CHAPTER VIII
CONCLUSION

This research work was done on the sculptures preserved in the Assam State Museum, Guwahati with special reference to style and technique.

The Assam State Museum is one of the premier Museums of the country of our time. It has its unique collection of sculptures from different parts of the region. Most of its collections of sculptures are of pre-Ahom period, ranging from seventh to thirteenth century A.D., The late mediaeval sculptures are very few in number. We have found no remains of sculpture before 5th century A.D. The history of stone sculptures begins in Assam from 5th century onwards under the patronage of the Varman dynasty of Prāgjyotisha Kāmārupa (early Assam). The Varman dynasty of Kāmarūpa was contemporary with the great imperial Guptas in India. During the Gupta period there was a vigorous impact of Indian culture and religion on the people of Assam. The influence was so powerful that even some Varman rulers of Kāmarūpa and their queens felt proud in assuming the name of the contemporary Gupta emperors and their queens.1

The sculptural remains of classical style so far found in Assam existed at Da-Parvatiya (Tezpur), Mikir-Āṭi, Brḍgaṅgā (both in

Nagaon), Kāmākhya (Guwahati) and Kārumedhipārā (Dudhnoi). The sculptures of different sites of Assam bear all the classical characteristics; therefore, these sculptures can be considered the as the classical sculptures. These classical styles continued from 7th century onwards.

Since the eight century A.D., the regional tendency began to develop with the influence of classical style. During that period a new school of art developed at Deopānī. This group of sculptures has its separate identity. This group of sculptures was first noticed at Deopānī, Golaghat and, therefore, may be described as Deopānī School.

The sculptures of this area, with a remote influence of the classical tradition and some local traits of their own are treated as a separate school. The Deopānī sculptures represent the last phase of classical tradition in Assam. Most of the sculptures, so far found, are of Viṣṇu, indicating that Vaiṣṇavism was very popular in this region. The image of Brahmā (Deopānī), Umā-āliṅgana, Ekamukha-liṅga, Lākṣmī, Čāmuṇḍā, (Borpathar), Durgā, Śiva, Gaṇeśa, Varāha, and numerous other images have been found. The Deopānī sculptures are made of black stone and each sculpture is finely polished.

The sculptural history of Assam began to change from 10th-12th century A.D. It was because of the direct influence of the Pālas of
Bengal. During that period the sculptures were more ornamental and decorated nicely. The *śilapattā* or *siracakra* of religious sculptures became a compulsory item and was decorated with the figure of Vidyādharas and Kīrttimukha at the top. Sculptures used mostly in black basalt. The black basalt is a hard stone, so it was found suitable for the artists to execute their art work in more detail. The Pāla style continued into 13th-14th century A.D. This is proved by the discovery of a large number of sculptures from Āmbārī, Guwahati. The Ambari excavation has thrown a flood of light in this direction. Most of its collections are at the Assam State Museum and have a separate gallery.

The Ahom sculptures are quite different compared to the pre-Ahom sculptures in Assam. These sculptures are of primitive look. They preferred the folk art style. Therefore, we see heavy folk elements in Ahom sculptures. During this period icons were frontally carved and other figures were always depicted in profile.

By the study of various developments of sculptures in Assam, we may realise that the region of Assam witnessed many sculptural styles, i.e. classical style, Pāla-Sena style or East Indian School of Medieval Art style and the local style of Assam.

The sculptures of Assam were fundamentally based on Indian traditional system, as is laid down in the *śilpa-śāstra*. In spite of all this we have found that Assamese art has some peculiarities.

The peculiarities and differences between Assamese art and those of the other parts of India were mainly due to the non-Aryan
influence in Assam. The history of sculptural art in Assam developed only from 5th century A.D. upto the early part of the 19th century A.D., when the Ahom monarchy completely declined.

The sculptures also proved that Brahmanical religion mostly was dominant in this region, although the Museum has preserved some Buddha images, too.

The important Brahmanical cult that existed in Assam was Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism, Śāktism and Saūra cult was popular in Assam from the early centuries of the Christian era. It became popular both among the aboriginal and Aryanised people. All the kings of Kāmarūpa upto Dharmapāla, patronised Śaivism. There is definite archaeological evidence to show that during the Gupta period Śaivism became a well developed cult in north India. It is evident from inscriptions that before the end of the 5th century A.D., Śiva was worshipped in the linga, form in parts of north Bengal. All this shows that the stream of this faith flew as far east as Assam and like some kings of Bengal all the royal authorities of Kāmarūpa upto Dharmapāla regarded Śiva as their tutelary deity.

Vaiṣṇavism grew in Assam during the early mediaeval period and rose to popularity in the period between 10th to 12th century A.D.,

2. Majumdar, R. C., History of Bengal, Dacca University, 1943, pp. 404-05.
although the sculptural evidence indicates its popularity from 8th century onwards.

Like Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism, Śāktism was also popular in early Assam. The iconographic evidence proved that Sūrya was once a popular cult deity in early Assam. That the cult of Sūrya was popular in this land is quite evident from the very name Prāgjyotīṣa. Quite a good number of Sūrya images have been preserved in the Assam State Museum. But at present there are no followers of the Sun-cult in this part of the country.

Besides the major cult images of Viṣṇu, Śiva, Devī and Sūrya, some references to other minor gods and goddesses are also found in Assam. The icons of minor gods and goddesses, such as Gaṇeśa, Kānttikeya, Indra, Kubera, Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Manasā, Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Yama, etc. belong to early period of Assam. Buddhism could not get a stronghold in Assam, though we have found some Buddha images. Regarding the existence of early Buddhism in Assam not a single epigraph directly hinted at it. It is likely that some sections of the people of early Assam were tempted to accept the law of the Buddha, as this was popular in Bengal, Bihar, Nepal, Bhutan, the bordering states of Assam, and whatever Buddhist images have been found, might have been brought to Assam by traders or some people who wanted to introduce the Buddhist religion in Assam. But they could not do so as the royal authorities were mostly Hindus.
From the above reference it is almost clear that Brahmanical culture or true Ārya-dharma made a stronghold in ancient Assam; though some rites and rituals underwent changes through the process of time and by coming into contact with the non-Aryan people.

But one important thing is that there was no sectarian jealousy among various groups of the people of Assam.

Religious tolerance is deep-rooted in the minds of the people of Assam. Some of the art pieces having non-Aryan influence and some works of art of classical beauty from this State have definitely enriched the treasures of Indian art.