CHAPTER-V

BACKGROUND OF THE ART HISTORY OF ASSAM

The history of Assam starts with the traditional rulers mentioned in the Purāṇas. They were called Dānava and Asuras, and were evidently non-Aryan people. In the epics and the Purāṇas they are mentioned as Kirātas and Mlecchas. The name of the earliest ruler, so far known from tradition and puranic history, in Assam, was Mahiraṅga Dānav. Mahiraṅga is Sanskritized from the Boḍo name Mairāṅg. Mairāṅga (Mahiraṅga) was followed by Haṭakāśura, Sambarāśura, Ratnāśura and Ghaṭakāśura, respectively.

Ghaṭkāśura, who is described as the ruler of the Kirātas, a powerful race, was defeated and slain by Naraka, a prince from Videha, who established a new dynasty in Prāgjyotisha. The kings of this dynasty ruled over Prāgjyotisha for a considerably long time. Naraka is mentioned in the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata. The episode relating to him is given in the Kālikā Purāṇa¹, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa², the Viṣṇu Purāṇa³ and the Harivamsa⁴.

The purānic tradition is well preserved in the inscriptions of early ruling dynasties viz. the Varman, Sālastambha and the Pāla dynasties.

¹. Kālikā Purāṇa, Ch. 36-40
². Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Book X, Ch. 59
³. Viṣṇu Purāṇa, Book V, Ch. 29
⁴. Harivamsa, Viṣṇu Parva, Ch. 63-64
of Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa kingdom. Both the Doobi (vv2-4) and Nidhanpur (vv4-5) copperplate charters refer to Naraka’s birth from Viśṇu-Varāha, the full details of the Naraka legend is found in the records of the rulers of the Sālastambha and Brahmapāla dynasties only. The Nidhanpur copperplate charter states that Naraka, the chief of the rulers of the earth, was the son of Viśṇu, who assumed the form of the Boar (Varāha), for the purpose lifting up the earth from the deluge. From Naraka was born Bhagadatta, the friend of Indra, and who challenged the latter in battle and was famous for his conquests. In the copperplate grants Balavarman (vv. 3f) it is stated that Upendra (Viśṇu), who assumed the form of a Boar (Varāha) and rescued the Earth, plunged in the universal deluge, begot a son, named Naraka, a friend of the asuras, who deprived Indra of his glory, took away Aditi’s jewels and who, having conquered Prāgjyotiṣa, took up his residence there. His son Bhagadatta was a unique hero, whose younger brother was Vajradatta. The Bargaon grant (vv. 3-8) retold the same story about the birth of Naraka, ‘who is partially an asura’ (narakosurāṇśakah), who defeated gods, and snatched away the earrings of Aditi, After him his two sons, Bhagadatta and Vajradatta, ruled successively. The Khanāmukh, the Subhaṅkara-pātaka and the Puṣpabhadra copperplate grants of Dharmapāla bear the same evidence. The epigraphs recorded the long established traditions
relating to early history of Assam. These evidences are important in
the sense that all the rulers of the historical period trace their
connection with the same Bhauma dynasty.

It is, however, interesting to note that some sort of confusion is
noticed in the inscriptions regarding the exact relationship between
Bhagadatta and Vajradatta. While in some inscriptions Vajradatta is
shown as the younger brother of Bhagadatta, in some others he is said
to be the son of the latter. This confusion arises, perhaps due to the
time gap of more than three thousand years in between.

The kings of this dynasty ruled over Prāgjyotisa for a considerably
long period. Narak is associated with both Rāma and Kṛṣṇa in the
Kālīka Purāṇa, and is made to rule from the end of the Tretā to the
Dvāpara- yuga, which seems to be absurd. It is, therefore, suggested
that Naraka, like Janaka, was a dynastic title and that belongs to the
latter's family. But Naraka of his time and, therefore, that of Rāma
was certainly different from the Naraka killed by Kṛṣṇa. The virtuous
and wicked character of the person as given in the same Purāṇa
cannot possibly refer to the same Naraka. The first Naraka, who came
under the influence of Aryan culture and had introduced Devī worship,
was different from Naraka of the later part of the story. The latter

5. Choudhury, P. C., History of Civilization of the People of Assam, p. 113
might have been the last Naraka who took to non-Aryan habits and was called an asura or mleccha; he is associated with Bāṇa of Śoṇitpura (modern Tezpur). With the expansion of the Aryan dominion to eastern India, Indo-Aryan ideas penetrated to early Assam. The advent of Naraka to early Assam was an episode of Aryan migration to this region. But during the age of Naraka, the kingship of the state structure as gradually developed, however, the society remained predominantly tribal with a pastoral economic life. Religious offerings and the worship of various deities were actually symbolic and related to fertility rites. The worship of the goddess Kāmākhya was also tribal fertility rite, and later it was Hinduised and linked with Sāti, wife of god Śiva. Even the name of Kāmarūpa, which came from the tribal rite of the dead, is connected with the rebirth of Kāma (the god of love) who lost his life because of the fury of Śiva. Furthermore, the myth relating to the holes on the riverside megalith of North Guwahati, near Aśvakrānta temple, connected with the footprints of the horse of Lord Kṛṣṇa, was a process of Hinduising the people worshipping the megalith. Thus, the Brahmins of bygone age played a great role in

7. Natun Prthivi (Assamese Quarterly), Vol. XII, pp. 28-29
8. ibid, p. 22.
associating and inducting the non-Aryan people into their fold, thereby creating a new culture. But the actual political history of Assam starts from the Varmans of Pragnyotisa-Kamarupa. Puṣyavarman, who ruled over Kāmarūpa during the 4th century A.D., was the founder of this line. He traces his descending line from the Bhauma dynasty of Naraka-Bhagadatta, and was the first illustrious ruler of the line as recorded in the inscriptions.13

The Nidhanpur copperplate grant of Bhāskaravarman states: “when the kings of the Narakā family, having enjoyed the position of rulers for three thousand years, had all attained the condition of gods, Puṣyavarman became the lord of the world.”14

The Varman dynasty continued from middle of the 4th century A.D. to the middle of the 7th century A.D. or even later. Puṣyavarman was the contemporary of Samudragupta. As he the used the epithet, Mahārajadhirāja, he must have gain power and influence in Eastern India.

Both Kāmarūpa and Davāka mentioned in the Allahabad Pillar inscription are evidence of Samudragupt’s imperial authority. Davāka of the Allahabad prāśasti is identified with the present Dabokā in the

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13. The Nidhanpur Copperplate Grant of Bhāskaravarman, EI. X., XII, 73; XIX, pp. 115ff; 245ff.
   The Doobi Copperplate Grant of Bhāskaravarman, M. A. Sl. No. 66, pp. 69ff70.
Nagaon district of Assam. With the political influence of the Guptas, cultural and religious influence of northern India was also felt by the people of this region. From the epic period Aryan migration to this region had started, and the people were influenced by the Aryan culture. On the other hand, the religious zeal of the Brahmanical religion of this period led to the penetration of the Brahmanical religio-cultural influence into this region. For the development of the artistic activities in this region, the rulers of Kāmarūpa invite various sculptors, architects, masons, carpenters, et al. from various other parts of India.

The most important factor of the artistic influence of the Gupta period in early Assam was the invasion of the Śakas and the Huṇas in the northern part of India. The Huṇas threatened the security of the people. The Brahmanas and various guilds, including the stonecutters and sculptors, whose labours depended on political tranquility, fled to eastern and southern region of India where political stability was not threatened at that time. After the death of Samudragupta, the throne of the Guptas passed on to Rāmagupta. But he was a weak ruler. He submitted his kingdom to the Śaka king and agreed to surrender his wife, too, to the Śaka king. His brother Chandragupta Vikramāditya at last saved the country. He divested the Śakas of their power and succeeded to the throne after killing his weak brother,

Rāmagupta and gave the empire a stability that could not be challenged until his death.

During the long reign of Kumāragupta I (A.D. 415-455) peace and stability of the country from the Arabian sea to the Bay of Bengal was restored. At the beginning of the reign of Skandagupta, the nomadic Huṇas advanced towards North India. The Huṇas inhabited in the border of Chiṇa from the 2nd century B.C. to 5th century A.D. They became very powerful in the Oxus valley and occupied Gandhāra. Skandagupta checked their advance to India. His Bhitārī inscription shows how he inflicted a crushing defeat upon the Huṇas. But the Huṇa invasion could not be stopped. By the close of the 5th century A.D., parts of modern Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Kashmir came under the rule of the Huṇa chief Toramāna. This adventure of the Huṇas continued until Yaśodharman of Malwa uprooted them. For a long time they devastated the region of Northern India under their control. Sung-Yūn, a Chinese ambassador to the Huṇa king of Gandhāra and Cosmos, an Alexandrian Greek, have narrated how the Huṇas tortured the people. The invaders occupied city after city, massacred the male populace and enslaved the women and children.

This invasion, however, indirectly helped in the progress of art and culture in Assam. The inscriptions of early Assam prove that the

Brahmins, architects and sculptors received favour in this region. During that time temples were erected, figures were sculptured and inscriptions were engraved. Local artists were also trained. In this way the classical tradition took its form in early Assam. We have found no remains of sculptural art in Assam prior to 5th century A.D. The sculptural activities in Assam began with the expansion of the Gupta empire. The Umāchal rock inscription, the Nagājarī-Khanikargaoon fragmentary stone inscription of the early 5th century (earlier) bear out that Brahmanical religion penetrated into Kāmarūpa (early Assam). The deity Balabhadra, a constituent of the Pāńcarātra cult, — a cult which became by and large extinct by the 5th century A.D., which,—was worshipped in Kāmarūpa as evidenced by the Umāchal rock inscription and the sculptural remains found at Da-Parvatīyā, Mikir-Āti, Bōḍgaṅgā, Kāmākhyā and Dudhnoi belonging to the late 5th and 6th centuries A.D. Before 5th century A.D. the artists of Assam used perishable materials like terracotta, clay and wood.

The first and the most impressive example of monumental art in stone in Assam is located at Da-Parvatīyā near Tezpur. It has come down to us as relief on the doorframe (dvāra) of a temple, now otherwise completely ruins. It is dated to the 6th century A.D. on the

18. *ibid* 305-6
19. *ibid*. 303-6
basis of the style of the figures, which share all the characteristic features of the classical art of the Gupta period in Assam. The classical tradition of the Gupta period is vividly portrayed in the beautifully executed sculptures of Gaṅgā and Yamunā on the dvāra. We have compared all the existing or known temple dvāras in India depicting these two river goddesses. But Da-parvatīyā dvāra stands first because of graceful and elegant posture in which these two figures are holding garlands, flanked by attendants and the details of the four sākhas (vertical bands) on each dvārasākha and dvāra-sirapatti depicting various mythical figures and Garuḍa holding two snakes from the lalita-bimba. The dvāra is affiliated to the Saranath school of Banaras in so far as the style is concerned. The quality of the stone used for execution of the dvāra is of superior quality and useful for its intricate work; it is found in the Benaras belt. This masterpiece is dated between 5th and 6th cen. A.D. Unfortunately the lower portion, i.e. feet of the figure of the goddess Gaṅgā including her vāhana, the makara are sadly mutilated. The lower portion of the figure of Yamunā has also suffered from mutilation.

In addition to this ruined temple, some terracotta plaques were found by R. D. Banerji at Da-Parvatīyā. One of the plaques represents the headless figure of a seated Buddha. Some terracotta figurines were also found at Da-Parvatīyā. These represent animal and human
figurines belonging to about 8th century A.D. One terracotta plaque showing two female elephant riders is in the Assam State Museum.

Mikir-Āti, near Daboka has yielded a stone sculpture of a female bust. The modelling of the sculpture is very much similar to the Da-Parvatīya Gaṅgā-Yaṁuna figurēs, in so far as the bust portion are concerned. But the sculpture is not identifiable and the quality of stone also appear to be slightly inferior to that of Da-Parvatīya. The piece of art is presently preserved in the Assam State Museum.

Similarly, there is an image of Dakṣa (fig.5) from Raṅgāgāḍā Tea Eastate, Tinsukia, ascribed to 6th-7th cen. A.D. Again, an image of Pārvatī (plate-4) obtained from the same place also is made in the same style. Both these images go a long way to prove that some local effort was made to adapt classical Indian idiom in Assam. The eyes of Pārvatī are, indeed, typically classical and so also the matted locks of hair (jāṭā) of Dakṣa. Both the images are now preserved in the Assam State Museum.

After the 6th cen. A.D., the supernatural quality of the classical sculptures lost its prominence. However, the sculptures represent the classical idiom in their style. This can be seen in the general style of modelling and transparent drapery, as is noticed in the sculptures from Devasthān, Na-Ñāth, Goalpara, Sūryapāhār. These sculptures become slender and more sensuous and emotional in treatment. Inspite
of classical influence the sculptures of this group fail to maintain the classical dynamism. Local trends began to emerge gradually.

Eastern School:

Since the death of Harṣvardhana regional emphasis may be seen to have been given in North India leading ultimately to the establishment of regional state, often in conflict with one another. Thus, it led to the development of regional languages, regional scripts and regional variations within the principle of religious systems, and also the regional school of art. So far as the eastern region was concerned, a new political power, that of the Pāлас emerged in Bengal and Bihar. The early rulers of this dynasty were inspired by imperial ambitions and had to contend for hegemony in north India with two other powers from the west and the south. In this ambition of theirs, the Pāлас were only temporarily successful. But they were able to maintain their hegemony in Bengal and Bihar for nearly four centuries. In Bengal, they were followed by the Senas them and both these political dynasties were swept away by the avalanche of Muslim invasion about the beginning of the thirteenth century. In Assam, the dynasty of Bhāskaravarman, contemporary of Harṣavardhana, as replaced in the second half of the seventh century by a new dynasty, that of Sālastambha, said to be of mleccha origin, though the later members of the family are known to have claimed as descended from Bhagadatta, son and successor of the mythical Naraka. The Bargaon
copperplate grant of Ratnapāla states that after the descendants of Naraka had ruled Kāmarūpa for several generations, owing to a turn of adverse fortune, Śālastambha took possession of the kingdom.\textsuperscript{20}

Harṣa seems to have been the first eminent ruler of the Śālastambha line, as one comes to know from a Nepalese inscription of the middle of the eighth century. One of his successors, Harijjaravarman, with a known data, Gupta year 510 corresponding to A.D. 829-30, and Vanamālavaran and his grandson Balavarman in later part of the 9\textsuperscript{th} century A.D. and the earlier part of the 10\textsuperscript{th} century A.D. were also illustrious rulers of this family.

In the second half of the tenth century A.D. the ruler of Śālastambha family were replaced by the dynasty of Brhumapālā, who was followed by a number of strong and powerful rulers holding undisputed sway in Assam till the early part of twelfth century. About this time Rāmapāla and his son Kumārapāla of the Pāla dynasty of Bengal and Bihar are known to have interfered in the politics of Assam by placing their own nominees. Apparently, this outside intervention led to the disruption of the old kingdom of Kāmarūpa. They were powerful enough to resist successfully the first Muslim invasion of Assam in A.D. 1205-06. But continued Muslim incursions led to the splitting up of the old kingdom into a number of small and weak principalities, frittering away their energies in constant conflict.

\textsuperscript{20} Bargaon copperplate grant, line 2-3.
with one another. Almost simultaneously, the Ahoms, who were destined to bring Kāmarūpa under their political hegemony, penetrated the Brahmaputra valley from the Shan country.

From the 7th to 9th century A.D. Assam witnessed, as in contemporary Bengal, a sculptural style that continued the Gupta classical tradition, but greatly influenced by local idioms and tribal motifs. The Pāla school of Eastern India, however, inspired the local Assamese tradition with still greater force. It is clear in the stone images from Golaghat, Deopani and Boropathar regions of Assam. These great works of art include inscribed images, one of Viṣṇu, two of Hari-Hara, and a torso of Viṣṇu. Interestingly enough, these sculptures were carved from large-sized river-born smooth boulders. The figures, moreover, have no halo or śrīcakra. The sculptural art of Assam till 9th century A.D. was simple and direct.

The Tibetan historian Tārānāth mentions the foundation of the Eastern School of Art to Dhimana and his son Bitapālo who lived during the time of Dāharmapāla and Devapāla in the 9th century A.D. 21

From the 10th century A.D. there may be recognised an increased output in the sculptural art of Assam in stone as well as in metal. The plastic form of the first half of the 9th century A.D., the trend was developed in a very large measure. Reference may in this context to

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a stone image of Umā-Mahēśvara from Daboka in Nagaon district (Pt.-26), now in the Assam State Museum, Guwahati which shows the god and the goddess on a lotus seat, the goddess seated to the left of the god. Here also the stela is rectangular with a rounded top and has beaded border with diamond shaped rosetes edged by flame pattern. This sense of ornamentation is also noticed in a large number of personal ornaments worn by divine couple. The execution of the pattern of double lotus seat is also developed. The platic forms bear evidences of definitive modelling, but the expression of the face of each of the couple is in a certain measure difference. Some of the features in this appear to be later in evolution. Two black stone sculptures of almost identical execution from Guwahati may be seen in the Assam State Museum. One of them represents Brahmā (fig. 39) and the other represents Indra. (fig. 30. Each of them stands on a high pedestal with the respective mount of each and lotus blossoms carved on it. In addition Indra may be seen to have a lotus seat over the pedestal. The stela of the image of Brahmā is broken at the top, while that of Indra is seen to have a kīrttimukha at the pointed apex. The style of the sculptures is almost similar. These two sculptures may be placed in the tenth century A/D.

From the Narakāsur hoard (Kahilipara, Guwahati) there have been found again two metal sculptures, one of Viṣṇu and the other of Avalokiteśvara, which may be deserved mention in this context.
In the 11th century A.D. there may be recognised a greater elaboration of the stela and this elaboration has a tendency to stifle the plastic form altogether. The tendency reaches ultimately a point in which the overcrowded ornamentation of the stela has the effect of completely suffocating the plastic forms presented by the principal and accessory figures. In the eleventh century, in spite of increased ornamentation, the value of the plastic form was not lost sight of. In the eleventh century there may be recognised eminent production in stone and in metal and the figural works in the architectural pieces may also be seen to reflect this tendency. Reference may be made in this context to the miniature image of Viṣṇu, Mahiṣaṃarddīṇī and Sūrya from Ambari, now in the Assam State Museum. The images are corroded to great extent. But despite this corrosion, the feeling for form defined by clear contour may be recognised in each of these sculptures.

Two extremely fragmentary pieces in black stone from Tezpur, now in Assam State Museum, representing part of image of Mahiṣaṃarddīṇī may also be taken note of in this context. One represents the lower parts of the image in which the demon is seen to be issuing out of the decapitated body of the buffalo, the other, one may notice, the bust of the goddess with all the hands gone and the face mutilated. Despite the damages wrought, the value of the plastic form may be recognised in both the fragments, together with a
dynamism that is distinctive of Mahiṣamardini images of the eleventh century from other part of Eastern India.

By the end of the eleventh century, the stela bears an increasing numbers of ornamentation which consisted of stylised motifs. At the same time the pedestal shows a number of rathaka projections bearing on the surface of the lotus buds, figure of the mounts and the donors. In this regard mention may be made of two imags of Viṣṇu, one from Daboka and the other from Budhābuḍḍi. In each of them the god stands on a lotus supported on the central projection with a separate figure on to sides standing each on a separate lotus over the intermediate projections. The stela has been designed as throne back and has a pointed top. On the either side of a pilaster supported a gaja-simha motif which in its turn supports an architrave with makara-head end on either side. The god has a hallow around his head with a pointed kirīta projection beyond its top. On either side may be seen a garland-bearing Vidyādhara while the pointed top is crowned by kirtimukha are now broken away. The principal as well as the acolyte figures wear rich ornaments. In the sculpture from Daboka we have all the characteristic features of late eleventh century Assamese sculpture. In spite of the increasing ornamentation of the stela there is still noticed a balanced and rhythmic integration of the plastic form within the ornamented stela. These characteristics also distinguish
a few other sculptures of Viṣṇu, Sūrya, Mahiṣamarddini and others from Ambari now in the Assam State Museum.

Belonging to the first half of the 12th century A.D. are the two sculptures of Viṣṇu, one nearly complete and the other fragmentary, both now in the Assam State Museum. In the two sculptures, the form gets slender and elongated and despite definitive modelling of the higher relief of the decorative motif of the stela, as one sees in the Viṣṇu image from Chandmari, the plastic context of the principal figure may be seen to have lost its effect in a certain measure. The ultimate stage in which the decorative feature of the stela appears to stifle the plastic form may be seen in a number of sculptures of approximately late twelfth century to which period may be assigned one image of Sūrya from Daboka, now in the Assam State Museum.

A development of plastic direction of this popular idiom may again be noticed in a few metal sculptures from Narakasur hoard.22 Two of them may deserve mention in this context.

One of the two images of Chamunda with eight hands. The goddess sits cross-legged on a double lotus stela. Behind, there is a solid prabhāvali with rounded top edged with beaded borders and flame motif. The prabhāvali is is surmounted by a parasol with two flying streamer below. The modelling is coarse in a certain measure,

but a developed diction may be recognized in the higher relief given to the entire figure, together with a balanced integration of the volumes and masses. The goddess has a squarish face with wide open eyes and thick lips that seem to curl at the edge.

An image of Śūrya, again from Narakasur hill hoard, seems to furnish yet another example of this popular idiom in Assam. The sculpture has open eyes, thick lips curling at the edges and square face. The god has a solid oval halo around the head with beaded borders and flame patterns at the edges and the top. The two accessory figures, Daṇḍa and Piṅgala, have also each a halo around the head; however, it is hollow instead of being solid. The figures have grown slender and elongated, a characteristic feature of eleventh century Assamese sculpture and of the eastern school as well.

The decline of the Pāla dynasty in the 12th century led to diminishing art activities due to lack of royal patronage. The Tai people entered Assam from upper Burma by the beginning of the 13th century. They became known as Ahom and ruled in the Brahmaputra valley till the advent of the British.

However, the pre-Ahom Pāla continued in early Assam age, as the Ahom rulers took some time to get familiar with the local culture, sanskrit language etc. This is proved by the discovery of a large number of sculptures from Āmbāri, Guwahati.
The Āmbārī excavation has thrown a flood of light in this direction. Apart from big and small-sized stone images of Brahmanical deities, a number of terracotta sculptures representing Brahmanical deities are also discovered during the course of excavation. These big sculptures belong to 13th-14th centuries A.D. The deterioration in the art style can be clearly seen in the big stone images. But these are executed in the pre-Āhom, Pāla style. Stylistically also it has been proved. Inscribed letters on the body of few images give the same impression. Images in plenty are found in the same place where large quantity of images of various sizes were sculpted for commercial purposes. An inscription dated in Śaka era corresponding to A.D. 1232, issued by a king Samudrapāla by name. He was most probably a ruler of the Pāla dynasty of Kāmarūpa. The sculptures of that place undoubtedly belong to the 13th century A.D.

After Āmbārī sculptures of early Ahom period, we do not have information of any such sculpture discovered in Assam. There is no information of artistic endeavours in Assam in the 15th and 16th centuries. From 17th century onwards, the Ahom rulers, after consolidating their position, started patronising art activities. As a

23. Āmbārī stone inscription of Samudrapāla 1154 Śaka. Acc. No. ASM (3129) (79 X 43). The stone inscription was discovered in the campus of the Textile Institute at Āmbārī, Guwahati while some labourers were working for laying the foundation of the Institute. It records that in the kingdom of Samudrapāla, there was a powerful satra institution in Guwahati where rituals were performed Kamarūpa Śāsanāvali, p. 142.
result, temples and sculptural art occupied an important position in the list of artistic works of the Ahom rulers.

The Ahom artists made a complete departure from the pre-Ahom Pala style, while executing their art work. The classical formula was completely ignored because of, possibly, a generation gap. They preferred the folk art style. Therefore, we see heavy folk elements in the Ahom sculptures. During this period, sculptures are frontally carved and figures are always depicted in profile. Not only in stone sculpture, in terracotta, painting and wood work also we find the same formula and the same style. In case of metal sculpture, the style differs. Here artists could follow the common system, and formal style can be seen in their work. The Ahom style in Assam continued for four generations. Panels in Ahom sculpture are very few. Divinities of Brahmanical pantheon or Hindu religion are common in stone sculptural art of this period. Secular form of art depicting social scenes, dance and musical scene are not commonly found in the sculpture of the Ahom period. The art style of the Koch artists of the same period was very similar in style and execution.

In the Ahom period we find the brass sculptures mostly representing Viṣṇu, Veṇu-Gopāla and Laḍuvā-Gopāla. However, a beautiful Mahiśmardini was found at Tinsukia of 18th century A.D. The image is at present preserved in the Assam State Museum.
Wood art tradition has occupied a prestigious place in the history of art in Assam. Almost every Satra of Assam is connected with wood art activities. Most of the Satra buildings are decorated with wood art, which are mainly connected with Vaiṣṇavism. Apart from the image of Viṣṇu, Garuḍa etc., panels of Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata are also carved on wood.

The wood art, however, had no connection with the Ahom or the Koch temples; they were connected with the Satras. The Assam State Museum has a number of wood art pieces belonging to this period.

But not a single piece of wood art of the pre-Ahom period is yet discovered in Assam so far. It was because of the heavy rains and excessive heat that old wood-work has only rarely survives. In Bardowa Museum, there is a beautiful image of Viṣṇu on a wooden stela displaying Pāla features. It appears that as far as the style in sculpture is concerned, the direction changes have been the same whatever be the medium.

Clay is another medium in which works of art were produced. These were hand modelled as well as cast. The ancient most, of the 6th century A.D., sculptures in classical style; teracotta seated male figure has been discovered at the ruined temple site of Da-Parvatiyā near Tezpur. Terracotta or burnt clay images of the 10th-12th century have come from the old sites at Guwahati and Bhaitābārī in high
relief, and display pre-Ahom style of workmanship. However, the terracottas of Ahom-Koch period, like the stone sculptures, clearly show the dominance of folk elements. The terracotta sculptures from Bhagpara, now in the Assam State Museum, on the other hand, shows a peculiar admixture of late Mughal and folk styles. It reflects the life style of the people of 18th-19th century.

Thus, in the conclusion, we can say that sculptural art of Assam had in the beginning only some pockets of classical idioms as presented at Sūrya-pāhār, Da-Parvatiyā, Na-Nāth, Mikir-āṭi, Kāmākhyā, Bargaon etc. It was only in 10th and 12th centuries that Assam witnessed the mature phase of artistic activities, though here too it was the style of Eastern Indian School of medieval period. The Pāla characteristics mark most of the works of art. The Ahom period on the other hand, started with an extremely dull note in this field. The Ahom-Koch artists were perhaps not well-versed in the classical Sanskrit tradition of the Pālas. These works of art are found highly impregnated with folk elements. Some attempts were made to imitate the classical style but these were, by and large, unsuccessful.

There are many stone or rock-cut images lying in the entire length and breadth of the State. They need study, protection, preservation and security, otherwise they will perish for ever.