CHAPTER-I
INTRODUCTION

Sculpture is one of the finest works of human endeavour. It helps us to know the growth of various stages of human life. Sculpture are made of various materials like stone, clay, wood, metal. It developed only when man become civilized. In last centuries various pre-historic art has been discovered from different parts of the world. All these facts proved that people of ancient world were creative and had taste of exquisite beauty. The present form of Indian art took its final shape, after a long process of development that took many years.

Recent excavations at Harappa in south Punjab and Mohenjodaro in Sindh have finally established that a civilization (known as Indus valley civilization) prior to that of the Aryans existed in India. The history of Indian art is about 5000 years old.

According to N. P. Joshi, ‘Indian history and culture is a vast ocean, where cultural streams of different land met together, poured there contents but carries back a little nay they themselves became part and parcel of fathomless collection of water.’ The ‘Bhāratiya’ culture had a broader outlook and was progressive by nature. The assimilation of

these unique qualities of Bharatiya culture played its vital role in the development of different fields like philosophy, literature and fine art, medicine, astrology, astronomy etc. Iconography is an exception to the already mentioned branches. These branches of art are closely associated with the very idea of worshipping the divine. 'Him'. It seems to be deep-rooted in their mind. Naturally, therefore, as man changes, his ideas also change. N. P. Joshi believes that with fluctuations in political power in coming of fresh tides of cultural waves making old order change, yielding place to new symbols of worship have undergone sweeping changes. For example, Lord Buddha was only conceivable as a human in the first stage, that in the second stage represent symbolically and then in the final stage heading a huge pantheon in innumerable forms.

Religion is the pivot of architecture and sculpture in ancient India. When temples were built, the idea of decorating them inside and outside also caught the imagination of the builders. The sculptural art of India received inspiration from the various religious creeds of the land; even those sculptures, which were non-religious or secular in appearance, found a place on the outer walls of the temples and were accepted as serving the needs of a life, religious in aim and inspiration. Temple architecture in India, with its treatment on the wall surfaces exhibited

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outstanding religious quality. Inside the temples we have the sculptures of gods and goddesses, animals and the semi-human beings of the age-old mythology, reflecting the religious life of the people. These sculptures are also carved on rocks. The temple sculpture of India, in general, is a combination of philosophical concept of the Aryans in origin, with the Dravidian (aboriginal) representational and naturalistic character.

‘The idea of making was image was first mentioned in the Ashtadhyayi of Panini, where he refers to the image of Vasudeva and Arjuna. Patañjali refers to the devotees of Śiva.’ From this we may trace the evolution of temple architectures and sculptures. The Brhat-Samhita of Varahamihira refers to some wooden images. Various terms were used for images, such as Devatā, Pratimā, pratikrti, mūrti etc. Though the Harivamsa refers to stone images, no stone image earlier than Mauryan period are found. “The construction of a Hindu temple had its special purpose for the devotees, in that they could have darśana and perform pūjā. Before facing the principle deity, the devotee was overwhelmed by the architecture, with the sculptures on the body of the temples and the mandapas, leading to the principle deity” Indian religious and silpa-texts make frequent mention of the hand poses, pedestals,

weapons and other objects, which are associated with the Indian deities. They have great significance in iconography. Each god or goddess has his or her cognizance symbols, which help to distinguish him or her from other gods and goddesses of the pantheon. The Indian sculptor was thus required to be fully conversant with the religious texts, which described the various Indian icons. Every posture of the hand have their own meaning. Every stance of a god is suggestive of some mood. Every object carried in the hand has some reason. Deities may be sitting, standing or be in a lying down posture. The posture of a deity has to suit his or her mood.

The sculptural art in Assam is the domain of Indian art style. It is quite clear, Assam is an integral part of India. The artist of Assam followed the same style and technique as it was referred to in the śilpa-śāstra. We have found no remains of sculptures before 5th century A.D. The sculptural activities in Assm began with the expansion of the Gupta empire. The Umāchal rock inscription and the Nagājari-Khanikargaon fragmentary stone inscription of early 5th century A.D. bear out that Brahmanical religion penetrated into Kāmarūpa (early Assam).

10. Early Assam was known as Kāmarūpa from the days of Mahābhārata. The Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta refers to the kingdom of Kāmarūpa. Huen Tsang mentions Kāmarūpa as Kā-má-dô-lô-pô.
Most of the collections of sculptures in the Assam State Museum are of pre-Ahom period, ranging from 7th century A.D. to 19th century A.D. We have come across various branches of sculptural art styles in Assam. The classical influences are mostly found in the sculptures of 6th to 7th century A.D. The sculptural remains, so far recovered in Assam, are found at Da-Parvatiyā (Tezpur), Mikir-āti (Nagaon), Badgaṅgā (Nagaon), Kāmākhyā (Guwahati), Dudhnoi (Goalpara) etc. Since eight century A.D., the regional influence in the art of Assam began to appear with classical influence. A new school of art developed at Deopānī region of Assam. The local art style is also seen in the sculptures at Na-Nāth, Kāmākhyā, Sūryapāhār and Tezpur.

The Influence of the East Indian School of Mediaeval Art is also seen in the sculptures of Assam during 10th-12th century A.D. This group of sculpture is known as Pāla-Sena style of eastern India.

The late mediaeval sculpture of Assam is entirely a new conception in style and technique, which is primitive in attitude. The Ahom artists made a complete departure from the pre-Pāla style. They generally preferred the folk style. This style of artistic activities continued for four centuries.

The Assam State Museum has a good collection of sculptures. Some important art pieces of the Museum are the images of Sura-Sundari,
standing in an elegant posture, the images of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, obtained
from Burha-Burhi, the icon of Sūrya from Davoka and the sculpture
representing Viṣṇu from Barpeta are examples of high artistic tradition
prevalent in Assam in the pre-Ahom period. The huge stone image of
Nātarāja is undoubtedly a masterpiece, the parallel of which is not
available in the entire country. It is carved in the pre-Ahom period in
the Pāla-Sena style. The style of Ambari sculptures dated in 13th-14th
century A.D. Likewise, the stone image of Manasā from Kaliabor Tea
Estate, dated in the 12th century A.D., is very important from the
iconographical point of view.

All these masterpieces, except the Da-Parvatiyā door-frame which
is in situ, are preserved in the Assam State Museum.

The Assam State Museum is one of the pioneer Museums in India
in our time. I have studied various important images preserved in the
Museum. Besides the sculptures in stone, we have metallic sculptural
specimens in large number. In the pre-Ahom period, the bronze sculptures
were executed in Assam in the same Pāla-style as found in Bengal and
Bihar. In the Ahom period, we have found the brass sculptures mostly
representing Viṣṇu, Veṇu-Gopāla and Laḍuwā-Gopāla. However, a
beautiful big brass icon of Mahiṣamardinī has been found at Tinsukia.

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 old Satra buildings are decorated with wood art, which are mainly connected with Vaiṣṇavism. The Assam State Museum has a good number of collection of wood articles from different parts of the region. In fact, the tradition of the wood art was not popular in early Ahom period, and as such not a single sculpture of wood art belonging to this period has so far been found in Assam.

To make an image the artists of Assam mostly preferred clay, stone, wood and metal like the other parts of India. These sculptures are the products of both local and traditional craftsmanship.

My aim is to study various developments of sculptures preserved in the Assam State Museum. A comparative study of the sculptures with those of some other parts of India has been attempted. The work has been divided into the following chapters:

Chapter-I : In this chapter a brief Introduction to the Art history of Assam from early period to 12\textsuperscript{th} century A.D. has been presented.

Chapter-II : This chapter deals with the Background of the art history of India.

Chapter-III : In this chapter the concept of the sculptural design is discussed.

Chapter-IV : In this chapter a thorough discussion is held on style and technique of the sculptures in its various forms and positions.
Chapter-V : Here we have a discussion on the Art history of Assam.

Chapter-VI : In this chapter, an attempt has been made to hold a thorough discussion on the various development of the sculptural art in different periods of Assam.

Chapter-VII : This chapter relates to the sculptures of Assam State Museum. These sculptures are critically studied with iconographic details based on śilpa-śāsra (śāstric-texts).

Chapter-VIII: It is the concluding chapter. The findings of the study have been presented here in details.