CHAPTER-V

CONCLUSION

From the observations and findings of this study, it could be concluded that the art and iconography of the sculptures of the Kamrup District of the State of Assam was fundamentally based on, and reflection of different religious beliefs and customs prevalent in the region in various phases of historical development throughout the ages. This phenomenon is similar to other places of India as well, as had already been observed by Stella Kramrich—"the plasticity and naturalism, dynamic characteristics, influenced by various racial factors, determined the art history of India as a whole".1 During the study it was found that the different linguistics groups viz. Austric, Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burmans contributed to the growth, development and metamorphosis of the art and culture in the region. Subsequently the arrival of the Muhammedans in the late medieval period led to the assimilation of Islamic art with the prevalent art forms in the region. The different art form found expression through different mediums like terracotta, wood, stone and metal in the region as found in the Indian counterparts. It reveals the inner vision of artistic approach, style and technique of different phases of art and cultural traits that took shape in the region.

The archaeological evidences from the 1st B.C.E./C.E. at Ambari excavations showing influence of Sunga-Kushana period, evidences from Gupta art form at the Nilachal Hill with epigraphic records of Umachal rock inscription of 6th C.E. and Palasena art form of 9th-12th C.E. at various other places of the region as well as the evidences of the Turko-Mughal art from the 13th C.E. onwards in the region exhibits the influence of different art idioms on the art forms of the region. However the archaeological evidences of the region also signifies and establishes that the art and architecture of the region are imbued with regional and indigenous elements in it. The impacts of local and indigenous traits have been reflected in physiognomy of the sculptures carved in this region throughout the ages.

The art activities of the region was fundamentally based on traditional Indian system following the norms as laid down in the ancient Indian Śilpasastras like the Agni Purāna, the Matsya Purāna, the Garuda Purāna, Rup-mandana, the Vaikhanasagama, the Rudra-Yamala, the Kurma Purāna, the Vishnudharmottara, the Skanda Purāna and the Kālikā Purāna etc. The excavation at Ambari archaeological site with its findings of antiquities, terracotta objects and a group of stone sculptures carved as per canonical norms indicates existence of atelier for artisans working under master craftsman either for trade or other purposes. The Ambari inscription of 1232 C.E. indicates the existence of Sattra institution at Ambari, established by the king Samudrapala at Yogihiati and exhibits royal patronage for the development of art and crafts in the region. Trade might be routed through the present Dighalipukhuri adjacent to Ambari site which was earlier a channel of the river Brahmaputra, was a part of noubahar of the Paniduar (port) during Ahom period.

However there were some regional variations with ethnic and indigenous influences in the art form of this region. The influence of the indigenous traits can be traced in non-anthropomorphic or aniconic worship of God which was later Hinduised as pithas as found in the ten pithas of Dasamahavidya in the Nilachal hill, the Ugratara and the Basistha temple. This apart, we still find non-anthropomorphic worship in monolithic form amongst the non-Aryan people like Tiwas, Karbis, Lalungs and Garos dwelling at places like Sonapur, Boko, Hengrabari and surrounding areas. It has also been found that though the sculptures of various Gods and Goddesses were carved as per iconographic norms of Indian Śilpasastras, there are some regional variations reflected in the sculptures of Navagrahas at Navagraha temple in Chitralachal hill, where the cults of Navagrahas had been identified with nine planets or Grahas, represented by lingas that appeared to be a significant feature of worship of Navagrahas; Similar features could not be found in any other places in India. The iconographic features of the Navagrahas deferred from the Śilpasatras and Purānas, indicating regional variation in depiction of āyudhas and vāhanas of the nine-grahas. The three female figures of Parśadevata on the adhisthana of the exterior of the Madan Kamdev temple representing the Śakti of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva in the form of three female deities with different āyudhas and vāhanas reveals importance of Śakti worship in Kamrup District in early medieval period. Further the four faced figure of Brahma at Basistha
temple, holding *pustakas* in his four arms represents iconographic variations and deviation from the ancient texts. Another figure of regional importance is the broken figure of four-footed icon at Hajo which appears to be figure of *Dharma* according to the Puranic texts. Another indigenous feature found on art is the flat and round or squarish facial type with oblique eyes of the sculptures carved during different historical periods in the region.

It is observed in the study that the literary and archaeological evidences of different phases of historical development reflect the society and social customs and behaviour as well as religious practices prevalent in the society. The depiction of various social scenes on the panels as well as plaques as found in various archaeological sites, like panels with musical and dancing scenes; of erotic scenes; religious and devotional scenes — worshiping of linga and Yoni; day to day life of the people — watering plants; mother and child; woman giving water to tired man etc. reveals the social customs and beliefs as well as religious activities of the different phases of historical development. The erotic sculptures as found in Madan Kamdev and Pingaleswar archaeological site and Śakti goddesses at Kamākhyā reveals influence of tantricism in the religious as well as art activity of the region. Terracotta figures Buddha at Uzan Bazar and rock-cut figure of Buddha at Nilachal hill as well as Buddha at Hayagriva-Madhava in Hajo and Asvakranta, Pingaleswar in North Guwahati and also use of chatrawali in Metal images of Narakashur hill indicates practice of Buddhism in Kamrup District as well as its influence in the art form of this region.

The neo-Vaishnavite movement initiated by Sankardeva (1449-1568 C.E.) as a part of Bhakti Movement also reflected the art style of Kamrup District. The typical indigenous features like conical head-dress and lower garments — *dhoti* of Satriya-Vaisnavite dress style found in carvings of the sculptures on the exterior of the wall of the Hayagriva-Madhava temple and figure of *Jay* and *Vijay* in *batchora* of the temple as well as figure of Lakshmi and Saraswati in the Ganesa temple in Hajo exhibits Vaishnavite influence in sculptural art. Similar instances were found in all the late medieval art activities at Asvakranta, Kamākhyā and Basistha temple of the region. The dress style of these sculptures also indicates influence of the Mughal art style. The
chignon (hair-knot) of the female figure in typical style of 'Khopa' of Assamese society, the covering of head of the woman figure by the upper paridhana 'chador' called 'Uroni', a custom followed by the married Assamese woman are found to be depicted in panels of different phases of art activities in Nilachal hill. Thus archaeological evidences and literary texts confirms the continuous habitation settlements in Kamrup District of Assam from the earliest times to the eighteenth century C.E. and till date, which signifies the importance of the region as a centre of art activities throughout the ages.

The depiction of various social scenes on the panels as well as plaques reveals the social customs and beliefs as well as religious activities of the different phases of historical development with the typical ethnic and indigenous features in it. Taking into consideration all these findings, it can be concluded that the art and iconography of the Kamrup District represents unity in diversity by taking into its fold - the Brahmannical, Buddhist and Islamic art with ethnic and indigenous traits of regional character with it. Thus it can be concluded that the art and iconography of the Kamrup District assimilated the art and iconography of Indian counterparts based on religious beliefs and customs.

This study may remain incomplete if mention is not made about the unfavourable climatic conditions of the region which may have perhaps played a significant role in the development of the art forms in the region. The region lies in the monsoon belt with very high humidity. The unfriendly humid climatic condition perhaps affected the life and times of the people living in the region leading to quick natural degeneration of any form of physical art, sculptures or architecture. As the region was composed mainly of folded and technically disturbed and coarse-grained metamorphic and sedimentary rocks, and as such quality of the stones available in the region was coarse and different from the fine granite stone found in the Gangetic valley. This is perhaps one of the reasons for the inferior quality of craftsmanship found in some of the sculptures of the region.

However, there were references of import of black -basalt from Rajmahal hill of Bihar through the river Brahmaputra by ship or boat. It led to the carvings of fine craftsmanship in black basalt in the early and the medieval period, as found in the
carvings of some of the sculptures in the Kamrup District. It also indicates good communication and trade relation of the region with the rest of India in the early and the medieval period. Trade and industrial relation of the ancient Kamrupa kingdom with the rest of India can be traced to as early as 2nd C.E. as found from literary and excavated findings. Further the excavated findings at Ambari Archaeological site in Guwahati like the Arrentine and Rouleted pottery ware of the Roman ware datable to first-second century A.D and the Chinese celadon ware indicate international trade relation of Prāgyotisha –Kāmarūpa with China and Rome in the 2nd - 1st B.C.E./ 1st C.E. which is supported by Chang Kien, the Chinese text of 2nd B.C.E., who also referred to the trade relation of this region with China. The existence of International and national trade and commerce of the region exhibits thriving economy of ancient kingdom of Prāgyotisha-Kāmarūpa of which Kamrup District was an integral part. It is reflected in the growth of art and culture of the region up to the early medieval period.

This apart the influence of South-East Asian art form can be traced in the carvings of kirttimukha and kiratamukuta of the Sculptures at Kamākhya, Madan Kamdev and Hayagriva Madhava temple in Hajo. The metal images found in the Narakasur hill at Kahilipara stylistically datable to circa 9th -12th C.E. exhibits similar artistic style of Bengal and Bihar. The figure of Buddhist pantheon Prajñaparamita or Chunda found at Narakasur hill represents similarity with the figure of Chunda at Chittagong in Bangladesh.

In the later medieval period, the art activities of the region suffered a setback and lost royal patronage due to the political turmoil in the region. Art activity of this period deviated from the earlier art style and started developing a regional art form as found in most of the temple buildings of Kamākhya on the Nilachal hills, Hayagriva-Madhava temple at Hajo, Siddheswar temple in Sualkuchi, Merghar ruins in Chaygaon, Manikarneswar temple, Aswakranta temple in North Guwahati, Chatrakar temple, Umananda temple, Sukreswar temple in Panbazar, Basistha temple etc., where rebuilding or reconstruction of the temples were done either by the Ahoms or by the Koches. During this period, it appears that the artisans based their art on folk elements with features like flat face, broad nose, thick lips and low relief and sculptures are
depicted in profile; and are frontally carved. The figures are made stiff and
disproportionate, with flat and round or squarish face. The art and sculptures seemed to
have lost the finesse and perfection. Perhaps it was due to the lack of royal patronage
so that the art could not flourish; secondly, perhaps there was no systematic learning
and presence of a proper system to get the finer techniques of the art form to be handed
over to the successors. Thirdly, lack of interest of the next generations to inherit and
continue with it for want of benefits or incentives may also be one of the reasons. As
mentioned in various records series of invasions in the region by the Mughals from the
west also the change of economy of the state. The engagement of common people in
warfare against the enemy led to the fall of agricultural productivity as well as trade
and commerce. Continuous invasion and lack of royal patronage resulted in a break of
the continuity in the art activity of the region.

Further the coming of the Mughals with various artisans led to the assimilation
of the Islamic art with the regional art form. This apart, the Koches reconstructed the
early stone temples with the masons and artisans from Koch Bihar who were already
acquainted with the Islamic architecture of hemispherical shape of dome and sikhara
like minarates and guldastas of Islamic architecture as found in the Bengal art form
under the Islamic rule. It reflected in the do-cala type of antarala, mandapa,
mukhamanda with niche or devakosthas as found in the Kamakhya temple and other
temples at Nilachal hill, Sukreswar temple, Hayagriva-Madhava and Basistha temple,
Siddheswar temple in Kamrup District. There by created a new art form which
reflected in the sculptures of the late mediaeval art style in Kamrup District as found in
art style and arch or dome like structure of the late medieval temple activity. The
archaeological evidences and literary texts confirm the continuous human settlements
in the Kamrup District of Assam from the earliest times to the eighteenth century C.E.
and till date which signifies the importance of the region as a centre of art activity.

Thus, the various art activities found in the Kamrup District is a synthesis of
different cultural traits of India and forms an integral part of Indian art tradition.

Though it is a first attempt in this line of work, however the study has to be
summed up here due to the limitation of time and space. It is hoped that this work will
be a helpful and fruitful work for the students of art and sculpture in particular and for
the students of history in general for further study. There is much scope to further undertake exhaustive studies in this field in future as a consequence of throwing of light on some of the interesting and relevant aspects of the art and iconography of the region during this study. It may be reiterated from the findings and the outcome of the study that the art and iconography of the Kamrup District of Assam is essentially of Indian origin developed over the time, bearing a strong and distinct regional and indigenous identity which will place it in the international level as an integral part of the Indian art tradition.

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