CHAPTER-VI

SCULPTURES OF DIFFERENT PERIODS IN ASSAM

Indian sculpture is always related with temples. We do not find any group of separate monumental sculpture. The sculptures of Assam, which served as the decorated parts of temples, namely, walls, ceilings, doorways and lintels etc. rarely exist now in its original form.

Ruins of temples are scattered in most of the places of Assam. The majority of sculptures that have been found in the region represent various gods, goddesses and other divine figures.

We have found no remains of sculptural art in any medium in Assam prior to the 5th century A.D., as the sculptural activities in Assam began with the expansion of the Gupta empire. The Umāchāl Rock Inscription and the Nagājari-Khanikargaon fragmentary stone inscription¹ of early 5th century A.D. bear out that Brahmānical religion penetrated Kāmarūpa (early Assam) from very early times.²

Sculptural remains have been found at Da-Parvatiyā,³ Mikir-
Ati, Badganga, Kāmākhyā and Dudhnoi belonging to the late 5th and 6th century A.D. During this span of time sculptural art in Assam flourished tremendously. An art tradition in wood and terracotta may have existed in Assam prior to 6th century A.D., and might have found expression in stone with classical influence at both Kāmarūpa and Daboka as evidenced by Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta.

Davāka of the Allahabad pillar inscription or praśasti, is identified with modern Daboka in Nagaon district of Assam. With the political influence of the Guptas, cultural and religious influence of northern India is 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 infiltration of the Brahmanical religious cultural influence into this region. It is likely that the sculptors of Kāmarūpa were trained abroad, alternatively the rulers of the region invited sculptors and architects from various parts of India to help in the artistic development in the region, and thus began the cultural impact of the Gupta period. During the Huṇa

4. Kāmākhyā another name of the hillock Nilācala in Guwahati, where the temple of goddess Kāmākhyā is situated. The origin of Kāmākhyā is actually related to the tribal fertility rites. (Natun Prithiva, p. 22) and the Kalika Purāṇa also tentatively supports this view explaining the word ‘Kāmākhyā’ as ‘kāma iti ṭikhyā’, famous for fertility rite.


and the Śaka invasions in early parts of the 5th century A.D. in North India, number of master artists migrated from this place to other places. The Huṇas threatened the very security of the people, Brahmans and various guilds including artists, masons, and sculptors fled to the eastern and southern regions of India where political stability was not threatened at that time.

During the long reign of Kumāragupta I (A.D. 415-55) peace and stability from the Arabian sea to the Bay of Bengal were restored. At the beginning of the reign of Skandagupta, the nomadic Huṇas advanced towards northern India. However, their advance to India was checked by Skandagupta. His Bhitari inscription shows how he inflicted a crushing defeat upon the Huṇas and saved the fortune of his family. But the Huṇa invasion could not be stopped for ever. By the close of the 5th century A.D., parts of present Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, and Kashmir came under the rule of the Huṇa Chief, Toramāṇa. This adventure of the Huṇas continued until Yaśodharman of Mālwa uprooted them. For a long time, they devastated the region of northern India under their control.⁸

Inscriptions of early Assam or ancient Kāmarūpa prove that the kings of Kāmarūpa greatly honoured the artists, sculptors and Brahmanas for the development of the region. They did not fail to

⁸ Majumdar, R. C., (Ed.) Classical Age, p. 36.
engage in their professional activity in the peaceful dominions of the Varmans of early Assam. They erected temples, figures were sculpted, inscriptions were engraved and new techniques in agriculture and trade was introduced. Thus the classical phase took its roots in early Assam.

Development of sculptures in early Assam from 5th-6th century A.D.:

The idiom of sculptural art, evolved in the Gupta Empire, transcended its limits, chronological as well as political. Its spirit saturated the minds of the artists of the neighboring territories. Among such regions were Kāmarūpa and Dāvāka, the two border states of the Gupta Empire. These areas can be placed within the limits of modern Assam.

During the Gupta period there was vigorous impact of Indian culture and religion upon the people of Assam. The influence was so powerful that even some Varman rulers of Kāmarūpa and their queens felt proud in assuming the names of the contemporary Gupta emperors and queens. There are also data indicating the use in Kāmarūpa of

10. Ibid., p. 122f
administrative terms and forms and even of an era known to have been in vogue in the Gupta Empire. It appears that the impact of the contact of Kamarūpa and Dovāka with Gupta Empire had on them a lasting effect.

The sculptural remains of classical style so far found in Assam exist at Da-Parvatiyā (Tezpur), Mikir-Āṭi, Bodgaṅgā (Nagaon), Kāmākhyā (Guwahati) and Karamedhipārā (Dudhroi). These sculptures here conform to the general characteristics of the classical art style.

At Bhārhūt and Sāñci sculptural depiction of nature enjoyed equal status with human figural art. But during the classical period human figures were given precedence over nature, although the latter was not totally neglected, as evidenced by the depiction of plants and creepers, etc. as sculptural motifs. The drooping eye-lids, single jewellery, transparent drapery, egg-shaped face, bow-type eye-brows, lotus petal-type eye, tilaphula-(sesame flower) type nose, śaṅkha-type neck etc., typified human figures. The torso of a male was to be broad and the waist of a male should be like that of a lion, while that of a female was to be like that of a damaru. The shoulders were to resemble a gajatuṅga (elephant head) and arms to the trunk of a young plaintain tree. The thighs were compared with the trunk of a

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young elephant.\textsuperscript{15} These external features gave mundane as well as spiritual expression.

The sculpture of the different sites of Assam, as referred to above, bear all these characteristics, and, therefore, these sculptures can reasonably be considered as classical sculptures.

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 reliefs on the door-frame (\textit{dvāra}) of a temple; it is dated to the 6th century A.D. On the basis of the style of the figures, which share all the characteristic features of the classical art of the Gupta period. It is generally related to the mature phase of the Sārnāth School of Indian art.

The two upright door jambs (\textit{sākhās}) of the gateway bear at their bottom two most elegant female figures, one of Gaṅgā and the other of Yamunā; the former stands on crocodile (\textit{makara}) while the latter stands on tortoise (\textit{kacchapa}). The hip of each of the river goddess swing slightly backward, while the torso takes a gentle turn forward like the famous terracotta Gaṅgā and Yamunā figures from Ahicchatra, now in the National Museum, New Delhi. These extremely delicate figures with garlands held lightly and gracefully in hands

are juxtaposed by two flying geese (hamsa). The scene is rightly considered the most lyrical poetry written on stone.

Stylistically, the Da-Parvatīyā door-frame may be placed between the last part of the 5th century and early part of the 6th century A.D.\textsuperscript{16} in view of the similarity of its general layout to those of the Pārvatī temple of Nachna Kuthara, Śiva temple of Bhūmāra and Daśāvatāra temple at Deogarh, which are later in date compared to the early flat-roofed temples of Nachna Kuthara, Bhūmāra\textsuperscript{17} and Bāigram (Bengal) with an inscription dating 447-48 A.D.\textsuperscript{18} The Deogarh sculptures are placed in the 6th century A.D.\textsuperscript{19} which are less sophisticated than the art of the Sārnāth School.\textsuperscript{20} The sculptures of the Daśāvatāra temple are more elaborated than those at Da-Parvatīyā and, therefore, the sculptures of both the places can definitely be placed later than the sophisticated Sārnāth School of art.

The stone sculpture of the same period as that of Da-Parvatīyā but carved locally include such fine images as Pārvatī in pañcatapa form. Similarly, there is an image of Dakṣa form Raṅgāgarhā Tea

\begin{itemize}
\item[16.] \textit{Bulletin, Assam State Museum}, No. 1, 1975, p. 37.
\item[17.] Majumdar, R. C. , (Ed.) \textit{The Classical Age}, p. 507.
\item[18.] Majumdar, R. C, (Ed) \textit{op. cit.}, p. 50.
\item[19.] \textit{ibid}, p. 517; Percy Brown, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 50.
\item[20.] Saraswati, S. K., \textit{op. cit.}, p. 138; Majumdar, R. C., \textit{op cit.}, p. 526
\end{itemize}
Estate near Tinsukia. Both these images go a long way to prove the adoption of classical Indian idiom in Assam. Both of these sculptures are preserved in the Assam State Museum.

One beautiful Dakṣa image is found at Raṅgāgarhā T. E., Tinsukia, [Pt.- 5]. It is about 3 x10cm and of sandstone. Here the headed Dakṣa-prajāpatī is seen in arddha-paryāṅkāsana, wherein one leg is folded on the seat and the other bent at the knee rest on the ground. The figure is plain. In his two hands he is seen holding a knife in his right hand and a fruit in his left. His two hands are missing. Only stumps of the bases remain. Dakṣa is clad in a tight fitting short dhoti. The only ornament is a twisted rope posing above his ears.

On the other hand the image of Pārvatī [Pt.-4] is found in paṅcatapa form. Here the deity is made to sit in bhadrāsana. Both hands of the deity rest on the respective knees. The jata of the deity is well done. The upavīta worn by the deity is also clearly visible. The left breast of the deity is slightly damaged. The vāhana of the deity is not seen.

The eyes of Pārvatī are indeed typically in classical form and so also the matted lock of hair (jata) of Dakṣa.

Sculptural development of Assam in 7th-8th century A.D. :

After the 6th century A.D., the supernatural quality of the classical sculptures lost its prominence in Assam. However, the sculptures
represent the classical idiom and style. This can be seen in the general style of modelling and transparent drapery, as is noticed in the sculptures from Devaśṭhān, Na-Nāth, Goalpara and Sūrypāhār. These sculptures are more slender, sensuous and emotional in treatment. In spite of the classical influence of this group, these sculptures failed to maintain the classical dynamism.

The more slender and sensuous body, exaggerated broad shoulder, fleshier faces with full lips and sometimes Negroid type features are the special characteristics of this group of sculptures.21

The image of Viṣṇu from Kharāchakalpāra/ Medhipāra, Dudhnoi [Pt.-3] in Goalpara district, belongs stylistically to the early 7th century A.D. This four handed deity is standing on a lotus pedestal in samapāda-sthānaka pose. The two upper hands hold a padma and a śankha, while, curiously enough, the cakra and gada of the two lower hands are represented by a male (cakra-purusa) and a female (gada-devi) deities of an early classical idiom. The face and the crown of Viṣṇu are mutilated. A halo can be noticed behind the head. The sculpture exhibits no stiffness in attitude. This is the only image of Viṣṇu showing āyudha-purusa found in Assam so far; it is a very important collection of the Museum.

Dutta, Manoranjan, Sculptures of Assam, 1990, p. 48-49.
The sculpture of Buddhisattva Padmapāni found at Na-Nāth is famous of this group. The sculpture of Na-Nāth is very badly mutilated; its feet, head and the two hands are not present. It stands in tribhanga pose, with the right hand in varada mudrā (broken) and the left hand (broken) resting on the thigh. On the left side of the deity, parallel to the left arm, a thin band is seen, probably indicating the stem of a lotus. Below the right hand of the deity, a female attendant is seen. Dutta has opined that, “iconographically, the sculpture bears similarity to the Bodhisattva of the Nālandā stūpa.” The sculpture of Na-Nāth is sensitive and it may be placed towards the late 7th century A.D. At Kāmākhyā many sculptures of this group are found.

Deopāni School:

A group of sculptures of special style and extra-ordinary artistic skill are of a special style prevalent in Assam. This group of sculptures was first noticed at Deopāni, Golaghat. Dutta has narrated this group of sculptures as the Deopāni School of sculptures.

The sculptures of this area, with remote influence of the classical tradition, and some local traits of their own, are treated as a separate school. The Deopāni sculpture represents the last phase of the classical tradition in Assam. Round face, thick lips, and stout body of the

22. Now preserved in the Archaeology Dept., Govt of Assam, Hojai, Nagaon.
24. Ibid, p. 54.
Deopānī sculptures have some characteristics of their own, which made them distinct from the other groups of sculpture of India. Its influences expanded upto Tinsukia in upper Assam. But its influence was short-lived, which may be due to the lack of royal patronage, and the influence the East Indian School of mediaeval art. This group of art wa patronised mostly by the royal authority in the feudal days. Both king Jīvara, Diglekhavarman and Kākhyā and his son encouraged the art of carving at Deopānī. Balāhi seems to be the sculptor. Most of the sculptures so far found are of Viṣṇu indicating that Vaiṣṇavism was very powerful in this region. Images of Brahmā (Deopānī), Umā-āliiigana (Deopānī), Lakṣmī (Rājāpukhurī-Ahomgaon), caturmukha-linga (Deopānī), Cāmuṇḍā (Barpathar), Dakṣa (Barpathar), Durgā (Pābhajān), Śiva (Barpathar), Gaṇeśa (Deopānī) and numerous other images are also found. The Deopānī sculptures are made of block stone and each sculpture was finely polished. The classical characteristic and some special features made the Deopānī School of Art a distinct one. Round face, thick lips, broad but pointed nose, long ear, generally square kirtī-mukuta, broad forehead, long hair and thick eyebrows, all go to make the facial characteristics of the Deopānī sculptures stand apart. These are always frontally carved on a single block of stone.

26. ibid, p. 312.
27. ibid, p. 306-12.
The Deopāṇi sculpture of Hari-Hara [Pt.-7] is very rigid in execution and it has a square face. It appears to be the earliest of the Deopāṇi sculptures. The thick lips, broad but pointed nose, long vanamāḷā from the arm to the knees, the śrīvatsa mark on the chest, and broad shoulders show that the sculpture was also a product of Deopāṇi School.

Another beautiful Viṣṇu image of the same school is also preserved in the same Museum [Pt.-9]. Here the deity is shown in samapāda-stānaka attitude. The deity has four arms, but the two left hands are broken. The upper hand holds the śaṅkha, the lower one touches the gada. The kiriṭamukūṭa and other ornaments worn by the deity are quite visible. The upavlīta and the vanamāḷā are prominently depicted. There is an inscription behind. The feet are broken. The physiognomy of the sculpture portrays tribal style. The inscription records that, “the priest in charge of the temple is named as Pi.” The epigraph also informs that, “the stone image of Lord Nārāyaṇa is for the devotees.”28

The Deopāṇi sculptures represent essentially a people’s art and are basically expressive of physical vigour rather than spiritual tranquility, bodily charm and sensuous beauty. The sculptures preferred only human figures. They did not prefer animal figures.

The natural phenomenon, which is a main feature of the classical art, made no impact on Deopāṇi sculptures.

The Sculptural Development in 8th century A.D.:

From the 5th century to 8th century the development of sculptures, more or less, followed the classical idiom. By the 8th century A.D., the history of India took a new direction both politically and culturally. India's characteristic features both in art and culture began to diminish and regional spirit gradually took its place in Indian life.

Kāmarūpa was an independent kingdom in the early mediaeval period; sometimes the suzerainty of the powerful Pāla and Sena kings of the neighbouring Bengal tried to suppress its power. At the same time, the kings of Kāmarūpa conquered many parts of Bengal. Kāmarūpa was then ruled by two powerful dynasties, - the Sālastambhas and the Pālas.

The inscriptions of Assam state that some of the rulers of these dynasties, like Śrī Ḥarṣa, Harihara Varman, Vanamālavarmadeva and Ratnapāla were powerful enough to conquer the neighbouring territories. The Paśupatināth temple inscription of the Nepāl king Jayadeva-II records that Śrī Harṣadeva was the lord of Gauḍa, Odra, Kaliṅga, Kośala and other lands.29 But the Tibetan historian Tārānātha's reference about the subjugation of Kāmarūpa by

29. Chouddury, P. C., The History and Civilization of the People of Assam, p. 225
Dharmapāla of Gauḍa is not referred to in the inscriptions. It is probable that Harjjara of Kāmarūpa and Devapāla of Gauḍa came in conflict.\textsuperscript{30} Inscriptions credit Vanamāla with the conquest of the present North Bengal. Of the Pāla dynasty of Assam, Ratnapāla was the most powerful king, who was credited with the successful campaign against the kings of Gujarata, Gauḍa, Kerala, Southern India and the Tāhikas and the Bāhikas.\textsuperscript{31} Indrapāla and Dharmapāla were also powerful rulers of this dynasty. But after Jayapāla, the Pāla dynasty became weak and the Sena rulers of Bengal and Muslim conquerors made their inroads into Kāmarūpa. But the important fact is that political contacts gave way to cultural contact and, therefore, the Pāla-Sena rules and the Central Indian school of art penetrated into the land of ancient Kāmarūpa. Only one very image which is inscribed with the word ‘deva-pāla’, which, perhaps, be a reference to the second ruler of the Pāla dynasty of Bengal (C.A.P. 801-850) has been found in the excavation. It could be said that the image was brought from Bengal by the pilgrims.\textsuperscript{32}

The gradual development of the mixed culture of various people in Kāmarūpa brought a new trend in sculptural art and tradition of medieval Assam. Racial and regional cultural influence had its impact

\textsuperscript{30} Majumdar, R. C., (Ed.) \textit{History of Bengal}, p 117
\textsuperscript{31} Bargaon copperplate Inscription of Ratnapāla.
\textsuperscript{32} Dutta, Manoranjan, \textit{Sculptures of Assam}, p. 69.
on the traditional art in changing the art-style with the changing form of art pattern. The inscriptions proved that many kings of Assam patronised building of temples. We come to know that Avaguna, the district governor, constructed a temple on behalf of Bhūtivarman. The epigraphs of Balavarman-III (about the last quarter the 9th and the first decade of the 10th century A.D.), like the Nowgong and Ulubāri records, give Vanamāla (first half of the 9th century A.D.) the credit of creating a row of palaces consisting of many rooms, decorated with pictures. According to Vanamāla’s Tezpur copperplate grant, Vanamālas repaired the fallen temple of Hāṭaka-śūlin (Śiva). The Bargaon copperplate inscription speaks of “thousands of whitened (plastered) turrets” in the city of Durjaya, the capital of Ratnapāla (about the first half of the 11th century A.D.). In another reference it states that Ratnapāla “studded the earth with white-washed temples” enshrining Śambhū. All these inscriptions

36. Tezpur Copperplate grant, v.24, vide, Bhattacharyya, P. N., op.cit., p120
37. Bargaon Copperplate grant, ll. 31-32 vide Bhattacharyya, P. N., op. cit., p. 94
38. Bargaon Copperplate grant, ll. 31-32 vide, Bhattacharyya, P. N., op. cit., p. 96
prove that several of the Kāmarūpa monarchs of the age concerned were patrons of art and architecture.39

Kāmarūpa’s zest for art and architecture during this age is also attested by abundant mass of ruins of monuments found in several areas including Darrang, Kāmarūpa, Goalpara, Guwahati, Nagaon and Sibsagar districts of Assam.40 These have been dated to pre-Ahom age and to different phases within the broad period ranging from 9th to the 12th century A.D.41

The condition of Kāmarūpa was conducive to art activities. This was (from an earlier age) connected through routes with extra-Indian territories as well as with different parts of the Indian sub-continent including the area of eastern India.42 The trade and commerce of Kāmarūpa were in a fairly developed stage.43 This reference is supported by the evidence of the prevalence of some sort of a medium of exchange and also by a number of coins of which some bear the character ‘ha’ (= Harjjaravarmā) and some display the letter ‘va’ (= Vanamālavarmā).44 Under such circumstances, trade and industries

39. For example, among the earlier Kāmarūpa kings, Sthitavarman (Sthiravarman) built a city on the bank of the holy river (i.e. Brahmaputra). Dubi Copperplate inscription of Bhāskara-varman, v. 49, vide, Sharma, M. M., Inscriptions of Ancient Assam, pp. 40ff.
41. Choudhury, P. C., The Civilization of the People of Assam, p.378f
42. ibid, p. 386; Barua, K. L., Early History of Kamrup, p. 185f.
43. Choudhury, P. C., The Civilization of the People of Assam, p.387f
Singh, J. P. and Ahmed, N., (Ed) Coinage and Economy of the North Eastern States of India, pp. 1f and 7f
would accumulate profit, and the rulers would be able to fill their treasuries by levying taxes on articles of trade. The richer section would have enough wealth to spend for building activities and for patronising art. One of the motives for erecting temples and images was to acquire religious merit. In such conditions it not only helps the local artists, but also attracts the foreign artists from these areas with which Kāmarūpa region had commercial and cultural contacts. That such a conducive situation prevailed in Kāmarūpa is supported by the discoveries in that territory of sculptures stylistically affiliated to the idiom of the domain of the Pālas and the Senas.

A few of these sculptures could have been imported into Kāmarūpa. It is possible that initially some artists from the domain of the Pālas and Senas worked in ateliers of Kāmarūpa.

The artistic development in early mediaeval Assam in sculpture and architecture came to an end, by and large, with the fall of the Pālas of Kāmarūpa. Sculptures of this period are generally related to human figures carved out of the iconographic tenets of the respective religious cults. The images of the classical period in Assam have a great value artistically and spiritually, which helped the devotee to realise the ultimate object. But the early mediaeval sculptures lack harmony between the artist and the devotee. It was because the

45. From other parts of India we have numerous instances of installation of cult icons for the purpose of acquiring religious merit.
expression of faces becomes more and more gracious rather than spiritual, and the body form becomes more sensuous establishing a relationship with the erotic ideology of Tāntricism. This group of school is known as East Indian school of medieval art. The sculptures of Kāmarūpa are found in three different features. These are:

(i) Classical Style;

(ii) East Indian School of Medieval Art;

(iii) Local Art Style.

These divisions are made on the basis of their style and technique.

East Indian School of Medieval Art:

Since the death of Harṣvardhana, regional emphasis may be seen in the North India. The establishment of a regional state made possible the development of regional language and literature, script, regional variation within the principal religious systems and also of the regional school of art. These tendencies came to appear only by the second half of the eighth century. Regional tendencies which come to be gradually felt emphasised, led to the growth of regional school of art. One such regional school emerged during the period of the Pālas of Bengal and Bihar. This is known as the East Indian School of Mediaeval Art, also called Pāla School of Art, which came into being in its distinctive form during the time of Dharmapāla and Devapāla about the beginning of the 9th century A.D. The Tibetan

historian Tārānātha attributed the foundation of the East Indian School of Mediaeval Art Dhīman and his brother Bitopalo who lived during the time of Dharmapāla and Devapāla in the ninth century.

The East Indian School of Medieval Art was actually indebted to the classical tradition.\textsuperscript{47} Like other regional art schools, it has some special features of its own. The sculptures of the East Indian School of Mediaeval Art were generally the cult icons carved on the stela and rarely round. During the classical period also the stela was carved; in the Deopāṇī School, it is found that stela also gradually developed. However, The East Indian School of Mediaeval Art shows a significant growth of the stela. It even symbolized the periodic development of the East Indian School of Medieval Art sculptures. The \textit{kirtimukha} decoration becomes the special feature of the East Indian School of Mediaeval Art sculptures. The pivot of the School is the human figure. Heaviness in ornamentation is a common feature of the East Indian School of Mediaeval Art. The sculpture became more and more sensuous in body posture, in fleshy body and in gracious face cut. The East Indian School of Mediaeval Art is the combination of the heavenly and worldly attitude. Development in the ninth century A.D. The Kahlipara Indra is slender in body and the deities standing on its right and left are in a stiff attitude. The stiffness in standing posture

\textsuperscript{47} Majumdar, R. C., (Ed.) \textit{The Struggle for Empire}, p. 642
increased gradually. The sculpture can definitely be placed in the 9th century A.D. A decorative sensitiveness, together with sensuous gracefulness, runs through the whole sculpture. The elephant, Indra's vāhana is standing on a viśva-padma and it is framed in round and the back portion crosses the actual limit of the stela. The stela itself is designed to emphasise the the supreme dignity of the heavenly figure. Haloes are sculpted behind the hands of Indra and the accessory deities. This bronze image of Indra is at present preserved in the Assam State Museum. The image from Lehigangā, Barpeta, (Plate-44) reveals sensuousness in its fleshy body form. The image is badly mutilated, but its sitting posture shows easiness in form. The development Tantricism as a new religious cult, and the new socio-economic condition changed the attitude of the artists. Sensuousness became the new artistic ideals, which began to dominate the spirit of the art form, and new aesthetic ideals, which began to dominate the spirit the art form and new themes for art came into being. The 9th century sculpture played a connecting role in the growth of sculptural art in this region, with the tradition of the classical sculptures and the new trend that was emerging.

Development in the Ninth century A. D. :

The East Indian School of Mediaeval Art in Assam is from the 8th century to 9th century A.D. We have found a number of sculptures from this period. The main growth of East Indian School of Mediaeval
Art is in Bengal, Bihar and modern Bangladesh. The style of the sculptures continued its Gupta tradition, which survived for a long period. But the regional elements impacted on the art style of Bengal earlier. In case of Assam, the facial feature in emotional characteristic found their way in the sculptures. Here the art style of Deopani, central India and East Indian School of Medieval Art worked together. The fact is that, in spite of some local trends, the whole of eastern India, including modern Bangladesh, was vigorously influenced by the East Indian School of Medieval Art style from the 9th century A.D. In the 9th century, the stela are generally cylindrical and half round at the top. The borders are generally flat or slightly raised. The main characteristic feature of these groups of sculptures were the fleshy body with a sensuous charm and cleanness of the face within definite outlines.

In Assam we have some sculptures, which stylistically may be placed in the 9th century A.D. An inscribed image found at Na-Nath area of present Nagaon district may be mentioned. On the back of this image the word 'devapala' is engraved. This 'Devapala' is none but the third ruler of the Pala dynasty (A.D. 820-850) of Bengal.\footnote{48 The sculpture is found at Na-Nath, Nagaon district, Assam during the excavation by the Archaeology Dept., Govt of Assam and now in the possession of Archaeology Dept., Assam, Guwahati.} The image thus belongs to the first half of the 9th century A.D. Another
unidentified image from Lehidangara, Barpeta, and some metal images found at Kahilipara, Guwahati may also be placed in the 9th century A.D. A metallic bell inscription has been discovered at Kahilipara (Odāłbākṛā or Narakāsura hill) village near Guwahati. It records that ‘Śrī Kumāra’ who belonging to the king of Devas and Asuras was given this bell for the use of the worship the deities. The script belongs to the eastern variety, popularly called the Kuṭila (Siddhamātrkā) type as is found in the Hayunthal copperplate grant of Harijaravarman (9th century A.D.). The bell inscription is now preserved in the Assam State Museum. The image of Indra of Kahilipara in metal sculpture is the largest. The image belong to the 9th century A.D. Besides Indra, images of Viṣṇu, Sūrya, Gaṇeśa, Manasā (stone), Yama, Śiva, Mukha-
liṅga and some other unidentified images are found. The Kahilipara Indra is slender in body and the deities standing on its right and left are in a stiff attitude. The stiffness in standing posture increased gradually. The sculpture can definitely be placed in the 9th century A.D. A decorative sensitiveness, together with sensuous gracefulness, runs through the whole sculpture. The elephant, Indra’s vāhana is standing on a viśva-padma and it is framed in round and the back portion crosses the actual limit of the stela. The stela itself is designed to emphasise the the supreme digniti of the heavenly figure. Haloes are sculpted behind the hands of Indra and the accessory deities.

This bronze image of Indra is at present preserved in the Assam State Museum. The image from Lehidaṅgarā, Barpeta, [Pt.-44] reveals sensuousness in its fleshy body form. The image is badly mutilated, but its sitting posture shows easiness in form. The development of Tantricism as a new religious cult, and the new socio-economic condition changed the attitude of the artists. Sensuousness became the new artistic ideals, which began to dominate the spirit of the art form, and new aesthetic ideals and new themes for art came into being. The 9th century sculpture played a connecting role in the growth of sculptural art in this region, with the tradition of the classical sculptures and the new trend that was emerging.

Development in the Tenth century A. D.:

In Assam no dated sculpture belonging to the 10th cen. A. D. and afterwards has been found. The image of Vāgīśvarī, which is dated in the first year of the reign of the Gupāla-II (CAD 940-59) of Bengal, at Nalanda is a most important specimen for stylistic study of the 10th century sculptures of Assam. 50

Throughout the 10th century robust body form continues as a dominating factor with gradual increase of the stiffness and the legs loosing elasticity by the end of the century. The feminine figures also maintain the same form, excluding a deep sense of bodily pleasure. Spirituality and sensuousness were retained within discipline

50. Ibid, pp. 57-59.
modelling. The facial expression remained similar to that of the 9th century. Reference may be made in this context to a stone image of Karttikeya now at devastingana in Nagaon district. The god is seen seen sitting in lalitasana on a rectangular pedestal bearing the figure of peacock, the mount of the god. In his right hand he holds the sakti and the left a cock. He has jewelled ornaments, such as necklace, waistband, armlets and earring, together with a kirita on the head. The stela is rectangular with a round top and is without any decoration. From these characteristics it is possible to assign the sculpture to about the beginning of the 10th century A.D.

The image of Umā-Mahēśvara from Daboka (Nagaon district), now in the Assam State Museum [Pt.-26], shows the God and the Goddess on a lotus seat, the Goddess sitting on the left of the God. Here also the stela is rectangular with a round top and has a beaded border with diamond set rosettes edged by flame pattern. This increased the sense of ornaments worn by the divine couple. The execution of the pattern of double lotus seat is also a developed in order. The plastic forms bear evidences of definite modelling, but the expression of the face of each couple is in a certain measure insipid. Some of the features in this image appear to be later in evolution. By the last phase of 10th century A.D., the kirttimukha device appeared at the top of the stela. The image of Brahmā [Pt.-39] and Indra [Pt.-30] can be placed in the last phase of the 10th century A.D. These images are
now preserved in the Asam State Museum. Here in addition to the *kīrttimuka* device, the stele are also elaborated with necessary figures and design. The images are pot-bellied, short and stout in form. physical decoration, the artists have succeeded in maintaining comfortable, calm and peaceful atmosphere in conquering the inner world.

**Development in the Eleventh century A. D.**

In the eleventh century there may be recognised a greater elaboration of the stela. The artist preferred slender body form and graceful expression. The heaviness in body form lost its ground and more attention was paid to a thin waist and large chest. In spite of increased ornamentation, the value of the plastic form was not lost. Reference may be made in this context to the miniature images of Viṣṇu [Pt.-53], Mahīṣāmardinī [Pt.-57], and Sūrya [Pt/-59], from Ambari now preserved the Museum. The images are corroded to a very great extent. But despite this corrosion, the feeling far form defined by clear contours may be recognised in each of these sculptures. In a manner these images carry on the 10th century tradition in respect of plastic forms and composition of the stela. The metal icons, one of Gaṇeša and the other of Manasā, from Kāhilipara hill hoard, now in the Assam State Museum, may also belong to this period, though the modelling of the two may be of inferior level.
Two extremely fragmentary pieces in blackstone from Tezpur, now in the Assam State Museum, representing part of an image of Mahiṣaṁarāddinī, may also be taken note of in this context. One represents the lower part of the image in which the demon is seen to be issuing out of the decapitated body of the buffalo, while in the other, one may see the bust of the goddess with all the hands gone and face mutilated. Despite the damage wrought, the value of the plastic form may be recognised in both the fragments together with dynamism.

Development the twelve century A.D. :

By the twelfth century A.D., the slender body form of the eleventh century was retained, but ornaments increased impressively. The standing posture of the ninth century was slightly in tribhanga-pose, with the weight of the body being on one side, but this posture was gradually changed to rigidity and the posture became completely straight. The legs were column-like, with on elasticity, no movement of life in them. In the ninth century the ornaments were simple, the artist believed that the increase of ornaments might effect the spiritual content of the images. But the ornaments become continuously decorative and in the twelfth century they became profuse. The richness in ornamentation of the twelfth century sculptures indicates a changing outlook, having no spiritual content.
The accessory deities and decorative details continued to occupy the whole stela without a gap. Even the pedestal was occupied by decorative details and the accessory deities. The kirtimukta was expanded in length. The image of Viṣṇu from Budhābudhī (Nagaon) [Pt.-35], and the image of Sūrya [Pt.-46], from Daboka (Nagaon) and their accessory deities display a sense of serenity and spirituality. The eyebrows are also conventional and have a stylized appearance. The decorative details cover the whole stela. The attendant deities are more independent, though suggestively related to the principal deity.

The artistic creativeness of the twelfth century in Assam was full of worldly exuberance, and missed the sense of deep spiritual essence. Physical charm and gracefulness were the principles for the artistic activity of this period in Assam.

**Development in Thirteenth Century A.D.:**

In the thirteenth century also, these same principles of art continued in Assam coupled with a new theme. The 12th century overcrowding of the stela, however, was avoided in this century. The sculptures of 13th cen. has simple kirtimukha. In this period sculptural art in Assam became more and more localized. The kirtimukha became large in volume either in length or in breadth. The artist accepted mostly simple carved pedestal. The pedestal became a part of the stela. The borders of the stela were either not carved out, or flatly
carved without any decorative design over it. The limbs became more and more conventional with no rhythm at all. The image of Viṣṇu found at Ambari, Guwahati, [Pt. 51] shows the stiffness of hands and legs, even the face became longer than the deity. Images in plenty are found in the same place where the Viṣṇu image was found and it seems that it was a workshop where large quantities of images of various sizes were sculptured for commercial purposes. These sculptures are now preserved in the Assam State Museum. An inscription issued by a king, Samudrapāla by name, and dated in the Śaka era corresponding to A.D. 1232, has been found. This Samudrapāla most probably was a ruler of the Pāla dynasty of Kāmarūpa. The sculptures of that place undoubtedly belong to the thirteenth century A.D. In some cases one side of the borders of the stela was carved, but the other side remained bare. All these prove that the artists lost norms of aesthetic essence and art became stereotyped. The kīrtīimukha of Narasimha [Pt. 48] found at Uzambzar, Guwahati is bigger than the head of the deity. It became static. The limbs and poses of Naṭrāja [Pt. 55] found at Ambari also remained conventional. The bends became overemphasised with no plastic simplicity. The thirteenth century sculptural art in Assam of the East Indian School was only a distant imitation. These groups of art-work became more independent in Kāmarūpa. These groups of art began to decline from Bengal region due to the Muslim invasion.
in Bengal. According to M. Dutta, the sculptural art of Assam of the succeeding centuries was dominated by the East Indian School of Mediaeval Art. During the domination of the East India School of Medieval Art, the central Indian art styles also found vent and the local traits were not avoided completely.

Late Mediaeval Sculptures of Assam:

The newly born late mediaeval style of sculptural art retained its primitiveness and before acquiring maturity there was a complete break in the early nineteenth century. The fall of the Pālas witnessed the establishment of many petty states in the hole of the Brahmaputra valley and its adjoicing regions. It is evident from the Ambari inscription (preserved in the Assam State Museum, Guwahati) that a scion of the Pālas ruled in the portion of present Guwahati region till A.D. 1232. In the lower Assam, the Kamatā kings dominated the greater part of the present North-East India for a short span of time. In upper Assam the Chutiyās, the Barāḥīs and the Morāns established separate kingdoms. However, from Dikhau to Surama, the whole region was dominated by the Kacchārīs. In the meantime, the Ahoms established a kingdom in the Dikhau valley of Upper Assam. At the same time the various branches of the Bhuyans and the Tribal chiefs ruled over different parts of the region. For the ruling classes, there was no time to pay attention to the sculptural development of Assam.

Further, most of the kingdoms were tribal oriented and basically observing the tribal customs, rituals and beliefs. Though they came under the influence of Hinduism, sooner or later the tradition of sculptural art failed to survive for the lack of patronage. But gradually the Ahoms succeeded in establishing a powerful kingdom in the Brahmaputra valley and gave it political stability. For a long period of almost three centuries from the date of the establishment of the Ahom kingdom by Seu-ka-pha in A.D. 1228, in the Dikhau valley of upper Assam till 1504 A.D., the Ahoms merely consolidated their position. They established cordial relations with the neighbouring tribes, accepted the local language and culture as their own, increased intermarriages and thereby gave incentive to the birth of a powerful kingdom in the Brahmaputra valley. They started patronising art and literature. As a result, temples and sculptural art occupied an important position in the list of artistic activities of the Ahom rulers. The Ahom artists made a complete departure from the pre-Āhom Pāla style while executing their art-work. The classical formula was completely ignored, because of generations gap. They preferred the folk art style. Therefore, we see heavy folk elements in the Ahom sculptures. During this period, the religious sculptures were frontally carved and the secular figures were depicted in profile. The Ahom style in Assam continued for four centuries. Panels in Ahom sculptural art are rare.
Divinities of Brhmaqicel pantheon or Hindu religion are common in stone sculptural art of this period. Secular form of art depicting social scenes, dance and music scenes are not commonly found in the sculptures of the Ahom period. However, flowers, creepers, geomitrical designs, birds and animals are found as in other art forms in India. Not only in stone sculpture, in terracotta, painting and woodwork also we find the same formula and style.

The art style of the Koch artists of the same period was very similar to that of the Ahoms in style and execution. During this period the rule of iconography were not strictly followed. It appears that, at that time, the inter-relation of the art-form of Assam with that of the Indian mainland was not achieved due to the new political set-up. The people of the region developed a separate art school, which was independent in style and technique from the iconographical point of view. This school may be described as the Late Medieval School of Art of Assam.

Most of the late mediaeval sculptures are small in size, except those which are carved on the walls of the temples constructed under the patronage of the Koch rulers. The mediaeval sculptures are generally flat and frontally carved. In case of the images, which had three or four cases, they were also seen in profile in apparently disjointed manner with the toes and they are flat. It was a major defect of the artists of this period in determining the aesthetic beauty
and iconographic treatment. The sides placed the hands without proper joins in the arms. The *āyudhas* were also placed without any logical treatment. In some cases, the joints of arms expanded from the arm to the waist. In those images, which are shown with more than one head, their necks are very short and are decorated with a few necklaces. The sculptures are generally static in form and primitive in standard. In Śakti temples, even the male images are more or less feminine, either in dress or physique. Another very important tribal Durgā image [Pt.-68] of late medieval period found at Mongaldoi is now preserved in the Assam State Museum. Here the deity is in standing attitude with ten arms. All the arms are stretched outwards. The objects held in the arms are clear. Below there are three crude miniature human figures in the lower level. The deity is flanked by two animal figures. They may be identified, possibly, as tiger and fox. The eyes of the deity are golden. The *śilapatṭa* is tapering without the usual figure of Vidyādharas and *kirttimukha*. It is a most uncommon figure of tribal affiliation. Similarly, the Viṣṇu image from Deopānī with sides [Pt.-67] in *sthānaka* attitude, keeping his legs apart. In his four arms Viṣṇu is holding *saṅka, cakra, gadā* and *padma*. The face bears Mongolian traits. There are four holes on the *śilapatṭa* on either side of the neck and waist of the deity. The breadth of the *śilapatṭa* is less near the knee portion of the figure. The pedestal of the deity is slightly mutilted. The sculpture represents the typical Ahom style.
Nevertheless, the art of this period has a charm of its own within its primitive standard. The late medieval period of sculptural art in Assam was a period of artistic immaturity. Actually attention was paid to thin waist, large robust chest and sturdiest hips, but nothing was achieved, and the whole volume became disproportionate. The images are of youthful vigour of a conquering and expanding race. The important fact is that the region of Assam witnessed many sculptural styles. From the sculptural point of view, Assam is an integral part of the Indian sub-continent. Some of the non-Indian traits are also found in the sculptures of Assam, which are incorporated in Indian themes. Migration of people was the main cause for the expansion of various art styles in this region. Assam was a melting pot for the intermingling of various races and their cultures since time immemorial.