Chapter Two
Goddesses in Sculptural Art of Assam

In any religion goddess determines a female or feminine cult which is adorable for a group of people. In such respect she is considered as supreme authority facilitated with numerous supernatural powers. Being in virtue of her powers she can benefit any individual or harm anyone who dares to challenge her supreme authority. Throughout the world the either earth or mother is regarded as the source of development of feminine cult. The high merit of creation (in form of giving birth) and nourishment of a living being make him more important in most of the cultures entire the world. She is also considered important due to her capacity to make any ones victory and similarly important due to her destructiveness if required. The combination of both benevolent and malevolent powers makes her important among her followers. In various cultures she is worshipped in form of idols usually placed in a sacred building inside a sanctum. Though the importance of goddesses is find everywhere irrespective to time and space but the religious attention and respect which is given to her in matriarchal societies is unmatchable.

In Indian context a goddess is regarded with equal respect and adoration in all of the three Hindu, Buddhist and Jain religion. In Hinduism she is worshipped both in as individual and joint capacity. In advaitavāda she is worshipped as consort of a particular deity. In Śāktism she has is the sole source of all kind of energies. In Jainism a goddess is source of various energies. And in Buddhism she is considered as prajñā (female) without which an upāya (male) cannot achieve the supreme goal.

HINDU GODDESSES

Lakṣmī

Lakṣmī is one of the important goddess in Hinduism. She is also is also known as Śrī. She is the wife of god Viṣṇu. Lakṣmī and Viṣṇu appear in various incarnations of Viṣṇu as husband and wife. In Hinduism Viṣṇu is considered as the
supreme lord, god of world and the god of gods-Janārdana, so he has to be descended amongst mankind in various shapes and so does his coadjutor Śrī. Thus, in Hari’s (Viṣṇu) dwarf incarnation Lakṣmī appeared from water floating of the lotus and became famous as Padmā or Kamalā; when he was born as Rāma (Paraśurāma) of the race of Bhrigu, she was Dhārini-the earth; in the Rāma avatar she was Sītā and when he was Kṛiṣṇa, she was Rukmini and in this way she associated with him in all his descents, in same form and same ways whatever character it pleases Viṣṇu to assume.¹ In Veda, Lakṣmī is presented as the wife of Varuna or of the Sun. According to some sources she is said to have issued from Prajāpati, like Sarasvatī.

In Viṣṇu Purāṇa two contradictory accounts related to the origin of Lakṣmī are found.² In the first account it is said that Śrī was the daughter of Bhrigu and Khyāti. The divinities Dhatr and Vdhātr also were born to Bhrigu and they all resided in Swarga. But they left their home because of the sage Durvāsā’s curse and started live in Kshirsagar. As a daughter of Bhrigu, she is known as Bhārgavī. The other account of the origin of Lakṣmī is related to Samudra Manthan, commenced among devas and asuras. The reason behind this was amṛta, the divine nectar that grants immortality, which could only be obtained by churning, the Kśirsāgar (ocean of Milk). The devas (gods) and asuras (demons) both sought immortality and decided to churn the Kśirsāgar. For churning the river Viṣṇu took the form of Kūrma- the tortoise to place the mountain (Mountara Parvata) and used Vāsuki, the great serpent for churning the ocean. During that time alone with a host of divine celestial object Lakṣmī also emerged. She was the daughter of king (Varuna) of the milky ocean. Other sources say that Lakṣmī is the daughter of Kubera. When she came in front of the gods each of them wanted her as his wife, because of her growing and radiant beauty. Śiva was the first one who claimed her as wife. But Lakṣmī rejected him because Śiva had already seized the moon and Lakṣmī finally selected Viṣṇu. It is said that this rejection was the reason that Śiva was hurt badly and that led him to catch the poison vomited of the serpent in his mouth.

Lakṣmī or Śrī regarded as the goddess of love, beauty and prosperity. She is described as white as campaka flower. She is also represented as a beautiful golden
woman, and iconographically she is shown usually sitting or standing on a lotus (as her symbol). She has four arms, but in general she is presented as the ideal of feminine beauty with two hands only. Lakšmī’s vāhana is owl. The lotus shown with Lakšmī symbolizes the fertile growth of organic life. Usually Lakšmī is worshipped in conjunction with her husband Viṣṇu, when he sleeping on the coils of the serpent Śeṣanāga and she is offering her devotion to him by messaging his feet; or seated beside him on a lotus or riding with him on Gaṇuḍa. This appearance is generally known as Lakšmī -Nārāyaṇa.

Lakšmī is considered as the feminine energy of Supreme Being and mother of the World. Though image of independent form of goddess Lakšmī is rare, but the Agni Purāṇa describes an independent form of the said goddess having two hands with a lotus in right hand and śrīphala (bilva fruit-bilva is wood apple, commonly known as bell) in left hand. The Śrī-śukta describes bilvā as the distinctive tree of Śrī or Lakšmī, it fruit being said to ward off evil. In her Mahālakšmī form, she carries a rosary, paraśu, gadā, arrows, the thunder bolt, lotus, bow, kamadalu, danda, śakti, sword, carama, bell, a pot full of liquored, sūla, noose and sudarśana. In her Mahālakšmī form she seats on a red lotus and her skin colour is red as the rising sun.¹

In her secondary manifestation she is considered as Aṣṭa Lakšmī - a group of eight secondary manifestations of Lakšmī, who provide eight sources of wealth and thus represent the powers of Śrī Lakšmī -

1. Ādi Lakšmī - The first manifestation of Lakšmī
2. Dhyāni Lakšmī - Granary wealth
3. Dhairya Lakšmī - Wealth of courage
4. Gāja Lakšmī - Elephant symbol of wealth
5. Santāna Lakšmī - Wealth of continuity progeny
6. Vijaya Lakšmī - Wealth of victory
7. Vidyā Lakšmī - Wealth of knowledge and education
8. Dhana Lakšmī - Monetary wealth

In sculptural art of Assam generally images of Gāja-Lakšmī or Abhiṣekha-Lakšmī are profoundly found. Here goddess is lustrated by two elephants. In
Viṣṇudharman Tārā the description of Gāja-Lakṣmī is given, where she is sitting on lotus and hold lotuses in her hands. She is said to be bathed by water from pitchers held by elephants in trunks. Same description is given in Matsya Purāṇa also, only difference is that it prescribed padma and śriphāla in left and right hands of goddess Lakṣmī.

An image of Gāja-Lakṣmī of 8th Century CE was found in Sibsagar, which is now preserved in Assam State Museum. The image is carved on a block of basalt. The goddess is shown seated on padmā in lalitāsana (left leg on seat and right leg pendent). She has two hands and both of them are partly damaged. Perhaps the right hand is in varadā with a fruit on palm and holds a lotus by stalk in the left hand. It is a frontal representation of Gāja-Lakṣmī. The goddess has a beautiful appearance. She wears karanda mukūṭa, kanthahāra, valayas, keyūras, kuṇḍalas, and kaṭivāstra as paridhāna. The face of the deity is slightly mutilated. Her breasts are well shaped and waist is slender. There are two standing elephants near her head who pour water on her with their trunk. Both elephants stand on two padmās of which the mṛṇālas are held by the hands of the deity below. The right side elephant is badly damaged (Plate 1).

Three images of Gāja-Lakṣmī are explored from Maudnga or Devasthan. All images are depicted on the śirapatti of a ruined temple. Here the goddess is seated in padmāsana and her both hands are extended and rested on the knees. The image is a small one and not well carved, so the ayūḍhas and the ornamentation of the deity are not clear. Two elephants are seen giving ablution to the goddess from sides. The other two images of Devasthan are quite similar with preceding one, only differences are noticed in hand postures (Plate 2). In one image goddess is in praṇāma mudrā. Her mukūṭa and kanthahāra are distinct nicely. There are two elephants in claiming position in both sides. They carry two kalaśas in their trunk to pour water on her head. In another image the goddess holds a padmā in her right hand and her left hand is in varadā. Her mukūṭa, kuṇḍala, kankana and keyūras are seen in image. The elephants are standing on padmā and up their trunk to salute her (Plate 3). All these images are belonged to 8th-11th century CE. The next image of the deity is found in Mahamayathan of Karbi Anglong district. Here the goddess is similar with the goddess of Devasthan, who seated in padmāsana attitude with
extended hands. Both images carry the similar feature (Plate 4). At Cole Park, Tezpur, a small figure of a deity is seen, seated on a padma in the lalitasana. Her hands are rested on knees and they seem not to hold any āyudha. The deity is decorated with a karanda mukuta and kundalas. Other ornamentations of the body are indistinct. The elephants standing at the shoulder level of the deity on either side pour water on her with their raised trunk.

Two different types of images of Gāja-Lakṣmī are recovered from Jogijan area of Nagaon. Among them one is a terracotta image, which is preserved in Assam State Museum, belonged to 10th-11th Century CE. Here the deity is seated in lalitāsana attitude. Her two hands are in abhaya mudrā. She wears mukuta, kundalas, kanthahāra and her lower garment touches her knee only. Body structure of the goddess is not natural; her facial features and expression is not normal. The elephants as usual pour water on her with kalashas and they are standing at the shoulder level (Plate 5). The second image is carved on a stone slab. She is quite similar with others, only difference is noticed in hands. Here her one hand is in varadā and the other is broken but it seems to be in abhaya pose (Plate 6).

Images of Lakṣmī without the motif of Gajalakṣmī are also noticed in Assam. In Pandunath, Guwahati a standing Lakṣmī in tribhanga pose is seen. She has two hands. In one hand she holds kamalā and she holds her drapery with her left hand. The deity is decorated with mukuta, kundalas, valayas, kanthahāra, ekaḥāra and kativastra. Her waist is a slender one. Though the face is mutilated, it is beautifully carved sculpture (Plate 7). The second image of Lakṣmī is found in Kamakhya. The sitting goddess is shown with four hands. In upper two hands she carries kamalā and ghaṭ or kalaśa. Her lower right hand is placed to earth and the lower left hand rests near the breasts. The mukuta, kundalas, valayas, keyūras of goddess are distinct (Plate 8). At Mahamayathan she is carved sitting on padma in lalitāsana. Carved with four hands, she holds śakti in her right upper hand and trirānta in upper left. Her left lower hand is resting on her knee and her right lower hand is mutilated which makes it difficult to find what she holds. She is wearing mukuta, kundala, keyūras, hāra and kativastra (Plate 9). Many images of Lakṣmī are found from Malinithan. These images are almost same in nature. They have two hands and each hand rises up to her face level. The goddess is in padmāsana.
They use mukuta, kundala, keyūras, kanthhāra, ekahāra and kativastra, which are distinct. Her lower garment is ankle length. But the facial expression is not matched with their physical presentation. In both sides two padmās are noticed (Plate 10 and 11). A miniature image of Lakśmī preserved in Assam State Museum shows Lakśmī in lalitāsana pose on padmā. In right hands she holds a bilvaphalā and her left hand rests on her knees. She wears all kinds of alankāras. Along with her goddess Pārvatī also sits in padmāsana on a bloomed lotus. The prabhāvalī has two circles. Right behind the two images flanking a Kalpa-vrksa is noticed.

Lakśmī as a consort of Viṣṇu is seen in many images from Assam. Here she is seen at one side of Viṣṇu along with Sarasvatī on the other side. The sizes of female deities are smaller than the size of Viṣṇu. In this type of presentation she is standing in tribhanga on padmā to the right side of the god. She holds a camara in her right hand and keeps her left hand in katyāvalambita posture. To the left of Viṣṇu, goddess Sarasvatī or Pushṭi is carved standing on the same attitude as Lakśmī on a padma. She holds a vīnā with her both hands. Both these figures look young and have all the alankārā and vastras. In many places of Assam a good number of these type of sculptures are found, like Kawaimari, Hatisung-Gedavari, Gojpuria of Nagaon District, Barpeta, Mongoldoi, Hojai, Sualkuchi, Kahlipara (Guwahati) etc (Plate 12, 13, 14 and 15). In Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Bangladesh the images of Viṣṇu and his consorts are depicted in same way as presented in Assam.

Only one Image of Lakśmī-Nārāyaṇa is found in Assam. A small bronze image of Lakśmī-Nārāyaṇa is preserved in Assam State Museum. This image was found from Kāçumārī of Sibsagar district. The time period of the image is 10th-11th century. Here Viṣṇu is carved with four hands and Lakśmī with two. Viṣṇu holds śaṅkha, čakra, gadā and padma in his hands. He sits in lalitāsana posture, below his seat there is Garuda-Viṣṇu’s vāhana. The god wears kirīṭa-mukuta, hāra, kativastra, nūpura etc. the goddess seems to be sited in lalitāsana pose near Viṣṇu. She touches Viṣṇu by her right hand; her left hand is near her belly. She is decorated with as usual ornaments (Plate 16).

The images of Gāja-Lakśmī of Assam are resemble with the images of Bihar, Kiching, Orissa, Gaṅgārampur, Dinajpur (Bengal) etc, as far the sitting
posture of the deity and standing poses of the elephants are concerned. In some images of Gāja-Lakṣmī of outside Assam are in standing postures alone with their attendants, which is rare in Assam, but the elephants are depicted in same way. The images of four handed Lakṣmī have some similarities with the image of Pratihāra of Central India belong to 9th Century CE.

Sarasvatī

Sarasvatī is the goddess of wisdom and science, the mother of the Vedas and the inventor of Devānāgiri script. As the goddess of culture, music and learning, she was not only popular among the followers of the Brahmā nical religion but also with Buddhists and Jains. Her description appears in many religious texts, viz. Vedic, Epic, Purānik, Trantrik and canonical treatises (Brahmānical), Buddhist and Jaina. The Buddhists considers her as the consort of Manjuṣrī and the Brahmā nical mythology presented her as a wife of Brahmā and sometime as a wife of Viṣṇu.

The goddess Sarasvatī is known by various names, such as Vāk, Vāgdevī, Vāgīśvari, Bhāratī, Vānī etc. In Rig Veda she appears as a manifestation of a sacred river called river Sarasvatī. The same text also mentions that she and Āśvins help to refresh Indra’s labour. This story broadly explained in Vājasaneyī Samhitā, where it is said that Āśvin as a physician and Sarasvatī by his speech helped Indra and other gods in their healing sacrifice. Gradually she is resembled with Vedic Goddess Vāk, the personified speech, and identification is unhesitating the Satapatha Brāhmaṇa, and in Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, where it is reiterated several time. Sarasvatī is first appeared as a consort of Brahmā. In the third chapter of the Matsya Purāṇa there is a story related to Brahmā and Sarasvatī. The story tells that once Brahmā performed austere meditation in order to create his ten born sons from his mind. On the other from his body, sprang ten other issues, the last of whom was a daughter, variously called Satarupā, Angaja, Ātmaja, Sāvitrī, Gāyatrī, Sarasvatī and Brāhmaṇī. At the moment Brahmā seeing his daughter fall in love with her, but felt ashamed in front of his sons. When his daughter prostrated herself before him and began to walk round him in devotion, Brahmā kept his seat,
but his keen desire of never ceasing to look at her cause a face to spring in each
direction (north, east, south and west and up) and thus gave him five faces
(Brahmā subsequently lost one of his faces in contest with the five faced Rūdra and
thus came to be known as the Čaturmukha or the four faced one).

This myth of the incest of Brahmā has its origin in the Rig Veda (Verse X-61/5-7) and is developed through Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā, Śatpatha Brahmāṇa and Aitareya Brahmāṇa. In those Prajāpati is said to have coupled with his daughter called either Dyayus or Usas. The place of Dyayus or Usas is taken in the Purāṇas by Sarasvatī or Savitri, the Vedic learning personified.

In some legends, sometime she is called the wife of Viṣṇu. The vaishnava of Bengal have a popular legend that she was the wife of Viṣṇu along with Lakṣmī and Gaṅgā the other two wives. But because of many reasons Viṣṇu decided to keep one wife. So he transferred Sarasvatī to Brahmā and Gaṅgā to Śiva and counted himself with Lakṣmī. In the Brahmā Vaivarta Purāṇa, the story about Sarasvatī and Viṣṇu is found in details. According to this Purāṇa, Kṛṣṇa is the Lord of whole Universe and his female counterpart was Radhā. Once because of their union a mundane egg was produced which was thrown by Radhā. Kṛṣṇa became angry in this kind deed of Radhā so he crushed her and other goddesses who would be her parts and would proceed from her, with everlasting youth and barrenness. At that time suddenly a lovely fair lady wearing yellow dresses, heavily bedecked with jewels and holding vinā and a book in her hand sprang from the tips of Radhā’s tongue, who was the presiding deity of all the Śāstras. At the same moment Radhā again parted herself into two and her left half was transformed into Kamalā or Lakṣmī. Kṛṣṇa also parted himself into two and produced four handed Viṣṇu from his left part. Kṛṣṇa gave Sarasvatī and Kamalā to Viṣṇu as his wives.

There is another story of Sarasvatī and Viṣṇu in chapter 4 of the Brahmā Vaivarta Purāṇa. It appears that Viṣṇu had obtained another wife known as Gaṅgā. One day Gaṅgā was looking wistfully at her Lord and Viṣṇu was reciprocating the tender glances. This act was actually not legal. So this was too much for short tempered Sarasvatī who immediately accused Viṣṇu for partiality. Viṣṇu left the place for that moment so that Sarasvatī got some time to recover herself from the
temper. But this made her angrier and she advanced threateningly towards Gaṅgā, when Lakśmī intervened. Sarasvatī did not like interference of Lakśmī and cursed her with transformation into both a tree and a river. Lakśmī was holding Sarasvatī by force. The curse made her fall of grief but she neither curses in return nor left Sarasvatī. At that time Gaṅgā cursed Sarasvatī with transforming into a river. Sarasvatī, who had not yet cool down, returned the same curse to Gaṅgā.

When Viṣṇu returned and learnt what had happened. He forth while divorced Sarasvatī and Gaṅgā and decreed that only Lakśmī should remain with him part of her energy descending to earth to fulfill the curses of Sarasvatī. She would thus be born as the daughter of a king, obtain Viṣṇu as her beloved and then be transformed into the sacred Tulāśī plant. As a river, she would be known as the Padmavat or the Padmā and would be as sacred as the Gaṅgā. Sarasvatī was given owe to Brahmā and Gaṅgā to Śiva. Though the Sarasvatī and Gaṅgā’s energy would go to fulfill the curses and to attend their new husbands, but their rest powers still remain with Viṣṇu.¹¹

Iconographically Sarasvatī is a beautiful fair lady usually depicted with four arms: with one of her right hands she is presenting a flower to her husband and on the other she holds a book of palm leaves indicating her interest in learning. In her left hands she has a string of pearls, called śivaṁālā (Śiva’s garland) which serves as rosary; and on the other is a damaṛū or a small drum. Generally she is represented with two arms and sitting on a lotus, holding a book and a vinā.¹² There are different statement in texts regarding her vāhana, some would simply describe her as seated on a lotus, some would prescribe haṁsa (swan ) as her vāhana, while a few describe lion or peacock as her mount.

It is mentioned in Kālikā Purāṇa that white form of Tripurā Bhairavī is regarded as a pose of Sarasvatī¹³. She is wearing white cloth. In Kālikā Purāṇa it is said that she carried a garland and a book in two hands and other two are in ‘varadā’ and ‘abhaya’ pose.¹⁴ The Devī Bhagavata Purāṇa has given a different iconography of Mahāsarasvatī, whose complexion is resembled with kuṇḍa flower. She carries in her eight hands a bell, śoola, plough, conch-shell, mūṣala, sudarśana, bow and arrows. She is destroyer of Subha and Niśumbha.¹⁵ In Kālikā Purāṇa the
Tantrikā mūrti of Saravatī is described, where her colour is red and wearing a garland of skulls. This form of Saravatī is known as Vṛddha Saravatī.\(^{16}\)

In Assam goddess Saravatī appears in two forms either in accompaniment with Viṣṇu as one of his consort or independently. In the former appearance she is shown as standing with a slight bend holding the vinā (lyre) in her two hands. This form agrees with the description of Viṣṇu in Matsya Purāṇa where Viṣṇu is said to be accompanied by Śrī and Pushṭi (Sarasvatī) with padmā and vinā respectively in their hands (Śrī-Pushti chāpi Kartavye padma-vinā-karānvite).\(^{17}\)

An image of Sarasvatī was found in Sibsagar, is now preserved in Assam State Museum. This image is belonged to 9\(^{\text{th}}\) Century CE. The goddess is in tribhanga-sthānaka posture. She holds a vinā and wears kaṭimekha and kaṭivastra as main paridhāna. She uses common jewels like rāntākundalas, kanthahāra, valayas, keyūras and nūpuras. Her has beautiful keśabandha and uses alankara on forehead. The drapery is flowing round her body. She is beautifully carved. This simple elegant sculpture is belonging to pre-Ahom period (Plate 17).

Another figure of Sarasvatī is also preserved in Assam State Museum, which belongs to 9\(^{\text{th}}\)-10\(^{\text{th}}\) Century. This was brought from Uzan Bazar, Guwahati. Here the goddess is seen standing in tribhanga on padmā and playing vinā. She wears a mukūṭa, kundalas, hāra, valayas, keyūras and nūpuras. Another beautiful image of Sarasvatī is found in Pandughat, Guwahati. She is in sthānaka attitude, having tribhanga on body. She holds a vinā with both hands in her conventional way. Her hair dress is different from others. Here she ties her hair in a beautiful way (keśabandha) and wears a mukūṭa also. She uses kundalas, kanthahāra, Kankanās and nūpuras. She wears a stylish kaṭivastra (Plate 18).

A broken figure of Sarasvatī of 11\(^{\text{th}}\)-12\(^{\text{th}}\) Century is found in Madan kamdev, Baihata Charili. She is playing vinā. The goddess wears mukūṭa, kundalas, kankana and two different types of hāra. She is showing a pleasing appearance (Plate 19).

Another image of Sarasvatī is found in Malainithan. This image is belonged to 10\(^{\text{th}}\)-12\(^{\text{th}}\) Century CE. Here the goddess is standing in a different posture. Her mukūṭa, kundala and kaṭivastra are distinct nicely (Plate 20). The next figure of Sarasvatī is noticed on a slab of granite in Cole Park, Tezpur. The image belongs to 9\(^{\text{th}}\)-10\(^{\text{th}}\) Century CE. Here the deity is sitting in lalitāsana. She
holds vina with her hands in the usual way. She wears mukuta and valayas which are distinct. She uses some jewel in her waist also. The face of the deity is damaged, so it is not possible to explain her expression.

Two fragmentary images of Sarasvatī are noticed in the precincts of the Kamakhya temple. The sitting Sarasvatī has four hands. One of her hands is damaged. She holds a manuscript in her upper left hand. The normal pair of hands seem to be gathered near the breasts and perhaps holding a water pot between the palms. She has a jatāmukuta on head and wears common jewels. The second image is quite similar with the first one. She has also four hands. She carries a manuscript in her left hand and right hand is in varadā carries a rosary. The absence of vina, the most common emblem of Sarasvatī, is noticeable.\(^8\)

Two almost same type of terracotta images of Saravatī are seen in Bhaitbari, Meghalaya. These images are belonged to 11\(^{th}\)-12\(^{th}\) Century A.D. One of them is mutilated and another one is in good condition. Here the goddess is decorated with mukuta, kundalas, valayas and nupūras. She wears kaṭibandha and dhoti type vastra as parīdhana. She has also used transparent drapery. She holds a vina with her two hands (Plate 21).

**Uma**

Goddess Uma is famous as the consort of Lord Śiva. In religious texts she is presented by various forms and known by different names. Goddess Uma can be worshipped in her Tantrika form,\(^9\) when her complexion is yellow like gold. She is usually carved with two hands. As such she is holding a blue lotus in left and a white ‘candara’ in the right. She usually stands in the right side of Śiva. When she is standing near Śiva, she has placed her hand closely to him.\(^10\) Along with Uma her eight yoginis named Jayā, Vijayā, Mātangini, Lalitā, Nārāyanī, Sāvitri, Svadhā and Svāhā are worshipped.\(^11\) Uma is treated as the energy or active power of Śiva.

The sculptural representation of Uma-Maheśvara is showing lord Śiva and Uma together. Śiva or Maheśvara and Uma his saktī are represented together in art to affirm unification of masculine and feminine strength. The worship of Uma-Maheśvara helps the married couples to attain epitomes of mercy and compassion.
from god who gives longliness and resolve problems in relationship. This motif of Umā-Maheśvara shows Śiva seated with the goddess Umā or Pārvatī taking her on his lap and embracing her by one hand, sometimes touching her chin with the other. Śiva is shown either with two hands or with four and goddess is shown with two hands in general. The vāhanas of Umā and Śiva, i.e bull and lion respectively are also carved with them.

The images of Umā-Maheśvara are fairly common in Assam. Their sculptures appearance in Assam is found as independent conceptions as well as in architectural setting. An image of Umā-Maheśvara was found at Davaka, Nagaon. This image is now preserved in Assam State Museum. This sculptural representation belongs to 9th-10th century CE. Both the deities are shown occupying the same lotus seat. The god Śiva sits with the right leg hanging down and left firmly planting on the seat. The goddess Umā sits on his left lap with keeping right leg pendent and left rose to seat. Śiva clasps the goddess and touches her left breast with his left hand. The goddess keeps her right hand on Śiva’s right shoulder and she holds an utpala in her left hand. Both of them are decorated with various kinds of jewels. The god has a jatāmukuta on head and a ārdhva-medhra. Moreover he is shown wearing kundalas, kantahāra, keyūras, valayas and kativastra. The goddess hair is dressed up in a neat chignon with jeweled clasps. She wears kundalas, valayas, nupūras and kativastra. Both of them are decked with the third eye. They have pleasing appearance with divinely attitude. A female donor with hands joined in adoration is appeared on the pedestal. To her left may be seen a lion figure, the mount of the goddess. The vāhana of god, bull is however peeled off on the opposite side of pedestal. Another two stone images of Umā-Maheśvara depicted in the same style are noticed in the Assam State Museum. In both the cases the lower parts are mutilated (Plate 22). An almost similar image of Umā-Maheśvara has been noticed at Mikir Ati. Here the god and goddess are depicted in same motif as in the former case. Difference is seen in carry a darpana in her left hand by goddess Umā and her sitting posture. Another image of Umā-Maheśvara is found in BadGāṅgā. In this image Śiva is in lalitāsana and his consort Umā sits in a graceful pose on his left leg keeping her right leg pendent. Her left leg is kept upright on the āsana. Śiva holds a mātulinga (citron fruit) in
right hand and thrown other around the back of Umā, so as to embrace her tenderly. Umā’s right hand places on Śiva’s shoulder, while the left hand rests on her knee and holds a lotus-bud. Śiva’s specific iconographic traits, like ūrdhva-medhra, trinetra and jatāmukuta are clearly noticed. Both of them are decorated with common jewels like the previous images. The vāhanas of the divinities are not shown in this case.\(^{23}\)

The next image comes from Rajbari, Nagaon and belongs to 9\(^{th}\)-10\(^{th}\) century CE. As like the earlier instances, here also Umā and Maheśvara are depicted with two-hands. Śiva sits in latitāsana keeping Umā on his lap. Unlike the earlier ones here Umā keeps her legs to the asāna stretched her body towards left. Other features of the sculpture are same (Plate 23). Similar kinds of images of Umā-Maheśvara are recovered from Madankamdev, Tezpur, Devasthan, Deopani, Hojai etc (Plate 24).

In Assam a few images of Umā-Maheśvara are found where Śiva is figured as four-handed and Umā with two-hands. Basically the composition is the same as in the above group, i.e Śiva sits on a padma in lalitāsana and Umā on his lap, hanging one of his leg down. In this type of images the right hand of the Śiva touches the chin of his consort whom he embraces by his main left hand. In his additional hands he generally holds damāru and triśūla. The goddess usually rests her right hand to the shoulder of Śiva and in left hand she holds a darpana. This type of images are seen at Mahamayathan, Devasthan (near Hojai) etc (Plate 25). Both these images belong to 8\(^{th}\)-9\(^{th}\) Century CE. An image of Umā-alingana is exhibited in Assam State Museum, which was collected from Uzan Bazar. This fragmented image belonged to 8\(^{th}\) Century CE. But the existin part of this image indicates towards its ceexcellence. Śivā touching the chin of Umā with his lower right hand is carved with plenty of ornaments like mukuta, kundalas, layers of hāras, keyūrs. Only one hand of Umā is noticed in which she holds a darpana. She has a very beautiful keśabandha on her head. She wears kundalas, layers of hāras etc. Both them have divine expression in their faces (Plate 26). The figure of Umā-Maheśvara of square frame is depicted on the block of granite. The whole piece of stone is divided into nine equal squares. The middle square of the middle row portrays the image of Umā-Maheśvara. Alone with Umā-Maheśvara image other
gods like Ganesha, Kartikeya, Viṣṇu are depicted. Moreover four human images and sivelingas are also depicted in the squares. This piece of wok belongs to 10th century CE (Plate 27). A rock cut carving at Urvasi also shows Umā-Maheśvara of similar kind. The representations of Umā-Maheśvara in Assam resembles with the some images found in Bengal, Bangladesh and Bihar. The presentations of divinities in all instances of Assam are almost same with the images of Umā-Maheśvara of Bengal and Bihar. But the difference is that in the image from those places Śiva is generally represented with four hands. In case of Assam number of four handed Śiva are comparatively very less. The concept of Umā-Maheśvara is totally different from the concept of Kalyāṇsundara that depicts the marriage of Śiva with Umā or Pārvatī. In Nolambar sculptures (900-1000 CE) we have noticed that Umā instead of sitting on the lap of Śiva she is sitting near Śiva keeping her right hand on his left knee. This type of presentation of Umā-Maheśvara is totally absent in Assam.

When Devī appears as Umā, she is said to the daughter of Dakśa, a son of Brahmā. She is also known as Sāti. At first king Dakśa was unhappy with his daughter’s selection to marry a mendicant (Śiva), but his unhappiness was overcome when Brahmā revealed the truth. Once Dakśa organized a great sacrifice and invited all gods and Brahmāns except Śiva. This was become a serious insult for Satī who burnt herself to death on her father’s sacrificial fire in order to defend her husband’s prestige. When Śiva came to know about this, he started dancing to express his grief at her death, held her body locked in his embrace. Śiva carried the body and roaming all around the universe. At that time the gods became worried and went to Viṣṇu for a solution. Viṣṇu used his sudarśan ćakra to cut out her body and the pieces of the body fall in the earth and became sacred place. The name Umā firstly appears in the Kena Upanishad. In the third section of that treatise it is mentioned that on one occasion Brahmā gained a victory for the gods. Though Brahmā was the real hero of this victory, but the gods did not recognize him. At that time Umā Haimavatī appeared in the sky and narrated the deeds about Brahmā to the gods. The commentators on this passage declared that Umā means ‘knowledge’ and speak of Umā as the impersonation of ‘divine knowledge.’
In Ramayana it is mentioned that Uma is the daughter of Himāvat, the great king of mountains and Mena, the daughter of Meru. They had two daughters, Gangā the eldest one, the most prominent of rivers and Uma the younger one, the most excellent of goddesses. Uma was married to Rudrā. The Harivamsa mentions three daughters of Himava and Mena, where name of Gangā is missing. The three daughters are Aparna, Ekaparna and Ekapatala. These three performing great austerity without any contact with world, such could not be performed by gods or danavas. Ekaparna (one Leaf) fed upon one leaf; Ekapatala took only one patala (bignonia) for her food. Aparna took no sustenance, but her mother forbade her because of maternal affection, dissuading with her words U ma (oh don’t). Thus the goddess is famous as Uma to the world.

Kūrma Purāṇa\textsuperscript{26} gives another story of Uma’s origin. When Brahmā was angry with his sons for adopting an ascetic life and not interested in human life. So from the anger of Brahmā a form of half man and half woman was produce to which Brahmā said “divine thy self” and then disappeared. Later on at the command of Brahmā male half became Rūdra and female part became the daughter of Daksha, under the name Satī. Satī married to Rūdra and she gave up her life in her father’s sacrifice for not invited her husband. After that she was second time born as daughter of Himavait and Menu and she was known as Pārvatī.

Pārvatī:

Pārvatī has been identified as a reincarnation of the goddess Satī, first wife of Śiva, who committed suicide because of an insult to her husband. In Purānas Śiva and Pārvatī are generally represented together as engaging of making love and discussing the most abstruse question of Hindu Philosophy in Kailāsh. They often fought like common husband and wife. Once Śiva reproached her for her black skin colour, because of this Pārvatī was hurt and went to a deep forest and started a great course of austerities. As a result of these austerities Brahmā granted her a boon and she became a golden complexion lady and from this circumstance she is known as Gaurī.\textsuperscript{27}
The Varaāha Purāna describes a legend related with Pravati’s origin. According to the legend once Brahmā went to mount Kailāśa to visit Śiva and to tell him to kill an asura named Andhaka (darkness). Brahmā then looked intently at Śiva, who by thought summoned Viṣṇu into their presence. When the three deities look at each other, from their refulgent glances a lovely beautiful like petals of blue lotus, adorned with gems woman came in front of the gods. The lady has three colours black, white and red. Then the gods asked her who was she and why she was distinguished with 3 different colours? In response she told them that it was because of their glances from where she was produced. Then Brahmā told her that she was preserver of the universe. On request of Brahmā she was divided into three parts and these three parts were – the white parts known as Sarasvatī and cooperation with Brahmā in creation, the red was become Lakṣmī the beloved of Viṣṇu, who helps him to preserve the universe; the black was Pārvatī, endowed with many qualities and energy of Śiva. The Vaivarta Purāna relates the circumstance which led to reappearance on earth of Umā, who had sacrificed herself and become Satī, under the form of Pārvatī.

In Assam a less number of images of Pārvatī have been found. One image of Pārvatī is preserved in Assam State Museum. This image was collected from Uzan Bazar, Guwahati. The image belongs to 10th-11th Century CE. It is a miniature bronze image. The deity is seated on a padmā in lalitāsana with the right leg pendent and the left bent. She has two hands, one hand is in varadā mudra and holds a fruit and with the left hand she holds a child that sit on her lap. One sarpa is seen coiling round her right hand and another around the left. The deity uses all as usual ornaments, like mukūta, ekahāra, kuṇḍala, Kankan, keyūras and nūpura. She wears katīvastra. The image is small in size, so it is difficult to say about her facial expression (Plate 28). The next image of Pārvatī is shown alone with Lakṣmī. This image is preserved in Assam State Museum. This unique sculpture is belongs to 10th-11th Century CE. The image was brought from Hahara, Kampur. Here Pārvatī sits in padmāsana posture. She has two hands, which are kept near her breast and holding unidentified something. She wears all kind of alankaras. On her right side image of Lakṣmī has been seen in lalitāsana pose on padmā (Plate 29). Another image of Pārvatī is noticed in Ranga tea Estate, Tinsukia. She is in sitting
postures. Her two hands rest on her two knees. Her hair dress is very beautiful. She wears *kundalas, harās* and a kind of *hastā alaṅkara* on arms. She has a very well organized *keśabandhā*. Her eyes are closed and she has a very pleasing divine expression in her face (*Plate 30*).

**Durgā**

As her form of Durgā, Devī Pārvatī plays a totally different role. In her incarnations as a wife of Śiva she acted as a normal ordinary woman and manifested womanly virtues, but in her Durgā form she was great warrior of the world, under many names, for the destruction of demons. In Skanda Purāṇa, the story of Durgā is found in details. Here in the account it is said that once Kārttikeya asked Agastya, the great sage that why his mother was called Durgā? In reply the muni said that a giant name Durgām, the son of Ruru, having performance penance in favour of Brahmā, obtained his blessing and became so powerful that he conquered three worlds and created a horrible situation. Then gods requested Śiva to kill the demon and Śiva appealed Pārvatī to go and destroy the demon. Firstly, Pārvatī sent Kālārātri (dark Night) a female power, but she was not succeeded and fled to Pārvatī. Then demon followed her and then Parvati assumed thousands arms with weapons. Later she defeated the demon.

Another account of the origin of Durgā is found in the Čaṇḍī, a part of the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa. Mahiṣa was a powerful king of asura lineage. He once fought with gods and defeated them and as a result the gods became in very pitiable condition. Indra the king of Indralok, first went to Brahmā and then Śiva for their help, but these two gods could render no assistance. So, they went to Viṣṇu and asked him to help. Viṣṇu who was so grieved at the sight of their wretchedness that streams of glory issued from his face and from this a female figure known as Mahāmāyā (another name of Durgā) came in front of all. At the same moment stream glory issued from the face of other gods also, which was entered into the body of Mahāmāyā and made her body glory like a mountain of fire. The gods handed their weapons and this goddess fought with the giant and gave redress to the gods.
The account relates to goddess Drugā slight differently present in Vāmāna Purāṇa. When the gods had sought Viśṇu in their distress, he command Śankara (Śiva), Brahmā and other gods, emitted such flame from their eyes and countenance that a mountain of effulgence was formed, from which Kātyāyanī came over, refulgent as a thousand suns, having three eyes, black hair and eighteen arms. All gods gave her their weapons like Śiva gave her his trident, Viśṇu a discus, Varuṇa a conch shell, Agni a dart, Vāyu a bow, Sūrya a quiver full of arrows, Indra a thunderbolt, Kubera a mace, Brahmā a rosary and water pot, Kāla a shield and sword, Viśakarmā a battle axe and other weapons. Thus with full preparation Kātyāyanī proceeded to the Vidhya hill where she met Cunda and Munḍa. These two asuras fell in love with her beauty and informed about her beauty to their king Mahiṣa. Mahiṣa developed a desire to marry her and hence proposed. In reply the goddess told him to fight. So they started to fight and once Durgā got down from her lion’s back and sprang upon the back of Mahiṣa, then Mahiṣa became in form of a buffalo. In his buffalo form Durgā cut off his head with her sword.

Durgā is said to have assumed ten forms for the destruction of two giants, Śumbha and Niśumbha. The Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa describes these ten incarnations in the following order,

1. As Durgā she received the message of the giants.
2. As Daśabhujā (the ten Armed) she slew part of Śumbha’s army under the chief Dhum, she has ten hands
3. As Simhavāhinī (seated on a lion) she fought with Raktabīja. In this form she has four arms and drank the blood of the leaders and devoured a large part of their troops.
4. As Mahiṣāsurasuramardinī (destroyer of a buffalo) she slew Śumbha in the form of a buffalo. According some sources in this form she has eight arms and according to some ten arms.
5. As Jagadadhātri (the mother of the World) she overcomes the army of the giants. She is seated on a lion. She has four arms and looks similar to Simhavahini, only difference notice regarding the weapons. Jagaddhātri
holds conch-shield, discuss, bow and arrow in her hands, whereas Simhavahini carries only sword and spear in her two hands.

6. As Kālī (the black woman) she slew Raktabija. She has four handed and she holds a sword, in another the head of the giant she has slain, with the other two she is encouraging her worshipping. She stands upon the body of her husband.

7. As Muktakesī (with flowing hair) she overcame another group of army of the giants. In this form she is little bit same with Kālī. She has four hands holding a sword and a helmet in her left hands and other two hands use for blessing. She is too standing upon the body of her husband.

8. As Tārā (the savior) she slew Sumbha in her proper shape.

9. As Chinnamastā (the headless) she killed Niṣumbha. She is painted as a naked fair lady who wearing a garland of skull, standing upon the body of her husband.

10. As Jagadgaurī (the golden coloured lady renowned through the world) she received the praises and thanks of gods. She is four handed goddess holding a conch shell, a discus, a club and a lotus.

Some other important incarnations are:

1. Pratyāngina (the well proportioned one). This form of Durgā image is not made. The priest in general offers her red flower, liquors and bloody sacrifices. The fleshes of animal, intoxicating etc are offering for her worship.

2. Annapūrṇā (she who fills with food) generally she is sitting on a throne or standing on lotus. In one hand she holds a rice bowl and in other hand a spoon.

3. Ganeśajananī (the mother of Ganesha) She is worshipped with her infant (Ganesha) in the arms.

4. Kṛṣnakrona (she who holds Kṛṣṇa on her breast) when Kṛṣṇa fought with Kāliya the serpent in Yamuna river, he was bitten and in pain called some
one for help and then she came to help him and gave relief Krsna from pain.

In a famous hymn of Mahabharata Arjuna addressed Durgā with many names like Siddha Senani, Kumari, Kapali, Krsna pingala, Bhdrakālī, MahaKālī, Candi, Chanda, Tarini, Varavarini, Katyayani, Vijaya, Jaya etc. In Mahabharata there is a hymn where Durgā was presented as the younger sister of Krsna refers to the fact that it was she who took Krsna’s place in Devaki’s womb after Vasudeva had carried the infant Krsna to Nanda and whom Kamsa attempted to destroy. Actually Krsna promised her that if she would take place as Davaki’s child, she assimilated to him to glory and by meditating upon Viṣṇu on the Vidhya Mountain she would get power to kill two demons Śumbha and Niśumbha and would be worshipped with animal sacrifice.

Most of the images of Mahiṣāsuramardini of Assam are rock cut images, which are belonged to 9th-10th century CE. The image of Mahiṣāsuramardini of Sirajuli in Dhekiajuli is one of best work of art of Assam. The image belongs to pre-Ahom period. Here the deity is standing in atibhaṅga posture. Her right leg is placed on the back her vāhana, lion and the left one is kept on the back of the beheaded Mahishāsura. The goddess has ten hands. Her āyudhas in ten hands are placed in clockwise: śūla, tanka, bāna, khaḍga, khēṭaka, dhanu, paraśu, ānkuśa and keśabandha of the demon. The deity wears karanda-mukuta, kundalas, hāras, valayas etc. She uses kativasta. With the śūla the goddess attacked the demon and made pierces in demon’s chest. The head of the asura comes out of the decapitated neck of the mahisha (buffalo), bends downwards as the deity holds his keśabandha with her left hand. The asura fights with Devī with a khaḍga. His right leg is pounced by the simha, while the left one is still inside the decapitated neck. At Sidhesvari temple, Soalkuchi, an image of Mahiṣāsuramardini is seen. The image is badly mutilated. She is in atibhaṅga posture. Here the goddess is made to hold the following āyudhas clockwise in her ten hands (from the upper most right), triśūla, an unidentified āyudha, paraśu, khaḍga, śūla, sarpa, cakra, dhanu, another unidentified āyudha and a ghanṭa. The goddess uses triśūla to kill the demon.
Mahishāsura holds a *khadga* to fight with the goddess. The deity is ornamented and draped in the usual way (Plate 31).

A small figure of Mahiṣāsuraṁardinī is found at Hajo of pre-Ahom period. This image is carved on a block of basalt. Here the deity has ten hands. The deity stands placing the right leg on the back of her vāhana and the left one on Mahishāsura whose head is cut off and from the neck of whom he comes out in human form. The āyudhas of her ten hands are in clockwise (from upper most right): *triśūla, bāna, ankuṣa, gadā, mudgara, śankha, cakra, muṣala, dhanu* and nāgāpāśa. She wears *karaṇḍa-mukūṭa, hāras, valayas, kuṇḍalas and nūpura*. She wears *kaṭimekhala* and kaṭivastra as *paridhāna*. Another image of Mahiṣāsuraṁardinī is seen at Ulubari, Guawahat of 11th Century. This image is quite similar with the other above mention images, only difference is noticed in āyudhas. The āyudhas of the hands are clockwise (from the upper right): *triśūla, tanka, akṣhamālā, bāna, khadga, dhanu, ghanṭa, ankuṣa* and the *keśabandha* of the asura. A rock-cut image of Mahiṣāsuraṁardinī is seen below the Sukresvara temple at Guwahati. The lower part of the image is damaged to a heavy extent. It is known from the image that the deity has ten hands. Her āyudhas are indistinct (Plate 32).

An image of Mahiṣāsuraṁardinī is carved on the stela of an image of Yogāsana Viṣṇu. This image was found at Uzan Bazar, Guwahati, now preserve in Assam State Museum. The time period of this figure is 10th-11th Century. The effigy of goddess occurs in the upper right hand corner of the stela. The goddess has ten hands. Weapons of the goddess are as recognized, *triśūla, khadga, cakra*, arrow and *śākti*, in the right hands and bow, shield, *pāśa, ankuṣa* and the *keśabandha* of the asura in the left hands. She wears *mukūṭa, kuṇḍala, hāra, kaṭivastra* etc. Her killing postures of the demon are as same as the above mention goddesses (Plate 33). Almost same types of twelve miniature images of Mahiṣāsuraṁardinī images are found in Ambari site, Guwahati and now preserved in Ambari Site Museum. These images belong to 10th-11th Century. All images have ten hands each and they are depicted as traditional style like the above mention images of Mahiṣāsuraṁardinī. Among them some are nicely distinct and some are not. All deities are well decorated with usual jewels, but because of their
small sizes all are not distinct (Plate 34). Another miniature image of Mahiśāsuramardini was found at Ambari of 11th century CE. This image is now preserved in Assam State Museum. Here the goddess is standing with her right foot stretched on the back of the lion and left, slightly bent, on that of the buffalo from the decapitated body of which emerges the demon with a sword in his right hand. The goddess grasps his hair by one of her left hands, while with triśūla in one of her right she pierces him on the chest. All the weapons that she carries are not distinct. Only the sword and arrow of two right hands and shield and bow in two left may be clearly recognized (Plate 35).

An image of Mahiśāsuramardini is preserved in the museum of Surya Pahar museum. The half part of the image is broken. Only six hands are distinct and others are broken (Plate 36). Mahiśāsuramardini, is a popular goddess in India, specially in Bengal and Assam. So images of Mahiśāsuramardini that found in Bengal and Bihar have great similarities with the images of Assam. The images of Mahiśāsuramardini of Assam can be well compared with the image of a Decca Museum (now in Bangladesh). This image is depicted in the same way as in Assam. Here also the asura comes out from the decapitated mahisha and the deity pierces his chest with the śīla. Difference between two images is that in Decca’s image there are two female figures on both sides of the deity are seen fighting with asura, this is absent in our image.31

In Assam we have images of Mahiśāsuramardini having ten hands, while in other places of India images of Mahiśāsuramardini images are found having four, six, eight, ten, twelve, sixteen and eighteen hands, which are not very common in Assam. One image of Durgā in the santa form is found in Assam. This image is noticed at Devī temple of Deopani, near Golaghat. The goddess is in samapādasthanka attitude. She has four hands. The lower right hand is in varadā mudrā with a padma and in lower left hand she holds śaṅkha in varadā mudrā. There are triśūla and cakra in upper right and upper left hands respectively. The deity wears karaṇḍa-mukuta, kuṇḍalas, hāras, keyūras, sarpavaijayanti, valayas etc. She is draped in a kaṭivāstra like short sari. She has the third eye on her forehead. In her right and left side on the pitha two female figures are noticed. They are in sthānakā attitude and in aṅjalihasta pose. On the śilāpatta to the right
side of the deity, a miniature image of Gaṇeṣa is seen at her waist level and to the left on the same level the image of Kārttikeya is seen. Both the figures are in the Sana attitude and with their vāhana, ie Gaṇeṣa with mouse and Kārttikeya with peacock.32

Another big image of Durgā is seen at Dimapur now in Nagaland. This one is also as big as the previous one. Like the former image this is also four handed and standing in same samapādasthanaka attitude. The front hands are broken. The right back hand holds a pāśa and a triśūla in the left back hand. The face of the deity is mutilated. The breasts of the deity are not look like natural so it is mistaken as a male figure. At the pratisthāna are two female figures in the sthānaka attitude and in the aṭjali mudrā. Again, at the waist level of the deity both sides, Gaṇeṣa and Kārttikeya are represented, as in the previous case. The alankāras of the deity are almost damaged. Difference of the deity with the former is that this image does not wear sarpa-vaijayantī and kaṭivastra on her waist.33

These types of sānta-rūpa Durgā are also seen in Bengal. Some of them have four hands and three eyes. As presented in Assam even in Bengal images of Durgā, her two sons Kārttikeya and Gaṇeṣa are found accompanying her. The āyudhas, held by our images and the images from Bengal, do not tally with each other. But in Assam the images of simha, the vāhana of Devī is not depicted. An interesting image of Mahiṣāsuramardini is preserved in Assam State Museum, which is belonged to 9th -10th century. The image was found at Odalbakhra, Kahilipara in Guwahati. The image is depicted on a round shape bronze plate. Only the face of the goddess and mahish are depicted. The goddess’ mukūṭa and kundāla are shown. She has trinetra. It is said that the image has tribal influence (Plate 37).

An image of Śīṁhavāhinī Durgā of 9th century CE, is preserved in the Assam State Museum. The image is carved on a small block of granite. The goddess is sitting astride on her vāhana, lion. The goddess has four hands. She is in fighting pose as she raises her hand to the height of her head while holding the āyudha. She holds a khadga with her right hand. The back right hand does not carry any āyudha; the palm of hand simply turns upwards. The left hand of the front holds a khetaka, while the back one is with śūla. She has a jatāmukūṭa on her head.34
In her Durgā form she has matted hair, three eyes and having half moon on her head. She is a very beauty like full moon, whose colour complexion is like heated gold. She has ten hands and she carries a trident, sword, disc, sharp arrow and a lance in her right hands and in her left hand she carries kheṭaka, bow, noose, hook and a bell or an axe. A demon’s head comes out from cutting head of a buffalo lies on the feet of goddess, whom head was cut by goddess with her sword. He is bounded by the nāgapāśa. Devī is holding the pāśa by her left hand and also catches the hair of the demon. She places her right foot on the lion while the thumb of her left foot is place on the buffalo. At this occasion she is surrounded by her eight attendants, viz, Ugracanda, Pracanda, Candoga, Candana, Candavati, Camunḍa and Candika. This form of Mahiṣāsura-mardini is known as Durgā.

It is mentioned in Devī Bhagavata Purāṇa that Goddess Durgā famous by this name because she killed a demon named Durgām. She is described as four handed carrying a conch, disc, mace and a lotus. This Purāṇa also describes her ‘Santa Rupa’ of Devī Durgā. In this form she looks like thousands of fixed light. In this form swan is her vāhana and she has four hands carrying a noose and a goad while her two hands are in the ‘abhaya pose’ and ‘vārada pose’. She has three eyes. She wears a garland looks like crystal which is hanging from neck to feet.

BhadraKāli

The famous form of goddess Mahiṣāsura-mardini with sixteen handed is known as Bhadrakāli. Her body is huge and complexion is like the Atasi flower and having moon on her crescent hair. She is wearing golden earrings and golden necklace alone with a snake in her neck. In her right hands she carries śūla, disc, sword, shaft, spear, thunder, bolt and a rod and in her left hands she holds kheṭaka, leather shield, bow, noose, hook, bell, an axe and a mace. She stands on a lion while piercing the buffalo with her lance. In Kālikā purāṇa she is mentioned as a supreme goddess alone with her eight attendants, named as Jayati, Mangala, kālī, Kapālinī, Durgā, Śiva, Ksama and Dhatri.
Another form of goddess Mahiṣāsuramardinī is Ugraṣanḍa, who has eighteen hands. She holds a club and a vessel full of wine in her additional right and left hand respectively. She wears a garland of several hands and has a snake on her hand. Her eyes are red and her skin is like oily. Lion is her vāhana. Her eight attendants are Kauśikī, Śivaduti, Haimavati, Isvari, Sakambhari, Durgā, Umā and Mahodari.³⁸

The dreadful form of Ugratārā was created in order to slay down two demons known as Śumbha and Niśumbha. She has a black complexion. She wears a garland of skulls. In her two right hands she carries a blue lotus and a Khadga, while in her left hands she carries a Kartri and Kharpāṣa. She has a nagahāra on her breast. Her skin is black and eyes are red. She wears tiger skin on her waist. She has placed her left foot on the chest of a corpse and left foot on the back on her vāhana, ie lion. Her eight attendants which are worshipped along with the goddess are named as Mahākalā, Rūdrani, Ugra, Bhima, Ghora, Bhramari, Maharatri and Bhairavi.³⁹

The goddess is named as Kauśikī, for she comes forth from the pores of the body of the Goddess Kālīka.⁴⁰ She wears a half moon on her forehead and above the sandal mark (eg Tilaka). She wears a gold necklace decorated with gems and nagahāra and a garland of lotuses in her neck. She is described as a very beautiful lady who has heavy breasts, a slender waist and three folds in her belly. She has ten hands and carries a śūla, vajra, bow, khadga and sakti in the right hands and a gadā, ghanta, capa, shield, a conch in her left hands. She is sitting on a tiger skin or placed on the back of her lion.⁴¹
The goddess Kauśikī should be worshipped along with her eight attendants, viz, Brahmāṇī, Māheśvari, Kumāri, Vārāhi, Vaiṣṇavī, Narāśiṃhi, André and Śivadutī.

Kālī

Kālī is a scared looking goddess of Hindu mythology. She is a part the great Devi. Kālī was born from forehead of Devī Ambikā when she prepared to fight with two asuras, Čaṇḍa and Muṇḍa. Kālī was a black lady with red eyes and dry fleshes wearing tiger’s skin. Kālī or Kālīma who was associated with Čaṇḍī slew Raktabīja, a great giant. Actually, when asura power became weaker Raktabija came himself to fought with goddess. From every droops that fall down from Raktabija’s body thousand of giant born again. To kill him another form of devī arose from Čaṇḍī, known as Kālī. Kālī drunk the blood of Raktabija and at that time Čaṇḍī slew the giant.

In general Kālī is represented as a four arm goddess, holding a sword and head of giant in her one hand and the other two hands use for blessing worshippers. She wears a necklace of skulls and a girdle of dead man’s hands. Kālī’s tongue comes out from her mouth and her eyes are red. She stands with one foot on the thigh and another on the chest of her husband. This position of Kālī actually related to a story. When Kālī won the war over the giants, she started dancing with joy and she danced so furiously that earth trembled beneath her weight. At that time gods requested Śiva to stop her. Śiva told her to stop dancing but in her excitement she did not give interest to his request. To stop her Śiva laid down on the floor, Kālī did not noticed him and continuously dancing until she caught sight of her husband under her feet, immediately her tongue came out with shame because she disrespect her husband.

In Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa different legend is given about the origin of Kālī. Here incarnation of goddess Kālī was associated with Sita. In this legend it is showed that when Rama returned with victory by defeating Ravana and enjoyed his victory then Sita said him that there was nothing to kill ten headed Ravana, what would be happened if Ravana with thousand heads appear. Rama started
preparation and settled in Satadvipa to meet this new Ravana. Hanumana collected all important information about Ravana and Rama went to attack him. But Ravana destroyed all powers of Rama only with his three arrows, so Rama afraid and felt lonely at that moment. Sita by seeing her husband condition assumed the terrific form of Kālī and attacked that thousand headed Ravana. The war was lasting for ten years and at last she killed the demon and drank his blood and started dancing madly upon the dead body. Her dancing shocked the universe and to stop her Śiva lay down before her. Sita saw him and felt shy because of her disrespect behave and stopped dancing and assumed her proper form.

The Skanda Purāṇa explains about Čaṇḍī, another form of Devī, who came to assist Kālī to kill Raktabija. Čaṇḍī’s account related to kill two powerful asuras named Čaṇḍa and Muṇḍa. These two powerful asuras, because of their divine boon were able to subdue the three worlds, so the gods requested Čaṇḍī to destroy them. But Čaṇḍī told them that without the help of Śiva it was impossible to destroy them, and so started worship Śiva and got the promise from Śiva to help her. Lastly Śiva destroyed these two asuras.

In Linga Purāṇa it mentions that Kālī is part of Durgā but completely in different form. Here a different legend is found relate to origin of Kālī. Once a female asura named Daruka became powerful and started killed gods and Brahmāns. As she was a lady all gods including Viṣṇu afraid to kill her, because slaying a woman is a great sin. On request of Śiva Pārvatī created a maiden. She was black colour with matted looks, having an eye in the forehead, holding a trident and a skull in her hands, wearing all kinds of ornaments and celestial garments. With the help of her army consisted of ghosts, goblins and demons Kālī destroyed Daruka. According to Markandya Purāṇa Kālī is a production of Māhālakṣmī. She separated the quality of darkness from her and gave birth a Devī, who was as dark as night with dreadful tusks and large eyes. She carries a sword, goblets, a head and a shield in her hands and adorned with a necklace of skull. She is famous as Mahakālī, Ekavira, Kalaratri etc. Similar Māhālakṣmī produced Sarasvati from her quality of purity. Māhālakṣmī generated a male and female, named Brahmā and Lakṣmī and in the same manner these two deities produced their own forms. Māhākālī produced Śiva and Sarasvatī produced Gauri. Viṣṇu makes Lakṣmī. Then
these gods and goddesses married each others like Sarasvatī to Brahmā, Gaurī to Śiva and Lākṣmī to Viṣṇu.

According to another source the Goddess Kālī comes out from the forehead of Kauśikī. She has four handed goddess with blue lotus colour. She holds khatvānga and candrāhasa in her right hands and carama and a pāśa in her left hands. She wears a garland of skulls in her neck and tiger’s skin. Her body structure is long and slim and she has long teeth and protruding tongue. Moreover she has red eyes, extended ears and wide face. She is sitting on a headless trunk (Kabanda). Kālī is also known as Tārā and Chamunḍā. (k.a.p 63,92-95 usha Devī ) Kālī always should be worshipped with her eight attendants viz; Tripura, Bhisna, Ćaṇḍi, Kartri, Hartrī, Vidhānika, Karala and Sulini.

A different iconography of Māhākālī is given in Devī Bhagavata Purāṇa. In this Purāṇa it is said that Devī has three eyes and ten hands. In her hands she holds varieties of weapons like- Gāda, Bāna, Capa, Parigha, śūla, Bhusundi, Kapāla, and Khadga. She shines like nilanjana (a kind of black pigment). Here it is mentioned that Devī has ten faces and feet, who destroys the demons named as Madhu and Kaitabha.

In Mahābhagavata Purāṇa goddess Kālī is described as a dominant goddess. She is described as Śakti (i.e Prakṛti) of Śiva (i.e Purusha). Here it is mentioned that she assumed various forms with two, four, ten, eighteen and one hundred hands. Sometime she is presented as standing on a corpse and sometime she has lion as her lion.

In Assam an image of Mahākāli has been seen at Deopani temple of Numalighar. The image can be placed in 8th-9th century A.D. The goddess has four hands. Her lower right hand is in varada mudrā and in upper right hand there is khetāka. She holds munda in her lower left hand and a khadga in upper left hand. The goddess is in samapādasthānaka attitude on a padmā. The goddess has a terrible look. She has a jatāmukuta on her head. Two female attendants with terrible look are standing in sthānaka attitude in both sides of deity. A prabhāvalī is noticed just behind the head of Mahākāli. At Bhaitbari in Meghalaya two images of Kālī in terracotta plaque are found. Here in one plaque a Kālī in standing posture with her open hair is noticed. She has two hands. In another plaque an
image of Kalī seats on a dead body is seen. Both of them are depicted with two hands each.

**Tripurānā**

According to Kālikā Purāṇa the great Goddess Māhāmāyā first of all manifested herself as a virgin and then divided into three aspects known as Tripurānā. Her three forms are named as Tripūra-Bhairavī, Tripūra Bāla and Tripūra Sundāri. Tripūra-Bhairavī may be worshipped in the left hand ways. She has four hands, where she carries a garland and a book while her left hands are in ‘abhaya’ and ‘varadā’ poses. She is a red complex lady, dazzling like thousand suns. She seats upon a white corpse. She appears as becoming three fold by three garlands of skulls on her head, breasts and waist. Her eyes are intoxicated with liquor and her lips are red.

The six attendants of Tripura, which are worshipped with her, named as Bhāgā, Bhāgajīhvā, Bhāgasyā, Bhāgamālinī, Bhāgodāri and Bhāgaharā. Besides these she has some other attendants also known as Anangamekhalā, Anamgakusuma, Anangamadana and Anangavesā etc.

One image of Tripura Bhairavi was found in Jogijan, Nagaon of 10th-11th Century. This image is now preserved in Assam State Museum. She has four hands. In upper right hand she holds a rosary and in upper left a pustaka. One of the lower hands of the image is broken and another one is in blessing posture. She is sitting on padmā in padmāsana postures. There is a mundamālā near her legs. She wears mukuta, pushpā kundala, keyūras, valayas and many layers of hāra. Her kativasta is a stylish one. Her waist is slender and facial features are well distinct. There are a good number of miniature sculptures of other gods and goddesses are seen behind the main deity (Plate 38).

**Sapta Mātrikās**

The concept of mātrikās is started in the epic period, but the appearance of these seven goddesses is quite modified in purānic period. In the medieval period
they are patterned specially in appearance on male deities of the Hindu pantheon. The seven mothers or Sapta-mātrikās, representing the Śaktis of the important familiar deities, are Brahmāṇī (or Sarasvatī), Māheśvarī (or Raudrī), Kaumārī (or Kārttikeyanī), Vaisṇavī (or Lakṣmī), Vārāhī, Indrānī (or Mahendrī) and Chamunḍa (or Chamunḍī).

**Vārāhī**

The most important mythological account of the mātrikā in medieval period is found in Deveci-māhātya of Mārkaṇḍya Purāṇa. There the demons Śumbha and Niśumbha, who have usurped the gods from their positions, are confronted in battle by the Devi. When Devi started fighting with demons, then the male gods create sakties, female counterparts of themselves, to help her. Seven such saktus are created, and in appearance they closely resemble the male gods from whom they are said to arise: Brahmāṇī, created from the god Brahmā, holds a rosary and water pot; Māheśvarī, created from Śiva, is seated on a bull, holds a trident, wears serpent bracelets, and is adorned with the crescent moon; Kaumārī, created from Kārttikeya, rides a peacock and holds a spear; Vaisṇavī, created from Viṣṇu, is seated on Garuda and holds a conch, *cakra* (discus), mace, bow and sword; Vārāhī, created from the man-lion avatāra of Viṣṇu, has the form of a woman-lion’s mane; and Aindrī, created from the god Indrā, holds a thunderbolt and is seated on an elephant. These group of goddesses helped Devi, Kālī and Śivadūtī in the battle field. After battle they started dance and drinking blood. The same description of mātrikās is given in Devi-bhagavata Purāṇa and the Vamana Purāṇa.51

It is known from Devi-Māhātya and Devi-Bhagavata-Purāṇa that primarily these mātrikās are not the divine consort or the śaktis of male deities but they are the forms of Devi herself. After killing Niśumbha, his brother Śumbha challenged Devi to fight with him alone, and accepting his challenge Devi she absorbed into herself all the mātrikās. In Vāmana Purāṇa it is mentioned that the mātrikās arise from different parts of the Devi’s body and named after the male deities.52
In Matsya Purāna origin of these māтриkās is presented differently. Here it is said that Śiva creates māтриkās to combat the demon Andhaka. Andhaka has the ability to duplicate himself from each drop of blood that spills from him when he is injured. So Śiva instructed the māтриkās to drink up his blood and thus Śiva defeated the demon. In this Purāna along with seven main māтриkās, 190 other names of māтриkās are also given.

In the Varaha Purāna it is said that Devī Vaiṣṇavī creates the māтриkās. When Devī is doing asceticism of Mount Mandala, at one point she loses her concentration and from her disturb mind many beautiful female attendants come out who later on help Devī in the battle field. Here they describe as lovely but born from uncontrolled mind of goddess, which indicates that the māтриkās essentially uncontrolled natures.

In Bhagavata purāṇa māтриkās are mentioned with the uragas, raksasas, pisacas, bhūtas etc. According to Devī Purāṇa the Sapta māтриkās are the counter parts of Rūdra, Brahma, Skanḍa, Viṣṇu, Yāmā, Indrā and Agni.

According to Markandeya Purāṇa, “the Saktis of the individual gods are characterized by the respective forms, ornaments and mounts of those gods.”

The iconographic features of the māтриkās are found in various texts, like – Agni Purana, the Amśumadhdhedagama, the Purvakaranagama, the Matsya Purāṇa, the Rūpaṇatara, the Rūpamaṇḍana, the Viśvakarmāśāstra, the Śilparatna, the Sritattvanidhi and others. It is noticed that these māтриkās are the female counterparts who are armed with the same weapons, wear the same ornaments and ride the same vahanas and carry the same banners as the corresponding male gods do. The Varaha purāṇa relates them to vices or inauspicious emotions: “Yogīsvārī is the symbol of lust, Māheśvarī of Anger, Vaiṣṇavī of greed, Kaumārī of attachment, Brahmānī of pride, Aindrī of jealousy, Cāmnāṇā of depravity and Vāraḥī of envy.”

The image of Vāraḥī is seen in Assam State Museum. The deity is sitting in lalitāsana. She has two hands; with the left hand she holds a gada. The āyudha of the right hand is beyond recognition as the image is highly weathered. The face of the deity resembles very well the face of Vāraḥī. The deity seems to wear a karaṇḍa-mukuta. The deity is looking to the right side. Stylistically it belongs to 9th century CE (Plate 39). Another image of Vāraḥī is noticed in Madankamdeī.
image is damaged, so her face and her right side cannot recognize. Only her harā, valayas and kativasta are distinct. Next image of Vārāhī is found in Malinithan. She is in sitting posture. Her face is like Varaha. The depiction is not clear. Only her neck ornament is distinct. The image belongs to 10th-12th century (Plate 40).

Camunda

The origin of Camunda is described in the third episode of the Devī -Māhātmya of Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa. Camunda, one of the greatest Devī, is so named on account of her having caused complete annihilation to two demon brothers, Canda and Munḍa, who were the faithful servants of demon king Śumbha and Niśumbha. These two brothers became powerful and disturbing all gods. As a result, the gods prayed supreme goddess to kill the demons. Thereupon, the goddess Kauśikī sprang from the body of the Supreme goddess. Devī Kauśikī (Ambikā) is extremely beautiful and about her dazzling beautiful form was reported to demons kings by Canda and Munḍa. Having heard of the beauty of goddess, Śumbha sent her a messenger asking her to marry either him or his brother Niśumbha. The goddess replied, “he who vanquished me in fight shall be my husband” so the king ordered Canda and Munḍa go and seized the goddess. The sight of Canda and Munḍa greatly incensed the goddess and she uttered her wrath aloud against them and as a result of which her countenance grew dark as ink. “From the surface of her forehead, rugged with frowns, suddenly sprang forth a goddess, black and scowling, of terrible countenance, with drawn sword and lasso, bearing a many coloured skull-topped staff (Khaṭvaṅga) decorated with a garland of skulls, clad in a tiger’s skin, grim with emaciation, exceeding wide of mouth, lolling out her tongue terribly, having deep sunken reddish eyes, and filling the regions of the sky with her roars.” She killed Canda and Munḍa and represented their heads to her originator Kauśikī, who bestowed on her epithet Camunda in recognition of her achievements.

The image of Camunda with general characteristics is found in Agni Purāṇa, Matsya Purāṇa, Amsubhedigama, Viṣṇu Dharmasthātā. She looks like skeleton appearance, flesh dried up, bones showing through the skin, eyes sunken
and abdomen contracted. Her laugh is loud, with the teeth prominent and tongue protruding out. She wears necklace of skulls and bone. Her dress is made of tiger’s skin. Her vāhana is owl or a corpse. Her abode should be in a funeral ground under a Vatā tree. Her skin colour is dark or blue, but in one her form skin colour becomes blood red. Sometime she is presented with a ass as her vehicle and sometime with a vulture. Some images have a fat and plumping boy as the vehicle of Devī. This boy has a smiling face and has attitude of assurance, ie abhaya mudrā.

Goddess Cāmuṇḍā symbolizes universal death and destruction. The ordinary image of Cāmuṇḍā has four hands and in her right hands she carries javelin and a knife and in her left hands skull and spear. The Agni Purāṇa enumerates eight varieties of the forms of Cāmuṇḍā and these are called the eight mothers.58 Rūdra-Charchchika-she is presenting as a goddess with six arms. In her hands she holds the skull, knife, javelin and lasso and two ends of an elephants’ skin.

1. Rūdra –Cāmuṇḍā: in this form she has eight arms, where she carries all the same things like Rūdra-Charchichka, alone with a human head and a kettle drum in additional.
2. Mahālakṣāmī- this goddess has eight arms, and four faces.
3. Siddha- Cāmuṇḍā: she has ten arms. In her right hands she holds javelin, sword, kettledrum and bone. The left hands she holds shield, sword, bell, mace (khatavanga) and trident and remaining two hands probably hold two ends of the elephant’s skin.
4. Siddha-Yogeśvarī: In this form she has presented with 12 arms where she carries same weapons like Siddha Camunda, only adding lasso and elephant goad in her extra hands.
5. Rūpa-Vidyā: she has twelve hands.
6. Kṣamā: she is represented as an old woman with two arms, who is surrounded by jackles.
7. Dantura: she should br represented as squatting on the ground with a hand on her knee.
Above these two other popular forms of Camunda are-

1. Kālīka: she is represented naked with a necklace of skulls and sitting on a
   ass, her vahana.
2. Kubjikā: she has six hands.

In Assam a few number of images of Ĉāmuṇḍā are found. Two of them can
be find in the precincts of the Kamakhya temple. Among them in one the goddess
is sitting on a corpse, with the right knee raised up, over a double-petal lotus. She
has a skeleton like body with three sunken eyes and open mouth, perhaps with
fangs. She has an angry mien. She wears a mundamālā (a garland of human
skulls). The jatāmukuta on her head is beautifully executed. Two jatācūdas (hair
tufts) from her head are risen up on both sides. Besides this she is seen to have
ornaments of snake round the neck. She wears common alaṅkaras like kunḍalas,
hāras, valayas etc. She has four hands: the upper right holds a kartarikā, and upper
left holds a muṇḍa; and in the lower right there is kapāla and in lower left a triśūla.
There are a few miniatures bhūtas (ghosts) below the pretāsana of the deity.
Figures of a Kīrtimukha and two Vidyādharas are decorated on the silapatta of the
image. The image belongs to 9th century. The second image is as same as the
previous one. She is also depicted with a long tongue, protruding teeth, emaciated
body, withered belly, sunken eyes and exposed ribs and veins. She holds the same
āudhyas in her four hands like the previous one. Slight difference is noticed in the
second image which has prābhā, is almost round and does not contain the figures
of Kīrttimukha and Vidyādharas whereas these are seen in the first image (Plate
41).

Images of Ĉāmuṇḍā are fairly known in Eastern India. This type of image
of Ĉāmuṇḍā is also seen in Varendra Museum. The image is collected from Itahar
(W. Dinajpur) this sculpture is to some extent carried some same features like the
Assam’s sculpture. The third image is found inside the nāṭghar of Kamakhya
temple. She stands on a preta pīṭha; she has six hands and holds various āudhyas,
like (clockwise): kartarikā, dāmaru, kapāla, muṇḍa, khajabhangā and śula. There
is a jatāmukuta on her head. She wears mundamālā and other common
alakāras. Another image of Ĉāmuṇḍā is noticed at Nabhanga in Nagaon. The
image is in a bad condition. It is carved on a slab of stone. The goddess sits on a human body. She has six hands. Only visible weapons of her hands are arrow, bow and śāla. The deity has all the general features of the horrendous aspects. To the right of the deity a vulture and to the left a jackal are noticed. An image of Čāmuṇḍā is preserved in the Purva Bharati Museum, Nalbari. This image was collected from Karbi Anglong. The image carries all the common features of Čāmuṇḍā. Another image of Čāmuṇḍā was found in Barpathar, now preserved in Assam State Museum. She has a skeleton body with two hands. Her appearance is terrible. She is in sitting posture and both hands are rested on knees. She wears kundalas. There is no mukuta or any kind of hair dress (Plate 42).

BUDDHIST GODDESSES

Tārā

Goddess Tārā is originally related to Buddhism, she does not figure prominently in Hindu tradition. The earliest reference of Tārā is found in Subandhu’s Vāsavadatta, which is probably written in middle of the 7th century CE. It is mentioned in above text, “the lady twilight was seen, is devoted to the stars and clad in red sky, as a Buddhist nun (is devoted to Tārā and is clad in red garments). In Buddhist Tantric mythology Tārā belongs to the family of the Dhyānī Buddha AMoghasiddhi, but she also relates to the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. In one account all the creatures lament the thought of Avalokiteśvara’s abandoning them as he is about to achieve nirvāṇa. Hearing them, Avalokiteśvara sheds a tear of compassion for all being and that tears become Tārā. Her essential nature in Tibetan Buddhism is that of compassionate savior who rescues her devotees from peril. Tibetan Buddhists gives another legendary mythological account of Tārā’s origin. According to them Tārā was the wife of first great Tibetan king, Songsten gampo (617-650 CE). The king is said to be the incarnation of Avalokiteśvara, while his Chinese wife said to have been an incarnation of Green Tārā and his Nepalese wife of White Tārā. Another Tibetan legend says that the Tibetan people arose from the union of a monkey and rock ogress. This legend is ancient and pre-Buddhist in origin. By the fourteenth
century, when Buddhism had come to dominate Tibet, however, the monkey had come to be identified with Avalokiteśvara and the rock ogress, despite her lustful nature, with an incarnation of the goddess Tārā.

There two images of Tārā are preserved in Assam State Museum. These two bronze images were found in Narakasura Hill. One image of Tārā is represented as standing and this figure belong to the ninth-tenth century. She is standing in tribhanga attitude. The goddess has two hands, the right hand is in varadā pose, while the left holds stalk of bloom of which is marked on the halo behind her head. Her ornamentation is not distinct. Only her lower garment is distinct. There is no hairstyle on head. Her face is damaged (Plate 43). In the second image the goddess is seated in lalitāsana on a lotus with her right hand in varadā-mudrā resting on the right knee, while the left hand holds a lotus by stalk and plays abhaya mudrā. Another lotus with stalk is shown also to right of the goddess, perhaps for the sake of balance. She is decorated with karanda- mukuṭa, kūndalas, kanthahāra, ekahāra, valayas, keyūras, and nūpuras etc. She wears a long kativasṭra of thin fabric. Her figure is well shaped along with her youthful beauty. This figure belongs to 11th century.

Another image of Tārā is found in Tezpur. Here at the upper part of the stela there are pancha-dhyān-Buddhas. This image can be placed in the eleventh century. The goddess has a thin waist and large breasts. She has mukuta, kundala, kanthahara, ekahara, kankana, armlet, etc. she is sitting on a padma in lalitasana. Her right hand and leg are broken. In her left hand she holds padma. The facial expression shows spirituality not devoid of blissfulness. A spirit of sensuousness bursts out of the fleshly body and smiling face (Plate 44). Two images of Ugra Tārā are found at Bhaitbari in Meghalaya. These are depicted on terracotta plaque. Both of them are looked very terrible. They have big bellies and fatty bodies.

Çundā

Çundā is one of the Tantrik Buddhist Goddess. One image Çundā was found in Narakasura Hill. Now this metal image is preserved in Assam State Museum. The goddess is seated in Vajraparyanka on a lotus. A stela surmounted by a parasol
with flying streamers are noticed behind the goddess. The goddess has eight hands. One pair of hands is shown in *anjali mudra* near the breast and a second pair *dhyana mudra* with the palms joined on crossed soles of the feet. One other right hand is in *varada*, while the fourth right hand bears a rosary. The remaining two hands in left bear a water pot and lotus on which is supported a manuscript. She wears *karanda mukuta, kundala, hara* etc (Plate 45).

**SEMI DIVINE ELEMENTS**

**Manasā**

Devi Manasā is said to be the mind born daughter of sage Kaśyapa. Her mother is Kadru and brother is serpent king Śeṣa. On the other hand she is also said to be the daughter of Śiva and a mortal woman. Sometime she is identified with Śiva’s consort in her Jagadgauri form. Because of her fair complex she is also known as Jagadgauri. She is also famous as Śaivī because she is disciple of Śiva. She is the foremost of the Jñāni and is the presiding deity of the siddhas. Her dhyāna mūrti complexion is compare with the campaka flower and her body is covered with jewels and ornaments.

Manasā enjoys a wider spread cult as a deity, mostly in Bengal where she is invoked for protection against snake bites. As a legend it is believed that once Manasā was grew angry with a rich merchant named Chand who was a pure devotee of Śiva. Manasā demanded his worship forcefully and he refused to do it, she started destroy his properties and also tortured him in many way. Lastly, Manasā was biting his six sons to death. She then capsized his ships containing all his wealth and left him far from home, castaway. But Chand determination is not break. He resettled himself again. A new son was born to him, called Lakshmindra. Lakshimdar was married to Behula and then a new prediction was come that he would die of a snake bite on his wedding night. Chand took every kind of protection to save his son’s life. But at the night Manasā bite him. Next morning his dead body was laid on a raft and set a float down the river in the hope that a physician could make him cure. Behula remained with her husband’s body for six
month until one day she saw washer woman, angry with her little son, kill him and then, by sprinkling him with water some time later bring his life back. Behula asked the lady to do the same to his husband. In real she Manasā so said to that she could help her if Behula would promise to convert Chand. Behula agreed and when they reached Chand’s house they sent in word that they would enter only if Chaand would worship Manasā. Thus forcefully Manasha was worshipped by Chand. Ever since then Manasha has been recognized as goddess.

A beautiful image of Manasā of 12th century was found at Kālīabor Tea Estate, Silghat in Nagaon. Now the image is preserved in Assam State Museum. The goddess is seen in samapāḍasthāṅka attitude on a padmā. She has two hands. The body of the goddess is well ornamented and draped. She wears mukutas, kundalas, kanthahāra, ekahāra, valayas, armlets and mūpurās. She wears stylish kaṭivastrā and kaṭimekhela as paridhāna. Her kaṭimekhela is knee length size, which is beautifully decorated. She has given a well shape figure. Above the head of goddess a five headed snake is seen canopying her. Two nagas or naginis in half human form with folded hands are seen on either side of the deity and their tails are coming down. In both sides two attendants of goddess are seen. In the knee level of goddess both of them are standing. Below the pūṭhā of the deity is seen an elephant which may be the vehicle of the deity. On either side of the elephant two miniature female figures are seen in añjalihastamudrā which may be a devotee (Plate 46).

A metal image of Manasā was found in Narakasur hill. This image is now preserved in Assam State Museum. The deity is in lalitāsana posture. She has two hands, the right hand being held in the varadā pose resting on the knee, while the left hold a sarpa. She wears the usual alanḍāras and vastra. The head of the deity there is a canopy of sarpa. To the right of the deity a breaded male figure is seen seated in utkatika posture, may be identified as Jaratkāru. To the left is seen a female figure in the same posture, may be represented a nagini who has three- hooded sarpa. Another image of Manasā is preserved in Assam State Museum. This image belongs to 11th century found in Jakholabandha, Nagaon. The goddess is made to sit in lalitāsana, hanging her left leg down. She has two hands. With her right hand she holds something and forms varada-mudrā. She holds a sarpa with
her left hand. There are seven hoods of sarpa forming a canopy over the head. She wears mukuta, kundalas, kanthahāra, ekehāra, valayas, armlets, nūpuras and katiyavāstra. Her lower garment is distinct nicely which is ankle length. Her waist is slender and facial features are beautiful. At the waist level of the deity to the right side reidentified as Āstiśa, the son of the goddess or as Vaśūki. One female figure in aṅ jalimudrā is depicted in below (Plate 47).

Same presentation of Manasā can be seen in Varendra Research Museum. This image was collected from North Bengal.65 Both images are same. Only difference is that two female figures are depicted in below. Same types of images are noticed in the same Museum which was collected from Dinajpur district.66 Small differences are noticed in the both sculptures, but the presentation of main deity is same.

Apsarā

Apsaras, the heavenly beings and demi goddesses are described in the Uttarākāṇḍa of the Rāmāyaṇa, Matyapurāṇa, Vaikhānasāgama, Viśuddhārmottārapurāṇa, Mānasāra, Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Jainālankāra, Abhinayadarpaṇa, Amara, Abhidhānacintāmaṇī and Rūpavidyā.67 In Indian mythology Apsaras are the nymphs found in heaven. In Vedas these Apsaras are not presented as a prominent class, but Urvasi and a few others are mentioned by name. An entire hymn deals with the colloquy between Urvaśī and her mortal lover Pururavas. In the institutes of Manu they are said to be the creations of the seven Manus, the progenitors of mankind.68 The Bhāgavata Purāṇa also states that the Apsarās were born from Kaśyapa. In Rāmāyaṇa it is mentioned that the Apsarās are originally come out from the churning of the ocean, and with this the Purānic account of their origin agrees. It is important to notice that when they rose from the water neither gods nor asuras would wed them, so they became the common property of both classes. Sometime they were called the wives of gods and daughters of pleasure. The Apsarās are fairy like beings, beautiful and voluptuous, who are the wives or mistresses of Gandhāras, the court musician of Indra. According to Hindu and Buddhist mythology Apsarā is a female spirit of the
clouds and waters. Apsarās are extra ordinarily beautiful, youth and elegant and famous for their dancing quality. They are the rewards in Indra’s heaven held out to heroes who fall in battle. Apsarās are said to be able to change their shape at will.

There are two types of Apsarās; Laukika (wordly) and Daiviya (divine). A good number of images of Apsarās are found in Assam. Two broken rupapattika (friezes) from Numaligarh are brought to the Assam State Museum depicting busts of Apsaras. Their faces are long and smiling with feminine beauty. Features of the faces are distinct nicely. Each of them has tītalkā on the forehead. They are in flying postures holding padmas in either hand. Their figures are nicely curved. The Apsaras wear mukuta, pushpā-kundalasā, kanthahāras which are very beautiful. Similar types of Uranta Apsaras on freizes are noticed in Hojai museum brought from Karbi Along. Here the broken figures are not as distinct as the previous images. The faces of the apsara are round shape. Each of them has tilakā on forehead. Their mukutas, kundalas and hāras are different from the previous one. These images wear valayas also. They hold padma in their hands (Plate 48 and 49).

Four images of Apsarās in terracotta plates are preserved in Museum of Anthropology Department of Cotton College. Among them only one Apsara is in good condition and others are broken (Plate 50). The one image of Apsara is in sitting posture. The image is depicted from lateral aspect. The other two images are in dancing position. Their alankaras like kundalas, kanthahāras, ekahāras etc are distinct (Plate 51). In one image her kativastra is noticed. Their draperies are flying. Their hair dresses are not clearly visible. In terracotta plate only the lower portion of the body is noticed.

A good number of Apsarās are found in Malinithan. These images are belonged to 10th-11th century A.D. One image of Apsarā is in samapādasthānka attitude. There is chatra above her head. She is decorated with a beautiful mukuta kundalas, kanthahāra, ekahāra, and valayas. She wears kativastra and katimekhela as paridhāna. Her lower garment is well decorated. All the alankara and vastra of the image are well distinct. She has a well body shape with thin waist and heavy breast. But the facial features and expression is not natural. She holds a padma in
her right hand and her left hand is in *katyavalambita* pose (**Plate 52**). Another same type of Apsara image is noticed in poor condition. Here she is in standing position. She is beautifully decorated with *mukuta, kundalas, kanthahāra, valayas, nāpubras* and *kaṭivastra*. Above her head there is a *chatra*. Her draperies are flying. Right hand of the Apsarā is broken and in left hand she holds her drapery. Her face is damaged. It is noticed that like the previous one her face and body structure is not natural (**Plate 53**). Some images of Apsarā are in dancing posture. Most of the images of Apsarās of Malinithan are mutilated and difficult to explain their features and due to low relief carving the images are not clear. One image of dancing Apsarā has an uncommon hair dress is uncommon. She is wearing as usual jewel like kunḍalas, valayas and hāras.

An image of apsara is found in Guptesvara temple. The Apsarā is standing in *tuibhanga* posture. She wears *kundalas, kanthahāra, ekahāra, valayas, keyūras, kaṭivastra* etc. she holds a rosary in her right hand and her left hand is in *katyavalambita* pose (**Plate 54**). Another broken figure of Apsarā is found in Deoparvat, Numaligarh. Here only the upper part of body is found. There is a *chatra* above her head. She is decorated with *mukuta, kunḍalas, hāras* etc. Her hands are also broken.

**River Goddesses**

In Rig Veda the Gaṅgā is mentioned in the nadistudi, which lists the rivers from the east to west. Here the word Gangā mentions to mean a name of river. According to Bhagavat Purāṇa, in his Vāmana avartāra pierced a hole in the universe with his nail of big toe when measure-the whole universe. Through the water the pure water of the causal ocean entered in this universe as Gaṅgā River. Because Gaṅgā touched the feet of Viṣṇu, she is known as Bhagavat-Padi. It is mentioned in Vālmiki’s Ramayana that Gaṅgā was the daughter of Himalaya and Manaka. The deities abducted her and took her to heaven. From that time onward she started living inside the karmandala. According to Krittivas’ Ramayana the deities had taken Gaṅgā to Śiva to get married with him. When her mother did not find her in the house, she cursed Gaṅgā to attain the form of water.
In Rig Veda the story of Yamunā is found. Here her loves for her twin, Yama is described, but her brother asks her to find a suitable match for herself. In Rig Veda Gaṅgā is also alternatively referred to as Jahnavi. Similarly Yamuna is alternatively referred as Amusumati (sunlight) in Rig Veda. The same story is found in a Sanskrit hymn Yamunashtakam of 16th century, on ode by Vallabhacharya. The story of river goddess Yamunā is also connected to the religious beliefs surrounding Krṣṇā. In various stories relate to Krṣṇā and Yamuna are found in Hindu religious texts especially in Purānas. In Mahabharata river Yamuna is mentioned in many time, relate to Krṣṇā. Yamunā is the daughter of the sun god, Surya and his wife Saranyu. She is also known as Yami, the sister of Yama, the god of death.

Iconographically Gaṅgā is depicted in the doorframe of temple alone with Yamunā. In iconographic texts makara is prescribe as the vāhana of Gaṅgā (makaropari Jāhnavi) and kūrma as the vāhana of Yamunā (kūrmagā Yamunā). In Angī Purāṇa text prescribes that Gaṅgā has white complexion and Yamunā has blue complexion. In the same text it is mentioned that Gaṅgā is to have a water pot and lotus in her two hands, while Yamunā is to hold a water pot only. Two images of Gaṅgā and Yamunā are depicted in the doorframe of a temple of Dah-parватāī in Tezpur (Plate 55 and 56). Both the images of the deities in high relief have been placed on the lower parts of the two śākhās of the dvāra. The figure of Gaṅgā is depicted at the bottom of the right pillar. The deity stands on a makara (crocodile), which has been broken off. She holds mālā in a graceful pose with her two hands. She is standing in tribhanga posture. The goddess has a beautifully arranged keśabandha. She is decorated with common alāṅkāras like kundalas, hāras, valayas and nūpuras. She wears a κaṭimekhalā. The goddess has a slender waist. There is a prabhāvalī behind the head of goddess, which indicating her divinity. Two flying hamsa (geeses) are seen to the right of the deity’s head. At the same level of left side there is a nāgī in añjalihasta pose. On either side of the deity, there stand two female figures on the same pūtha on which the deity stands. Each of them holds a chowri.

The figure of Yamunā is depicted at the bottom of the left dvāra-sākhā. She is stands on her vāhana, kūrma (tortoise), which is partially broken. She carries a
mālā with her two hands in an elegant posture. Like Gaṅgā, she has also a beautiful keśhabandha on the head. She wears the same jewels like Gaṅgā. She wears a kaṭimekhalā around the waist. Near the head of the goddess two flying hamsa are depicted. Here these two birds are seen in the left of the head of the deity. At the same level a nāgī in aṇjalihasta pose is depicted. Behind the head a prabhāvalī is seen. The deity is flanked by two female attendants. They are standing in the same pītha and one of them holding a chamara in her hand and another attendant holding a handled pot. There is seen another female figure in ālīḍhāsana in front of the deity, who holds a flat receptacle containing flowers.

These two figures of river goddesses can be compared with the Sāranāṭh School. These figures bear all the features of Classical art style. According to R.D. Banerjea, this dvāra belongs to the great school of art which existed at Pataliputra and Banaras in A.D. 5th and 6th centuries. The image of Gaṅgā-Yamunā of Assam can be compared with sculptures of Deogarh temple. The main difference of these two images with Assam's images lies in that the images from Deogarh are carved at the top of the dvāraśākhās, while images of Assam are carved at bottom. The standing position of the figures of Gaṅgā and Yamunā, depicted on the dvāra from Tigovā, are almost same as the images of Assam, but they do not hold mālā. The figures are very large and heavy. Moreover two trees are depicted behind the figure which is absent in Dah-parvatiā sculptures.

The image of Gaṅgā from Iśvarīpur, Bengal which belongs to 10th century can be compared with the Gaṅgā of Assam. The standing posture and holding mala of Iśvarīpur image is same as the Assam image. But the Bengal image is depicted independently. Another two image images Gaṅgā and Yamunā are seen in a dvāra which is preserved in the India Museum, Kolkotta. They are comparable with the images of Assam, in so far as sthānaka posture and the style of holding a mala are concerned. But they are not as refined as the images of Assam.

Another dvāra brought from a ruin temple of Mājgaon, is now preserved at the residence of Late Prabodh Chanmdra Baruah of Majgaon, Tezpur. Here at the bottom of the dvāraśākhās the figures of Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Dvārapala and Nandi are noticed. In the right sākhā the images of Gaṅgā, Dvarapala and Nandi are depicted. All are in the sthānaka posture and all equal in height. Gaṅgā is seen
holding a mālā in the tribhanga posture. The deity is depicted on her vahāna makara. She seems to have a jata on her head. The figure of a Dvārapala in tribhanga pose stands to left of Gaṅgā. He holds a triśūla in one hand and the other āyudha of another hand is not clear. To the extreme left a figure of Nandī is depicted holding a danda with both his hands. The face of this figure seems to be slightly different. It is longer. The figures of the Dvārapāla and Nandi seem to stand on padmās. At the bottom of the left dvāraśākhā Yamunā is depicted to the right of Dvārapāla who stands in between Yamunā and Nandī. She also holds mālā in her hands like Gaṅgā and she stands on her vāhana kūrma in tribhaga pose. The figure of Gaṅgā turns slightly towards the entrance of the dvāra, while Yamuna stands in the same manner, slightly turning towards her right. Stylistically it can be placed in c. A.D 10th century.

Another dvāraśākhā lying at the site of the ruins of Mājgāon shows a figure of Gaṅgā, Dvārapāla and Nandī. Here the deity is made to stand on a makara in tribhanga attitude holding an mālā in her hands. The other dvāraśākhā evidently showing the figure of Yamunā could not be traced in the ruins.

An image of Yamunā is seen in ruins of Sankhādevī near Rājbāri, (Jogijān). Here the deity is made to sit on kūrma in lalitāsana posture. With her raised right hand, the goddess holds a circular flower while displaying varadamudrā. Her left hand is in bhūmmisparśamudrā. Two figures of matsyakanyā, from both sides over her head holding each ghata and pouring water on the head of the deity are seen.

The river goddess of Mājgāon is depicted in the same way as the images of Da-parvatiā. These images are belonging to 9th century A.D. The standing postures and the style of holding the mala of these figures are similar to those of Da-parvatiā. But at Da-parvatiā the figures of Dvārapāla and Nandī are absent. The image of Mājgāon is not as smooth as dahparvatiya. Stylistically these figures may be placed in CE 9th century. The figure of deity from Sankha Devi, however is quite different from the images of Da-parvatiā and Mājgāon.
Lilakamal

Symbolically representing the capacity to create anything by depicting her standing with bloomed lotus emerging out from water. Two images of Lilakamal are seen in Madan Kamdev. She is sitting in padmasana on padma. She has two hands. Both hands are resting on her knees. The goddess is decorated with mukuta, kundalas, haras and kativastra. She has a divine looks in her face. She has thin waist. Two buds of lotus are depicted in right and left side of the deity (Plate 57). The second image of Lilakamal is lalitāsana posture on a padmā. She has two hands. The right hand is kept on her knee, but it is mutilated and in the left hand she holds a padmākosā. Her figure is well shaped. But her face is indistinct. The alankaras of the goddess is visible. She wears mukūṭa, kuṇḍalas, two hāras, valayas, keyūras, kativastra etc (Plate 58).

Another image of Lilakamala is noticed in Malinithan of 10th century CE. The goddess is standing in tuibhaṅga posture. She has two hands; in her right hands she holds a padmākośa and the left hand is in katyavalambita. She wears mukūṭa, kuṇḍalas, hāra, kaṅkanas. She wears kaviṭastra, kaṭimekhala and her drapery is flying in back (Plate 59). An interesting image of Lilakamal is noticed in Sadiya. The goddess is standing on padma. Her face is not natural look. It is not matching with the physical appearance. Behind the head some flowery works have been done. Her kuṇḍalas, hāras, valayas, kaviṭastra are distinct. She has two hands. She keeps her left hand near the belly and right hand.

Śālabhaṇḍikā

Śālabhaṇḍikā or Shalabhajika refers to the sculpture of a woman, displaying stylized feminine features, standing near a tree and grasping a branch. The name of these figures comes from the Sanskrit śālabhaṇḍikā meaning 'breaking a branch of a sala tree. The motif became very prominent in Buddhist art which symbolically represents the birth of Buddha in Lumbini grove. But in Hindu sculptural art it is represented to depict the feminine merit of giving birth to human being. Sūrya Pahāra which is a prominent Buddhist and Hindu archaeological site provides two
beautiful images of śālabāṇjika. The first one shows a female standing under a tree with keeping her legs cross (Plate 61). She is carved resting her right hand over the branch of tree and attempting to garb the branches of tree from another. The other śālabāṇjika depiction from same place shows a nymph again standing under the tree but with variant action. Here she is depicted playing with branch of tree in cheerful mood. The gesture and posture of the image makes her more near to the Kuṣāṇa motif of puspapraçārikā (Plate 62). Both of these women are carved standing under the tree in closed manner. They are wearing a fine dress and are dressed with elegant jewellaries. The bodily curves of the śālabāṇjikas are projected very lively and lavishly in Śūrya Pahār.

The sculptural art of Assam provides number of Hindu and Buddhist goddesses. But the numbers of Hindu goddesses are significantly more than the number of the Buddhist female deities. In addition some images are recovered which are other than Hidu or Buddhist in nature and usually devoted by followers of both religions. The Hindu goddesses whose images in prominence are discovered from Assam are In this chapter the Hindu goddesses which are studied with extra concern are Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Durgā, Varāhī, Brahmāni, Kālī, Umā-mahēśwara, Čāmuṇḍā, Vaikuṇṭha-Vaiśṇavī, and Tripurā-Bhairavi. The Buddhist goddess Tara and Ćuṇḍa are also found concisely in art of Assam. In Assam a significant number of goddesses of semi Divine natures like are Manasā, Apsarā, River Goddesses, are also discovered. These goddesses are secular in nature and are equally respected and worshiped by followers of Hinduism and Buddhism. They have wide popularity among the people of ancient Assam and attracted wide attention of people to sculptural art of Assam. The numbers of Hindu goddesses are more than the Buddhist Goddesses in art of Assam. In Assam both Vaishnavite and Saivite goddesses are found in prominence.

Reference


figure is shown kneeling down. The left hand of the figure carries the weight of its body. The figure of the bull is shown jumping over her from backside. The bull raises its tails and seems to be full of passion (Plate 147). In Gastol another sculpture of bestiality is seen. Here a woman and a bull are depicted. The woman is in sitting posture and looked behind the bull. She holds somewhere tightly for support her body. The bull is shown in full passion (Plate 148).

Another scene of bestiality is noticed in a slab of Madan Kamdev. In this sculpture a woman is engaged in sexual union with an animal. The animal is drown in her back side and touches the cheek with his mouth. The woman hug the animal’s neck with her right hand and her left hand places in upon her knee for support her whole body (Plate 149). Another depiction of bestiality scene is also noticed in Madan Kamdev. The sculpture is mutilated and indistinct. Here a woman and a lion are noticed. Both woman and animal are in standing posture. The lion looks like touches the woman (Plate 150).

Scene of bestiality is also noticed in Pingaleswar. Here a monkey and a woman are found in sexual union. The woman is half lying position and her upper part of the body is bent. The monkey touches her right breast. The woman rests her left hand on the right shoulder of the monkey and her right hand keeps on the knee of the monkey. Her left leg places on a short pillar for support. She is shown as lying in a very comfortable way. The monkey raises its tails and seems to be full of passion (Plate 151). Another sculpture of bestiality is noticed in Pigaleswar. Here also a monkey and a woman are seen. The sculpture is mutilated. But it is shown that the monkey is depicted in back of the lady. The lady is kneeling down and bent her upper part of the body which is depicted in frontal view. The kuṇḍalas of the lady are very big and well distinct. The left hand of the figure carries the weight of its body. The monkey touches the breast of the lady (Plate 152). In Pigaleswar an erotic sculpture of bestiality is noticed. Here a woman and a animal is shown in sexual union. The woman is lying is same posture like the previous one. The animal holds her hand tightly and trying to kiss her (Plate 153).
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