are characterized by kinship bonds, limitation of technology, and socio-economic and political decisions that are guided by customary laws and indigenous belief systems. Their livelihood mainly depends on agriculture, fishing, hunting, and gathering that center around a family or tribe.

[4] Mathew Kelleher, *Archaeology of Sacred Space: The Spatial Nature of Religious Behaviour in the Blue Mountains National Park Australia* (Sydney: Department of Archaeology, University of Sydney, 2002), accessed February 20 2018, http://hdl.handle.net/2123/4138.

[5] Thomas Gale, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion,* s.v. "sacred space," accessed July 10 2018. www.encyclopedia.com/environment/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/sacred-space.

[6] Pranab Jyoti Sarma and Manjil Hazarika have attempted a periodization of Assam history from an archaeological perspective. The earliest recorded history of Assam is the reference to Kāmarūpa in the Allahabad Pillar inscription of the 4th century CE, which also marks the beginning of the state formation process. The study divides Assam history into the Early Phase, the Transitional Phase, and the Late Phase, which begins with the advent of the Ahoms to Assam in 1228 CE. The available archaeological materials indicate that the historical phase in Assam started from the 4th century CE. Hence, it is reasonable to use the term Early Assam for the period 4th-12th centuries CE, which may be identified with the combined period of the Early Phase and Transitional Phase. For discussion on periodization in Northeast Indian history, see, Pranab Jyoti Sarma and Manjil Hazarika, "Situating Northeast Indian Archaeology in Chronological Perspective: Fresh Observation," in *50 Years after Daojali-Hading: Emerging Perspectives in the Archaeology of Northeast India*, eds., T. Jamir and M. Hazarika (New Delhi: Research India Press 2014, 51-52).

[7] The *Kālīka-Purāṇa* is divided into three sections, viz., mythology, rituals and sacred geography. See Paolo Eugenio Rosati, "The Cross-Cultural Kingship in Early Medieval Kāmarūpa: Blood, Desire and Magic," *Italian Institute of Oriental Studies,* September ('Sapienza' University of Rome 2017).

[8] Thomas Watters, *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India, 629-649 A.D*. (London: Royal Asiatic Society 1904, 348). Yūan Chwāng visited the Kāmarūpa kingdom at the invitation of King Bhaskaravarman during the years 642 and 643 CE.
[9] Timothy Insoll, ed., *Archaeology and World Religion* (London: Routledge 2001).
[10] Assam has a total geographical area of 78,438 sq. kms. It is broadly divided into five physical units, viz., Brahmaputra Valley, Barak Valley, and the hill districts of Karbi-Along, West Karbi-Along, and Dima Hasao. It lies between latitudes 28°18′and 24° north and longitudes 89°46′ and 97°4′ east. The population stands at 312.05 lakhs, according to the *Census of India: 2011.*
[11] The Ahoms led by Sukapha, the Shan prince, is said to have left Maulong in Southern China in 1215 CE and having subdued many tribes along the way, reached the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam and occupied it by 1228 CE. The Ahom kingdom was established in the same year, and they ruled for about six hundred years (1228-1826 CE). Dimbeswar Neog, *Introduction to Assam* (Bombay: Vora and Co. Publishers Ltd. 1947, 66).
[12] The Tais, or Siamese, branch of the Indo-Chinese group of people are called Shans by the Burmese. The Tai people of Mongoloid origin inhabit large tracts of Southeast Asia, and are found in groups and sub-groups under various regional names, such as Shan (Myanmar), Thai (Thailand), Lao (Vietnam), and Dai (China), etc. In India, the Tai people live in the Northeastern states of Assam, Arunachal and Manipur, and are known by various names, such as Ahom, Aiton, Khamti, Khamyang, Phake, Turung and Kabow. See Girin Phukon, "Tais of Northeast India and their Cultural Linkage with Southeast Asia," *Synoptic Note on the Lecture Delivered at the Institute of Language and Culture for Rural Development* (Thailand: Mahidol University, August 4 2009).
[13] Prāgjyotiṣa (also spelt as Prāgjyotiṣapura, or Prāgjyotishpur) means the 'city of eastern astrology', and was the capital of the kingdom of the legendary king, Naraka. E.A Gait, *A History of Assam* (Calcutta: Thacker Spink and Co. 1906, 15). Pragjyotiṣa is identified with the modern city of Guwahati.
[14] The major eighteen *Purāṇas* are encyclopaedic collections of legends and myths, among which the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* are the most important. These *Purāṇas* are Sanskrit texts which reflect the Brāhmaṇization of tribal cults and represent a synthesis of various cultural traditions from the Indian subcontinent.
[15] Gait, *A History of Assam*, 10. In the epics and the *Purāṇas* the geographical boundary of Kāmarūpa kingdom encompasses the land bounded by the Himalayan ranges of Bhutan and Tibet (north), the Patkai ranges (east), the Naga Hills separating Assam from Burma (south-east), the Lushai hills (south), the hills of Tippera and Mymensing (south-west), the Garo hills, and the River Sonkasa (west).
[16] V. A. Smith, *The Early History of India* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1940, 383). The kingdom of Davāka (also spelt as Dabaka, or Doboka), identified with the Kapili-Jamuna Valley is in the present Nagāon (also spelt as Nowgong) district of Assam. The geographical boundary of the Kāmarūpa kingdom extended from the Karatoya River to Sadiya after the annexation of Davaka in the 5th century CE.

[17] Amalendu Guha, "Pre-Ahom Roots and the Medieval State in Assam: A Reply," *Social Scientist* 12, 6 (1984): 70-77.
[18] S. N. Sarma, *A Socio-Economic and Cultural History of Medieval Assam: 1200-1800 A.D* (Guwahati: Bina Library 1989, 38). Koch Behar was part of the Kāmarūpa kingdom from the 4th to the 12th centuries CE.
[19] For a discussion on Kirātas, see Nagendranath Vasu, *The Social History of Kāmarūpa*. vol. 1. reprint (New Delhi: Northern Book, 1986).
[20] B. C. Allen, *Census of Assam, 1901*, vol.1, Report, reprint. (Delhi: Manas Publications 1984, 120).
[21] S. K. Chatterjee, *Kirata Jana Kriti, The Indo-Mongoloids: Their Contribution to the History and Culture of India.* reprint (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society 1974, 45).
[22] M. K. Dhavalikar, "Archaeology of Gauhati." *Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute* 31/32, no. 1/2 (1970): 137, accessed June 7 2018, http://www.jstor.org/stable/42930897.
[23] A. C. Bhagabati, "Social Formations and Ethnic Identities in North-East India," Vth Prof. N.K. Bose Memorial Lecture, *Vihangama Newsletter* 11 (March-April), (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts 2002). The term 'tribal' is used here to refer to clan-based ethnic communities largely untouched by market economy and urbanization.
[24] Vaiṣṇavism is predominantly practised in Assam, Manipur, and Tripura. The religion in Arunachal Pradesh may be categorized into the Buddhists and the non-Buddhists. The Monpas, Shekdukpens, and the Khamtis, are Buddhists, whereas the Nyishis, Mishmis, Singhpos, and Adis, are some of the non-Buddhist tribes of the state. Christianity has made an impact in Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Manipur.
[25] Birendranath Datta, ed., *A Handbook of Folklore Material of North-east India* (Guwahati: Anundoram Borooah Institute of Language, Art and Culture 1994, 12).
[26] Acculturation is the process of acquiring culture traits as a result of contact and interaction between two or more distinct groups of people, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either, or both, groups. David Levinson and Malvin Ember, eds., *Encyclopaedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology* (New York: Henry Holt and Co. 1996, 84).
[27] Dennis O'Neil, "Process of Change, Acculturation," In *Culture Change: An Introduction to the Processes and Consequences of Culture Change*, accessed June 7 2018, http://anthro.palomar.edu/change/ change_3.htm.
[28] *Varṇāśramadharma* refers to the Brāhmaṇical tradition of *varṇā* and *āśrama*. The *varṇā* system relates to the four castes viz., Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya and Śūdra. The *āśrama* concept represents four stages of life, viz., Brahmacharya, Grihastya, Vanaprastya, and Sanyasa.
[29] P. Bhattacharya, "Two Lost Plates of Nidhanpur Copper Plates of Bhaskaravarman," *Epigraphia Indica* 19 (19), 1927-28: 118f.
[30] Romila Thapar, "The First Millennium BC in North India," In *Recent Perspectives of Early Indian History*, ed., Romila Thapar (Mumbai: Popular Prakashan Pvt. Ltd. 1998, 83).

[31] N. K. Bhattasali, "The Bargaṅgā Rock Inscription of Mahārājadhirāja Bhutivarman," new series, *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 8, 4 (October): 138-39.
[32] R. M. Nath, *Background of Assamese Culture* (Gauhati: Dutta Baruah 1948, 35).
[33] M. M. Sharma, Nidhanpur Copper Plates of Bhāskaravarman (v.25, ll.34-35), in *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam* (Gauhati: Department of Publications, Gauhati University 1978) 52.
[34] B. K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam*: *Early Period* (Gauhati: Lawyer's Book Stall 1951, 119).
[35] P. C. Choudhury, *The History of the Civilisation of the People of Assam from the Earliest Times to the 12th Century* (Gauhati: Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies 1966, 334).
[36] R. C. Muirhead Thomson, *Assam Valley: Beliefs and Customs of the Assamese Hindus* (London: Luzac and Company Ltd. 1948, 46-47).
[37] P. Bhattacharya, "Two Lost Plates of Nidhanpur Copper Plates of Bhāskaravarman," 164f.
[38] Sharma, Khānamukh Copper Plates of Dharmapāla (vv.16-22), 232-33.
[39] Sharma, Subhaṇkarapāṭaka Copper Plates of Dharmapāla (v. 22), 248.
[40] Sharma, Kamauli Copper Plate Grant of Vaidyadeva (v.34), 287.
[41] Robert H. Winthrop, ed., *Dictionary of Concepts in Cultural Anthropology* (New York: Greenwood Press 1991).
[42] Rena Laisram, *Early Meitei History: Religion, Society and the Manipur Puyas* (New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House 2009), 11-12. The royal chronicles of Manipur and Tripura are dated to about the 15th century CE, while the *Puyas* are dated to about the 18th century CE.
[43] M. J. Yinger, *Religion, Society and the Individual* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. 1957).
[44] Cited in *Religion in Indian History*, ed., Irfan Habib (New Delhi: Tulika Books 2007), xi.
[45] D. P. Chattopadhyaya, "In Search of the Roots of Religion or *Dharma*," in *Religion in Indian History*, ed., Irfan Habib, 2.
[46] Nicholas Abercrombe, et al., eds., *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Penguin Books, Harmondsworth 1988).
[47] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life,* trans. Joseph Ward Swain (New York: The Free Press, 1965). The Functionalist approach interprets religion as contributing to the maintenance of society by creating social solidarity through joint rituals, common beliefs, and the support of socially important rules of interpersonal behaviour. Societies are thought to function like organisms and social institutions are functionally integrated to form a stable system, so that a change in one institution precipitates a change in other institution(s).
[48] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* trans. T. Parsons (London: George, Allen and Unwin Ltd. 1930). This seminal work focuses on the impact of culture and religions on the development of economic systems.
[49] P. Tillich, *Religious Situation* (New York: Meridian Books 1956).

[50] See Colin Renfrew and Paul Bahn, eds., *Archaeology: Key Concepts*. (London and New York: Routledge 2005).
[51] Colin Renfrew, "The Archaeology of Religion," in *The Ancient Mind: Elements of Cognitive Archaeology*, eds., C. Renfrew, C. and E. Zubrow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994, 55).
[52] R. Whitehouse, "Ritual Objects. Archaeological Joke or Neglected Evidence?" in *Approaches to the Study of Ritual: Italy and the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed., J. Wilkins (London: Accordia Research Centre 1996, 9).
[53] P. P. A. Funari, S. Jones and M. Hall, "Archaeology in History," in *Historical Archaeology: Back from the Edge*, eds., P. P. A. Funari, M. Hall and S. Jones (London: Routledge 1999, 3,8).
[54] Lars Fogelin, "Sacred Architecture, Sacred Landscape: Early Buddhism in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh," in *Archaeology as History in Early South Asia*, eds., H. P. Ray and C. M. Sinopoli (New Delhi: Indian Council for Historical Research and Aryan International 2004), accessed July 20 2017, cai.siu.edu/vspages/vsproposal_fogelin.pdf.
[55] Gait, *A History of Assam*.
[56] Jae Eun Shin, "Searching for Kāmarūpa: Historiography of the Early Brahmaputra Valley in the Colonial and Post-Colonial Period." *Puravritta: Journal of the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums* 1 (Government of West Bengal: Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Department of Information and Cultural Affairs 2016, 115).
[57] H. C. Ray, *Dynastic History of Northern India: Early Medieval Period*, 2 vols. (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publication 1973).
[58] R. B. K. L. Barua, *Early History of Kamarupa: From the Earliest Times to the End of the Sixteenth Century* (Gauhati: Lawyer's Book Stall 1966).
[59] R. G. Basak, *History of North-Eastern India* (Calcutta: Sambodhi 1967).
[60] Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam*: *Early Period*.
[61] Nagendranath Vasu, *The Social History of Kāmarūpa*, vol. 1. reprint (New Delhi: Northern Book 1986).
[62] Sarma, *A Socio Economic and Cultural History of Medieval Assam: 1200-800 A.D.*
[63] Choudhury, *The History of the Civilisation of the People of Assam from the Earliest Times to the 12th Century.*
[64] Nath, *Background of Assamese Culture.*
[65] B. K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya* (Gauhati: Lawyer's Book Stall 1961).
[66] Nayanjyoti Lahiri, *Pre-Ahom Assam: Studies in the Inscriptions of Assam between the Fifth and the Thirteenth Centuries A.D.* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Pvt. Ltd. 1991).
[67] R. D. Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam* (New Delhi: Agamkala Prakashan 1985).

[68] N. D. Choudhury, *Historical Archaeology of Central Assam from the Earliest Period to 12th Century A.D.* (Delhi: B. K. Publishing Corporation 1985).
[69] P. D. Chaudhury, *Archaeology in Assam: An Introduction* (Gauhati: State Department of Archaeology, Government of Assam 1964).
[70] Arun Bhattacharjee, *Icons and Sculptures of Early and Medieval Assam* (Delhi: Inter-India Publications, Delhi 1978).
[71] P. C. Sarma, *Architecture of Assam* (Delhi: Agamkala Prakashan 1988).
[72] B. N. Mukherjee, *East Indian Art Styles: A Study in Parallel Trends* (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi and Company 1980).
[73] Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam.*
[74] P. N. Bhattacharya, ed., *Kāmarūpa Śāsanavālī* (Rangpur: Sahitya Sabha 1931).
[75] Gautam Sengupta, "Recent Trends in the History of Art in Ancient Assam," in *Proceedings of North East India History Association* VIIth Session (Shillong: Department of History, North Eastern Hill University, 1988, 86-97).
[76] Mignonette Momin, *Aspects of Political Institutions and Social Structure in Kamarupa c. A.D. 600-1200*. MPhil diss. (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University 1979); *Polity and Society in Assam circa A.D. 600-1200,* PhD diss. (New Delhi: Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University 1987).
[77] Lars Fogelin, ed., *Religion, Archaeology and the Material World*, Occasional Paper No. 36 (Carbondale: Center for Archaeological Investigations, Southern Illinois University 2008).
[78] Matthew Engelke, "Material Religion," in *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, ed., R.A. Orsi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011, 209-229).
[79] Timothy Insoll, *Archaeology, Ritual, Religion* (London: Routledge 2004).
[80] David Morgan, ed., *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief* (New York: Routledge 2010).
[81]See Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Westview Press 1939).
[82] D. K. Chakrabarti. "The Archaeology of Hinduism," in *Archaeology and World Religion*, ed. Timothy Insoll (London: Routledge 2001).
[83] Edmund R. Leach, "The Gatekeepers of Heaven: Anthropological Aspects of Grandiose Architecture," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 39, No. 3 (Fall 1983): 243-264, accessed February 23 2017, https://doi.org/ 10.1086/jar.39.3 .3629670.
[84] For discussion on historiography of Pre-Ahom inscriptions, see Nayanjyoti Lahiri, *Pre-Ahom Assam: Studies in the Inscriptions of Assam between the Fifth and the Thirteenth Centuries A.D.* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Pvt. Ltd. 1991, 1-10).
[85] Sharma, The Gachtal Copper Plate Grant of Gopalavarman (v.21), 215.
[86] Julia Shaw, "Archaeology of Religious Change." in *World Archaeology*, ed., Julia Shaw 45, 1 (London: Routledge 2013):7, accessed August 5 2018, https://doi.org/10.1080/00438243.2013.783968;

[87] Leach, "The Gatekeepers of Heaven: Anthropological Aspects of Grandiose Architecture," 244, 256.
[87] Harry Lerner, "Lewis Binford and the New Archaeology," in *Totem: The University of Western Ontario Journal of Anthropology* 1(1) (Ontario: The University of Western Ontario London, Spring 1994): 57, accessed August 22 2018, http:// ir.lib. uwoca/totem/vol1iss1/10.

Chapter Two

[89] The 'Hindu Triad' associated with Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva are the three highest manifestations of the Ultimate Reality in Brāhmaṇical philosophy, and represent the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer of the Universe respectively.
[90] Dimbeswar Sarma, ed. *Kamarupa Śāsanavāli*, trans. P.D. Choudhury, et.al. (Assam: Publications Board 1981, 148).
[91] M. M. Sharma, Tezpur Copper Plates of Vanamāla (v.5), in M. M. Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam* (Gauhati: Gauhati University Publications 1978, 101).
[92] Sharma, Tezpur Copper Plates of Vanamāla, (v.5), 101.
[93] Sharma, The Uttarbarbil Copper Plate Grant of Balavarman III, (v.8), 133; The Nowgong Copper Plate Grant of Balavarman III, (v.8), 144.
[94] Sharma, Dubi Copper Plates of Bhaskaravarman, (v.2), 25.
[95] Sharma, Tezpur Rock Inscription of Harjaravarman, (l.21), 85.
[96] Sharma, The Uttarbarbil Copper Plates of Balavarman III, (v.1), 135.
[97] Sharma, The Gauhati Copper Plate Grant of Indrapāla, (v.l), 185.
[98] Sharma, Bargāon Copper Plate Grant of Ratnapāla, (v.1), 160.
[99] J. L. Shastri, ed., *The Liṅga Purāṇa,* trans. J. L. Shastri (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Pvt. Ltd 1951, 382-83).
[100] N. D. Choudhury, *Historical Archaeology of Central Assam from the Earliest Period to A.D. 12th Century* (New Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation 1985, 106).
[101] Maheswar Neog, *Religions of the North East* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 1984, 4).
[102] Shastri, ed., *The Liṅga Purāṇa,* 367.
[103] R. D. Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam: Pre-Ahom Period* (New Delhi: Agamkala Prakashan, New Delhi 1985, 81).
[104] B. N. Mukherjee, *East Indian Art Styles: A Study in Parallel Trends* (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi and Company 1980, 27).
[105] B. K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam (Early Period)* (Gauhati: Lawyers Book Stall 1951, 205).
[106] Sharma, Tezpur Copper Plates of Vanamāla (v.24), 103.
[107] Sharma, The Gachtal Copper Plate Grant of Gopalavarman (v.21), 215.
[108] Sharma, Assam Plates of Vallabhadeva (vv.13-14), 298.
[109] R. D. Banerji, "Exploration: Pre-Ahom Art and Architecture," *Archaeological Survey of India: Annual Report* (1924-25): 96.

[110] Arun Bhattacharjee, *Icons and Sculptures of Early and Medieval Assam* (Delhi: Intre-India Publications, Delhi 1978, 14).
[111] Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam: Early Period*, 203.
[112] Dimbeswar Sarma, ed. *Kāmarūpa Śāsanavālī*, trans. P.D. Choudhury et.al. (Assam: Publications Board 1981).
[113] Sharma, Tezpur Copper Plates of Vanamāla (v.5), 101.
[114] Sharma, The Uttarbarbil Copper Plate Grant of Balavarman III (v. 8), 133; The Nowgong Copper Plate Grant of Balavarman III (v.8), 144.
[115] Sharma, Dubi Copper Plates of Bhāskaravarman (v.2), 25.
[116] Sharma, Tezpur Rock Inscription of Harjaravarman (l.21), 85.
[117] Sharma, Tezpur Copper Plates of Vanamāla (v.1), 101.
[118] Sharma, Tezpur Copper Plates of Vanamāla (v. 24), 103.
[119] Sharma, The Uttarbarbil Copper Plates of Balavarman III (v.12), 134.
[120] Sharma, The Uttarbarbil Copper Plates of Balavarman III (v.1), 135.
[121] Sharma, The Gauhati Copper Plate Grant of Indrapāla, (v.l), 185.
[122] Sharma, Bargāon Copper Plate Grant of Ratnapāla, (v.1), 160.
[123] Sharma, Khānamukh Copper Plates of Dharmapāla (v.1), 230.
[124] Shastri, *The Liṅga Purāṇa,* 18.
[125] Pandit Padmanath Bhattacharya Vidyavinod, "Mahadeva-the Iṣṭadeva of the Kings of Kāmarūpa," *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 2, no. 1 (April 1934): 3.
[126] Sharma, Hāyuṅthal Copper Plates of Harjaravarman, 92.
[127] Vidyavinod, "Mahadeva-the Iṣṭadeva of the Kings of Kamarupa," 1-6.
[128] Sharma, The Bargāon Copper Plate Grant of Ratnapāla (v.1), 160.
[129] Pandit Padmanath Bhattacharya, Vidyavinod, "Mahadeva-the Iṣṭadeva of the Kings of Kāmarūpa," 5.
[130] R. D. Choudhury and D. Chutia, "A Note on the Archaeological Finds at Narakāsura Hill," *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 19 (1970), 23-35.
[131] Sharma, The Kamauli Copper Plate Grant of Vaidyadeva (v.26), 286.
[132] Sharma, The Bargāon Copper Plate of Ratnapāla 5 (ll. 32-33), 163.
[133] Sharma, Tezpur Rock Inscription of Harjaravarman (l.2), 85.
[134] Sharma, Khānamukh Copper Plates of Dharmapāla'; Subhaṇkarapāṭaka Copper Plates of Dharmapāla (v.1), 22.
[135] Sharma, Assam Plates of Vallabhadeva (v.13), 298.
[136] Sharma, The Pārbatiyā Copper Plate Grant of Vanamālavarmadeva (v.25, ll. 47-48), 124; Tezpur Copper Plates of Vanamāla (v.29, ll. 21-23), 105.
[137] Sharma, The Bargāon Copper Plate Grant of Ratnapāla (v.1), 160.
[138] Sharma, The Gauhati Copper Plate Grant of Indrapāla (v.20), 185.
[139] Sharma, The Bargāon Copper Plate Grant of Ratnapāla (v.15, ll. 30-34), 163.
[140] Sharma, Nidhanpur Copper Plates of Bhāskaravarman (v.2), 50.
[141] Sharma, The Bargāon Copper Plate Grant of Ratnapāla (v.15, ll. 30-34), 163.
[142] Sharma, Tezpur Copper Plates of Vanamāla (v.2), 101.
[143] R. D. Banerji, "Exploration: Pre-Ahom Art and Architecture, 32ff

[144] Neog, *Religions of the North East*, 7.
[145] P. D. Chaudhury, *Archaeology in Assam: An Introduction* (Gauhati: State Department of Archaeology, Government of Assam 1964, 31-33).
[146] Chaudhury, *Archaeology in Assam: An Introduction*, 42, 43, 45, 47.
[147] Chaudhury, *Archaeology in Assam: An Introduction*, 57.
[148] Chaudhury, *Archaeology in Assam: An Introduction*, 56.
[149] Chaudhury, *Archaeology in Assam: An Introduction*, 58.
[150] Sharma, The Uttarbarbil Copper Plates of Balavarman III; The Nowgong Copper Plate Grant of Balavarman III (v.1), 133.
[151] Sharma, Dubi Copper Plates of Bhāskaravarman (v. 59), 25.
[152] Sharma, The Nowgong Copper Plate Grant of Balavarman III (v.12), 134.
[153] Sharma, The Nowgong Copper Plate Grant of Balavarman III (vv.12, 22-23), 134.
[154] Sharma, Khānamukh Copper Plates of Dharmapāla; Subhaṇkarapāṭaka Copper Plates of Dharmapāla (v.1), 230.
[155] Sharma, Puṣpabhadrā Copper Plate Grant of Dharmapāla (v.1), 262.
[156] Sharma, Kamauli Copper Plate Grant of Vaidyadeva (v.28, ll. 47-50), 286.
[157] Neog, *Religions of the North East*, 4.
[158] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam: Pre-Ahom Period*, 80.
[159] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam: Pre-Ahom Period*, 239.
[160] T.A.G. Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, vol.1 (Madras: Law Printing House 1914, 31-32).
[161] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam: Pre-Ahom Period*, 69.
[162] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam: Pre-Ahom Period*, 70-71.
[163] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam: Pre-Ahom Period*, 71.
[164] Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam (Early Period)*, 204.
[165] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam: Pre-Ahom Period*, 67-69.
[166] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam: Pre-Ahom Period*, 79-80.
[167] P. C. Choudhury, *The History of the Civilisation of the People of Assam from the Earliest Times to the 12th Century* (Gauhati: Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies 1966, 441).
[168] R. M. Nath, "Ruins of the Śiva Temple at Numaligarh," *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 2, no. 1 (1934-35): 7-9.
[169] Neog, *Religions of the North East*, 4.
[170] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam: Pre-Ahom Period*, 143.

[171] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam: Pre-Ahom Period*, 229.
[172] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam: Pre-Ahom Period*, 81.
[173] G. N. Bhuyan, "Notes on the Terracottas of Bhaitbari (Garo Hills)," *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 20 (1972): 9.
[174] P. C. Saikia, "A Note on some Archaeological Relics in and around Barpathar (Golaghat), Assam: An Appraisal," *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 25 (1979-80) 34.
[175]Mandakranta Bose, *Women in the Hindu Tradition Rules, Roles and Exceptions* (London and New York: Routledge 2010, 15).
[176] Pandit Padmanath Bhattacharya Vidyavinod, "The Sign ζ in Ancient Copper Plate Inscription of Kāmarūpa," *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 1, no. 1(1933): 10-11.
[177] Vidyavinod, "Mahadeva, the Iṣṭadeva of the kings of Kāmarūpa", 2.
[178] Sharma, The Pārbatiyā Copper Plates of Vanamālavarmadeva (v.24), 122.
[179] Charles Eliot, "Hinduism in Assam," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, London (1920), 1152, cited in Maheswar Neog, *Śaṅkaradeva and His Times: Early History of Vaisnava Faith and Movement in Assam* (Gauhati: Department of Publication, University of Gauhati 1965, 82).
[180] M. Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, trans. S. Ketkar, vol.1 (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 252).
[181] Hugh B. Urban, "The Womb of Tantra: Goddesses, Tribals, and Kings in Assam." *The Journal of Hindu Studies* 4, (3), October 2011: 231–247. accessed July 24 2018, https://doi.org/10.1093/jhs/hir034.
[182] Tantricism is a mystic esoteric system and one of the sub-traditions of Śaktism, which refers to the techniques, practices and rituals of worshipping the male and female principles, *liṇga-yonī* or Śiva-Śakti involving sacred diagrams (*yantra, maṇdala*), gestures (*mudra*), repetition of sound formulas (*mantras*), meditation and *yogic* exercises, in order to achieve spiritual liberation (*siddhi*). See Hugh B. Urban, *Tantra: Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion* (Delhi: Motilal, Banarsidass 2007, 46-47).
[183] Neog, *Śaṅkaradeva and His Times: Early History of Vaisnava Faith and Movement in Assam*.
[184] D. C. Sircar, *The Śakta Pithas* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass 1973, 15).
[185] B. K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya* (Gauhati: Lawyer's Book Stall 1961, 35).
[186] N. N. Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Mother Goddess* (Calcutta: Indian Studies 1971, 30).
[187] Sircar, *The Sakta Pithas*, 15.
[188] Sharma, Tezpur Copper Plates of Vanamāla (v.29, ll. 11-13), 104.
[189] Neog, *Religions of the North East*, 106.
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[192] Sircar, *The Sakta Pithas*, 7.
[193] Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, 35.
[194] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam: Pre-Ahom Period*, 143.
[195] Choudhary, *Archaeology in Assam: An Introduction*, 55-56.
[196] R.M. Nath, "Antiquities of the Kapili and Jamuna Valleys: Further Discoveries," *Journal of the Assam Research Society*, vol. 8, no. 3, (July 1941): 85.
[197] Choudhary, *Archaeology in Assam: An Introduction*, 50, 56.
[198] Choudhary, *Archaeology in Assam: An Introduction*, 32-33, 50.
[199] K. L. Barua, "The Hatimura temple in Nowgong," *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 2, no.1 (1934): 12.
[200] P. C. Sarma, *Architecture of Assam* (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan 1988, 15).
[201] Sarma, *Architecture of Assam*, 75.
[202] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam (Pre-Ahom Period)*, 156.
[203] Sarbeswar Kakati, "Ancient Remains at Singri in Darrang," *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 4, no. 4 (1937): 94-95.
[204] A. C. Bhattacharya, "The Ancient Relics of Kāmrūp," *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 3, no. 1 (April 1935): 15.
[205] Bhattacharya, 'The Ancient Relics of Kāmrūp, 15.
[206] R. M. Nath, "Antiquities of the Kapili and Jamuna Valleys," *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 5, no. 1 and 2 (1937): 43-47.
[207] Nath, 'Antiquities of the Kapili and Jamuna Valleys: Further Discoveries', 85-87.
[208] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam (Pre-Ahom Period)*, 83, 87, 92.
[209] S. Kakati, "Antiquities and Historical Sites in Goalpārā," *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 2, no.1 (1934-35): 11.
[210] Choudhury, "Gold Objects from Singamari in Garo Hills district," *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 24 (1978): 27-31.
[211] The image is now preserved in the residence of Mr. I. Bora, Dhekiajuli.
[212] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam (Pre-Ahom Period)*, 90-91.
[213] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam (Pre-Ahom Period)*, 90.
[214] P.C. Saikia, "A Note on Some Archaeological Relics in and around Barpathar (Golaghat) Assam: An Appraisal," *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 25 (1979-80): 32-40.
[215] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam: Pre-Ahom Period*, 249.

[216] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam: Pre-Ahom Period*, 90.
[217] Mukherjee, *East Indian Art Styles: A Study in Parallel Trends*, 27.
[217] Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam: Early Period*, 207.
[218] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam: Pre-Ahom Period*, 232.
[219] G. N. Bhuyan and R. D. Choudhury, "A Hoard of Metallic Images from Hahara, Kāmrūp," *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 25 (1979-80): 73-74.
[220] Sharma, Tezpur Copper Plates of Vanamāla (v.29, ll. 11-13), 104.
[221] Sharma, The Guwākuchi Copper Plate Grant of Indrapāla (v.29, l. 49), 201.
[222] Sharma, The Pārbatiyā Copper Plates of Vanamālavarmadeva (v.25, ll. 33-47), 123.
[223] R. B. K. L. Barua, *Early History of Kamarupa: From the Earliest Times to the End of the Sixteenth Century* (Gauhati: Lawyer's Book Stall 1966, 100).
[224] Vidyavinod, "Mahadeva-The Iṣṭadeva of the Kings of Kāmarūpa", 5.
[225] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam: Pre-Ahom Period)*, 64-65.
[226] R. M. Nath, "The Deopānī Ruins," *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 8. No.4 (October 1941): 132; R. D. Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam: Pre-Ahom Period*, 63-65.
[227] Sarma, ed., Kāmarūpa Śāsanavālī, 152.
[228] Sharma, The Bargāon Copper Plate Grant of Ratnapāla (v.1), 160.
[229] Sharma, Khānamukh Copper Plates of Dharmapāla, 230; Subhaṇkarapāṭaka Copper Plates of Dharmapāla (v.1), 249.
[230] Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya,* 46.
[231] Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam (Early Period)*, 167.
[232] Sharma, The Guwākuchi Copper Plate Grant of Indrapāla (v.25, l. 71), 206.

Chapter Three

[233] Pranabananda Jash, *History and Evolution of Vaisnavism in Eastern India* (Calcutta: Roy and Choudhury 1982, 61).
[234] B. K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya* (Gauhati: Lawyer's Book Stall 1961, 10).
[235]Maheswar Neog, *Sankaradeva and His Times: Early History of Vaisnava Faith and Movement in Assam* (Gauhati: Department of Publication, University of Gauhati 1965, 87).
[236] Jash, *History and Evolution of Vaisnavism in Eastern India*, 61.
[237] *Mahābhārata Santiparva*, Chapter 348, cited in B. K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam: Early Period* (Gauhati: Lawyers Book Stall 1951, 149).
[238] Suvira Jaiswal. *The Origin and Development of Vaisnavism* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 1981, 196).

[239] D. C. Sircar and P. D. Choudhury, "Umāchal Rock Inscription of Surendravarman," *Epigraphia Indica* 31, no. 10 (1955-56): 68-69.
[240] M. M. Sharma, Bargaṅgā Rock Inscription of Mahārājadhirāja Bhutivarman, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam* (Gauhati: Gauhati University Publications 1978, 5-7).
[241] Sharma, Puṣpabhadrā Copper Plate Grant of Dharmapāla (v.1), 262.
[242] Sharma, Puṣpabhadrā Copper Plate Grant of Dharmapāla (v.180), 264-265.
[243] Sharma, Kamauli Copper Plate Grant of Vaidyadeva (l.1), 282; Assam Plates of Vallabhadeva (l.1), 296.
[244] Sharma, Kamauli Copper Plate Grant of Vaidyadeva, 282-283.
[245] Sharma, Gauhati Copper Plate Grant of Indrapāla (v.2), 185.
[246] Sharma, Nidhanpur Copper Plates of Bhāskaravarman, 76-81.
[247] Sharma, The Kamauli Copper Plate Grant of Vaidyadeva (v.1), 283.
[248] Sharma, The Nidhanpur Copper Plates Grant of Bhāskaravarman (v.25, ll. 34-54), 52.
[249] Sharma, The Tezpur Copper Plates of Vanamāla (v.45), 101.
[250] Sharma, The Gauhati Copper Plate Grant of Indrapāla (v.90), 186.
[251] B. N. Mukherjee, *East Indian Art Styles: A Study in Parallel Trends* (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi and Company 1980, 26).
[252] Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Westview Press 1939).
[253] R. D. Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam* (New Delhi: Agamkala Prakashan 1985, 25).
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[255] P. C. Choudhury, *The History of the Civilisation of the People of Assam from the Earliest Times to the 12th Century* (Gauhati: Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies 1966, 485).
[256] Hemchandra Raychaudhuri, *Materials for the Study of the Early History of the Vaisnava Sect* (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1975 (reprint), 104).
[257] Sharma, The Gauhati Copper Plate Grant of Indrapāla (v.3), 185.
[258] Sharma, The Kamauli Copper Plate Grant of Vaidyadeva (v.4), 283.
[259] Manmatha Nath Dutt, ed. *Vishnu Purana*, trans. H.H. Wilson (Calcutta: Elysium Press 1896, Section IV, 14).
[260] Sharma, The Kamauli Copper Plate Grant of Vaidyadeva (v.1), 282.
[261] Sharma, The Guwākuchi Copper Plate Grant of Indrapāla (v.24), 200.
[262] Sharma, The Tezpur Copper Plates of Vanamāla (v.13), 102.
[263] J. H. Marshall, "Conservation," *Annual Report of Archaeological Survey of India, Bengal Circle* (1903): p.22. The antiquity of this temple is assumed from its reference in the *Kālīka-Purāṇa*, Chapter 76ff; B.K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam*: *Early Period* (Gauhati: Lawyer's Book Stall 1951, 71).
[264] J. C. Ghosh, "Hayagriva Worship in Assam," *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 5, no. 3 (1937), 79-85.

[265] Jash, *History and Evolution of Vaisnavism in Eastern India*, 61.
[266] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam* (New Delhi: Agamkala Prakashan 1985, 38).
[267] P. D. Chaudhury, *Archaeology in Assam: An Introduction* (Gauhati: State Department of Archaeology, Government of Assam 1964, 35).
[268] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 44.
[269] Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam: Early Period*, 210.
[270] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 239.
[271] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 34.
[272] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 41-46.
[273] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 31.
[274] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 27-28.
[275] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 34.
[276] G. C. Westmacott, 'Description of Ancient Temples and Ruins at Chārduār in Assam', *Journal of Asiatic Society*, Vol. 40, 1835, cited in N.D. Choudhury, *Historical Archaeology of Central Assam from the Earliest Period to 12th Century A.D.* (Delhi: B.K. Publishing Corporation 1985, 234).
[277] Choudhury, *Historical Archaeology of Central Assam from the Earliest Period to 12th Century A.D.* (Delhi: B.K. Publishing Corporation 1985, 25).
[278] Choudhury, Historical Archaeology of Central Assam from the Earliest Period to 12th Century A.D., 43.
[279] R. M. Nath, "The Deopānī Ruins," *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 8, no. 4 (October 1941): 131.
[280] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 26-27.
[281] K. N. Dikshit, "Exploration', *Annual Report of Archaeological Survey of India*, 1923-24, p.80.
[282] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 38.
[283] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 34.
[284] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 46.
[285] P.R.T. Gurdon, "Asvakranta near Gauhati", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 32 (1920): 25-27.
[286] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 48.
[287] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 43-35.
[288] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 40.
[289] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 36, 38.
[290] R. D. Choudhury and D. Chutia, "A Note on the Archaeological Finds at Narakāsur Hill," *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 19 (1970): 32.
[291] Choudhury and Chutia, "A Note on the Archaeological Finds at Narakāsur Hill," 28-29.
[292] R. D. Choudhury and D. Chutia, "A Note on the Archaeological Finds at Narakāsur Hill," 36.
[293] Barua, *Cultural History of Assam: Early Period,* 212.

[294] S. Kakati, "Antiquities and Historical Sites in Goalpārā," *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 2, no. 1 (1934-35), 11.
[295] Vasudevism is the worship of Vasudeva, another name of Viṣṇu, a cult of Bhāgavata religion within the larger fold of Vaiṣṇavism. See R. G. Bhandarkar, *Vaisnavism, Saivism and Minor Religious Systems*, Routledge, London 2015 (Reprint), 10, 28, 30).
[296] Śaṅkaradeva (1449-1568 A.D.) initiated Neo-Vaiṣṇavism in Assam, preached *bhakti* or devotion to one god, that is, Viṣṇu -Kṛṣṇa and the *Bhāgavata-Purāṇa* became the most influential and authoritative work. Neo-Vaiṣṇavism went counter to the spirit of traditional Brahmanical faith of caste and worship.
[297] Maheswar Neog, *Religions of the North East* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers 1984, 23).
[298] Choudhury, *The History of Civilisation of the People of Assam up to the 12th Century* (Gauhati: Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam 1959, 457).
[299] Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam: Early Period*, 189.
[300] R. M. Nath, "Antiquities of the Kapili and the Jamuna Valleys: Further Discoveries," Journal of the Assam Research Society 8, no. 3 (1941): 14f.
[301] Choudhury, *The History of Civilisation of the People of Assam up to the 12th Century*, 48.
[302] Choudhury, *The History of Civilisation of the People of Assam up to the 12th Century,* 457.
[303] Nath, "Antiquities of the Kapili and the Jamuna Valleys: Further Discoveries,"14f.
[304] Choudhury, *The History of Civilisation of the People of Assam up to the 12th Century*, 487.
[305] Dimbeswar Sarma, "Trends of Religion on Ancient Kamarupa," *Journal of the Asiatic Research Society* 16 (1962), 21.
[306] R. D. Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 48.
[307] Mignonette Momin, "Contextualizing Origin Myths of Northeast India", *Proceedings of North East India History Association,* (Shillong: Department of History, North Eastern Hill University 2002, 43).
[308] R. D. Banerji, "Exploration: Pre-Ahom Art and Architecture," *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India* (1924): 97.
[309] P. C. Sarma, *Architecture of Assam* (Delhi: Agamkala Prakashan 1988, 66).
[310] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 49.
[311] Sharma, Nidhanpur Copper Plates of Bhaskaravarman (v.19), 51-52.
[312] Sharma, Nidhanpur Copper Plates of Bhaskaravarman (v.19), 50.
[313] Sharma, Nidhanpur Copper Plates of Bhaskaravarman (v.19), 49.
[314] Sharma, Nidhanpur Copper Plates of Bhaskaravarman (v.19), 244.
[315] Sharma, Nidhanpur Copper Plates of Bhaskaravarman (v.19), 50-51. The Sapta-Mātrikā or the "Seven Divine Mothers" are always represented together. The Mātrikās are the personified powers (Śakti) of different *devas* or gods. Brahmani

emerged from Brahma, Vaiṣṇavi from Viṣṇu, Maheśvari from Śiva, Indrani from Indra, Kaumari from Skanda, Vārāhi from Varāhā and Cāmuṇḍa from Devī.
316 Sharma, Nidhanpur Copper Plates of Bhaskaravarman (v.19), 50.
317 Banerji, "Exploration: Pre-Ahom Art and Architecture," 97.
318 Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 50.
319 Nath, "Antiquities of Kapili and Jamuna Valleys", 14f.
320 Barua*, A Cultural History of Assam: Early Period*, 205.
321 Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam,* 310ff
322 Sarma, *Architecture of Assam*, 13.
323 Sarma, *Architecture of Assam* 86, 28f.
324 Sharma, Deopānī Visnu Image of Inscription, 309.
325 Neog, *Sankaradeva and His Times: Early History of Vaisnava Faith and Movement in Assam*, 86.
326 Suvira Jaiswal, *The Origin and Development of Vaisnavism* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1981), 187-188.
327 Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam: Early Period*, 170-171.
328 Sharma, Deopānī Visnu Image Inscription, 309.
329 Sharma, Śaṅkara-Nārayanā Stone Image Inscription, 310.

Chapter Four

330 Sūrya is also known by other names, which include Aditya, Bhanu, Savitru, Pushana, Ravi, Mārtaṇḍa, Mitra, and Vivasvāna.
331 H. K. Barpujari, ed., *The Comprehensive History of Assam*: *Ancient Period*. Vol. 1. (Gauhati: Publication Board 1990, 402).
332 P. C. Choudhury, *The History of the Civilisation of the People of Assam from the Earliest Times to the 12th Century* (Gauhati: Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies 1966, 434).
333 M. M. Sharma, The Gauhati Copper Plate Grant of Indrapāla (v.24, l.51), in *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam* (Gauhati: Gauhati University Publications 1978).
334 B. K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam: Early Period* (Gauhati: Lawyer's Book Stall 1951, 174).
335 R. D. Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam* (New Delhi: Agamkala Prakashan 1985, 51).
336 Maheswar Neog, *Religions of the North-East* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers 1984, 464).
337 R. D. Banerji, "Exploration: Pre-Ahom Art and Architecture." *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India* (1924-25): 98-99.
338 L. P. Pandey, *Sun Worship in Ancient Assam* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass 1971, 226).
339 K. N. Dikshit, "Assam," *Annual Report of Archaeological Survey of India* (1929-30): 45.
340 S. Kakati, "Antiquities of Assam," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 6 (1930): 367.

[341] Kakati, "Antiquities of Assam," 367.
[342] L. P. Pandey, *Sun Worship in Ancient India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass 1971, 226).
[343] N. D. Choudhury, *Historical Archaeology of Central Assam from the Earliest Period to A.D. 12th Century* (Delhi: B.R Publishing Corporation 1985, 118).
[344] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 52.
[345] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam,* 239.
[346] Arun Bhattacharjee, *Icons and Sculptures of Early and Medieval Assam* (Delhi: Intre-India Publications 1978, 36).
[347] S. C. Goswami, "Antiquarian Notes," *Journal of the Assam Research Society*10, nos. 1 & 2 (1943): 38.
[348] Choudhury*, Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam,* 54-55.
[349] Choudhury*, Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam,* 225.
[350] Choudhury*, Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam,* 53.
[351] Choudhury*, Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam,* 57.
[352] Choudhury*, Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam,* 53.
[353] Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam: Early Period*, 186; Illustration No. 53.
[354] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam,* 54.
[355] P. C. Saikia, "A Note on Some Archaeological Relics in and around Barpathar (Golaghat) Assam: An Appraisal" *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 25 (1979-80): 37.
[356] Saikia, "A Note on Some Archaeological Relics in and around Barpathar (Golaghat) Assam: An Appraisal" 36.
[357] Dharmeswar Chutia, "A Note on an Inscribed Sun Image Preserved in the Assam State Museum," *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 30, no. 1 (1988), 50.
[358] Chutia*, "*A Note on an Inscribed Sun Image Preserved in the Assam State Museum," 51.
[359] Chutia*,* "A Note on an Inscribed Sun Image Preserved in the Assam State Museum," 54.
[360] Chutia, "A Note on an Inscribed Sun Image Preserved in the Assam State Museum," 55, 4ff.
[361] T. A. G. Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography* (Madras: Law Printing House, 1914), 309.
[362] Edward Moor, *The Hindu Pantheon* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services 1981), 169. Gaṇeśa is a Sanskrit compound, (*gaṇa:* a group, multitude, or categorical system; *isa:* lord or master). The principal scriptures dedicated to Ganesa are the *Gaṇeśa-Purāṇa*, the *Mudgala-Purāṇa*, and the *Ganapati-Atharvashirsa*. Also see B. Bhattacharya, *Saivism and the Phallic World* (New Delhi: Oxford and IBH Publishing Company 1975, 825).
[363] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam,* 76. Ganapati is mentioned in the *Rig Veda, Ganapati Upanishad, Agni-Purana and Yajnavalkya Smriti.*

[364] The *Amarakosha*, an early Sanskrit lexicon, lists eight synonyms of Gaṇeśa: Dvaimātura ('one who has two mothers'), Gaṇādhipa (Ganapati and Gaṇeśa), Ekadanta ('one who has one tusk'), Heramba, Lambodāra ('one who has a pot belly, or, literally, one who has a hanging belly'), and Gajanana ('having the face of an elephant').
[365] Sharma, Dubi Copper Plates of Bhāskaravarman, 22.
[366] Sharma, Kamauli Copper Plate Grant of Vaidyadeva, 258
[367] Sharma, Assam Plates of Vallabhadeva (v.1), 296.
[368] S. S. Barua, "Some Ancient Relics found in North Lakhimpur," *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 3 (1935-36): 43
[369] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam,* 72-73.
[370] Barua, "Some Ancient Relics Found in North Lakhimpur," 43-44.
[371] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 73.
[372] Bhattacharjee, *Icons and Sculptures of Early and Medieval Assam*, 41.
[373] Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam: Early Period*, 205.
[374] Sipra Sen and T. C. Sarma, 'A Note on Terracotta Objects from Ambari', *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 19 (1970), 47
[375] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam,*75
[376] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 150.
[377] Choudhury*, Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 73.
[378] P. C. Sarma, *Architecture of Assam* (Delhi: Agamkala Prakashan 1988, 35).
[379] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam,* 74.
[380] R. D. Choudhury and D. Chutia, "A Note on the Archaeological Finds at Narakāsur Hill," *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 19 (1970): 27
[381] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 77-78.
[382] G. N. Bhuyan, "Notes on Terracottas of Bhaitbari (Garo Hills)," *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 20 (1972), 9
[383] The 'Guardians of the Eight Directions' are Kubera (north), Yama (south), Indra (east), Varuṇa (west), Īśāna (northeast), Agni (southeast), Vāyu (northwest), and Nirrti (southwest). In Brāhmaṇical tradition, the images adorn the walls and ceilings of temples. Indra, who is known as the 'King of the Gods', became the Guardian of the Eastern Quarter.
[384] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam,* 94-95.
[385] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam,* 96.
[386] Choudhury and Chutia, "A Note on the Archaeological Finds at Narakāsur Hill," 24.
[387] Choudhury, "Archaeological Finds in Narakāsur Hills," *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 16 (1962): 59.
[388] Sharma, Dubi Copper Plates of Bhāskaravarman (vv. 25-6), 20.
[389] Sharma, Hāyuṅthal Copper Plates of Harjaravarman (vv.13-14), 89.
[390] Sharma, The Gachtal Copper Plate Grant of Gopalavarman (v.19), 215.
[391] Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam: Early Period*, 216.
[392] Bhattacharjee, *Icons and Sculptures of Early and Medieval* Assam, 47-48.

[393] Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam: Early Period*, 208.
[394] R. D. Banerji, "Exploration: Pre-Ahom Art and Architecture," *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India* (1924-25): 96.
[395] S. Kakati, "The Discovery of Three Stone Images at Gauhati," *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 9, nos. 3&4 (1942), 89.
[396] Bhattacharjee, *Icons and Sculptures of Early and Medieval Assam*, 50.
[397] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 97.
[398] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam,* 107.
[399] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam,* 103-104.
[400] Manasā is chiefly worshipped for the prevention and cure of snakebite and also for fertility and prosperity.
[401] S. N. Goswami, "Snake Worship: Goddess Manasā Cult in Assam," *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 25 (1979-80), 28.
[402] Neog, *Religions of the North-East*, 39.
[403] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 101.
[404] Bhuyan, "Notes on the Terracottas of Bhaitbari (Garo Hills)," 9-10.
[405] P. D. Choudhury, "A Miniature Bronze Image," *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 8, no. 1 (1942): 13-16.
[406] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 107.
[407] Kakati, "Antiquities and Historical Sites in Goalpārā," 10.
[408] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 109.
[409] R. D. Banerji, "Epigraphy," *Annual Report of Archaeological Survey of India* (1925-26), 110.
[410] Allison Mull, "Tara and Tibetan Buddhism: The Emergence of the Feminine Divine" *Tibetan Studies Program Independent Research* (Dharamsala: Emory-IBD Tibetan Studies Program Dharamsala, India (Spring, 2004), 10-14. Tārā manifests in twenty-one forms, both in benevolent and aggressive nature.
[411] Choudhury and Chutia, "A Note on the Archaeological Finds at Narakāsur Hill," 28.
[412] B. N. Mukherji, *East Indian Art Styles: A Study in Parallel Trends* (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi and Company 1980, 26).
[413] Sharma, Nidhanpur Copper Plates of Bhaskaravarman (v 3), 50.
[414] Sharma, The Gauhati Copper Plate Grant of Indrapāla (v.24, l.51), 179.
[415] M. M. Sharma, "Religion", in *The Comprehensive History of Assam*: *Ancient Period*, ed., H.K. Barpujari, 317.
[416] S. C. Goswami, "Hidden Traces of Buddhism," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 3 (December 1927): 747-757.
[417] Sharma, Puṣpabhadrā Copper Plate Grant of Balavarman III (v.7): 263.
[418] Sharma, The Uttarbarbil Copper Plates of Balavarman (vv.17, 22-23): 134.
[419] R.M. Nath, *Background of Assamese Culture* (Gauhati: Dutta Baruah, 1948), 30.
[420] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam*, 113.

[421] Rena Laisram, "Archaeology of the Sacred: Contextualizing Ganesa in Early Assam," in *Anusandhāna*, Centenary Celebration Commemorative Volume (Guwahati: Kamarupa Anusandhāna Samiti 2012, 152-155).

Chapter Five

[422] B. K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya* (Gauhati: Lawyer's Book Stall 1961, 35); D.C. Sircar, *The Sakta Pithas*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass 1973, 15). The original Kāmākhyā temple was destroyed during the Muslim invasion in the early 16th century CE, and the present temple was re-built in its place. The temple has no image, but has a symbol: a *yoni* representing the procreative force of the Mother Goddess.

[423] Guwahati has a total municipal area of 264 sq. kms. In the 1970s, the newly notified corporation boundary of Guwahati included the urban agglomeration of the Pandu town, along with the rural agglomeration of sixty-two villages. See H. N. Sharma and J. Borah, "Environmental Pattern and Socio-Economic Changes in the Peri-Urban Villages of Guwahati City," *Journal of the North-East India Geographical Society* XV, nos.1 and 2 (Guwahati: Gauhati University 1984, 78-82).

[424] Conservation of a heritage site relates to protection, and restoration to its original form. It is also associated with the collection, care, and management, of the broader aspects of culture such as art, architecture, and museums, etc.

[425] Sacred sites may be differentiated from other forms of archaeological sites and cultural heritage, in that they represent, and are imbued with, sacred or spiritual values, by religious beliefs and/or faith. See Myra Shackley, *Managing Sacred Sites* (London and New York: Continuum 2001).

[426] Stovel Herb, et.al., eds., *Conservation of Living Religious Heritage*, ICCROM Conservation Studies 3 (Rome: International Study for the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property 2005, 2).

[427] The term 'heritage' is used in a broad sense to include inherited traditions, monuments, objects, and culture. It is also a component of far-sighted urban and regional planning.

[428] 'Historic' is understood not just in terms of old, but as a source for the discipline of history, associated with a meaning and value.

[429] Sustainable urban development requires consideration of the entire ecosystem supporting such development, including prevention and mitigation of adverse environmental impacts occurring outside urban areas; the natural environment being the homeland of indigenous people.

[430] *List of Tourist and Religious Locations under Category II Sites-Annexure X*, File No. 4/1/2013-14/SADP Information and Public Awareness (I&PA) Group (New Delhi: Ministry of New and Renewable Energy Government of India, January 16 2014).

[431]http://tcpassam.gov.in/Assam_Notified_Urban_Areas%20_Other_than_Guwahati_%20Building_Rules_2014.pdf, accessed May 24 2017.

[432] Wasbir Hussain, "India's Northeast: The Super-highway to Southeast Asia?" *Southeast Asia Research Programme (SEARP)*, 104 (New Delhi: Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies June 2009).
[433] J. B. Fuller, "Introduction." In: Alan Playfair, *The Garos*. London: Nutt 1909, *xii*).
[434]According to *Census of India: 2011*, Guwahati Municipal Area and Guwahati Metropolitan Area (GMA) had a population of 963,429 and 968,549, respectively. The GMA area comprises about twenty-two percent of the state's urban population.
[435] Guwahati is one of the most rapidly growing cities in India. The city's population grew from just two lakhs in 1971 CE, to more than five lakhs in 1991 CE, and in the *Census of India 2001* the city's population was 808,021. See also *Census of India: 1971*: *Assam Town Directory*. Directorate of Census Operations Series: 2-5; Angur Begum, *"*Guwahati City and its Ecodegradation," *The Socioscan: An International Quarterly Journal of Ethno and Social Sciences* 3 (nos. 1 and 2 2011, 31).
[436] Renu Desai et al*., "*Poverty, Inequality and Violence in Indian Cities: Towards Inclusive Planning and Policies," *Center for Urban Equity, Working Paper 24* (Ahmedabad: Centre for Urban Equity. Center for Environment Planning and Technology University May 2014).
[437]*Protected Archaeological Sites and Monuments* (Gauhati: Directorate of Archaeology, Department of Cultural Affairs, Government of Assam, 2018), accessed April 16 2018, https://archaeology.assam.gov.in/information-services/ detail/protection-declaration-of-the-archaeological-sitesmonuments.
[438] The official definition of the term, 'Historic Urban Landscape' (HUL) was made in 2005 CE. Today, historic cities constitute the largest heritage category on the World Heritage List, which includes archaeological sites, historic towns, architectural monuments, and complexes and cultural landscapes.
[439] Ballarat, one of Australia's fastest growing cities was the first city to become part of an international program to implement UNESCO's Recommendation on the HUL in 2013. The *Vienna Memorandum on World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture-Managing the Historic Urban Landscape*, UNESCO World Heritage Centre and City of Vienna, 2005, was adopted in 2011, accessed August 17 2017, http://whc.unesco.org/uploads/activities/ documents/activity-47-2.pdf.
[440] The Recommendations on HUL, adopted by the 36th Session of UNESCO General Conference on November 30 2011, provides guidance at international level. Yet it is up to the national and local governments to adapt, disseminate, facilitate, and monitor its implementation.
[441] *Proceedings of the Round Table on Heritage and the Conservation of Historic Urban Landscapes,* Organised by the Canada Research Chair on Built Heritage, Montreal (March 9 2006, 83).
[442] B. K. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya,* 34.
[443] N. N. Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Mother Goddess* (Calcutta: Indian Studies Past and Present 1971, 30). There is no archaeological evidence to support the statement.

[444] G. Adhikary, "The Concept of Nuclear Area and the Temples of Kāmākhyā." *Proceedings of North East India History Association,* XXth Session (Shillong: Department of History, North Eastern Hill University, 1999), 69-79. After the downfall of the Pala dynasty, the Kāmarupa kingdom disintegrated into different domains in the 12th century CE under the Chutiyas, Ahoms, Kacharis, Baro-Bhuyans and Kamatas. The Koch dynasty ruled over the Kamata kingdom.
[445] G. Adhikary. "Function and Power of the *Doloi* in the Temples of Kāmrūp." *Proceedings of North East India History Association,* XXIst Session (Shillong: Department of History, North Eastern Hill University 2000, 35).
[446] Nīlācala Hill is situated on the southern banks of the Brahmaputra River and is one of the biggest hills in Guwahati.
[447] P. C. Sarma, A*rchitecture of Assam* (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan 1988, 13).
[448] R. D. Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam* (New Delhi: Agamkala Prakashan 1985, 76).
[449] Arun Bhattacharjee, *Icons and Sculptures of Early and Medieval Assam* (Delhi: Inter-India Publications 1978, 47-48).
[450] Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam,* 91.
[451] Mridul Bora, et.al., "Studies on the Distribution Pattern and Habitat Utilization Pattern by Indian Leopard," in *Issues and Trends of Wildlife Conservation in Northeast India*, eds., Lalnuntluanga et.al. (Aizwal: Mizo Academy of Science 2014, 222).
[452] "Kamakhya Body Quiet on Archaeological Survey of India Indian Oil Corporation Conservation Move," *The Times of India,* Guwahati, February 24 2016, accessed February 4 2017, http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/51116262.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest& utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst.
[453] *North Eastern Space Applications Centre: Annual Report: 2006-07* (Umiam, Meghalaya: Department of Space, Government of India, September 2007). Remote sensing and Geographic Information System (GIS) is an effective tool to study forest cover, vegetation, and anthropogenic changes in land-uses and land-covers.
[454] *The Urban (T) Department Government of Assam Notification*, February 20, 2014, File No. UDD (T) 42/ 2008/vol-2/116.
[455] Gajendra Adhikary, *Religious Establishments of Assam: Studies in their Socio-economic Background* (Guwahati: Chandra Prakash 2006, 120).
[456] Donald Getz. *Event Studies: Theory, Research and Policy for Planned Events* (UK: Oxford 2007).
[457] Colin Renfrew, "*The Archaeology of Religion*," 55.
[458] Prescilla Field, *"Is Divinity a Gender Issue? The Case of the Minoan "Goddess."* Master's diss. (Oslo: Department of Archaeology, Conservation and Historical Studies, University of Oslo 2007, 14).
[459] Gavin D. Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996, 20, 65-66).

[460] Rachel MacLean, "Gender in the Archaeology of World Religion?" in *Archaeology and World Religion*, ed., Timothy Insoll (London: Routledge 2001, 195).
[461] The history of the World Heritage is marked by Conventions and Recommendations viz., *Recommendation on Landscapes and Sites (1962), Venice Charter (1964), World Heritage Convention (1972), Recommendation on Historic Areas (1976), Florence Charter (1982), Washington Charter (1987), Intangible World Heritage Convention (2003) and Convention on Cultural Diversity (2005).*
[462] Globalization does not simply refer to a global culture that people of the world would supposedly share, rather it is concerned with how people increasingly form local cultures, traditions, and identities in terms of general global models. In the 1990s, connectivity was seen largely in terms of the rise of global markets. Today, this connectivity is being looked at in terms of the rise of global culture. See Ian Buchanan, *A Dictionary of Critical Theory* (UK: Oxford University Press 2001, 202-203).
[463] David Peaty, "Sacred Sites, Conservation and Tourism," *Bulletin of Universities and Institutes*, 19 (Kyoto: Ritsumeikan University 2011, 195).
[464] Shailaja Tripathi, "Monuments Gone Missing," *The Hindu*. New Delhi, April 17 2013.

Chapter Six

[465] M. M. Sharma, Khānamukh Copper Plates of Dharmapāla (v.7), in M. M. Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam* (Gauhati: Department of Publications, Gauhati University 1978, 231).
[466] B. K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam: Early Period* (Gauhati: Lawyers Book Stall 1951, 210).
[467] Hemchandra Raychaudhuri, *Materials for the Study of the Early History of the Vaisnava Sect* (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation 1975 (reprint), 104).
[468] Suvira Jaiswal, *The Origin and Development of Vaisnavism* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 1981, 187-188).
[469] Sharma, Śaṅkara-Nārayanā Stone Image Inscription, 310.
[470] R. D. Choudhury, *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam: Pre-Ahom Period* (New Delhi: Agamkala Prakashan 1985, 19).
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[473] R. D. Choudhury and D. Chutia, "A Note on the Archaeological Finds at Narakāsur Hill," *Journal of the Assam Research Society* 19 (1970): 24-31.
[474] Sharma, The Uttarbarbil Copper Plates of Balavarman III (vv.12, 22), 134.
[475] Siân Jones, *The Archaeology of Ethnicity: Constructing Identities in the Past and the Present* (London: Routledge 1997, 1).

GLOSSARY OF SANSKRIT WORD(S)/TERM(S)

Abhayamudra	: Pose of hand offering protection, in which the palm of the right hand, facing the devotee, is held with fingers upwards
Acala	: Immovable
Adhiṣṭhāna	: Pedestal
Agrahāras	: Grant of rent-free land, typically by a king to Brāhmaṇas for religious purpose
Akṣamālā/ Akṣasūtra	: String of beads
Akshi	: Tree spirit
Alaṁkāra	: Ornament
Anji	: Symbol written as invocation at the beginning of texts
Ardhayuvatīśvara	: Composite male-female form of Śiva, and His consort Parvatī
Āsana	: A sitting *yoga* posture
Āsura	: Evil spirits; demons
Atibhanga	: Dance form with extreme flexion, with twists in arms and legs
Avatāra	: Incarnation of a Hindu deity, especially Viṣṇu
Āyudha	: Instrument; weapon
Banaliṅga	: Stone found in nature; symbol of worship
Bardeori	: Chief Priest
Bhakat	: Member of Vaiṣṇavite monastic order
Bhakta	: Devotee
Bhiṭṭi	: Wall of temple
Brahmottar	: Land granted free of rent to Brāhmaṇas
Cakra	: Wheel
Damaru	: Small hour-glass shaped drum
Daṇḍa	: Staff
Darpāṇa	: Mirror
Dasavatāra	: Ten Incarnations
Dēvadāsī	: A female dedicated to service of deity; of Devadasi system

Devottar : Land granted free of rent to temples and religious institutions
Dhanu : Bow
Dvārapalika : Door-keepers of temple
Dvāra-Sirapaṭṭi : Lintel
Dvibhaṇga : Posture with bend at the waist
Ekachakra-ratha : Single-wheeled chariot
Gadā : Mace
Gaja-munda : Elephant-head
Gaṇa : Spirit accompanying a deity
Garbhagriha : Sanctum sanctorum
Gopī : Cowherd Girl
Graha : Planet
Hara : Necklace
Iṣṭadeva : Worshipper's favourite deity
Jaṭāmukūṭa : Matted hair
Kapāla : Ritual bowl
Karanda-mukūṭa : A hairstyle
Kaupina : Loincloth
Khaḍga : Double-edged straight sword
Khaṭvānga : A ritual staff
Kheṭaka : Shield
Kiritamukūṭa : A tall conical crown, typically worn by Viṣṇu
Kuṇḍala : Earring
Lalitāsana : A sitting position
Liṅga : Phallic symbol
Mahisāsura : Demon
Mālā : Garland
Mantra : Repetition of sound formula
Manusa : Man
Mudra : Gesture
Muṇḍa : Skull
Muṇḍamālā : Garland of skulls
Mūrtī : Image, idol, statue
Muṣika : Mouse
Nāmasaṁkīrtana : Devotional Song
Nāmghar : Large prayer halls of Neo-Vaiṣṇavite tradition
Naṭī : 'Female dancers in temples', of the Devadasi system

Nṛtyamūrtī : Dancing image
Padmā : Lotus
Padmāsana : Sitting in lotus posture
Paraśu : Battle-axe
Pāśa : Noose, trap
Pātra : Vessel
Pināka : Bow
Pīṭha : Holy seat of Mother Goddess
Prabha : Light
Praśāsti : Eulogy
Pretāsana : Corpse pose
Ratha : Chariot
Ratni : Jewel
Śāṅkha : Conch Shell
Samudra-Manthana : 'Churning of the Sea'
Sanghata-murti : Composite image
Samabhaṅga : Standing erect
Saṁkirtana : Performing art involving ritual singing, with drumming and dancing
Sānta : Pacific form
Sapta Mātrikās : 'Seven Divine Mothers'
Sarpa : Serpent
Satra : Neo-Vaiṣṇavite monastery
Saumya : Mild
Sayana : Reclining position; of Buddha and Viṣṇu
Siddhi : Attainment of spiritual liberation
Siṁha : Lion
Sirapaṭṭi : Lintel
Stambha : Pillar
Sthānaka : Standing
Śūla : Spear
Svasti : Symbol of well-being
Svayam-Pradhanamūrtī : Independent image
Tandava : A cosmic dance; a vigorous, divine dance, performed by Śiva
Tantra : Esoteric practices of some Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain sects
Tathagata : An honorific title of Gautama Buddha; or a person who has

attained perfection by following Buddhist principles

Tribhaṅga : Standing posture with three bends at neck, shoulder, and waist

Triśūla : Trident

Trivikrama : Three steps

Ugra-mūrtī : Aggressive form of deity

Vāhana : Animal vehicle/mount of deity

Vaijayanti : Garland

Vajrāsana : A meditating pose

Vāmana : Dwarf

Vanamālā : Garland of forest flowers

Varṇāśramadharma : Four orders of society and stages of life according to the *Vedic* tradition

Vastra : Cloth, garment

Vedya : 'Temple woman'

Veena : A stringed musical instrument

Viratarupa : Huge, colossal; of universal form

Yajña : Sacrificial rituals

Yogāsana : Seated in *yoga* pose

Yoni : Female principle representing Mother Goddess

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Sacred Landscapes

Fig. 2-1. Madankāmdev Temple Ruins, Baihata Chariali, Kāmrūp District, Guwahati

Fig. 2.2. Madankāmdev Temple Ruins of Uma-Māheśvara

Fig. 3-1. Śri Sūryapāhār, Śiva-*Liṅga*s

Fig. 4-1. Śri Sūryapāhār Archaeological Remains, Goalpārā District

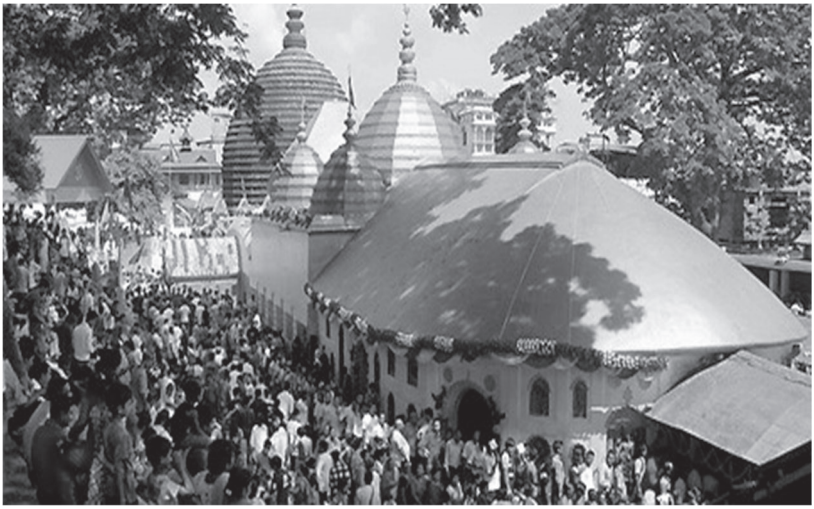

Fig. 5-1. Kāmākhyā Temple, Nīlācala Hill, Kāmrūp Metropolitan District, Guwahati

Fig. 5-2. Nīlācala Hill, Abode of Goddess Kāmākhyā