CHAPTER - VI

CULTURAL LIFE
Culture is an important aspect of a civilized people. In ancient Assam with the existing social, political and economic atmosphere of the cities the urban cultural superstructure was evolved. The culture that developed in the urban centres of ancient Assam was a composite type.

There were certain factors responsible for the growth of this composite urban culture in early Assam. The kings of ancient Assam formed their administrative staff consisting of his family members, relatives, friends, priests, scholars, ministers, high and low military as well as civil officials, which formed the important section of the society of the cities of ancient Assam. Thus the administrative staff of the kings of ancient Assam belonged to the diverse communities, grades and professions that having their own castes and class prejudices.

The traders and the business groups who formed the important section of the urban economy played the great role in growth of the urban society of ancient Assam. This section of people consisted of
diverse groups and categories and thus played a great factor in the growth of composite urban culture in ancient Assam.

The cities of ancient Assam were the shelter of the artisans of various sections who were invested in (i) producing different crafts and industrial articles for consumption of the city dwellers as well as for trade, (ii) performing different constructive activities like construction of roads, building of the palaces, forts, ramparts etc. and (iii) involving in performance of different branches of art and the like.

From the very beginning there was close contact between the urban and rural centres of ancient Assam. For sustenance of the cities the surplus production especially the agricultural products of the villages were necessary. Similarly the village people were looking for the sophisticated articles produced in the crafts and industries of the cities. Therefore a cordial relationship between the cities and villages was going on in Assam from remote past. Mentioning both the cities and the villages in the inscriptions of ancient Assam indicates the on going co-existence and co-relationship between the cities and villages of ancient Assam. Besides it is known that few cities of ancient Assam were developed on the platform of the villages. One such city was Hāruppeswara which was developed from a village where there was a temple of lord Hātakasulīn (lord Siva). This long standing urban - rural relationship also played the role for the growth of composite urban culture in the cities of ancient Assam.
The king of ancient Assam occupied the supreme position in the society. He associated himself with the concept of divinity. The inscriptions indicate the decent of most of the kings of ancient Assam from Boar incarnation of Lord Vishnu and compared themselves with gods. The succession of the kings was done on hereditary basis. In many times the reigning king nominated his successor in the presence of his people. Sometimes the ruling monarch abdicated the throne in favour of his son. At times in the absence of a legitimate heir, election or selection was to be done for succession of a king in ancient Assam. Thus to save the country from anarchy after the death of the last Sālastambha ruler, people of Kāmarūpa elected Gopāla as their king.

One of the important functions of the royal court of ancient Assam was the consecration of royal ceremony. Inscriptions describe the consecration or ceremony which was performed by the priest with the sprinkling of holy water that was carried from all sacred places in silver pots in the presence of the royal officials, feudatory chiefs, princes and the merchants.

The pattern of the performance of the ceremony indicates that the kings of ancient Assam were consecrated according to the Vedic rites and rituals.
Another ceremony that performed by the kings of ancient Assam was the horse sacrifice (Asvamedha). Kings of ancient Assam like Mahendravarman, Bhutivarman performed the horse sacrifices (bājīmedhatarapati). This sacrifice performed after some conquest and thereby signified the conquest and greatness of the performers. The performance of this ceremony indicates that the kings of ancient Assam followed the customs and rituals of the Vedic and Epic times.

One of the important aspects of the cultural life of Ancient Assam was the performance of religious activities. Religion played a dominant role in the cultural life of the different cities of ancient Assam. Most of the kings of ancient Assam followed the Vedic Brahmanical religion. It is known from the copper plate inscriptions that all the rulers of ancient Assam were the staunch devotees of the Brahmanical god Siva. The rulers patronized the temples of lord Siva as well as other deities in their cities. Thus king Vanamālā (832-855 A.D.) of Śālastambha dynasty newly constructed the temple of Hatakasulin (Lord Siva).

_Dhurude udbhasya yena papitain kalīntarādālayain_  
_Soudhaṁ bhaktinatā khilāmaravatnālārchchtuangreli punah _|  
_Prāleyāchulasringatungamatulagrāmabhavesyājane-  
_Yuktaṁ hātakuśulin khitibhujā bhaktyā navaiṁ sakusā _|  

Some of the capital cities of the times like Hāruppeswara emerged initially as a religious site. In some of the inscriptions of ancient Assam the city Hāruppeswara or Hadapyaka was called as the Purūya (holy) city.
The kings and his administration of ancient Assam adopted some measures to maintain the sanctity and to increase the beauty and attractiveness of the religious sites. Thus for increasing the sanctity and attraction of the temples in the cities the kings of ancient Assam provided the temples with pleasant parks, bowers and houses, which surpassed the market places and township. The parks of the temples were full of different kinds of beautiful flowers, nice plants, attractive birds and animals and ponds with full blooming lotuses, lilies and moving geese.

Devāgarairi vādyagita-pranādairnārārāmaḥ satrināṁ vyāhataishra

Gaṇantyaudāyāpyaharmanyaṁ sukamyo dese dese śālimiṁ yasya kirttiṁ | | ¹⁶

The kings themselves showed the interest in building temples and endowed them with the men, women, money, and animals and also granted rent-free lands for the temples. King Indrapāla constructed the temple of lord Siva as like Kailāsa (abode of lord Siva) in his capital. King Vanamālā rebuilt the temple of Helaṅkūlin (i.e. lord Siva) magnificently so as to make it the abode of lord Siva (i.e. Kailāsha), and endowed it with matchless villages, elephants and prostitutes. King Surendravarman (Mahendravarman) constructed a cave temple of Lord Balabhadra on Umāchal hill. The king of ancient Assam considered the performance of any religious duty as the holy duty and thus invested his officials to construct religious asylum (āśramas). The religious inclination of the king and his subjects of ancient Assam was indicated by the Hiuen...
Tsang’s remark that the kingdom (Kāmarūpa) was abundance of Deva temples²².

Besides the lord Siva, Vishnu was also a popular deity of ancient Assam. Naraka, the founder of the Naraka - Bhagadatta dynasty was known as the descendant of Boar incarnation of lord Vishnu²³. Using of the epithet of Parama-daivata parama- bhattachakra²⁴ by the Kāmarūpa king like Bhutivarman (510-555 A.D.) and others indicates that Lord Vishnu was a popular god among the rulers of ancient Assam.

The Sakti cult was also developed during this period. The Mother Goddess Mahā Gaurī²⁵, sometimes referred to as Pārvati, was invoked in inscriptions along with that of her consort Siva. She was said to reside in the Kāmakuta Hill beside of which flowed the holy river, presumably the Brahmaputra. Literature and the Grants of ancient Assam refer to the prevalence of the Sakti cult in ancient Assam²⁶.

Besides these Bramanical gods and goddesses some minor Brahmanical gods and goddesses were worshipped in ancient Assam. Among them the most mentionable was Surya or Aditya (the Sun) god. Important centre for worship of god Surya was the Sri Surya Pāhār in the district of Goalpara which contains large number sculptures of great iconographical significance²⁷ (Appendix, Plates-117, 118, 119, 120). Another mentionable minor deity that worshipped in ancient Assam was god Ganesha. The sculptural ruins discovered at Pāndu, Narakāsur Hill, Daparvatiyā, Umānanda witnessed the prevalence of the worship of
Ganesha in ancient Assam. Besides, the seal attached to the Kamauli Grant of Vaidyadeva depicts the figure of seated Ganesha and, the first verse of Assam plates of Vallabhadeva contains a prayer to Lombodara i.e. Ganesha. The sculptural remains discovered in the different places of Assam testifies the worship of other minor gods and goddesses in ancient Assam like Indra, Balabhadra, Kuvera, Agni, Kārtikeya, Manasā etc.

There is the controversy among the scholar regarding the extension of Buddhism in ancient Assam. Not discovery of single Asokan rock edicts in Prâjñyotisa-Kâmarûpa kingdom indicates that neither the kingdom of Kâmarûpa was included into the Asoka's empire nor his religion Buddhism was extended to the land. On the other hand the Buddhist literature is silent about any information of the land. This silent of Asokan edicts and the Buddhist literature leads the scholars like R. C. Majumdar to opine that Kâmarûpa retained the Brahmanical religion to the last. The view of Bhattasali in this regard is that there was no trace of Buddhism in ancient Assam till the time of Hiuen Tsang and this region remained the last stronghold for Brahmanical religion. The view of Hiuen Tsang was that the people of Kâmarupa worshipped devas and did not believe in Buddhism. The conversation between Hiuen Tsang and his teacher Silabhadra of Nâlandâ University is also mentionable in this respect. When Hiuen Tsang at first was not agreed to come to Kâmarûpa after getting the invitation from Kâmarûpa king Bhâskaravarman, the Buddhist teacher Silabhadra convinced the Chinese scholar to accept the
invitation of the Kāmarupa king who was not a Buddhist. So these references indicate that till the visit of Hiuen Tsang in the first half of seven century A.D. neither the king nor his subject had the faith on Buddhism.

However it is referred in the Rājatarangini of Kalhān that king Meghavāhana of Kashmir married a Prāgjyotisa princess named Amritaprabhā who was accompanied by Stunpā, the spiritual guide (guru) of her father who hailed from Loh and built a stupa called Lo-Stunpā. The father of Amritaprabhā was Balavarman I (405-420 A.D). This reference in the Rājatarangini indicates that prior to the 5th century A.D. Buddhism had penetrated into Kāmarupa. The use of the term Tathāgata in an inscription of Balavarman III also indicates the existence of Buddhism in ancient Assam.

Art and architecture is one of the indicators for urbanization. The activities of this branch of art were significant aspects of the urban cultural life in early Assam. The performance of architectural activity in ancient Assam in the historical period goes back to the middle of 4th century A.D. Literature, epigraphs and architectural remains of ancient Assam testify to the abundance of architectural works in ancient Assam.

The Mārkandeya Purāṇa refers to the building of a Surya temple in Kāmarupa. The Kālikā Purāṇa describes the city of Prāgjyotisapura which was adorned with tall and beautiful buildings and encircled by high walls.
The Purana also indicates few other cities of ancient Assam like Alakā, Chandrāvati, which were full of beautiful white buildings, palaces and parks. The Yogini Tantra describes the sacred city of Apunarbhava which was full of blue, red and white buildings (prasādas). In the city of Kundilnagara there were various buildings, built with stones and inscribed and painted on the walls on the subjects like decorative pots, dancing girls, elephants, tigers, lions and different types of birds which increased the beauty of the city. The Chinese pilgrim Huen Tsang mention in his account about the existence of hundred of deva temples in Kamarupa at the time of his visit to the land (643 A.D.).

Like the literature the inscriptions of ancient Assam also indicate the availability of abundant buildings in ancient Assam. The Umāchāl Rock Inscription of king Surendravarman (Mahendravarman) indicates the only instance of the construction of a cave temple and installation of a deity therein.

The Parvatiya Grant of Vanamala indicates the repair of a lofty temple by king Vanamala, which had fallen down.
The Gáchtal Grant of Gopáladeva mentions that King Indrapála studded the earth with white washed temples that enshrine the idol of Shambhu.

The Nowgong Grant of Balavarman indicates the rows of buildings erected by king Balavarman, which had large numbers of rooms, decorated with carvings.

Bargaon grant of Ratnapála refers to the city of Dujjayanagara which had magnificent buildings constructed by the rulers. The numerous big and tall buildings of the city had hidden the view of the Sun.

Inscriptions refer to the construction and fortification of the capital city like Sri Durjjayanagara. The city was protected with a rampart and a strong wall, which struck terror into the hearts of many contemporary kings of different places.
Besides the references in the literature and epigraphs, the discovery of the architectural remains in different places of Assam witnessed the abundance of architectural activities in ancient Assam. In Goalpara district the architectural remains are noticed at Dekhoā, Paglātek and Sri Surjya Pāhār. The architectural remains found in the different places of Darrang and Sonitpur districts namely at Daparvatia village, Bāmparvatia village, in the vicinity of the Tezpur town lead one to consider the area as Hāruppeswara, the capital city of the kings of the Sālastambha dynasty. In the Kāmṛup and Barpetā district architectural remains are found in the places like at Hājo, Madan Kāmdev, North Guwahati, Kāmakhyā, Ambāri and Uzānbazār area of Guwahati, Pingaleswar, Tāmulpur, Chaigāon etc. In many places of Nagaon district archeological remains of ancient Assam have been noticed in numbers of places. Some of such places are Jogijān, Māthorbāri, Chāng-chouki, Akāsiganga, Dabokā and its adjoining places, Mikirāti etc. Archeological remains also discovered in different places of present Golāghat district especially at Deoparvat, Deopāni and many other places of Dayāng-Dhansiri valley. In Dibrugarh district archeological remains have been discovered at Sadiyā region where there was Kundilnagar the capital city of the traditional ruler Bhismak. Besides, the ruins of ancient forts, ramparts, tanks and others, which are scattered in different places of Assam, would witness valuable information regarding the architectural activities of Ancient Assam.
Although the different sources inform about the construction of the palaces, buildings, temples, forts etc. in ancient Assam at present only few architectural remains of ancient Assam have been discovered and that too in very deplorable condition. Many of the buildings and palaces mention in the sources practically have no any traces at present. Certain factors have been playing their role in destroying and damaging and thereby leading to the disappearance of the ancient buildings of Assam. These may be discussed as the followings.

1. The nature of the soil and climate of Assam were responsible for the destruction of the ancient buildings of the land.

2. The physical condition and jungle vegetation of the land were also the factors for the destruction and the disappearance of the buildings of ancient Assam. The building materials that used for the construction were not as such to make the buildings everlasting.

3. The natural calamities like floods, earthquakes etc. were also responsible for the damage and disappearance of the ancient buildings of Assam. The earthquake of 1897 which destroyed many historical remains is the example in this respect.

4. The religious zeal that showed by the Muslim invaders during their operations destroyed many temples and other religious architectures of ancient times.
Architectural activities that were done in ancient Assam can be divided in two heads (i) Storeyed type architecture and (ii) Temples

From the description in literature and inscriptions the information about the storeyed type architecture of ancient Assam can be derived. This storeyed type architecture is consisted of palace buildings, forts, moats, bridges etc. Inscriptions indicate that in the cities especially in the capital cities of ancient Assam innumerable buildings were constructed. The buildings of the cities so overcrowded that the rays of the Sun could not be seen. There were huge number buildings in the cities and the rooms of the palaces were heavily ornamented with realistic pictures. The sacred city of Apurnarbhava was adorned with blue, red and white buildings (prasādas) and the multi-coloured streamers were flying from their tops.

The sources indicate that for protection of cities the strong and suitable fort system was provided in ancient Assam. Thus Kalikā Purāṇa mentions six types of forts for protection of a city. These are Jala Durga (Water fort), Bhumi Durga (earthen fort), Vriksa Durga (fort encircled by closely knitted thorny trees), Aranya Durga (fort surrounded by dense forest), Bala Durga (fort manned by properly equipped army) and Sālīyaja Durga or Giri Durga (mountain or hill fort). The type of fort was chosen depending upon the suitability of the area and its location (yatha durgam svadesatāh). Further it is also indicated that the forts should situated at a distance from the city. The fort again should be surrounded by
a moat (pārikha). Thus the Prāgjyotisapura city was in the middle of Kāmarūpa kingdom (madhyagam Kāmarūpasya) and was protected by giridurga and was unassailable even by the gods.

\[
\text{saguptāncha purīn chakse giridurgena mādhuvali}
\]

Thus the Pragjyotisapura city was in the middle of Kamampa kingdom (madhyagam Kāmarūpasya) and was protected by giridurga and was unassailable even by the gods.

\[
\text{Taddurgain sarvatobhadraṁ devatrapī durāsadaiṁ | 58}
\]

Four gates were provided in the four direction of the city and four great generals were placed to look after the affairs of the four gates59. The cities were adorned with tall and beautiful buildings and encircled by high walls.

\[
\text{Sriyāyuktāṁ dipyaṁānāṁ prākāṛattālabhusitāṁ |}
\]

\[
\text{Sa meva nagarim visnul kimindrasyānārāvāti | 60}
\]

Like the city of Pragjyotisapura, Durjayanagara was encompassed by a rampart and protected with a strong fence which baffled and struck terror into the heart of the enemies. In that city there were thousands of buildings with high white glistening towers with lime plaster which had hid the view of the sun61. Similarly other cities of ancient Assam like Alakā62, Chandrāvati63, were full of white buildings and palaces.

In the cities of ancient Assam there constructed different types of roads and streets to facilitate the transportation of the city dwellers. The streets were well planned and the inscriptions indicate some such streets as like maharajamarga64, rathya, vithi, Chatuspatha65, brihad ali (high way)66 khetra ali (field dividing lane)67 etc.

For supply of water to the people for drinking and other purposes the kings of ancient Assam dug several tanks in different places the remains which are still available. Some of such tanks are Dighali
pukhuri, Jorpukhuri in Guwahati, Hajjarapukhuri, Balipukhuri and a tank in the name of Kubhanda, the minister of king Bāna in Tezpur and the like. Construction of stone bridge was another architectural work of ancient Assam. One of the most fascinating examples of a stone bridge that constructed in ancient Assam is still noticed in North Guwahati reference of which was made by historians of the invasion of Bakhtiyar. This bridge is a one piece stone work.

The temple type of architecture of ancient Assam consisted of temples, the parks that attached to the temples, caves, religious shrines etc. In the field of architecture in ancient Assam the most developed one was the temple architecture. The inscriptions and the literary sources significantly indicate temples of ancient Assam. Hiuen Tsang informs that during his visit to Kāmarūpa he found hundred of deva temples in the country (1st part of seven century A.D). Kalika Purāna refers to the temple of Kuvera at Darpana hills and a Vishnu temple at Agnimalla hills. Yugini Tantra refers to the Sacred Tirtha of Apunarbhava which was adorned by numerous beautiful temples (devayatanir divyalaḥ). Among the inscriptions the Umachal Rock inscription of king Surendravarman (Mahendravarman) indicates the dedication of a shrine to lord Balabhadra swāmin. Tezpur Grant of Vanamalā records the rebuilt of the temple of Hatakasulin (lord Shiva) and donation of villages, elephants and dancers for the purpose. The Guwahati Grant records that king Ratnapāla had caused the whole world to be covered by white
washed temples of lord Shiva75. Besides, the inscriptions issued by the other kings of ancient Assam also indicate the construction of temples in ancient Assam.

The ancient ruins discovered in different places of Assam testify the construction of temple architecture in different places of ancient Assam. The earliest remains of temples, belonging to the late Gupta period are located in Da-Parvatiā, Tezpur. Here a doorframe of the discovered temple is available which has the characteristic of the early Gupta style of architecture76.

The ruins of Gupta type temples are also discovered at Mājgāon in Tezpur, Mikirāti, near Davakā in Nagaon, Gāchtal in Nagaon district, Devasthān (Maudāngā) near Haurāghāt in Karbi-Anglong district, Deopāni and Deopāhār in Golaghat and the like.

From the study of the sites of the temples in ancient Assam the idea of the general lay-out of the temple architecture of ancient Assam can be known. They are-

- Construction of a torana which is situated at a little distance from the main temple on the approach road.
- Construction of a doorway at the entrance of the temple building.
- Construction of a mandapa or nātimandir.
- Provision of gopura or entrance chamber or antarāla.
- Provision of garbhagriha or sanctum-Sanctorum or cella
• Construction of small shrines consists only of *garbhagriha* within the enclosed yards.

Some principles were followed in constructing the body of the temple in ancient Assam. Thus the body of the temple was constructed dividing into four principal parts. They are-

- *Pada* or *pista* (pedestal)
- *Janghā* (Waist or body or wall)
- *Kāndha* or *gāndi* (neck)
- *Sikhara* or *mustaka* (the peak-crown)

Temples of ancient Assam bears the influence of two phases of temple architecture of India. They are - the Gupta style and the Rastrakuta style. The evidence of the Gupta style in the temples in Assam is the doorframe of Da-Parbatia and the influence of the Rastrakuta style is noticed in the construction of the *sikharas* of the temples in Assam.

The temples of this period made of both bricks and stone. The Da-Parbatia temple is the brick built temple and followed the Gupta technique of squire design and dimensions. Similar are the temples at Mājgāon, the Bāmuni hills, Gosāinjāri all of which are existed in Sonitpur district. At Mikirāti near Davaṅgā, the central temple is made of bricks where as the pedestal was of grey-soap stone. The temple at Gāchtal was constructed using the granite stone.

Like the architecture the art of sculpture was also noticeably developed in ancient Assam. The sculpture of ancient Assam
developed in two types- (a) Independent sculpture and (b) Decorative part of temple architecture namely – bhithis, simhakarnas, dvāras and sirapattis.

The discovery of different archaeological sites like Da-Parvatia in Tezpur, Surjya Pāhār in Goalpara, Hájo, Modan Kâmdev near Guwahati, Ambāri, Kukurmutā in Guwahati, Gāchtal, Chāng chauki, Mikirāti, Davakā in Nagaon district, Deopāhār, Deopānī and Dayāng-Dhansiri valley in Golaghat district and many other places of Assam have uncovered the developed sculptural works of ancient Assam. Sculptures of ancient Assam had been done with different metals in different forms. The figures that depicted in the sculptures of ancient Assam may be classified as—

1. Figures of god and goddesses
2. Human figures
3. Animal figures
4. Birds and
5. Sculptural designs

The substances that used for making the sculptural works in ancient Assam were stones, different metals, wood, earth, ivory etc. The independent metal and stone sculptural images that were done in ancient Assam are found in different places of Assam. Among them the most mentionable are- a metal Vishnu image found at Narakāsur hoard, a stone Vishnu image found at Mikirāti, a black stone Vishnu image found at Dudhnoi, the images of Vishnu and Siva found at Surjya Pāhār (Goalpara),
an image of Kārtikeya found at Devasthān in Nagaon, an image of Umā and Maheswara from Davakā etc.

The earliest stone sculpture that had done in ancient Assam was the doorframe found at Da-Parvatia in Tezpur. It is the superb workmanship of the sculptural art that developed in ancient Assam. It has similarity with the doorframes of the well-known Gupta temples at Nachnā Kutharā, Bhumara and Deogarh. Two similar stone sculptures found at Mikirāti in Nagaon consist of a male and a female figure; while a black stone image of Vishnu has been found at Dudhnoi in Goalpara. Varieties of other images have been discovered in places like Surya Pāhār, Madan Kāmdev, Ambārī etc. and most of them are now housed in the Assam State Museum, Guwahati. Most of the sculptures are religious in nature and belong to the period 5th century to 12th century A.D.

On observing the nature of the sculpture of ancient Assam it can be divided into four categories. They are—

1) Dancing figures
2) Amorous figures
3) Scenes from the epics
4) Scenes from the contemporary life

The dancing figures of ancient Assam represented some of the poses described in the Nātya Sāstras. The dancing figures of ancient Assam are found in the stone slabs lying scattered in many ruined
temples in different places of Assam especially at Tezpur, Deoparvat, Kukurmutā, Kundilnagar etc.

The amorous figures or the erotic sculptures of ancient Assam are generally noticed in the temple buildings. The figures were enjoined on the description made by the text such as Kāma-sutras. Many of such figures are noticed at Madan Kāmdev near Guwahati. The Assam State Museum houses as many as five stone blocks showing erotic scenes.

In very few sculptures of Ancient Assam the story of the two epics- the Rāmāyana and Mahābhārata are also depicted. Some such sculptures are found in the temple ruins at Deoparvat in Golāghat. In the panels of this place there is seen the images of Rāma and Lakshmana in a seated posture and Sugriva is seen kneeling before Rāma, while Hanuman and other monkeys are seen watching them. In another scene of the same place there illustrated the story of Garudagartabhanga (outdoing of Garuda’s pride) a story from the Mahābhārata.

Majority of the sculptures of ancient Assam depicted the scenes of social and domestic activities of the people like worshipping, child care, dancing, doing household activities and so on. Sometimes in the sculpture there notice the depicting of the story of secular themes. One such story is seen on the lower portion of dvārasākhā in a temple at Tezpur where it is shown a female figure with a basket on her head and some monkeys trying to catch the basket.
Depicting of animal figures is one of the common features of the sculptures of ancient Assam. The animal figures of the sculptures are real as well as composite mythical figures like makaras, kirtimukhas etc. Among the real animal sculptures the most common is elephant figure. The elephant head was generally used as royal insignia in ancient Assam. Almost all the inscriptions of ancient Assam bear the head of the elephant (Appendix, Plates 12, 24, 29, 42). The using of the rows of elephants (gajathāra) was common in many temples of ancient Assam. As a decorative motif the pairs of lions were commonly used in old Assamese art. The lion is also shown as vāhana of goddess Durgā or Mahishamardini image. Among the animal figures the bull was occasionally depicted in the sculptures of ancient Assam. The terracotta plaques and in other sculptural slabs of ancient Assam depicted the animal figures like horses, goats, monkeys etc.

Along with the animals in the sculptures of ancient Assam there noticed the figures of different kinds of birds especially the goose, peacock etc.

Besides the figures of human beings and animal figures and the birds the sculptors and the engravers of ancient Assam used the decorative sculptural designs in their arts and architectures. These designs may be divided in three groups viz. architectural, geometrical and floral. The caudrasālā motif in the sirapatti in the doors of the Daparvatiā temple is the example of the architectural designing sculpture of ancient
Assam. The geometrical designing sculpture of ancient Assam is mostly noticed on the ceilings as well as on the stambhas (pillars) which is now in ruinous condition. Different kinds of geometrical designs that were used in the sculptures of ancient Assam were circular, semi circular, triangular etc.

The floral designs which is comprises of art of leaves, flowers, creepers etc. were also used in the arts and architectures of ancient Assam. Leaves and creepers were commonly used in the dvāras (doorframes) of ancient Assam. Beautifully curved creepers and leaves are seen in the doorframes of the temples at Daparvatiā and Majgaon in Tezpur (Plate-149). Among the floral design lotus was the favorite one and was greatly used in the pitāhas and āsanas of the deities of ancient Assam. A few terracotta plaques found from Kundilnagar show the decorative floral designs.

The art of sculpture of early Assam would remain incomplete without reference to the development of terracotta art of the land. It is the most ancient medium for the expression of art. In the very early times even before the use of sculpture, terracotta was greatly popular in the cities and towns. They served both the religious and secular purposes. The terracotta study gives an idea of the social and religious beliefs of the people and also witnesses the people’s aesthetic sense. The study of the terracotta activities of a place of particular period ascertain the tastes of dress, hair style, ornaments and other aspects of culture of the
people of that period. It also throws light on the social, religious and artistic background of the people for the period to which they belong.

The study of the terracotta art of ancient Assam indicates that it has been used from remote past. The study also reveals that it has been used as a medium of creative and utilitarian art object for both domestic and ritual purposes. The instance of pre-historic terracotta production in North-East India discovered at Daojali-Hiding area in North Cachar Hills of Assam\(^4\). The terracotta objects of ancient Assam are found in the places like Sri Suriya Pāhār, Paglātek in Goalpara, Kukurmutā, Bhaitbāri, Ambāri, Cotton College campus etc. in Guwahati, Da-Parvaṭi in Tezpur, Borpathār and Dayāṅg-Dhansiri valley in Golaghat, Bhismaknagar in Dibrugarh and many other places. Majority of the terracotta have been now preserved in the Assam State Museum, Guwahati.

Discovery of the ancient terracotta objects in different places of Assam indicates that a strong terracotta tradition had been developed in ancient Assam. This is supported by the reference of kumbhakāragorta (a potter’s pit)\(^5\) and Dijjariṭihādi (a potter’s village)\(^6\) in the inscriptions of ancient Assam. The wide extension of the terracotta production in ancient Assam indicates its popularity in the land in ancient times. But most of the terracotta objects of the land now discovered are in most dilapidated condition. This indicates that large number of terracotta objects of ancient Assam had been lost before tracing out.
There were some underlying factors that played the role for the damage and lost of the terracotta objects of ancient Assam. Some of the main factors that responsible for the damage and lost of the terracotta objects of ancient Assam can be summed up as the following—

1) Assam is a riverine state with heavy rainfall which created frequent flood and that contribute to the decay and lost of the terracotta objects.

2) The acidic nature of the soil of the land led to the decay and disappearance of the terracotta objects.

3) The lack of consciousness of the people for the maintenance and preservation of the terracotta objects was also responsible for the damage and lost of the terracotta objects in ancient Assam.

Terracotta that found in ancient Assam may be classified under four heads –

(i) gods and goddesses

(ii) human figures

(iii) animal figures and

(iv) miscellaneous objects.

In Ancient Assam terracotta bearing the human figures were few in numbers. A terracotta piece from Kukurmatā depicts three female figures, each standing cross legged on a lotus pedestal the central one is being taller than the remaining two (Appendix, Plate-141). Each one
of the figure are wearing attractive cloth and valuable ornaments consisting of waistband, necklace, collar and earrings and their hair combed neatly. The tallest figure (principal figure) is raising her hands above the head while the other figures one of their hands is hanging along the waist of the tallest figure and the other is rising up. One figure of the same place is a skeleton like male figure dancing in tribhanga (Appendix, Plate-142). The left hand of the figure is holding a trisula and the right hand a damaru. From Bhismaknagara there discovered a number of terracotta plaques one of which is in a dancing pose (Appendix, Plate-144). Terracotta figures of both Bhismaknagara and Bhaitbāri were ornamented.

Numbers of terracotta objects come into light in the site of Ambāri in Guwahati with the unearthing of the site in 1989-90. The terracotta objects of Ambāri include - a few figures of gods and human beings along with other objects (Appendix, Plate-146). Among the figures the most notables one is a mutilated figure of Ganesha. The modeling is a superior and mature workmanship. A male broken figure seated like Yogi (in meditating mood) is another notable terracotta product found at Ambāri. The head along with the right hand were being lost. The figure is adorned with ornamented girdle bellow the naval. A padestalled linga with a circular Yoni pitha (partly broken) is another noticeable terracotta product that discovered at Ambāri. Besides, the broken parts of beads, bangles, necklaces, ball etc. are also discovered in the site of Ambāri. Thus the
terracotta objects of Ambāri witness the social, economic and religious life of a flourishing city life of the Brahmaputra valley.

Terracotta objects were also discovered in the Cotton College campus in Guwahati. Terracotta objects of this place are consisted of two figures of apsarīs, two vidyādhārans, a devotee with a Siva linga, an image of Kārtīkeya, one images of Indra, a potbellied dancing figure, a female dancing figure, a Yogi in padmāsana and an unidentified male figure.

Among the other terracotta figures that found in different places are a few female figurines in Surjya pāhār, a dhyāni Buddha image at Paglātek both are in Goalpara district and some seals at Barpathār in Golaghat district.

Painting is the symbol of human civilization. From the scattered sources it is known that there had been developed a flourishing art of painting in the civic society of ancient Assam. The superb portrait painting done by Chitralekha, the friend (Sakhee) of king Bāna’s daughter Ushā of Sinitapura kingdom is known from the local traditions and the purānic legends. The reference that Chitralekha was capable of drawing the portraits of all gods and all human beings indicates the great developed portrait painting art that prevalence in ancient Assam.

There is also the information of the prevalence of flourishing manuscript painting in ancient Assam. It is known from the Harsacarita of Bāna that among the various presents sent by Bhāskaravarman (594-650 A.D.) to Harsa of Kanouj, there were “volumes
of writings with leaves made from the aloe bark and of the hue of ripe cucumber and curved boxes of panels of painting with brushes and guards attached” 87.

Flourishing of painting in ancient Assam is also referred in the inscriptions of Ancient Assam. It is recorded in the Doobi Copper plates Inscription that "Bhaskaravarman's mark (i.e. picture) was seen in the royal palace un tarnished on account of great luster 88. Uttarbarbil inscription of Balavarman (9th century A.D.) indicates that the royal palace of the king Balavarman III was decorated with different pictures (prasādanānakritavisitrāpi sāchchitra) 89. The Nowgong Grant of the same king indicates that the rooms of the city Prāgijotisapura were ornamented with realistic pictures (pānkti prasādanānakritavisitrāpi sāchchitra) 90. The concrete example of the painting done in ancient Assam is witnessed by the line drawing that engraved on the Copper Plates Inscription of Indrapāla (1040-1065 A.D.), where the pictures of a bird, a lotus, a conch and a wheel had been engraved in the line drawings 91.

Education leads to social progress. Sources indicate that reading and writing was developed in Assam from ancient times. It was greatly developed in the urban areas of early Assam.

It is indicated in the Kālika Purāṇa that Narakasura after defeating Ghatakāsura occupied Prāgijotisapura and made provisions for study of Vedas 92. So it is evident that steps for educational...
development in ancient Assam was initiated by Narakāsura who ascribe to rule in Prāgjyotisapura since second or third century B.C. 93.

The reference of the term *Varnāśramadharma* (the Stages of life) in the epigraphs of ancient Assam 94 indicates that education was regularized in ancient Assam and state control was established on it. The reference of *Varna*, which signifies the caste, indicates that the education at this time was not for all. Generally the crown princes 95, sons of the Brahmin scholars 96 and sons and wards of the nobles were allowed to go for education. Women of Brahmins and the royal families were also having the chance to get education. Most of the queens of ancient Assam 97 and women of the Brahmin families were well versed in education and knowledge. Patronization of learned Brahmins by donating land and offering other facilities to the Brahmins who were regarded in the inscriptions as the teacher and guide of the pupils indicate that the kings of ancient Assam had given importance for development of education in their kingdom.

Giving importance in maintain *Varnāśramadharma* and imparting education of Vedas and *dharmastra* in ancient Assam as refer in the epigraphic and literary sources indicate that the system of education and curriculum of ancient Assam was similar to the education system of other parts of India in ancient times. According to the system education was imparted through two-fold processes. One was the *Gurukula* system according to which the pupils studied at the houses of their teachers from
the initiation till the ceremony of *samāvantana* (completion of education). The other system of education was the transmitting of education through hereditary system according to which the sons used to receive the education from their fathers.

The example of the first type of education indicates in the Nowgong Grant of Balavarman (885-910 A.D.) where it is mentioned that a Brahmana named Srutidhara having performed the *samāvantana* ceremony at his preceptor's house returned to lead the life of a householder and acquired the title 'Kathūmīsthā' for his proficiency in reciting ancient lore.

The examples of the other type of education are mentioned in the inscriptions of king Vanamālā (835-865 A.D.), Ratnapāla (early part of 11th century A.D.) and Dharmapāla (1095-1120 A.D.) where it is mentioned that the forefathers of the donee Brahmin scholars were reputed scholars and that they received their education from their fathers.

Sources of ancient Assam are not definite about the duration of education in ancient Assam. Prince Vajradatta completed his study of Vevas, angas, logic and others within due course. As already discussed the Brahmanical system of education was followed in ancient Assam. The author of *dharmaśastras* like Gautama indicates the duration of 12 years for the study of one Veda. On the other hand the biography of Sankardev (*Guru carit*) written in the medieval period of Assam informs that he spent 12 years in the *pathśāla* of Mahendra Kandali. Thus it can be
assumed that 12 years was the duration of education in the Gurukala system in ancient Assam.

The curriculum of education that was prevailing in ancient Assam can be known from the study of inscriptions and literature. The inscriptions of ancient Assam indicate that the curriculum of study of ancient Assam was consisted of both mental and physical education. The mental education included the knowledge of the Vedas, Sāstras, Angas, Grammar, logic, views of the preceptors of the devas and the asuras and the physical education included the subduing and taming of elephants, acquiring the knowledge of breed, nature and excellence of the horses and other military trainings.

Most of the inscriptions of Assam indicate the Vedas as the course of study for the students in ancient Assam. The literatures like the Puranas and the Dharmasāstras like Smriti-Nibandha were also included in the course of study in ancient Assam. Besides the study of angas, grammar (vyākaranas), and logic, knowledge of subduing and training of elephants and horses, and nitisāstras were also included as the courses for study of the princes in ancient Assam. Different branches of philosophy like Sānkhya, Mīmāṃsā, nyāya etc. were included in the curriculum of study in ancient Assam. Artha (Political ethics) was also included in the curriculum. The crown prince of ancient Assam were taught the science of polity and thus some of kings of ancient Assam like Narayana Varman (5th century A.D.) earned reputation as expert in the
science of polity (‘Arthasastajna’). Bhaskaravarman (594-650 A.D.) was described as expert in six fold political experiments. Kalika Purana mentions these six fold experiment as yana, asana, asraya, divaidha, sandhi and vigraha.

Yānāsanāsyāpraakāhādhasandhayo vigraha stathā

Abhyāset saragunāmetamstesāāin sthānancha śāśhantair

These political experiments certainly included in the course of Artha (political ethics) that were incorporated in the curricula of education of early Assam.

The art of warfare and military science was another course of study for the student of ancient Assam. The knowledge of the art was most important for the crown prince who was the heir apparent of the existing king. However the boys of other than the crown prince could also learn the art of military science. Thus the Brahmin boy Himanga studied the art of military science and earned reputation as an expert in that art.

The Yogas and Tantras were also included in the curricula of education of ancient Assam. The Dharmasastras and Smritisastras were also studied as the part of course of study in ancient Assam.

The astrology (jyotisa) was another important subject of the curricula of ancient Assam. The name of the land as Pragjyotisa (eastern land of astrology) and the existence of the Navagraha temple (temple of nine planets) on the Chitrachala hill at Guwahati from early times indicate the importance of the study of astrology in the land.
The literature especially the Kavya literature was also taught in ancient Assam. The well-versed and superior style of literature that found in the inscriptions of ancient Assam indicates that the composers of the text were well educated scholars. Some of the inscriptions indicate that few kings of ancient Assam were adornable poets and composed the literature. Thus the teaching of Kavyas was provided not only to persons of literature but also to the crown princes.

The art of singing and dancing was also taught in ancient Assam. Chinese traveler Hiuen Tsang (7th century A.D.) mentions that singing and dancing was practiced in the court of king Bhaskaravarman. The inscriptions also refer to the dancing girls (uatis) and practicing of singing and playing of musical instruments mainly in the urban areas in ancient Assam. The architectural and sculptural works discovered in different places of Assam exhibited the dancing figures which also witnessed the prevalence of the art of dancing and singing in ancient Assam. Without proper training and education of the art it could not be developed suitably. So the dancing and singing were also included in the curricula of the education in ancient Assam.

The training of the sculptors and stone engraver was also a significant professional education prevailed in ancient Assam. The discovery of the ruins of temples and palatial buildings, sculptural works, terracotta objects, forts and others in different places of Assam like Bamunipāhār, Dah-parvatic, Surjyapāhār, Madan Kāmdev, Dovakā, Bamunipāhār, Dah-parvatic, Surjyapāhār, Madan Kāmdev, Dovakā,
Jogijan, Numaligarh, Ambārī etc. indicate the availability of professional guilds in ancient Assam where the trainings were given to the architects, craftsmen, artisans, sculptors and engravers. Reference of the lekhakaras (writer) and Sekyākuras (Copersmith) indicates the availability of the professional training centers in ancient Assam to train the artisans.

It appears from the sources, particularly the land grants that Brahmannical culture and its attendants, the Sanskrit language, social hierarchical organization and performance of sacrifices were integral part of the cultural life of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. Imparting knowledge in these fields was also definitely done in ancient Assam. Yoga and meditation was also practiced in ancient Assam. Teaching in these areas was also definitely included in the curriculum of education in ancient Assam.

The kings of ancient Assam were interested in the spread of learning and education and thus adopted certain measures for it. Thus they made large grants to the Brahmin scholar for the spread of education. By donating land grants to the Brahmin scholars the kings of ancient Assam patronized the scholarly person of the time and thereby tried to spread the education and learning through this section of people. For increasing the scholarly sharpness and development of education, debates were arranged among the scholars on the subject of the knowledge of the renowned scripture like the Vedas. To patronize the knowledge and education in the urban centres like the capital cities the kings of
ancient Assam also established the poets, men of education and preceptors in the cities\textsuperscript{120}.

The sources indicate that there were so many languages in all urban centres of early Assam. The Malābhārata mentions that the original inhabitants of ancient Assam belonged to the kirātas and the cinas\textsuperscript{121}, who were referred in the classical works as mlechchhas, danavas and asuras and were generally known as the non-Aryans. These non-Aryans had own languages. On the basis of their languages as had been spoken by the descendants of the non-Aryan tribes and also names of certain places and rivers of Assam it can be confirmed that the earliest inhabitants of ancient Assam belonged to the Mon-Khmer family which had been categorized by Schmidt as the Austric family of language\textsuperscript{122}.

It was in this stage that the Arianization started in ancient Assam during the reign of King Naraka (in the Pre-Bhārata War time) who established his rule in Prāgyotisapura after killing its local ruler Ghatakāsura. It is known that Naraka after establishing himself in the throne of Prāgyotisapura deliberately started a process of Aryanization by establishing many learned people of twice born class in his kingdom.

\textit{Tasmiit kirātānatsārya vedasāstratigān balun} |  
\textit{Dvijātin vāsāyamāsa tatra varnān sanātanān} | | \textsuperscript{123}.

With this process of Aryanization Naraka and his successors transplanted in ancient Assam the Aryan culture including its language- Sanskrit. The availability of the copper plates and few rock
inscriptions indicate that Sanskrit remain as court language up to the beginning of the 13th century A.D. As a result of the import of Sanskrit language to ancient Assam the subsequent Assamese languages came out with the influence of the Sanskrit along with the original language of the people of Mon-Khmer family and other languages of northern India. Therefore here lies the truth when Huen Tsang recorded in 7th century A.D. that the language of Kāmarupa as slight different from the languages of rest of northern Indian territories\textsuperscript{124}.

The discussion of education will not be complete without having the idea of the script that used in early Assam. The earliest specimen of script that found in ancient Assam is the Umāchal Rock inscription of king Surendravarman that assigned between A.D. 470 and A.D.494\textsuperscript{125}. The script of the inscription of early Assam can be identified with the Gupta alphabet, which is an offshoot of the Brahmi script. According to S. Kākati, it is a descendent of the \textit{kutila} variation of the Gupta script of eastern India \textsuperscript{126}. An examination of the script of epigraphs of Assam which was written mostly in Brāhmi and Devanāgari scripts indicates that the Assamese scripts was derived from Brahmi and Devanagari through successive stages and ultimately reached its independent form. It is noticed that in the inscriptions of ancient Assam not only the old Assamese scripts along with Brāhmi and Sanskrit scripts used but modern Assamese words and expressions were also used there. As instance the name of \textit{Kāliā}\textsuperscript{127} of the Nidhanpur Grant can be indicated.
This word *Kāliā* is used as the modern form. Other such examples are *dumdari* (modern *damnaru*),128 *nākka* (modern *nīka* meaning nose)129 *kuā* (same as modern *kuā* meaning well),130 *āli* (same as modern *āli* meaning road),131 and so on.

It is mentionable that the vernacular languages particularly in northern India including Assamese were derived from *apabhramsa*, which was based not on the Sanskrit but on old *Prākrit*. Most notable example in this respect is the Tezpur Rock inscription of king Hajjaravarman of early 9th century A.D. where it is noticed that though the language of the inscription was Sanskrit, it contains many words of *prākrit*.132 This indicates that Assamese language originated from the same group of eastern variety of *Magadha prākrit* where from Bengali, Oriā and Bihāri also derived.133 Due to this reason that Hiuen Tsang found less difference between the language of Kāmarūpa and rest of the territories of northern India when he visited Kāmarūpa in the middle part of 7th century A.D.134

A civilization can be properly valued studying its cultural activities. From the study of the different sources it is seen that in the cities of ancient Assam from the palace to the lowest strata of the society all were involved in the cultural activities and contributed their contributions towards the enrichment of the culture. The literary evidences, inscriptional references, local traditions, discovered scattered remains that available in different places of Assam witness that in ancient
Assam notable development were made in every field of culture whether in religion, architecture, sculpture, painting, education and literature and so on. The culture of the people of cities of ancient Assam was reflected in their activities as well as in their moral behaviour. This is known from the inscriptive references where it is stated that the people of ancient Assam were healthy, morally fit, honest, dutiful, well behaved, and cooperative towards their fellow people and even the ordinary people were away from drinking wine.  

**Notes and References**

4. Doobi Grant, V.2, Sarma, M. M., O. Cit., p.11, (Plate-3);  
   Nidhanpur Grant, V.4, Sarma, M. M., O. Cit., p.41; Khanāmukh Grant, V.2, Sarma, M. M., O. Cit., p.226, (Plate-51); Gauhati Grant, V.5, Sarma, M. M., O. Cit., p. 185, (Plate-34)  
7. Nagong Grant, V. 23, Sarma, M. M., O. Cit., p. 145, (Plate 32); JASB,


13. Ibid


   Khanāmukh Grant, V.2, Sarma, M. M., Op. Cit., p. 226, (Plate-51);

27. JARS, XIV, pp.110-112
31. IHQ m XXII, p.255
32. Watters, T., On Huen Chwang's Travels in India, II, Reprint (Delhi, 1961), p.186
33. Watters, T., On Huen Chwang's Travels in India, I, Reprint (Delhi, 1961), p.348
34. Bhogayā desabhiksunāṁ vallabhāṣyāṁrtaprabhā vihāram-uccair anuytabhavanākhyāṁ akāśayat,
    desaikadesāl lornāṁniḥ prāptastasyāṁ putur guruh
    Stūpā tadbhūṣayā proktā lostunpā stūpa karyakrit. (Rājatarangini of Kalhan, III, VV. 9-10)


38. Markandeo Purana, Chap. 109

39. K. P., Chap. 40, V.91

40. Ibid, Chap. 40, V.60

41. Ibid, Chap. 63, V.136

42. Yogini Tantra, Chap. II, IX, 22-32

43. Sankardev, *Rukmini Haran Kavya* (the work based on Vishnu Purana), Guwahati, 1992

44. Watters, T., Op. Cit., p.186


47. Gāchtal Grant, V. 21, Sarma, M. M., Op. Cit., p.211 (Plate- 49)


50. Ibid, LL.34-36,

51. Chaudhury, R. D., *Archeology Brahmaputra Valley of Assam (Pre-Ahom Period)* Delhi, 1985, p.131


53. Brown, P., *Indian Architecture (Buddhist and Hindu Period)*,
55. Yogini Tantra, II, IX, 26-7
56. K. P., chap. 84, V.115
57. K.P., Chap.84, V.116
60. Ibid, Chap. 40, V.91
62. K. P., chap. 40, V.60
63. Ibid, chap. 63, V. 136
69. JASB, XXIV, pp.1f.
70. Watters, T., Op. Cit., p.126
71. K. P., Chap.79, V.1
72. K. P., Chap.79, V.11
   Cit., p. 2

76. A R A S I, 1924-25, pp. 94-102

77. J K A S, Vol. XXXVIII, p. 168. Here it is mentioned that the temples of Early Assam was influenced by the styles of the Guptas and the Orissan styles. The state of Orissa formed very recently. It was the Rastrakuta style that prevailed in the temples of orissa which styles noticed in the temples of early Assam also.


81. ARASI, 1936-37, p.59, pl.XVIIIa.

82. Ibid

83. Jain, K. C., Ancient Cities and Towns of Rajasthan, Delhi, 1972, p.548


86. Puspabhadra Copper Plates Grant of Dharmapāla, L.50, Sarma, M. M., Op. Cit., p.262 (Plate-64)

87. Cowell, Harsacarita, pp.212-215

88. Doobi Copper Plates Grant of Bhāskaravarman, V.67, Sarma, M. M.
89. Uttarbarbil Copper Plates Grant of Balavarman, V.14, Sarma, M. M.,
Op. Cit., p.130-31 (Plate-26)

90. Nowgong Copper Plates Grant Balavarman, V.14, Sarma, M. M.,
Op. Cit., p. 144 (Plate-31)


92. K. P., chap. 38, VV. 515-16

93. Barpujari, H.K., (ed) op. cit., p. 285

94. Doobi Copper Plates Grant of Bhaskaravarman, V.11, Sarma, M.
M., Op. Cit., p.12 (Plate-3)

95. Ibid, VV.4-5, p.12 (Plate-3)

96. Nowgong Copper Plates Grant of Balavarman, VV. 30-31, Sarma,

97. Doobi Copper Plates Grant of Bhāskaravarman, V. 27, Sarma, M.

p.145-46 (Plate-33)

99. Tezpur Copper Plates Grant of Vanamālādeva, VV.30-32, Sarma,
M. M., Op. Cit., p.100; Borgaon Copper Plates Grant of Ratnapāla,
VV. 16-19 Sarma, M. M., Op. Cit., p. 159-60 (Plates 39, LL.40&41);
Cit., p.228-29 (Plates-52, 53)

100. Doobi Copper Plates Grant of Bhāskaravarman, VV. 4-5 Sarma, M.

102. Thakur, Ramcharan: *Guru Carit*


104. Ibid

105. K. P., Dharma Purana etc.


110. K. P., Chap. 84, V.52


112. K.P., Chap. 12, VV.46f.

113. Sastri, M. "*The kāmarupa school of Dharmasāstra*" *Prāgjyotisa*


121. *Sa kirātaisca cinaisca vrītal prāgjayotiso bhābat anyaisca bahubhir yodhādhi sāgarānu pavanībhīlī* - Mahābhārata,( Sabha 26, V. 9)

122. Kakati, B.K., *op. cit.* , p. 6

123. K. P., Chap. 38. V. 124

124. Watter, T. op. cit., p. 185


128. Ibid, L.129,


132. Bhattacharya, P. N., Op. Cit., p. 188

