CHAPTER VII.

ARCHITECTURE, SCULPTURE AND MINOR ARTS.
Section 1

ARCHITECTURE.

The erection of temples, palaces and forts in Central Assam may be traced back to the Gupta period. In the Mediaeval period a number of buildings were constructed in various parts of this area. Unfortunately not a single ancient temple or any other building, in the original form, is now preserved in this region. Their ruins are lying scattered here and there. The epigraphical and literary evidences throw light on the construction of numerous shrines dedicated to Śiva, Sūrya, Viṣṇu, DeVī and other deities. The Mārkandeya Purāna (Ch. 109) refers to an early temple of Sūrya built in Kāmarūpa. The Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-Tsang refers to 'hundreds of Deva temples' which were extant during the time of his visit (C. 643 A.D.).¹ The Tezpur grant of Vanamāla² states that the king repaired the lofty temple dedicated to Śiva, which had fallen down. According to the Gauhati grant of Ratnapāla³ "studded the earth with white-washed temples, enshrining the idols of Sambhu." In the Nowgong grant of Vanamāla,⁴ mention is

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2. V. 24; Bhattacharya, P.N., op.cit., PP. 54-70.
3. V. 10; ibid., PP. 116-29.
4. V. 14; ibid., PP. 71-88.
made of a row of palaces erected by the king, which had a
large number of rooms decorated with carvings. The Bargao
grant of Ratnapāla\(^1\) refers to a city named Durjaya, which
had magnificent buildings constructed by the ruler. The
Silimpur inscription\(^2\) records the erection of a Siva
temple. The Gāchtal pillar inscription\(^3\) mentions that the
king Viśvasundaradeva ordered one Chandrakānta to repair
a Siva temple which had been damaged by the Mlecchas.

These records show that a number of temples had
been constructed during the early Mediaeval period. But
the present structural remains of these are relatively
scanty. The nature of the soil and climate are mainly
responsible for the destruction of the monuments. Again,
physical conditions encourage the rapid growth of jungle
vegetation. Once a building ceased to be cared for, the
creeping shrubs and trees speedily took charge, soon to
tear it to pieces so that before long it was merely an
unrecognisable mound of ruins. The character of the
country has also affected the nature of the building
material used, and this again has influenced the style of
its architecture.\(^4\) According to Gait: "Nature has vied

2. E.I., XIII, PP. 283-95.
4. Brown, Percy, Indian Architecture (Buddhist and Hindu
   period), Bombay, P. 185 ff.
with man in destroying them. The Brahmaputra valley is
an alluvial country, and the impetuous, snow-fed rivers
which debouch from the Himalayas find so little resistance
in its friable soil that they are constantly carving out
new channels and cutting away their banks; consequently no
buildings erected in their neighbourhood can be expected
to remain for more than a limited time, except at a few
points like Gauhati, Tezpur, Nowgong, where the solid rock
pierces through the alluvium. Further, though occurring
at distant intervals, violent earthquakes are, in Assam,
quite as great the cause of destruction as fluvial action.
A less sudden but almost equally potent, cause of damage
is found in the luxuriant vegetation of the country. The
religious zeal, which led the early Muslim invaders, was
also one of the causes for the destruction of the temples.\(^1\)
The architecture of the period from the middle of the 4th
to the 12th centuries A.D. and the history of the plastic
art of Assam has now been traced. Stone sculptures and
rock carvings have been discovered at different places
in Assam. These indicate that the mediaeval architecture
and plastic art of Assam were closely related to the general
architecture and art forms developed in northern India.\(^2\)

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2. Ibid.
Good supply of timber was available in Assam. Bamboo is also grown in plenty in this region. According to the Atharva Veda, 1 common houses were built of bamboo posts on raised up bamboo roof frames covered up with grass, the number of roofs being either two or four, "catuspadgah ochadih." 2

The two or four roofed thatched building of the common man must have had slanting or curved roofs in the areas of Assam where the rainfall was naturally heavy. 3

ARCHITECTURAL REMAINS.

Darrang District:

The earliest remains, belonging to the late Gupta period, are located in Dah Parbatia, a village near Tezpur town. A door-frame, being part of the oldest temple so far discovered in Assam, is characteristic of the early Gupta style of architecture. Two door-jambs (dvāra-sākhās), each having five vertical bands (pattās) are joined with a

2. A.V. III. 7.3.
lintel above (Plate. A... Fig. 22.23). The lower part of the right jamb is occupied by the river goddess Ganges (Fig. 24...). The while on the left jamb stands Yamuna. (Fig. 25...). Behind their heads, halos are depicted, indicating the heavenly nature of the two rivers. Both the rivers are standing with the garlands in their hands and are attended by a number of miniature figures. At the bottom of the right jamb there are two female figures, one standing with a chāmarā and the other kneeling in front with a flat receptacle containing flowers. A third female figure is seen with a chāmarā to the right of the goddess. To the left of the halo a nāgī is shown in the hybrid form, kneeling in anjali hasta posture. To the right, two geese are depicted flying towards the main figure. At the bottom of the left jamb there are only two female attendants, standing on either side of the main figure of Yamuna. On this jamb, too, a nāgī in the same posture of kneeling to the right of the halo is shown along with two geese flying to the left of it.

The outermost vertical band of the door-jambs extends beyond the lintel. The first two innermost bands are adorned with scroll (patralatā) design. The second band has the tail of the nāgī continuing horizontally on the lintel. The tails of the serpents are held by the
figure of Garuḍa in high relief of the lower part of the lintel. The third band consists of ornamental foliage having a straight stem with amorini clinging to it. This band, too, runs horizontally like the first two. The fourth band is made up of four superimposed panels containing human figures and lotus-bud (padma kosas) alternatively. This pilaster is surmounted by an ornamental vase and foliage (ghaṭa-pallava) design. The last band is a double inter-wined creeper forming conventional rosettes, which design is continued on the side-projection of the lintel.

The lintel consists of a separate piece in which the topmost horizontal band bears on it five caitya windows (Chandrasāla) with the figures of deities. The central one is occupied by the seated figure of Śiva in the form of Lakuliśa, while the left and the right caitya windows are occupied by the figure of Kṛṣṇa and Sūrya respectively.

The door frame may be placed in circa 6th century A.D.

The shrine was built of bricks of various sizes, the largest one being 36.5x28-5.5 cms. The bottom course of the walls and the floor was laid in stone. The door frame which is described above is made of sandstone - and the measurement of each door jamb is 162x40 cms while the lintel is 175x33 cms. The sanctum of the temple is 274 cms square, and the pillars lying in the site are of the size
273x44 cms. The pillars are small and plain, and appear to have belonged to some later temple on the site.¹

The square shape of sanctum of this temple tallies very well with the square shaped early Gupta temples of Sāṇchi, Eran, Tigowa and other shrines of Northern India.

The ruins of a second Gupta temple are scattered in the jungle of Majgaon² (near Tezpur town), containing broken pillars (stambhas), doorjambs, lintels etc. This temple was built of stone. A huge lintel (251x77x44 cms) is lying there, having three bands, on which the topmost band contains five miniature ornamental temple designs and four caitya window motif depicted alternatively (Plate. fig. 3). Inside the caitya windows, there are figures of seated deities. The second band is decorated with scroll (patralata) design with rosettes. The third band is adorned with diamond shaped rosettes and the centre exhibits the figure of Gaṇeśa. A door jamb (Plate. fig. 4) measuring 196x64x38 cms is lying at a little distance from the ruins in the same jungle, on the bottom of which three figures are depicted. From left, the first and the second

¹ A.R.A.S.I., 1925-26, PP. 41-42.
² Choudhury, R.D., op.cit., P. 119-209.
figures standing on lotus, hold a staff and triśūla in their hands while the third figure is of the river goddess, Ganga, standing on a Makara in tribhanga attitude, holding a garland in both of her hands. A door-frame originally from this ruins has been fixed in a modern temple of the village. The door-joins contain four vertical bands, the innermost band is decorated with floral design, the second is of scroll design, the third band is decorated with twisted serpents and the fourth having floral (puppa) designs upon a ghata or interspaced with a small āmalaka. At the bottom of the jambs, there are the figures of Ganga and Yamuna with their attendants, in the left and right jamb respectively. Ganga stands on Makara (Plate... Fig. 28.) while Yamuna on Kacchapa (Pl. 27... Fig. 29.) and both are in tribhanga attitude holding garlands in both the hands. The attendant to the extreme right of Ganga is holding a staff and the middle one holding triśūla and the same type of attendants are shown in the case of Yamuna to her left side. The lintel is plain and carving the same bands of the door jambs, has been carried up horizontally. On stylistic ground this may be assigned to the 8th-9th centuries A.D.

The Ramuni hill, near Tezpur town, is covered with the ruins of a group of temples. A group of nine temples has been noticed. Six of these shrines are situated in a
large rectangular enclosure, namely one in each of its four corners and two large oncs in the centre, the seventh stands to the east. The pavements inside the garbhagrihas of both of the larger shrines in the middle of the enclosure are still intact. One of the central temples is slightly smaller in size than the other. The larger temple which faces the north and an antarala with circular sculptured door-step intervenes between its sanctum and its mandapa, according to Banerji,¹ must have been gigantic in size. The shaft of a pillar noticed by him measures 326 cms in length and 51 cms in diameter. A cross-shaped bracket (135x145 cms) and a huge lintel (204x46 cms) ornamented with horn kirttimukhas are the important specimens. Another huge lintel ² (252x72x70 cms) is noticed in the site. There are two raised panels on this lintel one in the centre and the other on the left side, and on both the sides of these two raised panels there are niches. The space between the two panels and extreme right of the lintel is divided into six niches, and these niches are separated from each other by a round pilaster (laghu stambha). The panel on the left contains a sthanaka figure of Brahma with an

2. The right end of the lintel is broken. Probably there was another raised panel containing the figure of god with attendants.
attendant on either side while the central panel is occupied by Sūrya holding stalked lotuses in both the hands with two attendants in the same pose. All the niches contain the figure of deities, probably Navagrahās, one in each (Pl. X. Fig.3/4). A Visnuavatara pillar (164x72x47 cms) having two round pilasters with a trefoil arch on the top in the centre and an exactly similar panel or recessed corner of each side has been found. The small panels contain figurines of attendants. The central panels contain the figure of Nara-Sīṁha, Parasuṛāma, Balarāma, Varaḥa and Rāma the incarnations of Viṣṇu (Pl. X. Fig.3/4). The door jambs, lintels with miniature temple designs, pillars, friezes with decorations, square brackets with oblong panels and bas-reliefs, and plinth mouldings are the important specimens noticed in the site. The ruins may be placed between 9th and 10th centuries A.D. The temples of this site were attributed to different gods like Viṣṇu, Sūrya, Śiva, goddess Durgā etc. 1

The remains of ancient buildings and temples as well as sculptures are scattered in the Tezpur town. Most of

them are fragments and some of them are now preserved in
the Cole park, some are lying in the Mission compound
and others are near the Deputy Commissioner's residence.
These remains belong to "three different periods of history
and therefore must have belonged to separate buildings."¹

The most remarkable objects of the first group
are two pillars and one huge lintel, which are now preserved
in Cole park. The pillars are with octagonal bottom, plain
shaft² and capital raising in four stages. Two bands are
ornamented. Among these two, one broad band is adorned
with Kārttimukhas, the shape of this band portion of the
capital is octagonal. The lower band is adorned with
dentils (Pl. X2, Fig. 33). A lintel (208x45 cms) belongs to
the same period and is divided into two different parts.
The upper part represents five miniature temple designs
with Śiva lingas shown in each of them. In the lower part
a continuation of the ornamentation of the jambs, viz, two
vertical bands, one containing meandering creepers and the
other of rosettes is noticed. In the centre of the lintel,
there is a small niche, which contains the image of Ganesā.

The second group of sculptures consists of door-sills,
door-jambs, lintels, and other architectural pieces of Tezpur

² The shaft of the pillar is fine plain and not sixteen-sided,
as described by earlier writers.
town area, which have been collected and preserved in the Cole park. Among those objects, a huge lintel (312x78x77 cms) having three raised panels, one in the centre, and the other two in two sides, is important (Plate. 77. Fig. 8. 5).

The panel on the left contains the figure of Brahmā in sthānaka attitude, with an attendant on each side; and the central panel is occupied by Sūrya in the same attitude. In the extreme right panel stands Śiva with the attendants. The space between these raised panels is divided into six niches, three to the left of the central panel and three to the right. Each of the niches contains one deity, which cannot be precisely identified. The niches are separated from each other by round pilasters of 61 cms height. This temple, a gigantic one, was dedicated to the god Sūrya.1

The majority of the carved stones in the Cole park are collected from the plinth mouldings and string-courses of the huge temple. The string-courses were ornamented with Kīrttimukhas of various shapes and sizes and sunken panels containing ornamental rosettes and meandering creepers. In some of these there are projecting niches flanked by round pilasters containing deities. The outlines of the plinth mouldings show that the mediaeval architects of

central Assam employed the same motifs and figures as those of northern India. Some of these ornaments appear in relief as diamondshaped and circular rosettes, set in between arabesque work of a type known from the temples of Orissa. \(^1\) A remarkable and huge Dasāvatāra pillar (311x76 cms), contains the figures of Brahma and Matsya, Kūrma, Varāha, Narasiṅha and Rāma incarnations of Viṣṇu with attendants.

Besides these, there are some door jambs, lintels, friezes and other architectural pieces depicting music party and other scenes, ornamental and floral designs etc. They are lying in the Mission compound and near the Deputy Commissioner's residence. All these architectural pieces and sculptures range between 10th and 12th centuries A.D.

The extensive ruins, lying at a place locally called Viśvakarmathān in Singri, show that there were several temples these, probably nine in number. The remains consist of carved stones, sculptures, door-frame, pillars, ceiling piece etc. Some images of Gandharva waiting maids, damsels in dancing posture, some nude figures, representing amorous scenes are noticed. One door-lintel (184x67x59 cms) having two raised panels which are divided into large niches in

\(^1\) Ibid.
the centre with smaller one on either side. The left panel is occupied by a figure of Śiva in sthānaka attitude, while the extreme right one is occupied by Viṣṇu in the same posture. The space between the two panels and the extreme left end is divided into six niches, and they are separated from each other by round pilasters, and each of the niches contains one of the navagrahas. The extreme left side of the lintel is broken (Pl. X. Fig. 36.). Another lintel (267 x 60 x 77 cms) contains the figures of two lions (Vyālaka) and two female figures on the extreme right and left of the lions. Both the female figurines are depicted in a standing posture with lotus in their hands.

A door jamb (176 x 53 x 48 cms), contains three pratīhāri figures on the bottom. The left one is a female figure standing in tribhanga attitude, while the middle and the right ones are male figures one holding a bow and arrow and the other a staff respectively. There are four hands raised vertically above these three figures, which are adorned with rosettes, meandering creepers etc. According to S. Kakati, the temple was dedicated to goddess Durgā, as one image of Durgā was discovered in the ruins. This view is also supported by R. D. Choudhury. According to R. M. Nath, it

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belongs to a Śiva temple. It is more likely that the temple was dedicated to Śiva, as the Śaivite symbols are frequently noticed in the ruins. Again the ruins show that there were many temples, and one of them might have been dedicated to goddess Durgā.

At a little distance from the Singri ruins, the ruins of a small stones temple are noticed. In the Singri area scattered ruins are found in many places. In Totalā Basti, a frieze (53x20 cms) bearing six women worshipper is noticed. A modern temple also stands there, erected during late Ahome period or still later, called Guptesvār temple, where a door-frame of the pre-Ahome period is fixed at the entrance to the Garbhagriha. The left door jamb and the lintel containing the figures of the Dasāvatāras are noticed. Similar door-frames are known from other sites in Assam.

In Baman pāhār, (Mangaldoi subdivision) ruins of a stone temple containing mouldings, carved stone and capitals, are seen. The ground plan, which is intact, shows the

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2. A door frame is noticed in Nowgong Park, which was collected from Bujāgosainthān, and now preserved in the park.
Sapāratha-plan. The pedestal and the deity had been taken away and now there remains only the hole of the site surrounded by a small drain. A stone slab two metres-square, with a lotus carved on it, seems to be a part of the ceiling. At Mathajhar, ruins of a brick temple, door-frame, and part of lotus-carved ceiling are seen. Besides these places, scattered ruins of temples, and sculptures are noticed in Silputā Mandir, Bhāṅgā Mandir gaon (near Dhekiājuli), Niz Barsalā (near Dhekiājuli), Dewalkhanda (near Majbat Railway station), Singimari, Narikalar Bhāṅgā Mandir, Gaur Nitain tea estate, Barpukhuripar, Ketekibari, Duḍā Mádhab Devālay (Pratapgar tea estate), Rāṅgāgara tea estate (Manager's compound), Behāli, Biswanaththān, Galsepa (Gohpur), Kalyanithān, Kalyani Devalay and other places of Darrang district.

Nowgong district:

In this district, several sites of the temple ruins have been discovered. At Gosainjuri there are nine small mounds containing ruins of temples, close to each other,
facing each other in two parallel lines. The first mound contains a brick structure of a small shrine of 183 cms. square. The second mound is small, containing a gneiss door-sill and a lintel of block stone (168x38 cms) with a carved lotus on it in the centre. The third mound is low, and the capital of a pillar, which shows on two of its sides the designs of gavākshaś (circular windows) surmounted by trefoil, was revealed. Another piece of pillar of the same stone shows a row of recessed and projecting moulding. The fourth mound shows traces of quartz pieces and a fragmentary pillar of gneiss. The fifth and sixth mounds have yielded, respectively, a door lintel carved with Yavanika design and a round gneiss piece. The seventh mound is higher than the others, and reveals traces of brick structures and a sculpture of Viṣṇu (162x83 cms). The last mound is comparatively bigger with abundant bricks on it. Door lintel, door-jambs and a broken sculpture of Viṣṇu (77 cms height) have been discovered.

At Mikirati near Dabokā, there are nine mounds existing in three rows at equal distance (Plate.XII.Fig.43.). The central one is the biggest, and the others are small in size. The central one reveals brick structures and a

pedestal of grey soap stone. The garbhagriha of the shrine shows a place 270 cms square and 200 cms deep. The enclosure passage measures 276x88 cms. On the north east corner of the group of shrines one Śiva linga with yoni-pith has been found. Images of Umā-Mahesvara and Viṣṇu are noticed in the site. All the images now preserved in a thatched house. Some stone pieces bearing carvings such as foliage, huge lions standing on vanquished elephants and a god seated on a bull are noticed. A heap of ruins of a stone Śiva temple is seen at a little distance of these group of temples.

In Ākāśigāmā,¹ there are the ruins of more than one temple of gneiss, which appear to be Śaivite in character. A vast number of stones lie scattered here including pillars, capitals, some with carvings, perforated windows, āmalakas, door lintels, door jambs, gargoyles, pedestals and moulded architraves. A square piece shows courses of rosaries over a tilaka design placed in its turn between two leaves. Panels with figures such as Śiva-dhyānī, dwarfed gaṇas, dancing Gaṇeśa and miniature replicas of temples, pieces of entablature with projecting petals, ceiling

¹. Ibid., A.R.A.S.I., 1936-37, PP. 54-61.
pieces with full-blown lotus designs, pillars of octagonal bases and with central belts, vases with Vyālas flanking, capitals with cut ends of joists in the shape of scroll held by leafy belts have been found. Figures of bulls and lingas are scattered and one of lingas is still being worshipped. Among the carvings on the slabs and panels, a noteworthy one is that of Śiva as Sulapāni in abhānga pose flanked by two female attendants, one holding chamara and the other with hands in aṅjali-mudrā, standing with bent leg on the back of an elephant.

At Gahtal, traces of at least two Śiva temples each perhaps consisting of sanctum, an antechamber and a mandapa. The carvings on the door jambs and lintels, consisting of Gaṅgā, worshippers, Śiva in sthānaka attitude with rosary in the right hand and the trident in the left or seated in Yoga with four hands, dwarfs, vases flanked by Vyālas (lions), elephants, flowers, foliage courses with animal and birds insect, twisted serpents, and vases placed on āmalakas have been found. Other architectural fragments are ceiling slabs bearing lotus designs, pillars bases of odd shapes, capital shaped like āmalakas, and

1. Ibid.
pieces with recessed edges or the sarvatobhadra type. On
the fragmentary door jambs figures holding kamandalas and
the dvārapālas, holding saivitic symbols, such as śūla and
pāśa are noticed. The remains may be dated to 10th-11th
century A.D.

The entire structure is of granite.

At a place called Rajbari in Jugijan, we noticed
nine mounds containing ruins of stone temples of gneiss
stone lying scattered. The nine temples stand in three
rows; instead of the central one, the middle of the first
row is the biggest one. The temples were probably dedicated
to Śiva, as the Śiva lingas are still intact in some of the
ruins. In a small modern shrine in the site, an image of
Umā-Maheśvara is installed, which has been discovered from
the nearby river-bed.

The ruins contain pillars, lintels, carved with
temple minarets and Gaṇeśa, door-jamb with dvārapālas,
door sills, plinth mouldings, carved stone bearing
Gaja-simha motif etc.

About half a kilometre distance from this place,
ruins of a stone temple are noticed, which is locally called

Sankha Devi temple. Door jambs, lintels, pillars, capitals, door sills, carved slabs have been noticed in the ruins. One lintel (309x69 cms), having five horizontal bands which are the continuation from the door jambs is noticed. The first band adorned with diamond shape decoration, second with lotus petals, third plain, and in the centre of the fourth band, two hybrid female figures (upper portion human and lower of fish (?) Matsya kanya (?) holding flower-baskets in their hands and their tails continued into the jambs, are seen. In the centre of the lintel and just below those two figures goddess Yamuna is depicted. She is seated on a tortoise and her right leg is pendant, holding lotus or some other object in her raised right hand and with the left hand in bhumisparsa mudra. The fifth band is adorned with rosettes. Another door jamb (176x69 cms), contains three pratihari figures on the bottom of it. Above these figures there are four bands raised vertically, in which the first is adorned with rosettes, the second with twisted serpents, the third with petals and the fourth with diamond shaped decoration (Pl. 37, Fig. 38). One sculpture of Gajasimha motif is noticed which measures 104x108 cms.

At Na-Nath than in Jugiian, there are as many as nine brick temples. All are in ruins. So far, out of nine temples, seven have been dug out. All the temples contain
Siva lingas in intact condition. One broken image of Visnu was also found which measures 51 x 37 cms. The ruins contain door jambs, pillars, door sills, lintel, carving stones as well as moulding stones, besides the ground plans of the temple. On the pillars, engraved sculptures are seen. One shows a deer sitting on the back of another deer (Fig. 7a), indicating an amorous scene, and another one is of a horse (Fig. 7b). The ground plan of the temple consists of a square sanctum, and square mandapa. In the garbhagriha, the pedestal with Siva linga is still intact; steps also are shown for entering the garbhagriha from mandapa, and another series of door steps are also given at the main gate to enter the mandapa.

At Mahādeosāl, the ruins of temples are noticed, including door jambs, lintels, and other architectural pieces. A dasāvatāra pillar (106 x 32 x 25 cms) is found, which is installed in the modern shrine of the site. The site shows that there were more temples. A door lintel measuring 205 x 55 cms, is found adorned with miniature temple designs and trees alternately. On the centre of the lintel, on the lower band, goddess Gajalakṣmī is carved.

In Matharbāri,1 ruins of a Visnu temple are lying.

1. Ibid.
which contains door jambs, lintels, capitals, stone slabs with flanken lions and vase motif, plinth moulding etc. A broken image of Viṣṇu (42x24 cms) has been found. A door jamb with ornamental decoration with two figures of pratīharis on the bottom, is noticed. It measures 100x21 cms.

Traces of a group of temples, probably nine in number, showing the biggest one in the centre, have been noticed in Kawaimari. The temples were made of hard gneiss stone. Amidst the ruins, there is a door jamb (95x29 cms) bearing the figures of Dasāvatāras of Viṣṇu; a lintel having three raised panels, containing the figures of Viṣṇu, Śiva and Sūrya respectively with their attendants on both of their sides, with the space between them occupied by other deities. Besides these, images of Viṣṇu, parts of capitals, ceiling part with carved lotus, etc. are found. There is a lintel (153x46x30 cms) adorned with five miniature temples on the top horizontal band; and an image of Gaṇeśa is depicted on the centre of the lower horizontal band. A keystone over a window opening with circular twists, and a small elephant carved on a block of stone are found.

Ruins of a stone temple are found in Jis-juri tea garden (Chāpānālā). The ruins include door-ways; pillars, parts of sikharas and other carving stones, including spouts of a drain of elephant tusk design. One interesting pipe or
drain made of earthen pots of khōla type shape (a type of drum) adjoined with each other had been unearthed.

The ruins and stray objects and sculptures lying in the site or collected from the original places have been discovered at the following places: Bojāi, Āmtola, Chāngooki, Sītājakalā, Nowgong Park, Māyāng Hill, Pāsashila Pāhār, Basundhari Pāhār, Nabhaṅgā, Budābuḍā Pāhār, Mādhab Pāhār, Kāmpur, Sonakā, Kaliābor tea estate, Nāgānørka, Ānandāshram (Dabokā), Bahā Pāhār, Hātimurāh (Kaliābor), Kenduguri, Barpukhurīpār (Kawaimāri), Viṣṇu-purīthān (Kawaimāri), Budā Māyāng, etc. are important.

Mikir Hills:

In this district, the ruins of temples are scattered. We refer only to the important sites.

At a place called Devastān (Maudanga) about 3 kms. from Howraghat, there are nine mounds containing ruins of temples. Eight mounds are seen in two rows facing each other, and the ninth one is in one corner. The ruins consist of door jambs, lintels, stray images, Śiva lingas with pedestal

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., Vol. VIII, 1941, PP. 35-37.
and carved stones. The door jambs in one mound are plain with a little foliage decoration. The lintel, too, is plain and simple in decoration, with the image of Ganesa depicted in the centre of the lower part. The measurement of the door jamb is 148x37 cms, while the lintel is 176x38 cms. Another door jamb (139x46 cms) lies in the other mound; on the bottom of the door jamb, a dvārapāla, holding a staff is shown. A lintel (204x49 cms), adorned with miniature temple design, is noticed.

The next lintel (123x26 cms) shows the figure of Gaja-lakṣmī, seated on a double petalled padmāsana in the centre of the lintel, with two elephants pouring water on the goddess from each side (Pl. 24, Fig. 49). A frieze (162x91 cms) bearing an image of Uma-Mahiṣyāra in the centre of the lower panel with a lion and a bull at the feet and two flying vidyādharas on two sides on the top; and on the upper panel, there is the image of Gaja-lakṣmī in the centre with elephants on both sides pouring water from the pitchers held on their raised trunks; on the right side, a four armed Viṣṇu image with usual āyudhas and on the farthest end is Gaṇeṣa. All are in sitting posture.

A beautiful Siva linga in schist stone is found intact, seated not on the usual Yoni-pīṭha, but on a beautiful pedestal. In another mound, the image of Umā-Mahiṣvara partially broken is noticed, which measures 56x47 cms.
At Bugāgosain than (near Dokmoka) the ruins of temples of sandstones are found, containing door jambs, lintels, pillars, plinth mouldings etc. One decorated bull measuring 93x54 cms and a capital adorned with two lions seated up on two elephants are noticed. One doorframe containing the figures of dasāvatāras is now preserved in Nowgong park. There are two raised panels on the lintel, one in the centre and another on the left of the lintel, and each of them is divided into a large niche in the centre with a smaller one on either side. The central panel is occupied by the figure of Viṣṇu in sthānaka attitude with two attendants, while the left panel contains the figure of Śiva in sthanaka attitude with two attendants. The space between the raised panels and the right side of the central panel is divided into four niches, which contain figures which cannot be precisely identified. The left door jamb has two round pilasters with a trefoil arch on the top in the centre and an exactly similar panel or recessed corner of each side. The small panels contain female (?) attendants, while the central panel contains the figures of Narasimha and other incarnations of Viṣṇu. On the bottom of the right jamb, a dvārapāla is shown.

At Bargāṅgā, the ground floor of a quite big temple

2. Ibid.
measuring 26x24 metres, consisting of three parts - the sanctum (garbha griha), Mandapa and Ardhamandapa or Natmandir - is found. The sanctum was built with hard sandstone, while the Mandapa and Ardhamandapa were built of bricks. Two big stone bulls (121x91 cms) in crouching posture facing the temple are seen. Besides, there are two huge blocks of natural rocks standing side by side with a small gap in between. On the inside face of the left rock and facing the passage, the inscription of Bhutivarman is found. Two dvārapālas are carved at the entrance, one each on the rocks, 122 cms. high, holding battle-axe and wearing short dhoti. Another figure of Kīsaka is carved on the left rock. A door sill (118x23x36 cms) is adorned with lions and vase motif; and on both the sides of the sill represent a music party. (Pl. VIII. Fig. 46.)

At Domukhi-Jāljuri, the ruins of a temple are lying near a tank. A door jamb contains the figure of pratihāris, one of which is holding bow and arrow, and a female figure is in anjali mudrā. Three bands are raised vertically above these two figures, which are adorned with rosette and scroll design. The measurement of the jamb is 70x22 cms. There is also a lintel having three raised panels, the central one occupied by the figure of Śiva in atānakā attitude, and the right and the left panels occupied by Brahmā and Viṣṇu respectively in
sthānaka postures. The measurement of the lintel is 10\:x\:23\:x\:20 cms. The capital of a pillar adorned with lion motif (30x23 cms) is lying in the site. Another lintel (71x20x16 cms) has three panels, the central one occupied by Śiva, and the other two by Viṣṇu and Brahmā. An interesting decoration is noticed; the lower horizontal band on both the sides of the central panel is adorned with bull and lotus bud enclosed with the stalk. This type of decoration is rarely found. (Pl XXIV, Fig. 4).

In Chartherangphar gaon (Pasim Tārābasā), the ruins of temples are scattered containing parts of ceilings (130x114 cms) adorned with lotus design and carved stones, plinth mouldings, brackets, capitals of pillars etc. There is a broken four armed Viṣṇu image with Sarasvatī to the left side, on the upper kīrttimukh and with two Vidyādharas are. The measurement is 93x56 cms. One capital showing Akagrība bahodara motif measures 29x34 cms. A block of sandstone (60x31x23 cms) contains the figures of two decorated elephants. Both of the elephants are tuskers with decorated gādi on their backs, and with a bell hanging down by the side from a chain constructed with rings joined together. On another piece of slab, there is a male figure carrying a loaded basket on his head.

At Deopani, ruins of brick temples are noticed. From

the ruins a two-armed Vāmana, and two four-armed Viṣṇu images have been discovered, besides the images of Harihara, four-armed Durgā, Narasimha, four-armed Kāli, Ganeśa. The images of two-armed Viṣṇu and Harihara, containing four and three lines of inscription respectively, which are now preserved in the Assam State Museum, Gauhati. The other images are kept in a modern shrine of the site.

The ruins of temples, or rock-cut sculptures are noticed in Mahāmāyā hill, Bhoi-Parbat, Ganeshtān, Dīghalipānī, Tetelipukhuri and other places. Door-jambs, lintels, sculptures and other architectural pieces collected from the ruins of Phulani sides and Padumpukhuri are now lying in the premises of District Council Office, Dipchu and preserved in Dipchu park. Amidst those pieces, a door jamb (128 x 32 cms), containing the dasāvatāra figures with attendants is important. Another door jamb is plain, which contains on the bottom pratihāra figures, one holding bow and arrow. One specimen among the sculptures show a female figure holding mirror to arrange her hair. An image of Viṣṇu(?) or Sūrya, measuring 34 x 33 cms, is Yogāsana attitude. All the four arms are broken.

2. Ibid., Vol. VIII, PP. 85-90
3. Ibid.,
4. Ibid.,
The ruins of Deoparbat, comprising stone slabs of various sizes bearing sculptures and designs, are lying on the hill top. The floor of the original shrines still remains undisturbed. The roof and its supporting pillars and doorway have all tumbled down.

In one door jamb, dvārapālikas are depicted with coronets, and huge perforated patra kundalas. The vertical bands of the door jamb is adorned with drooping petals, encircling creepers with animal and human figures and strings of flying human beings. (Pl.: Fig. 9.) One specimen contains a pyramidal bracket with a bold design of sinuous lines flanking a central cusp. Another is in the shape of śikhara formed by a kṛttimukha with foliage issuing from it. The third shows a śikhara of foliage with āmalaka and lotus bud, final flanked by a god and goddess, both dancing upon elephants in turn supported by elephants. Remains of the Mukha-mandapa are noticed, and also pillar bases and capitals, carved and massive. There is a massive capital with huge kṛttimukha facing the four cardinal points with a worshipping Nāgi between every two points.

Plinths, entablature and pieces from basement (adhisthāna) and super-structure were all found scattered,

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and they bear carvings. One shows a row of busts with hands holding lotuses, tiara on head, flattened patra-kundalas designed like full-blown lotuses in the ears, a big circular tilaka mark on the forehead and with a number of necklaces. Another one shows a row of elephants in the same attitude of supporting the superstructures. Friezes, which might have come from the adhīsthāna of a mandapa, show in a series of panels scenes either domestic or drawn from Hindu mythology, including a few of an erotic character. The ruins may belong to 11th-12th cy. A.D.

Apart from the stone architecture, the tank and fortifications have been noticed. Ancient tanks are frequently found in almost all the sites of the ruins. The wells and ring-wells were not so popular in ancient time in Assam, and naturally tanks were dug for the supply of water. In Mangaldoi sub-division alone, there are 361 old tanks; some were dug during the Ahom period also. The biggest tank so far noticed in central Assam is the Harjjarā-pukhuri in Tezpur, which was constructed by a ruler of the śālastambha dynasty named Harjjarvarman, in 9th cy. A.D.

Nīrṇa temples: (pi. xiii, fig. 43)

We come accross many sites in Central Assam where the

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1. Sharma, Dineswar; Mangaldoir Burañjî, PP. 35-43; Assam Rajyik Panchayati Raj Sanmelan, Mangaldoi, PP. 1-3.
group of temples numbering nine has been noticed. The sites mainly are: Bāmuni pāhār, Devasthān (Maudaṅgā), Mikir-Āti, Gosāijnjuri, Rājbāri (Jugijān) and Nā-Mąththān. Probably in Kāwaimari, Mahādeośāl and Singri, there were also nine temples. References are not found as to why the nine temples were erected in one place. The temples were dedicated to the gods and goddesses such as Sīva, Viṣṇu, Sūrya, Durgā. No definite evidences have been found for the Nava grāha (nine planets). In some lintels figures of the Navagrahas¹ are noticed. The nine planets could have been popular in Assam during the early mediaeval period. The Navagraha temple at Gauhati is an example of this. On the basis of the nine planets, nine temples had been erected at one place, but dedicated to gods and goddesses other than Navagrahas. Possibly a few temples could have been dedicated to Navagrahas, too.

A group of nine temples is found at Alampur in Mahboobnagar district, adjoining Hyderabad. This group is popularly known as Nava-Brahmā temples; of them eight belong to the northern style and one (of Tarka Brahma) to the southern style.² The temples of the northern style are locally called

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¹ Navagrahas are noticed with the gods, Śiva, Viṣṇu, Brahmā and Sūrya on the lintels from Bāmuni pāhār, Colepark, Singri, Kāwaimari and other places.

² Krishna Deva, Temples of Northern India, New Delhi, P. 19.

According to the Arthasastra shrines should be erected in the centre of the city for goddess Aparājitā, Apratiḥata, Jayanta, Vaijayanta, Śiva, Vaiśravana, Asvina (divine physicians) and goddess Madirā (Śī Madirāgrham). The places, where the group of temples are found, must have been temple cities. The architects of Central Assam were influenced by the rules of the Arthasastra and the numbers of the temples rise up to nine for Navagraha. Most of the temples were clearly dedicated to Śiva, as the Śiva lingas have been found in situ.

From the architectural remains, which are lying scattered in different places of the region, we shall now try to reconstruct the temple architecture of Central Assam, which prevailed earlier times.

The Plan: (Pl. XCV, Figs. 44, 45, 46)

From what has been gathered so far from the sites of the temple ruins or some later temples constructed on the

1. Ibid.
ancient plinths, it appears that the general lay-out of temples consisted of:

(1) **Torana**, which is situated on a little distance from the main temple on the approach road;

(2) **Door way**, (two *Dvāraśākhās* and a *Sirāpaṭṭi*) at the entrance of the temple building;

(3) **Mandapa** or **Nātmandir** (Assembly hall);

(4) **Go-puram** or Entrance chamber; and

(5) **Garbhagriha** or the sanctum-sanctorum or cella.

It has been noticed that some small shrines consist only of *garbha-grha* with an enclosed yard in front of it. In those small shrines, only one deity was enshrined.

**Garbha-grha (or sanctum):**

The *garbha-grihas* so far noticed in Central Assam are mostly on a square plan. In Dahparbatia, it is 274 cms. square, and was built of bricks of various sizes, the largest being 36x28x5½ cms. The bottom course of the walls and the floor were laid in stone. The *garbha-grihas*, commonly found, are on a lower level and to enter it one has to descend a

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2. Ibid.
flight of steps. In the central shrine (now ruins) of Mikirati, the garbha-griha is 270 cms. square, and it is on a lower level and it requires three steps to descend to the sanctum. There is an enclosure passage of 276 cms. length and 88 cms breadth, probably adjoining the Mandapa, which has disappeared. In Na-Māth-thān also, it is square and below the level of the Mandapa. Similar square plans of garbhagrihas are noticed at Devasthān and other places.

The garbha-griha, the small inmost sanctuary with its usually square plan (caturasra) had the main shrine or Vimāna, the sky-scraping chariot, constructed over it with 'Sikharas' of various designs.¹ "The square plan appears to have been based on the śrṣṭi cakra or the śrīcakra of the Sakti-cult - a combination of nine triangles - four pointing upwards and five pointing downwards with a common centre of gravity."² Corners and sides were worked out from this śrī-cakra.

In Bāmanpāhār, the garbhagriha of the ruined temple is on the sapta-ratha plan. The cult deity of the temple is missing from the original place, where a hole still remains. (Pl.XIV. Fig.46.)

2. Ibid.
The ground plan of the temple of Bargangā, which measures 26x24 metres, consisted of three parts, i.e., the Garbhagriha and the Mandapa, which are square in plan, and the Ardhamandapa.

Mandapa:

Most of the shrines have square mandapas as noticed, but they vary in dimensions. In some of the shrines, mandapas are not traced. Those temples might have contained only the garbhagriha with sikhara; or a temporary mandapa could have been built of wood or bamboo which have disappeared in course of time. The mandapas are noticed at Na-Nāth thān, Devasthān (Moudāṅgā) and Bargangā.

The Ardhamandapas are noticed only at Dahparbatīā and Bargangā.

Pillars:

The pillars noticed in some of the sites, are quite massive, squarish and with projections at intervals. They are made of huge square blocks mortared one over the other. Some of them are decorated with floral designs, pot and foliage (ghāṭa-pallava) motifs and kīrttimukha symbols.
Several pillars\(^1\) lying at the site of Dahparbatia are plain and square (average measurement 273x44x44 cms). Similar pillars are known at Na-Nath-than. Two pillars, now preserved in the Coe park, Tezpur, have octagonal bottom, plain shaft and capital raised in four stages. Two horizontal bands are ornamented; one broad band is adorned with kīrtimukha symbols and this part of the capital is octagonal in shape; the other lower band is adorned with dentils (Pl. X? Fig. ??). Cucumber-shaped pillars with octagonal bases and central belts are noticed in the ruins of Ḡāchasīgangā; the cucumbers arise out of lotus calyx. In Gāchtal, the pillar bases are mostly of sorbotobhadra type i.e. a circular base with pinion-like teeth cut all round; and the other pillars with pedestals resemble somewhat the pedestal of a Doric column.\(^2\) The round pillars resemble the Ionic shaft, the capitals have cymarecta carving; and the bases are all in sorbotobhadra design. Two tapering pillars of special design measure 122 cms in length and 38 cms in diameter at the top having a kind of band-and-leaf design at the base. From Mahāmāya temple, there is a broken pillar, top octagonal, base square, bearing seated Viṣṇu images (23x20 cms) on each face. One square pillar has a full-bloomed

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1. The pillars of Dahparbatia, are small and plain and appear to have belonged to some later temple on the site; A.R.A.S.I., 1925-26, PP. 41-42.
lotus of eight petals inside and twelve petals outside engraved on its top. Two pillars from Tārābasā, 244 cms in length, 33 cms diameter, have octagonal bottom, (each faces of 14 cms wide); and the top portion of the pillars have sixteen sides (each faces 7 cms wide). ¹

Capitals and bracket :

Capitals of pillars and brackets are seen in the ruins of Central Assam. A cross-shaped bracket measuring 137x145 cms, is found in Bāmuni Pāhār. Capitals have cut ends of joists in the shape of scroll held by leafy belts from Ākāśigāngā. Pillar bases of odd shapes and capitals shaped like āmalakas are noticed in Gāchtalā. The cubical part of a pillar depicted on one side Viṣṇu seated in raṅgalī pose on a padmāsana, and on other sides Gaṅga and an emaciated figure of an ascetic, representing probably a mythological scene. The pillar base and capitals were carved and massive. On a pillar base can be seen what looks like a fan-palm. The pillar bases are mostly of Soroṭobhadra type. There are other pillars with pedestals somewhat resembling the pedestal of a Doric column (from Gāchtal). Among the pillar capitals found in Deoparbat, there are massive capitals with huge kīrtimukhas.

¹ Ibid., Vol. VIII, P. 89.
or vanaspati or kalamakara decorations as they are known in Java, facing four cardinal points with a worshipping Nāgī between every two points. ¹ Capitals of pillars shaped like vase (kalasa) are noticed in many ruins. There is also a pyramidal bracket with a bold design of sinuous lines flanking a central cusp.²

Roof: (Pl. X, Figs. 7-9).

Probably the roofs were huge slanting slabs. We notice so many parts of roofs lying in the ruins of the temples. It seems that the later Gupta practice has been followed there. The massive ceiling slab lying in Deoparbat is rectangular and measures 396x356-15 cms. Carved on it is a tastefully embossed lotus (Viśva-padma) of 244 cms. diameter in three courses. The seed-vessel of the Viśva padma bears in relief the figure of a Vidyādhara holding a garland with both hands and hovering in the sky as if to make obeisance to the deity below. A high crown (Kirtī-mukuta) with a frontal coronet adorns his head, perforated patra kundalas are seen in the ears, while his lower garment reaching the ankles has an elegant central tassel.³ Ceiling parts with lotus carving, are noticed in Cole park, Baman pāhār, Matharjhār, Changchoki and other places.

2. Ibid.
Vimāna ¹:

The Vimāna or the sky scraper is the general structure over the cella of the recess of the god's habitation. The vimāna being a replica of the human body has its pada (leg), Jāṅghā (thigh, waist), Kāndha (neck) and the Śikhara (the peak-crown). The Śikhara is the main structure round which all the architectural craftsmanship was concentrated by architects according to their ideas and conceptions with local variations - and thus different types of temples derived their architectural nomenclature. ²

Nagara - the North India type of temple has a square base, Śūka-nāsa (bird-beak), Śikhara with a tower gradually inclining inwards in a convex curve i.e. a curvilinear tower finishing to a point or apex which is covered up with an āmaleka over which is placed a kalaśa (pitcher). On the top of the kalaśa is placed the metallic insignia peculiar to the god or the goddess i.e. a trisūla or a cakra. ³

The first and the earliest phase of vimāna in Central

1. "Throughout the greater part of the country, the sanctuary as a whole is known as the Vimāna of which the upper pyramidal or tapering portion is called the Śikhara meaning a tower or spire" see Brown, Percy; Indian Architecture (Buddhist and Hindu), Vol. I, 1942, P. 42.
3. Ibid.
Assam is not found in its original condition. The Dah Parbatia temple which was the earliest, at about 6th century A.D., so far noticed in Assam, seems to have some later addition on the plan. Next comes the temple of Majgaon, which is placed during 8th-9th century A.D., where there is some miniature temple design, (the replica śikharas of Nagara style) depicted on the lintel, is noticed. In other temple sites, miniature temple design carved on the lintels, are also found, which may give a clue to the original temple.  

The miniature temple carved on the lintel may throw some light on the vimānas which were prevalent in the region - the replica śikharas of Nagara style, or of the Pahārpur (Bengal) style, one with the four sides of it divided in sections horizontally as well as vertically with the help of lines and tiers at the angles, again divided vertically with the help of āmala sīlās. Partly because of this and partly because of an intended Konakapage, this part is projecting out a little. This may well be under the whole scheme of pagas. Another śikhara is composed of moulded tiers or bhūmīs vertically diminishing in size, topped by usual āmalaka. At the centre of the sides of the śikhara a vertical decorative panel covers almost all the bhūmīs. Another śikhara provides a clear division of the body, which is horizontally divided

1. See Plate XXY. Figs. XXY...
ratha, anuratha and kanaka pagas. This is akin to the style of the first one.

The body of the temple may be divided along the vertical axis into four principal parts namely:

1. the Pada or pista or pedestal;
2. the jāṅghā waist or body or wall;
3. the kāndha (neck) or gandi; and
4. the śikhara (the peak-crown) or Mastaka.

Pada or Pista does not form an essential part of the temple.¹

The jāṅghā or wall rises vertically up to a certain height. The kāndha or gandi rises straight up to a short height and then begins to curve inwards at an increasing rate. The śikhara or mastaka starts from above the gandi. Just above the gandi, is the dingi or the neck; then comes the amlā or āmalaka, a flattened spheroid, ribbed at the sites and resembling an enormous fruit or āmalaki in appearance. Above the āmalaka comes the khola (the khapuri) or skull, on it is placed the Kalaśa (Kalaśi) or vase and āyudha or the weapon of the deity to whom the temple is consecrated.² Above

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2. Ibid., PP. 79 ff.
the āmalaka, nothing is shown upon the replica ākharas of
the lintels.¹

The jaṅghā or wall of the temple is composed of a
number of broad sub-divisions. The principal components of
the wall are the pābhāga or the division corresponding to the
base, the jaṅghā or the skin and the bārāndā which is a set of
mouldings crowning the wall. The gandi or the curvilinear
tower is composed of different elements along the various
pañgas. The outermost paga is sub-divided into a number of
bhumiṣ or plans, each of which is composed of mouldings
surmounted by a miniature āmalaka called the bhumi-āmla of
the plane.² The other pañgas may have ākharas or miniature
Rekha temples carved upon them for the sake of decoration.³

According to the Śilpaśāstra, the temples are
classified in accordance with the number of the rathakas.
The rathakas characterise the (different) classes of temples:
"The Brāhmaṇ (is characterised) by nine, the kṣhatriya by
seven, the vaisya by five, and the Śūdra by three rathakas.
If one builds a nabañgata temple, which is Brāhmaṇ (by caste),

¹. Kalasās or vases have been noticed in the ruins. They were
probably placed on the top of the ākharas.


³. Ibid.
then the manes of the person will dwell in the region of Brāhmaṇa, the Supreme Being. If one builds a sapta-ratha temple, one's manes will verily live in the Śūrya and Chandra lokas. If a Vaisya builds a pancharatha temple, then one's manes will dwell in the region of the hudra. (If one builds) a śūdra or triratha temple, then one's manes will dwell in the region of the Moon."¹ The construction of nine temples in one place, as mentioned previously, may be for this reason given in the Śilpaśāstra. The temples of Central Assam were built according to the canons of Śilpaśāstra. The frequency of nine temples together at several sites of Central Assam indicates that the Brāhmaṇical form of temples were in vogue.

In the architectural history of Assam before the coming of the Ahoms, two phases of architecture have been identified, the result of two art currents, flowing from the west and from different sources: one carries with it evidences of a Gupta-Hindu stream percolating into Assam, and the other was that formed by the extreme eastern limit of the Orissan style. The former is evidenced by the door-frame of Dahparbatia. The temples forming the latter group allied to the Orissan style have the appearance of shrines more than

¹. The Śilpaśāstra, XLIX, 'The Classification of Temples', A. PP. 53-4; B. PP. 1, 6-7.
temples, as they consist mainly of šikharas, with only a small porch or portico. Some of them may originally have been provided with mandapas or assembly halls, and Nat-
mandirs or dancing halls,¹ but these have disappeared in course of time.

¹ Dancing in the temple by girls and boys, is a practice still in vogue in Assam in some of the temples, such as Doobi, Hajo and other temples. They are called in lower Assam Nat (for boy) and Natî (for girl). References to granting land to the temple dancers by the kings of Assam are also found.
"Indian sculpture is rarely found alone, it had to serve architecture chiefly as ornament of the latter."¹ This observation of Dr. Sankalia is quite apt. The sculptures of Central Assam, which serve as the decorative parts of the temples, namely walls, ceilings, pediment, doorway and lintel etc. do not now exist in the original places, as the ancient temples in their original forms do not survive now. The majority of the sculptures that have been found in this region represent various gods, goddesses and other semi-divine figures. The sculptures from Central Assam may be classified in the following groups:

(1) Human figures;
(2) Animal figures;
(3) Ornamental designs.

(1) Human figures:

Representation of human figures other than those of deities is limited to a few examples. The earliest instances

of this category are found in some terracotta plaques from Dahparbatia. Plaques containing human figures were discovered by R.D. Banerji, and he illustrated only one of them. The head is missing; the figure is seated cross-legged, having broad chest, proportionately thin waist and well-formed hands and legs. According to the moulding of the torso and the general technique, Banerji remarks that the plaques cannot by later than 6th cy. A.D. According to him there was close connection between the mediaeval art of Bengal and of Assam. Figures of similar type has also been found at Birat in the Rongpur district and Paharpur in the Rajshahi district of Bengal.

Another human figure (Pl XVIII, Fig. 55.) is noticed in a niche in a wall from Gachtal now preserved in the Nowgong Park. The figure is seated in sukhāsana (easy posture). He wears a full tunic and dhoti, the waist is covered by a piece of cloth (katibandha). He wears a small turban on the head. This dress can be compared with the present day Assamese dress of a particular class. The figure measures 64x73 cms.

A stone slab, containing a male human figure with good physique, is preserved in the State Museum, at Gauhati.

The figure is shown standing in a wrestling pose. The muscles of both his hands and legs are depicted prominently. He has a beard and a round head. A broken figure of a lion or a bull is depicted in front of the human figure.

Three terracotta plaques, representing human figures, have been found, one from Na-Nāththān (Jugijān) and the other two from Māyāṅg area.

A couple is noticed, carved on a slab of stone, at Nowgong park (Pl. XXI, Fig. 52). The Kesābendha of both the male and the female are remarkable. Both are seated in an easy posture. The female figure has more ornaments than the male figure. She has a gorgeous coiffure. The male holds an indistinct object in his right hand and a flower in the left. The female holds a stalked flower in her left hand.

Yakṣa, Yakṣī, Vidyādharas, Apsarā, Kinnara etc:

These are more human than divine in nature. They are commonly found in the ancient art of Central Assam. They are depicted usually to serve as special attendants to deities. Generally they are found wearing karandamukuta and other usual

ornaments. They are described in the Uttarākānda of the Rāmāyana, the Vaikhanasāgama, Purāṇas and other texts.

The ceiling slab from Deoparbat contains the figure of a vidyādhara, holding a garland in both hands and hovering in the sky as if to make obeisance to the deity below. His legs are so arranged as to be symmetrical with the circular course of the seed-vessel, a feature met with in Gupta-Pāla sculptures. The facial type is local, the decorative and anatomic details of the vidyādharas recall late Gupta and Pāla features. The figure wears the kirītamukuta, patra-kundalas, and wears kāṭivastra which reaches the ankles.

The figure of a vidyādhara is noticed on a stone image of Viṣṇu from Gossainjuri with an uttarīya (scarf) held in the hands in the antariksa (ethereal) region, indicated by a circle with indented edges as in the Pāla representations. In one Viṣṇu image from Tarabasa, two figures of vidyādharas are shown holding a flute in their hands. Most of the images

2. Mankodi, op.cit., PP. 482, 484, 489.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
ranging between 9th and 14th century A.D., are having two figures of vidyādharas, in flying posture. These figures are depicted on the upper part of the lintel.

The gandharvas are artistically executed below the vidyādhaara figures in the Viṣṇu image from Tarābasā. The right one is having wings and is shown playing on a flute while the left one is shown in a dancing posture. Another figure of a flying gandharva is depicted on the lintel of Dahparbatia.

A kinnara figure is seen having four hands and holding an arrow and a bow in her hands. The āyudhas in the other two hands are not distinct. Two figures of apsarās are noticed in the park of Diphu both are shown in tribhanga pose, having kesaibandha on their heads. One holding a mirror is arranging her hair. The other holds a stalked flower in her left hand. Her right hand is placed on the breasts (Pl.XV.Fig.57).

A stone piece from Numaligarh contains the figure of a squatting gana, holding a mace (gadā) and the other figure showing a cluster of lotus buds with long stalks. Another 1 gana figure, now preserved in the State Museum, Gauhati,

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1. This image is wrongly identified with Durgā, and labelled as such in the State Museum, Gauhati.
originally from Tezpur, is shown in a fighting attitude, holding a sword. He is decked with karanda-mukuta, kundalas, hāras. The lower part of the stone shows an ornamental design with flowers and geese (Pl.XV. Fig. 58.). A stone slab bearing the figure of a chauri-bearer came from Singri, now preserved in the State Museum, Gauhati. She is well decorated, wearing patrakundalas, hāras, valayas, kaṅkās. The dhoti is tied with a girdle decorated with small bells (ksudraghantikas). The uttariya worn by her is hanging down from her shoulders. She stands in a most graceful tribhāṅga posture (Pl.XV. Fig. 57.).

Dvārapālas and dvārapālikās (Pl.XV. Figs 68, 69) are generally found on the bottom of the door jambs of the temples. They are the guardians of the temples. According to the Śilpa-saṅgraha, the dvārapālakas are like bhutas with two big hands, in one of which they hold a club. Generally they hold the symbols representing the main deity of the temple in their hands. The door jambs from Gachthal contain figures holding kamandalu and dvārapālas holding śūla and pāśa. Dvārapālas as noticed from Ākāśīgaṅgā, hold śūla and pāśa, the saivite symbols. In some cases, dvārapālas having four

2. Ibid.
hands, are noticed, in which case the dhakkā or the kettle drum - is held in one of the hands. A door jamb from Mahādeośāl represents the figure of a dvārapāla with bow and arrow, with figures of a female devotee and a dancer at the bottom. The dvārapāla engraved on the rock of Bāḍagāṅgā, is 122 cms. height. He is holding a huge trident-cum-axe. He wears karanaḍamukuta, kundalas, bāras and short dhoti as paridhāna, the traditional local dress (Pl.XIV., Fig.43.).

A door jamb from Bāmuni pahār shows a dvārapāla holding mace and a dvārapālikā in tribhanga attitude. The dvārapāla and the dvārapālikā from Deoparbat are highly adorned with ornaments, particularly the figure of the latter. The dvārapāla holds staff, and is wearing a cap and dhoti. His face shows the usual features of the tribe of that region. This shows that there was local influence on the art of Central Assam along with the Gupta and Pāla traits. Another dvārapālikā, now preserved in the State Museum, Gauhati, is richly adorned with ornaments. She holds a dagger in the right hand and a mirror in the left. She stands in tribhanga posture (Pl.XV., Fig.62.). Some dvārapālikās from Deopani are depicted holding khaḍgas, wearing karanaḍa mukuta and patrakundalas.

1. Ibid.
Dancing figures: (Plate Xv, Figs. 65-67)

Sculptures depicting dancing figures are also known from Central Assam. These are found on stone slab fixed on the walls, panels, door jambs, lintels etc. They formed an integral part of the temple decoration. A large stone slab, representing a very interesting dance scene, has come from Cole park, Tezpur. The slab is divided into seven panels by circular pilasters, and each panel contains two figures either of males or of females or both. Beginning from the right, the first one shows a man fighting with a lion; the second, a male playing on a flute and female dancing by his side; the third, a male playing on a pipe and the female in dance pose; the fourth, a male playing on a drum and a female dancing; the fifth, a male playing on cymbals and the female dancing; sixth, a female playing on a lyre and another dancing to her left; and the seventh, a male playing on a drum, another dancing to his right. (Fig. 65.)

Another dance scene is noticed on a door jamb, lying near the Deputy Commissioner's residence, Tezpur. The central vertical band is divided into three panels. The bottom one is occupied by a female dancer, the middle one by a male figure drummer, and the top one by a dancing female figure. All the figures are shown under canopies (Fig. 65.). A pillar,
lying near the residence of the Deputy Commissioner, Tezpur, is having four sunken panels. Those panels depict a music party, one in each panel, shown playing and dancing.

A door sill from Baraganga depicts two lions flanked and a ghata in the Centre; and on both the sides of the sill, there are four panels each divided by pilasters. All the panels are occupied by music parties; from the right, the first one playing on cymbal; the second one also playing a cymbal, the third a dancing female figure, the fourth a male playing on a drum; on the left side, the first and the second are broken, the third, a male playing on drum; and the fourth a male playing on cymbal. Another scene on a frieze from Deopahar contains the figure of a horseman, a woman shown seated and singing, and another figure playing on flute.

Besides group-scenes, individual figures in different dancing postures are also known. A door jamb from Mathajhar shows a dancing female figure on the bottom. A stone slab from Chartherangphar gaon (Pashim-Tarabasā) contains a dancing female figure. She wears gāmkhāru (Assamese type of bracelet), necklace (kāra) mālā, kundāla and anklet (Fig.67).

Amorous figures: (PLXVII Figs68-70).

Amorous figures are generally found on the panels of the Śaiva and Śākta shrines. The occurrence of this type of
figures, as suggested by Sir William Rothenstein, was "a part of the Tantric attitude which was characteristic of Indian religious philosophy between the 10th and 12th centuries A.D."¹ These erotic sculptures have the support of the traditional practices of centuries of temple building, and have been enjoined by the sacred texts such as Kāmasūtra. ² The Agni Purāṇa enjoins that the door-way of temples should be decorated with Mithunas.

An erotic scene is noticed in a stone slab from Singri ruins (Fig.68.). Two niches are divided by circular pilasters of the panel, and each of the niches contains four figures. From the right, two seated female figures raising their hands to their eyes shown to be hiding from the erotic scenes on their right side. A male and a female are shown seated; the female has raised her left leg horizontally, keeping her left hand vertically on the ground for support, the male with his right hand has embraced the left breast of the

female. The male figure is seen in a copulating pose over
the female, the body of the male lying between the raised legs
of the female. The second niche contains a male and a female
in a similar pose. The two female attendants one on each side,
are apparently trying to shut out the scene by keeping their
hands over their eyes.

The second scene is depicted in another frieze; the
male is copulating with the female in the same posture as
described above. In this panel, only one female attendant
is depicted.

Another interesting scene is depicted on a slab from
Changchaki (Kampur), wherein the male and the female figure
are seated on an easy chair. The right leg of the male is
spread horizontally and the left leg is bent and spread to
the opposite direction and parallel to his right leg; his body
is supported on this left leg; his right hand as vertically
spread over the chair for support, and his left is embracing
the female. The male is seated on the right thigh of the
female. The female has kept her right leg in such a way that
the male can sit on the thigh, and her left leg is kept on the
chair for support; with her left hand she has embraced the
shoulder of the male. Both the figures wear various ornaments.
Examples of similar scenes are found in the State Museum, Gauhati (Fig. 70).

Besides human figures, animals and birds are noticed in copulating postures. Such a scene, from Na-Nāth-Thān, is depicted on a pillar; male deer is seated upon the back of the female deer, in the act of coition. (Fig. 71.). A frieze, from Deoparbat, shows a royal archer shooting a deer couple when in coition.

Stories from the Epics:

Friezes (Rūpapattika) are by far the most interesting feature of the edifice in as much as they show in a series of panels scenes either drawn from Hindu mythology or domestic life, including a few of an erotic character.

A frieze, from Deopahar having five panels, shows Rāma and Laksman seated, the latter behind the former, while Sugrīva is kneeling before Rama in supplication, and Hanuman and another monkey are watching the scene with reverence, as

1. Some Erotic Sculptures from the Śākta Temple of Kāmākhyā are described by R.D. Choudhury, op.cit., PP. 210-26.
2. A terracotta plaque bearing a pair of peacocks from Sadia, in amorous poses illustrated by Barua, op.cit., plate IX, Fig. 16.
4. Ibid.
indicated by their hands held in āṇjali pose. The scene portrayed evidently relates to the scene from the Rāmāyana in which Hanuman succeeded in securing the friendship of Rāma for the protection of Sugriva. Another frieze represents the Mahābhārata story of Pāṇḍu, who shot a deer couple in coition. The third frieze represents a scene from the Mahābhārata, namely, the Garuḍa Garbābhāṅga, or the extermination of Garuḍa's pride.

Scenes from contemporary life: (Pl. XIX, Figs. 72-73)

The depiction of scenes from contemporary life on the temple walls, gives us some idea regarding the social and domestic life of those days. Scenes depicting the social life are numerous, and a few of them are described below:

A frieze from Singri shows six women seated with folded hands, three in each of the two panels (Fig. 72.). Another scene from Deoparbat, depicted in a panel, shows two ladies grinding corn in a Ural (Grinding urn), and a third female figure is shown talking to one of them (Fig. 73.).

A frieze from Deopāhār, consists of three panels; the first one shows a woman in her toilette; the second, a man

1. Barua, op. cit., Pl. XII, No. 23.
dragging a woman from a scene where another is about to thrash her, while a second woman is dissuading him; and the third, a man advancing with a raised mace. ¹ The second frieze, having four panels, depicts from left to right, an ascetic pushing a goat before him, another ascetic dancing with śūla and dhakka in his hands and kamandalu hanging from his right arm; and a seated woman in an ecstatic mood. The third frieze having four panels, depicts worshippers sitting with hands held in ājali mudrā. The fourth frieze, divided into two big panels, illustrates a combat between two warriors. The actual combat is shown in one panel, while in the other, one of the warriors marches off in triumph with the severed head of the other held in his hand, the headless trunk staggering behind. ² Another shows a man protecting his family seated on an elephant's back against a man attacking. The facial type of the men and women occurring on the friezes from Deopahar is distinctly local.

A frieze from Cole park, having three panels, depicts a duel. From left to right, the first one shows two men fighting only with their hands; the second one shows them lying on the ground with one overpowering the other; and the

1. Ibid., Plate, XX, (g) and (f)
2. Ibid., Pl. XVIII, C.
3. Ibid.
third one represents both lying straight in opposite directions, the right one holding the legs of the other, who seems to have surrendered (Fig. VII).

Animal figures : (Pl.XX.Figs 75:76)

In the art of Central Assam, sculptures showing animals are quite numerous. These adorn the walls, ceilings, pillars, door frame, etc. of the temple.

Elephants are very common in the ancient art of Assam, and the elephant tusk was used as the royal insignia in early times. A row of elephants, 'gajathara', appears as the moulding of the adhīsthāna (base) of some temples.¹ Elephants' tusks in the attitude of supporting the super-structures of a temple are also found in the ruins of Deoparbat. A frieze of the plinth from Deoparbat, containing elephant heads, is preserved in the State Museum, Gauhati (Fig. 75). Another piece from Deoparbat, shows a row of elephants, also in the attitude or supporting the super structure.² A frieze from Gāchtal shows two elephants with their trunks raised to pluck tree-leaves from both sides of the tree (Fig. 76).

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¹ "On a moulding in the Hajo temple of about 61 cms above the plinth, a row of caparisoned elephants in high relief encircles the building and appears to support the edifice"; Barua, op.cit., P. 197; Choudhury, R.D., op.cit., PP. 210-26.

The tusk of elephant is sometimes used as spouted drain. We notice such spouted drains in Akaśīgāṅgā, Jiājuri (Chāpānālā), Bāmuni pābār, Cole park and other places.

The lion is frequently found in the art of Central Assam (Figs. 46, 47). "The conventional representation of the lion shows that the inhabitants of the Assam Valley were not very familiar with the king of Beasts."¹ The lions are mostly found in lintel, door sills, and friezes of the walls. A door lintel (267x60x77 cms), from Singri, contains two lions; and they are in two different panels depicted in different directions (Fig....). A door sill from Akaśīgāṅgā (143x32 cms), contains a gbasta (vase), flanked by two lions standing with raised tails. This motif is noticed in a lintel (118x28x36 cms) from Bargaṅgā, and in another (124x30 cms) from Gachtal. The representation of a pair of lions shown running from each other with their heads bent towards the māṅgala kalasa (auspicious jar) are a very common decorative motif in early Assamese art.²

In some cases lions are also carved on the capitals of pillars. An example is found in the ruins of Baman pābār.

Gaja-Simha : (PLXXIV, LXXV Figs. 7, 8, 9)

Sculptures depicting a lion on an elephant, some times two lions on two elephants (Gaja-sīṃha) are commonly found in

². See No. 1088, A.R.A.S.I., Eastern Circle, 1913-14; also see, Barua, op.cit., P. 198.
the ruins of Central Assam. A gaja-sīṁha motif, the biggest so far found in the region, is found in the ruins of Sankhā Devī's temple in Jugijān. It measures 104 cms. in length and 108 cms. in height (Fig.78.).

Another gajasīṁha motif is seen at Pashim Tarābasā. Here two lions are seen seated on two elephants. The lions are shown with two bodies but a common head (Fig.79.). A gajasīṁha motif from Kawaimari shows that the trunks of the elephants are bound by chains or ropes. It measures 50x36 cms (Fig.80.).

Sculptures of 'gajasīṁha motif' are found at Bāmuni pāhār, Chāng choki (Kampur), Dīphu park, Buḍā gosainthān and other places. This motif has affinities with the relics of the pāla period of Bengal.¹ As these are lying in the ruins we cannot clearly identify their utility or purpose.

This type of representation is common in the Orissan temples, where they are used as an architectural device. The figure of a lion, rampant, is usually displayed on each of the śikhara—a projections specially in the Lingarāja and Kopārk temples.²

¹. Barua, op cit., P. 198 f.
². Saraswati, S.K., op cit., Pl. VIII, Fig. 16.
Bulls: (Pl. Xx, Figs. 2/-23.)

Representations of bulls (Nandi) are frequently found in the ruins of Siva temples of Central Assam. Figures of bulls were sculptured specially in Siva shrines; and as yahana of Siva, the Nandi is noticed with the Siva images. A seated Nandi, showing 'astaraka' on the back is seen at Duda gosainthān. It measures 93 cms in length and 54 cms in height (Fig. 2/...). Another bull (48 x 67 cms) from Akāśiganga, has an astaraka on the back and with a bell hanging from the neck (Fig. 2/...). The bull (47 x 38 cms) noticed from Numaligarh, adorned with astaraka on the back and wearing bell-garlands, is found in a seated posture. Two bulls are noticed from Gächtal (now preserved in Nowgong park), wearing astaraka (Fig. 2/...).

Other Animals: (Pl. Xx, Figs. 2/4-5.)

Besides the animals mentioned above, other animals, such as horse, deer, bear, pig and tiger are also found. Carved horse, deer and tiger are noticed on the pillars from Na-Waththān and Gächtal. Another carving of a bear on the capital of a pillar occurs in Kawaĩmi. Sculptures of horse and pig are found in Mahāmāyāthān.

Birds:

Birds are also depicted as decorative motif in the ancient art of the region. Among the birds, geese, peacocks and owl are noticed. The flying geese with long necks occurring on the door jambs of Dahparbatia are remarkable.

In addition to the independent representation of these animals and birds, we notice them with different deities as their vāhanas.

Grotesque or mythical figures: (Pl. XXVII Figs. 36.)

Among the grotesque or mythical figures the Kīrttimukha (lit. glory face) is the most common throughout the region of Central Assam; the motif occurs in Indian art, as a sacred symbol, then as a mere artistic device and lastly as an architectural ornament. As an important motif in Indian art and architecture, this has received popular recognition in the Indian sculpture. Almost all the

1. Three terracotta plaques from Sadia, contain first a pair of peacock showing in amorous attitude, 2nd, a falcon carrying a heron; and third, an owl with its wings opened. See also, Barua, op cit., Pl. IX, Fig.16.

Chalukyan monuments exhibit this trait. In Central Assam, it occurs either on the front pediment or throughout the walls and on the pillars and their shafts. It is found on the capitals of the pillars from Tezpur, now preserved in Cole park.

The antiquity of this motif in India goes back to the Gupta period where it looks more realistic and which later attains stylization. This is particularly evident from the specimen belonging to the temples of Central Assam. The ruins from Tezpur, (Sāmuni Pāhār, Cole park), depict the motif comparatively more elaborately than that of the Gupta period, but the later temple of Deopāhār represents the figure more in the ferocious lion thus marring its own reality and shape.

In Central Assam, the motif had undergone various types of stylization with a profusion of decorative elements. In most of the figures, the lower jaw is absent. The Kīṛttimukhas occurring on the coping piece of Deoparbat are remarkably akin to the Javanese figures and are provided, like the latter, with eyes having horn-like sockets. (Fig. 26).

1. Sankalia, op cit., P. 123.
In the images of the mediaeval period, Kirttimukha is an invariable motif, which is depicted at the top of the stele (silāpatā) flanked by two figures of vidyādharas. The figures of Kirttimukha were commonly used in temple decoration in the early mediaeval period in Assam.

Among the composite animal figures, the makara, whose mouth is that of an alligator or crocodile with a tail resembling that of an animal, Suparna, the mythical deity, half man and half bird; and Garuda are found in the art of Assam. Garuda is the vāhana of Viṣṇu; makara and tortoise (kurma) are the vāhanas of the river goddesses, Ganges and Yamunā respectively. The figures, Makara, Kurma and Garuda are noticed in the door frame of Dah Parbatia. Makara and Kurma are also noticed in the door jambs of Majgaon. In another door jamb, lying near the ruins of Majgaon, a makara is also seen. In the Dasavatāra pillar in Cole Park, Viṣṇu in the incarnation of Kurma is found.

Vyāla (lion) is generally depicted as grotesque in the art of ancient Assam. In addition to these grotesque figures, we notice some other grotesque motifs, such as hybrid form of woman and horse, the face of horse(?) and the body that of a woman. Such figure are known as Kinnarag (centaurs). Sometimes we notice the hybrid form of human

being and snake, or human being and fish; the upper portion is human and the lower portion is of snake or fish in the door jamb from Dahparbatia, and the lintels from Śankhā Devī Temple, and Chāng-choki (Kāwaimāri). Another is a massive capital with huge Kirttisukhas facing the four cardinal points with a Nāgī having folded hands (hybrid form of woman and snake) shown on all the four corners of the capital. Besides these, we noticed snake associated with some deities, such as Manasā, Chāmundā etc. Snakes were also used as the decorative motif in the art of Assam particularly in the door-jambs and lintels of the Śiva temples.

The Dwarfs:

The depiction of dwarfs was not a common feature in the art and architecture of Central Assam. The stunted potbellied figure, noticed in a terracotta plaque from Ganes pāhār, (Mayang) wears a lower garment, dhannavīra and heavy Kundalas. It measures 30 x 22 cms. (Pl...Fig...). The dwarfs are also noticed in a frieze from Deo pāhār.

(3) Ornamental designs:

These are divided into three classes:

(a) Architectural designs,
(b) Geometric designs, and
(c) Floral designs.
(a) **Architectural designs**

The caitya-window ornament occurring almost invariably at all periods of Indian monuments may be called an architectural design.\(^1\) The early form of this ornament "imitates the window-like hollow portion on the facade of the caitya-caves at Bhājā, Kondane, Beda, Kārle, Junar, Nāsīk, Pitalkhora and Ajantā."\(^2\) Caitya window (candrasāla) ornament is generally marked by the hollow portion of a temple wall and the imitated designs marked on the lintels etc. Two different types of caitya-windows are seen on the door lintel of Dahsparbatia. One is a trefoil, where the three arches are depicted in equal size; and in the second variety, the upper arc is larger than the two arcs on the sides.\(^3\) The interior of the sunken panels is entirely covered with geometrical patterns with a half rosette in the centre.\(^4\) The gavāska design (circular window), perforated (surīsa) window, ornamental shrine design, and replica āśambha desings are the most common, depicted in the ancient art of the region.\(^5\) The dome like stūpa and pyramidal roof are other architectural motifs.\(^6\)

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2. Ibid.
Geometrical designs are mostly found on the ceilings of shrines and also on pillars. "Purely geometric designs are the concentric circles of decreasing diameters are placed in an octagon. First three circles from below are cut deep and decorated with a both like thing. The next four circles illustrate the geometric design of arch-like cusp and circle. The inner most circle and the cusp look like a half opened flower".¹ This type of geometrical design is not found in Central Assam. The geometrical design noticed in the region has a different appearance. Geometric designs are noticed on ceiling slabs, containing floral designs on the outer circles while the inner circle is covered with a full-bloomed lotus in three courses. On the pillars of Kachamari and Dimapur, various geometrical designs are seen.

Floral designs comprising leaf-and-flower, creeper and purely leaf decorations, are commonly found. Of the floral designs, lotus was the most favourite, which was carved in various forms, i.e., bud, half blown and full blown flowers. The pedestals (āsana) of the deities are mostly found in the shape of full blown multi-petalled lotuses. The ceilings of the shrines contain a full blown lotus carved on them, quite large and circular in size, which is called viśvapadma. The ceilings bearing viśvapadma designs are noticed at Cole park,

¹ Sankalia, op.cit., P. 128.
Mathajhār, Raman pāhār, Chāngchoki, Pashim Tarābasā, Deopāhār and other places. A cluster of lotuses in full bloom appearing to be issuing from a tank, occurs on a stone slab from Deopahar, now preserved in the state museum, Guwahati. On a lintel, from Dewalkhandā, a big half blown lotus is carved. "Most of the images of various deities belonging to 10th-12th centuries A.D., have lotus bud (Padmakosa) design below the āsana of the deity. They are depicted coiling". 1 Human figures wearing patra kundalas of the full blown lotus design are seen.

The pot and foliage (ghaṭa-pallava) motif is discernible in the region. The vase from which springs out flowers with leaves falling downwards, decorates usually the lower part of the pillar of the Gupta temples, "known as the purna- kalaśa, the bowl of plenty, typifying a renewed faith, the water nourishing the plant trailing from its brim, an allegory which had produced the 'Vase and flower' motif, one of the most graceful forms in the whole range of Indian architecture." 2 According to Sankalia, this motif "may have descended from the floral motif on the medallions on the railings of Bhrābut and Sāñchi stūpas". 3 The first instance of this motif is noticed on the door jambs of Dah Parbatia, and another from Deopahar.

The flowers are more luxuriant in the Deopāhār than the former.

Another design, which is named "string course", 'scroll' or 'creeper' is essentially floral. This floral design is commonly met with in the door jambs, door lintels, pillars and other architectural features of this region. Most of these are winding and undulating scrolls containing flowers and foliage of various kinds, and covered the leading bands of lintels and door jambs. Figure 99 represents: 1st band Kṛttimukha, middle band triangular design, and the lower band is scroll; Figure 90 represents Ghaṭa pallava motif; 91 is scroll design; 92 is Ghaṭa pallava motif; 93 floral design. A splendid floral example is in the trefoil arc on black schist from Bāmuni-pāhar. Kṛttimukha is depicted at the top, a rosette is in the centre; and it contains meandering creepers of different styles.

A frieze containing spirited human figures in high motion is one of the interesting designs noticed in Deopahar (Fig. 94...). Another interesting design is found in a door lintel from Domukhi Jāljuri (Howraghat) the scroll, in its loops formed by the creeper enclosing bull and flower one by one (Fig. 104...). One door jamb from Cole park contains three vertical bands, and the extreme right band, in its loop formed

2. Barua, op.cit. Pl. XX, Fig. 38.
by the creeper, encloses animals and birds such as horse, hog, and swan.

Trees are also depicted in the door lintel as a decorative motif. A kalpa briksa motif is found on a stone slab or probably a piece of Toranā, from Deo Pāhār (Fig. 95...). The twisted serpents and snakes are seen as decorative motifs in many door jambs and lintels, which run vertically from the bottom of the jamb and sometimes continue in the door lintel; and in some of the door frames, it starts from the lintel and continues to the bottom of the door jambs. Examples are found in the door frames of Gāchtal, Sankhā Devi, Dah Parbatia etc.

The sculptures in Central Assam exhibit various regional characteristics. The monuments of this region belong at the earliest to 6th century A.D.; and it is noticed that several decorative motifs, architectural designs and temple sculptures are imitated from Bengal, Crissa and Central India.
Section 3

TERRA-COTTAS

"Earth or clay has been regarded as the primeval plastic material not only because of its ready availability, but also on account of its easy tractability". ¹ it satisfies the creative impulse of ordinary man, as much for aesthetic expression as for domestic and ritualistic needs. It has served as an easy and convenient plastic materials from time immemorial. ² In later Indian art terracotta is constantly employed in various ways, either decoration of buildings or for votive plaques. ³

In Central Assam terracotta constituted, as it does even now, the common and popular medium of the artistic expression of the people. But only a few terracotta figures have been discovered in Central Assam.

In Dah Parbatia, R.D. Banerji discovered a number of terracotta plaques ⁴ representing human figurines "which portray a very close connection between the mediaeval art of Bengal and Assam". ⁵ They are the same type as the terracotta

2. Ibid.
figurines discovered at Birat in Rangpur district and at Paharpur in Rajshahi district. Among those plaques, only one, containing a human figurine, has been illustrated by him. He remarks that the figurine "cannot be later than 6th century A.D." 3

T. Block has discovered some terracotta tiles representing figurines at Kundlnagar (Sadiya). From the stylistic point of view, the terracotta figurines from both the places are different, according to Dasgupta, and they are placed in the same age.

At Gauhati, K.L. Barua discovered a terracotta figurine of the Buddha, represented as in bhūmisparśa mudrā under the trifoliate arch surrounded by a śikhara or pinnacle. Two miniature stūpas are represented on two sides of the Buddha. Here, in this plaque, the figurine of the Buddha is indicated inside the great temple at Vajrāśana Vihāra i.e., Bodh Gayā. The Buddhist creed is inscribed beneath the āsana in the script of the 11th century A.D. Similar terracotta figurines are reported from Raghurampur, Sabhar and Nalanda. From Raghurampur, an exactly similar terracotta figurine of the Buddha has been found and illustrated by Dasgupta.

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid. Pl. LIV.f.
4. Block, T., A.R.A.S.I., 1906-7; 1909; Pl. VIII.
5. Dasgupta, C.C., Origin and Evolution of Indian Clay Sculpture, P. 228.
A terracotta plaque, representing a male human figurine, seated on āsana in yogasāna posture, has come from Na-Nāth-thān (Jugijān). The right hand is shown raised, holding an indistinct object, while the left hand is placed on his left thigh. The plaque is in a mutilated condition (Pl. XIX/4 Fig. 96.)

Another terracotta figurine (30 x 22 cms.), has been found at Ganesa-pāhār (Māyang), it represents a squatting human figure. This figure shows prominent tundīla (pot-belly), and both the raised arms hold some indistinct heavy objects, which are over his shoulders (Fig. 97.) A similar terracotta figurine has been reported from Mahasthan.¹

The third figure (38 x 26 cms.) has been found at Ganesa pahar (Mayang). It represents a crude human figurine in dancing attitude. He holds some round object in the right hand. The figure is emaciated. He wears a small loin cloth (Fig. 98...).

Two terracotta plaques found in Jugijān are now preserved in the State Museum, Gauhati. The first one, contains the figure of a human, half kneeling with folded hands. He is shown in anādha attitude. He wears a quiver with arrows on his back. The bow is shown behind the figure.

¹ Dikshit, A.R.A.S.I., Mahasthan, 1933, Pl. LII, d.
The next plaque bears the figure of two human figures, one seated cross-legged keeping both the hands on his knees, the other figure is shown standing to the left of the former. Both the figures wear crowns on their heads. Again three similar terracotta plaques are noticed at Kenduguri near Na-Nāth-thān, representing a human figure, a banana tree, and a bird.

The terracotta figurines from Central Assam belong to the early mediaeval period. They can be compared with their prototypes found in Bengal, Bihar, U.P. and Kashmir. In the modelling of the figurines, according to Dasgupta, there are points of similarity as well as difference among them. From the analytical study of the modelling of the terracotta figurines of the mediaeval period, Dasgupta divided them into seven distinct schools. They are: (1) The Assam school represented by Kundilnagar specimens; (2) the eastern school evolved out of the Gupta sculpture and represented by some terracotta specimens of Paharpur; (3) the school of the hybrid compromise between the eastern school evolved out of the Gupta sculpture and the school of the indigenous eastern Indian sculpture represented by some terracotta specimens of Paharpur; (4) the school of the indigenous eastern Indian sculptures represented by some terracotta specimens of Paharpur and Mahasthan; (5) the eastern Indian mediaeval

school represented by some specimens found at Dahparbatia, Sabhar, Raghurampur, Bangarh, Paharpur and Nalanda; (6) Central Indian type represented by Saheth-Mabeth specimens and (7) the North Indian type represented by Avantipur specimens.

The bird figurines from Kundilnagar are remarkable, as one of the specimens gives plastic expression to the conjugal love of the birds, which is rarely found in Indian plastic art. Here a peacock and a pea-hen are shown in an amorous attitude in a sensitive manner.

In the modelling of the figurines from Assam, belonging to the mediaeval age, we find similarity as well as difference. The terra cotta figurines, so far found in Assam, may be divided into three different categories. The Kundil nagar variety belongs to the Assam school, while the figurines from Dahparbatia belong to the eastern Indian mediaeval school; and the third category, represented by the specimen from Mayang, shows traits of the indigenous eastern Indian sculptures.
In archaeological excavations, pottery is usually found from ancient sites. In importance, it surpasses all the other types of antiquities so far as the bulk is concerned. With the help of pottery relative chronology of various sites, cultural contacts and influences and affinities between different regions can be studied.  

The earliest pottery forms in India evolved out of the stages when man was purely a hunter and then semi-nomadic, using articles like gourds, baskets and leather receptacles. India, being a vast country, the art varies in development because of geographical and climatic reasons, and thus a uniform development cannot be expected. 

The earthen pots as used in the earliest times, are still continued indiscriminately by the poor and the rich.

3. Ibid.
alike. The finding of earthen pots helps an archaeologist to ascertain the period and type of culture of the people. It has various purposes, but it is one of the most important steps towards archaeological search. Prof. Flinders Petrie has rightly characterised pottery as "the essential alphabet of archaeology in every land".¹

Due to the fragile nature of pottery, it is hard for the future generation to copy and use any except the most common and simple types. The changes in type and designs of this most useful and most common industry of a household give sufficient clues for distinguishing not only different tribes or countries but also to distinguish one tribe from another. The differences also help us to distinguish the successive periods of time. The practical indestructibility of the potsherd along with its changing nature well affords a criterion for fixing the age and character of ancient remains, and their relation to other relics of the past.²

The study of pottery has become the sheet anchor of archaeological chronology, and the first object of the scientific excavator is to determine the relative succession of the ceramic remains and to discover their connection with similar remains elsewhere.³

¹ Singh, U.V., op.cit., Introduction.
² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
The potsherds are amongst the most significant since the potter's art not only has a long history of its own, but its products have much to tell about the life and culture, of long-dead craftsmen and their contemporaries.¹

Potsherds are often the evidence of the past civilization, and they help in establishing the cultural sequence of an ancient site. The food habits of the people, their religious and social customs, the technological advancement attained by them, and even the economic condition can be judged by the various types of vessels, including the funerary and votive vessels, which are used in a particular period. The existing flora and fauna are also depicted on the painted vessels. The cultural contacts between the different groups of people are also determined by the pottery imported.

No systematic excavation on scientific methods has yet been carried out in any of the ancient archaeological sites in Central Assam, except only in the neolithic site of Dajjali-Hading. Many of the old sites, covered with jungles, had been cleared and dug by unskilled persons. The potteries discovered from those sites were carelessly thrown away.

The author during his exploration in various regions of Central Assam collected potteries from the surface. In

¹ Singh, U.V., op.cit., Introduction.
Dah Parbatia near Tezpur, potsherds have been found on the surface. A shallow bowl, which was probably used for serving the food or cooking, was discovered below the plinth of the well-known ruined Gupta temple, in a broken condition. In Mayang area, near the charaihaga pahar, potsherds were picked up from the surface. Another site, Mahadeosal in Nowgong district yielded huge quantity of potsherds, while digging a tank at the old temple site.

In the Ambari excavation (Gauhati), a good number of potsherds complete or in fragments were also recovered. As the report of the Ambari excavation is yet to be published, the materials could not be utilised for detailed and comparative study of the ceramic industries of Assam. With this small number of potsherds so far collected, we shall try to give an idea about the ancient ceramic industries in this region.

The ancient process of manufacturing pottery, can be guessed from the present day art of the potters in this area. The process of manufacturing can be divided into six stages.¹

1. Preparation of clay.
2. Shapping the pots.

3. Drying.
5. Decoration.
6. Firing.

The modern potters mainly manufacture two types of wares: Red ware and Dark-grey (or Blackish) ware. The Red ware is of two types: Fine Red ware and coarse Red ware. Both the fine red ware and the Dark Grey ware, are wheel made, but the method of firing in the kiln differs. The coarse red ware is usually hand made.

Preparation of Clay:

The essential characteristic of clay is plasticity in the wet state, a quality which it loses temporarily on drying and permanently when fired. Clays are decomposed rocks in a colloidal state, and, upon being burnt, return to something like their original rocky state. Natural clays are seldom used.¹

The potters usually obtain clay from the banks of rivers where, owing to the presence of small quantities of tannia acid derived from decaying vegetation, a high degree of 'temporary plasticity' is attained. Sometimes they collect clays from fields, too. Mostly they rely on local sources.

First, there is the treading of the clays in the stone-paved shallow tank, after it has been kept in the shade and covered with a wet rag. After the treading, it undergoes another process of kneading, by which the clay is purified.

The pots are either hand made or wheel made. Some large vessels are made on the wheel and then finished off by beating with the dabber. The various methods of shaping the pots by hand are: Coiling, Moulding, Beating and Scraping.

Wheel made:

The wheel of the potter is either solid or spoked, rotates fast and requires little strength and keeps its momentum for a longer time.¹

The prepared clay, made into a ball, is put on the Central keel of the wheel. The ball is shaped into a cone by squeezing the palms towards the centre of the ball. By depressing the clay cone, a perfect centred squat cylinder is made. To open the mass of clay, the potter keeps the hands cupped around the cylinder and presses downwards, leaving sufficient clay to form the thickness of the base. Then he starts to raise the wall at the same time, filling up the thinning wall. When the mass of clay has been opened and its walls thinned, the desired shapes are given by pressure.

The demarcation of the rim and the carination at the middle of the vessel are obtained by the finger. When the pot has been given the desired shape, it is cut off the wheel. Generally a thin string is used for the purpose, but smaller pots are cut off with the help of a knife. The pots made either by wheel or hand, and are air-dried in the shade.

The surface treatments given to pots comprise smoothing, burnishing, washing and slipping. For smoothing the pot, fine liquid clay is gently applied on the pot.

Burnishing is done to reduce the porosity of the clay, and it gives a smooth and shining surface to the pots. The process consists of the application of powder of a smooth greenish stone; the powder is rubbed over the surface. The dark grey wares are only burnished, and the others are treated with wash or slip and then painted.

The pots of red ware are treated with a wash after drying. This consists of an application of thin liquid of 'red ochre', mostly on both surfaces and rarely on the exterior only. This is done when the pots are not painted.

The potter uses only one slip of 'red ochre', applied in two or three coatings. The slip fills up the pores in the body of the vessel and, after firing, the pot remains red.
Decoration:

The different designs of decoration such as painting, incision, stamping and finger tip pressure are applied to the pot. The process of painting starts with the application of wash or slip of red-ochre. The apintings are executed before firing, drawn with a small pointed wooden piece or brush. Some motifs, such as oblique lines, are drawn with the fingers.

The incised decoration is done on Dark Grey ware vessels dried to a leather-hard condition and after their surfaces have been burnished. The interior designs are executed with the help of a cowree, denticles of a lady's comb and a denticulated small wheel of metal provided with a handle.

The stamped designs are made both on the Red and the Dark Grey ware. The metal stamp bearing the negative of the designs is fixed on a piece of lac. Finger tip decoration is used on coarse and thick Red ware, and the impression is given at the time when the pots have slightly dried.

Firing:

The kilns usually have a pit in which a layer of grass is spread first followed by the layers of wood, cow-dung cakes; and then pots are arranged in layers. The pots
are covered with a layer of tiles or pots. Again, the entire heap is covered with grass and finally with ash. The fire is lighted at specific points from the bottom, and the vessels are baked properly in about twenty hours' time. This process is only meant for the Red ware. The Dark Grey ware differs slightly. For the former, the layers of grass, wood, etc. are arranged at the bottom. Here the vessels, are arranged in an inverted position, and are covered with successive layers of tiles, grass and ash. After specific time of firing, a fresh layer of ash is spread over the kiln, and also water is sprinkled. Then the ashes settle down firmly. Sawdust is poured through the chimney and its mouth is closed. The smoke created by the burning of sawdust circulates and the pots turn to dark grey.

The vessels are slipped and decorated usually before firing. The pots which are made for ritual purposes, are decorated after firing.

The ancient ceramic industry in the region of Central Assam, known from Dabparbatia, (Tezpur), Mayang and Mahadeosal (in Nowgong district), is represented by Red ware only. Not a single pot of black ware, black and red ware or grey ware has been found. A few sherds of kaolin have also been found.
General observation:

The entire ancient pottery is wheel turned. The small and medium sized pots seem to have been manufactured usually on a fast wheel as is evident from the close striation marks on the pots. But bigger pots were invariably turned on a slow wheel. The fabric of the pots from Dah Parbatia is fine, the core is thin to medium in thickness, and the pots are made of well-levigated clay, free from impurities and mostly fired uniformly. The fabric of the pots from Mayang area is medium coarse, well baked, and sturdy; while the fabric from Mahadeosal is rough but well baked and shows impurities of clay, mixed with particles of mica. No painted designs have been noticed, except incised designs.

The pots, in general, are uniformly fired, but instances of imperfect firing, resulting in blotchy surfaces, are not lacking in all the wares. All the three sites have yielded pottaries of three different categories, not common to each other. Only Mayāng has yielded potteries besides Buff ware, kaolin ware and a very negligible quantity of dull red ware.

Technologically, on the basis of fabric, surface treatment and differential firing resulting in different shades of the same colour, the red ware can be broadly subdivided into three categories. Another category is made of Kaolin.
Thus the four categories are as follows:

1. Red slipped ware;
2. Buff ware;
3. Pinkish coarse ware; and

1. **Red slipped ware**: (Plate XXIII, Figs. 99...

In Dhar Parbatia, only this type of ware has been found. The original surface of this ware was red slipped. Due to stagnation of water, the slips have mostly vanished.

The ware is made of well-levigated clay free from impurities and is usually fired uniformly. The core is not gritty and shows particles of mixed mica.

**Types:**

The following shapes occur in the Red slipped ware:

(i) Jars of different sizes and shapes;
(ii) Bowls;
(iii) Basins.

Fig. 1. Jar with flaring club shaped rim,

2. Basin with club shaped rim and thick walls.

3. Bowl, cup shaped with tapering sides. This is identical with that of Tripuri, type No. 46 (P.53), Tripuri Excavation Report, 1952.
4. Bowl piece with incised decoration.
5. Jar of short necked with flaring rim, bulging body, and thick walls.
6. Bowl piece, with mat-impression design.
8. Bowl piece mat-impression designs.

Shapes No. 2, 5, 6 and 13, are similar to the types found in Tripuri and Tumain. Definite date cannot be assigned to as the fabrics and types are different.

**Designs:**

Mat impression designs are very common in addition to incised horizontal bands. A few sherds bearing jack-fruit designs are also known.

2. **Buff ware** : (Plate XXIV, Figs. 100, ...)

This variety is found only in Mayang area. The fabric of this type is medium coarse, well-baked and sturdy.

The following shapes have been found in this area.
1. Bowl piece with incised horizontal and vertical line decoration.
2. Bowl piece with incised line decoration.
3. Jar with club shaped rim, almost straight internal sides.
4. Bowl, with inwardly projecting rim, tapering sides, has thick core.

5. Large mouthed basin or dish, sharply sloping walls below the carination at the waist, and has thick core.

6. Jar with broad and slightly flaring mouth, incipient neck and outgoing rim.

7. Fragment of jar, with incised criss-cross designs.

8. Fragment of basin, with incised collar and horizontal designs.


10. Fragment of Bowl, incised with horizontal and vertical lines.


3. Pinkish coarse ware: (Plate...Figs...)

Pots of this type of ware have been found only in Mahâdeośāl. When the local people dug a tank at this ancient temple site, a huge quantity of potsherds was discovered.

The pottery found here is inferior in purity of clay, and the clay is not properly levigated, and a grit, such as dung and husk, seem to have been added to the clay. The fabric of this ware is rough but well baked and shows particles of mica.

The shapes found here, are:

1. Deep bowl (Hândi) carinated, shoulder with flared oblique rim.
2. Jar with short neck with bent rim and globular body.
3. Jar with broad and flaring mouth, outgoing rim and tapering sides.
4. Jar with broad mouth, constricted neck, and outgoing side. It has comparatively a thicker core.

4. Kaolin : (Plate XXIV Figs. 100...)

Only a few sherds of Kaolin have been collected from Mayang area. The fabric of these wares is fine and of well levigated clay duly fired.

The Mat-impression design is seen on these sherds. Wares Nos. 12 and 14 indicate the fragments of jar and bowl respectively. Neither rim nor bottom sherds of kaolin, have been found, the shape of the pot cannot be determined. Kaolin wares have also been found in Ambari excavation in large numbers. The mat impression and criss-cross designs are commonly met with in the different categories of wares in the sites.

As earlier stated, in Assam, no scientific and systematic excavation has yet been conducted. Therefore, it is difficult to correlate the potteries of different sites and to fix the date of the ceramic industries of Assam. The Neolithic pottery, discovered in Dacjali-Hading excavation, does not give an idea of the shape of the pots, due to lack of rim and bottom sherds.
On the basis of fabric and shape, the date of the ceramic industries of Dah Parbatia may go back to circa 4th-5th centuries A.D. or a little earlier. The date of pottery from Mayang may go to early mediaeval period. The potteries of Mahadeosal may be assigned to 11th-12th centuries A.D.

On the basis of the present day usage, the functions suggested for the different types of early historic vessels are as follows:

1. Large jar with broad mouth - storage of water and grains.
2. Jars with broad mouth - storage of water and liquids.
3. Jars with narrow neck - storage or carriage of water and other liquids.
4. Small jars - Holding and serving water, or ritualistic purposes.
5. Basin - storage of water or liquids, or feeding cattle.
6. Shallow bowl - serving of food, used as cover also.
7. Deep bowl - serving of liquid food.
8. Carinated Bowl - Eating, drinking and cooking.

Comparison with modern pottery:

A comparative study of the modern pottery shows the survival of the ancient tradition in a poorer way. As metallic pots are durable, and available in different qualities and shapes, the traditional potter’s craft has been greatly affected. The pots manufactured are purely utilitarian and
lack variety of forms and designs as compared to the earlier potteries. The fabric of the present-day potteries is comparatively inferior and coarser. The clay is not so well levigated and is fragile. The potters of Dah Parbatia probably had better control over the kiln and therefore could produce sturdier pots.