CHAPTER - IV

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE ART AND ICONOGRAPHY OF SCULPTURES OF THE KAMRUP DISTRICT WITH THOSE OF THE REST OF INDIA

Art is the medium of spiritual and aesthetic expression of the human kind. From the time immemorial, the growth of a culture and civilization is based on human behaviour. Like the Gangetic valley, the fertile valley of the river Brahmaputra created a distinct culture that is reflected in the art and sculpture of Assam, of which the Kamrup District is a part. As in other parts of India, religion was the basic force behind the development of art and iconography in the State of Assam also. The different phases of historical periods, witnessed the development of art and iconography in this region. The Kamrup district of Assam, being a part of the ancient Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa kingdom, is scattered with the art and archaeological evidences that reflects the socio-religious, economic and cultural traits of its inhabitants throughout the ages.

Eminent archaeologist H. D. Sankalia referred to Assam as an ethnological museum like Saurashtra on the basis of evidences of pre-historic settlements of the Early Stone Age at Garo hills -the neighbouring areas of Kamrup District. The findings of the Stone Age tools in the region exhibits sequence of Stone Age in Assam as found in the Indian counterpart. Though the period of study has been taken from 5th C.E. it is pertinent to throw some light on the background of the history of Kamrup District before 5th C.E. to see the subject in continued historical perspective. We come across numerous archaeological evidences starting from as early as the 1st century B.C.E./C.E. to the 18th C.E. in the region, which can be compared with those of the rest of India to evaluate and interpret the history of the region.

Eminent historian, V.A. Smith divided the art style of Hindu sculpture in India into four different schools representing four different regions of India. The first one is called Mathura School; the second school is represented by early Chalukyas of Badami

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and the Pallavas of Kanchi, both these schools are marked by simplicity and elegance with naturalism. The third school is represented by later Chalukya-Hoysala group of sculpture and is marked by heavy floral ornamentation and fine tracery; the fourth school represents the sculpture of Bengal, Orissa and Assam, and is characterised by the human figures with round faces, oblique eyes, and broad forehead, thin lips and small chin.²

As regards the comparative study of the art and iconography of the sculptures of Kamrup District with those of the rest of India, mention may be made of the raw materials used for making the art objects in the region.

Like the Indian counterpart, medium of the plastic art of Kamarupa kingdom was wood and clay which were the common media for making plastic art in the early period. The Brihatsamhita and the Bhavisya Purāna mentioned wood as well as clay as the common material for image-making, a traditional practice during ancient and mediaeval period.³ Use of perishable materials like wood and clay or terracotta manifested in absence of large scale findings of any sculptural art or artefacts of early period in the Kamrup District even though we sometimes come across such remains or evidences in ruins.

In this connection, mention may be made of findings of terracotta art objects at Ambari Archaeological Site in Guwahati. Eminent scholars like Z.D. Ansari and M.K. Dhavalikar are of the opinion that the cultural sequence of Ambari as a habitation site may go back to early centuries of Christian era. This hypothesis is placed by the scholars on the basis of finding of a characteristic ink-pot shaped lid during the course of excavation at Ambari. This is fossil type, similar to the art form of Kushana period found all over Northern, North-Western and Central India. As per the historical evidence, the imperial Kushanas had flourishing trade with China through two routes – the ‘silk routes’ through Central Asia and another route through Brahmaputra valley and Burma to China. This was supported by Paul Pelliot who states that there was a trade route between Assam and China as early as second B.C.E. A Chinese text, Chang

Kien of 2nd B.C.E. referred to trade relation between Assam and China. A broken piece of terracotta having beaded motif on the border was found at Ambari, which has been referred as having stylistic similarity with the beaded motif of the Sunga art form. One of the important features of Sunga art is its flowing linear rhythm that binds all the isolated objects in one continuous stream of life. Similar type of beaded motif on terracotta plaque is found at Chandraketugarh at Bengal. The figure is of Sri- Lakshmi datable to 2nd B.C.E. and represents similar motif. Further, in addition to this, in 2008-09 during excavation at Ambari a large brick-built tank and a terracotta sealing was exposed, which according to scholars appears to be stylistically similar to the art form of the Sunga-Kushana period. Further findings of kaolin ware at Ambari in all the layers with different types comprised of three types of imported wares, namely- ‘Chinese celadon’, ‘Green glazed ware’, ‘Arrentine and Rouleted ware’. Of these, Arrentine and Rouleted pottery ware are identified as the Roman ware datable to 1st-2nd C.E. and indicates trade relation with Mediterranean region. The Chinese celadon of Chinese ware type was imported from the principality in the Singkiang province of China. Albiruni (973-1048 C.E.) referred to the export of Chinese ware to India, Ceylon and Persia. All these excavated findings at Ambari archaeological site indicate international trade relation of Pragjyotisha-Kamarupa with China and Roman. It may however be also mentioned that the kind of China clay variety found in the Ambari excavation is also found in the foothills of Meghalaya in the south of Kamrup District and possibility is there that both imported and local China clay were used in the region. The imported Chinese Celadon ware indicates trade link between the ancient Kamarupa and China. M.K. Dhavalikar also mentioned that similar potteries were found in and around Guwahati at Navagraha, Nilachal and Sarania hills as well as in neighbouring District of Nagaon and in Tezpur. The excavation at Bhismaknagara in Arunachal Pradesh, the North-Eastern border State of Assam also exposed similar

5 Ray, Niharranjan, Muarya and Sunga Art, Indian Studies, 1965,p.62
Kaolin Pottery. Such variety of Kaolin potteries are not found anywhere in India. Hence Dhavalikar labelled it as ‘Ambari Ware’, a distinctive feature of Brahmaputra valley civilization as well as an ancient culture of Assam. Further the potteries with cut impression and matt finished decoration on bowls and dishes, incised lotus motif on the large dishes represents similarities with the potteries of Gangetic sites of Ahichchatra, Kausambi, Rajghat, Hastinapur and Charsadda, near Peshwar. Again roulette pottery found at Ambari exhibits similarity with the potteries first found at Arikamedu near Pondicherry and at Sisupalgarh in Orissa and other places of India in the later period which indicate similarity with the cultural development of the Gangetic valley of central India. The Green-glazed ware of Turkish–Mughal origin datable to 13th -17th C.E. represents assimilation of Islamic art form, which developed with the comings of the Mughals to this region.

This apart, S.D. Sankalia found numerous beautiful Mauryan terracotta sculptures at Bihar which portrayed invariably Manipuri and Naga dance forms and thereby art form of this region may be dated back to as far as the 3rd C.E. Further the Mauryan court at Patna had taken note of various ethnic tribes both on their eastern and southern borders. There is another unique terracotta huge phallus shaped object found at Ambari having hair or rays on it in relief. The object is made of kaolin and provided with a small hole at the tapering top. It has been identified as Mukhalinga, as initially relates to the Kushana period and continued in the succeeding periods. There is another fragment of a terracotta female figurine having headdress with layers of lavishly ornamented with pearls. Such headdresses are characteristics features of the Gupta and post-Gupta period. There also two miniature Śivalingas and Ganesa figurines; and a conical seal having depicted with a human face wearing tiara of three crests and perforated top having similarity with sculptures of Kamākhya temple. The headgear is one of the significant features of early medieval sculpture of Assam. Another significant finding at Ambari- a finest terracotta fragment of a female torso made of kaolin exhibits heights of artist’s skill of the period. The figure appears to be semi-

divine nymph or *apsara* and appears to be stylistically similar with the *surasundari* of the Sun temple at Konark at Orissa and may be datable to 8th-12th C.E. (Plate-259). Thus the terracotta findings at Ambari represent one of the finest ranges of Indian art form. The excavated findings at Ambari archaeological site of antiquities, terracotta objects and a group of stone sculptures carved as per canonical norms indicates existence of a atelier of artisans working under master craftsman either for trade or other purposes. The Ambari inscription of 1232 C.E. mentioned the existence of sattra institution at Ambari, established by king Samudrāpala at Yogihiati, in which rituals were performed and was attached to royal residence. The inscription bears mixed characters of Devanagari and old Assamese script having similarity with few characters of inscribed images of Ambari. This 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. It thus indicates continuity of the use of the port area even before the coming of the Ahoms with the rest of India and also perhaps for import of Black-basalt from the Bihar.

Another important discovery is finding of a terracotta boat during excavation at *Navagraha* hill. The boat is well-baked and measures 295x85x25 x12cm, oblong in shape. It is assigned to the 7th-12th C.E. having similarity with Ambari ware. Another one is found at the Gauhati University Campus, Jalukbari, Assam which is made of stone. The terracotta boat is unique and is perhaps nowhere found in the world. Though it reminds one of the Sutton Hoo ship burial in England which was made of wood and datable to the middle of the 7th C.E. Earlier scholars like Z.D.Ansari and M.K. Dhavalikar are of the opinion that the purpose of the boat was meant for enshrining mortal remains. This opinion is based on the continuation of the system of canoe burials among some Naga tribes of Assam.

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Later texts like the *Agni Purāṇa*, mentioned stone as the medium of plastic art form in India. In Kamrup District, earliest stone architectural development as early as 5th-6th C.E. is found at Kamākhyā temple in Nilachal Hill. There exists some stone panels at the site, which appears to be the remnants of a stone temple of early period. While some of them are lying outside the present temple, some are found to be used on the outer side of the *garbhagriha* of the temple in later period. The panels has carvings of scroll or creeper design having similarity with that of the scroll motifs which is typical of the Gupta Classical age, found at Chandimau pillar scroll motif at Bihar, door-panel of *Daśavatāra* temple at Deogarh and Dhamekh Stupa of Varanasi. Further we find similar Gupta influence in the art form of 7th-8th C.E. at Kamākhyā, Ambari, Uzan Bazar and Hajo etc. At Kamākhyā in Nilachal hill, found some sculptural panel depicting lively narration of homely life, like blowing Sankha, pouring water, mother and child etc. These are some of the art reliefs that represent plasticity of Gupta art form—wearing of transparent drapery of Gandhara art form, scanty ornamentation with simplicity and flowing contours that exhibits lingering of the Gupta art form. The life-size sculptures of various deities in between pilasters on the outer side of the wall of the temple and panels of socio-cultural life projected vertically on the outer side of the wall of the *garbhagriha* of the Kamākhyā temple are stylistically similar with the scroll motif and life sized sculptures of the Duladeo temple of Khajora. The squarish face with drooping eye-lids and discipline with slender form of the life-size sculptures on outer side of the walls of *garbhagriha* of the Kamākhyā temple represent lingering of the Gupta art style with sensuousness of eastern trend. The original plan of the Kamākhyā temple represents *pancaratha rekhadeul* temple of the North Indian Nagara style though its upper part was reconstructed in later period by the Koch and the Ahoms. The *Darrang Rajavamsavali* referred that the renovators failed in two successive attempts in resetting the temple with stone masonry and reconstructed the *sikhara* of the temple with bricks. The *sikhara* was given a sixteen sided dome like shape having similarity with Islamic domes. The same text mentions that Koch King Naranarayan sent troops of soldiers and workers from Koch Bihar of present North Bengal, for the reconstruction job who were accustomed with Islamic art and

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architecture. The Hayagriva-Madhava temple at Hajo of Kamrup District has a panel of gajathara on the plinth of the garbhagriha similar with the gajathara of Kailasa temple of Ellora, though the panels at Hayagriva-Madhava was depicted with heavy ornamentation. (Plate-6). Similar depiction of elephants is also noticed in the Konark Sun Temple. Further some reused panels having carvings of musical and social scenes, broken parts of Daśavatāra panel fixed on the batchora subsequently, are examples of reliefs that represents similarity with the Gupta art idiom. Worship of the avatāras was one of the important features of Bhagavata religion of the Gupta period. Remains of temple panels of jangha parts depicting erotic, geometrical, floral carvings, gajathara, apsaras, vidyādhara, parsadevatas carvings on it found at Uzan bazaar and few other places of Guwahati (now at Assam State Museum) signifies the prevalence of Nagara type of temple in this region.

Thus it may be assumed that till 8th-9th C.E., the art style of Kamrup District was influenced by the Nagara style of the North Indian art form. Then from 9th-12th C.E. we found influence of Pala-Sena art of Bengal and Orissa. By 9th C.E., the art form of the region was influenced by the evolutionary growth of stella formation of the Pala art form of Bengal. The Eastern art form of Bengal and Bihar which derives the formation of stella along with pitha or plinth from the Gupta Classical Art and eventually developed into graduated projections of tri-ratha, pancha-ratha, sapta-ratha and so on. Such artistic traits are found at Kamākhya temple in Nilachal hill - the image of Chamunda with rectangular top and rope design of the stella, the figure of Narasimha at Uzan Bazar (now at A.S.M.), the figures with projected pithas at Ambari, Hajo, Aswakrranta etc. All these represent features of Pala-Sena art form. The Eastern school of art which is the distinctive art form of Bengal and Bihar is characterised by dated sculptures along with painted, sculptured and casting of metal images which also influenced the art tradition of Kamrup District of Assam. Black chlorite (kashti pathar)

18 Sivaramamurthy, Calambur. The Art Of India, Harry N. Abrams Incorporated Publishers, New York. 1977p. 394 Fig. 549.
and Asthdhatu (made of eight metals) were distinctive features of East Indian Art of early medieval period. There were references of importing of black -basalt from Rajmahal hills of Bihar as black basalt was not available in the region.22 There is a possibility of importing of black-chlorite through the river Brahmaputra by boat or ship from Bengal and Bihar. The present Dighalipukhuri adjacent to Ambari site, which was a part of the noubahar of the Latasil or Paniduar (Port) of the Ahom period was the water channel of the river Brahmaputra indicates flourishing trade in this region.23 The figure of Uma-lingamurti (ASM2424,Guwahati), mutilated figure of Vishnu (ASM2872, Chandmari), Hari-Hara (ASM.6,Uzan Bazar), Ganesha (ASM3540, Ambari), mutilated part of a stella with kirttimukha on the top at Kamakhya were some of the images made of black-basalt found in the Kamrup District. As regards dated sculptures, mention may be made of sixteen-handed inscribed image of Mahishamardini bearing an epithet Chandanayika inscribed in circa 11th C.E. and another figure of Surya with inscribed title mitra on the pedestal found at Ambari which exhibits similar artistic features of Eastern Indian school of art. The Vedas identify Mitra, an Indo-Iranian form of God with Surya in North Indian Sun-worship. The deity wears a sacred waist girdle known as avyanga which is the Indianised form of Aiwiyaonghen, the sacred waist – girdle of the Iranians. Further two numbers of terracotta plaques with the depiction of figure of Buddha found at Uzan Bazar in Guwahati (now at A.S.M.) represent similarity with terracotta plaque of Buddha in Bhumisparsamudrā found at Nalanda, Bihar. Both the figures of Buddha are in bhumisparsa mudrā within an arch on a lotus pedestal and surrounded by stupas, stylistically similar with the figure of Buddha in Nalanda.24 Of them, one is inscribed below on the pedestal and datable to 11th C.E. representing inscribed features of Pala-Sena art form of Bengal and Bihar. (Plate-93-A ).

Another feature of North Indian style is depiction of Sūrya cult wearing boots and covering the body up to the breast and same can be found in the depiction of the deity at Kamākhyā, Ambari and Pandunath in Kamrup District. (Plate-182).  

Further the hoard of metal images found in the Narakaṣur hill at Kahilipara stylistically datable to circa 9th -12th C.E. exhibits similar artistic form of Bengal and Bihar. Of these, the figure of two handed Vishnu with ayudha-purusha, cakra and gada is stylistically similar to the bronze figure of Vishnu with ayudha-purusha of 8th -9th C.E. of Patna museum. Further there is a bronze figure of Indra with chatrawali on the top of the stella which is a Buddhist iconographic feature, represents assimilation of Buddhism and Hinduism in art and stylistically similar to the bronze image of Buddha from Kurkihar, a Pala art of 9th C.E. of Patna museum. The metal image of the tantric Goddess of Buddhist pantheon Prajnaparamita or Chunda, found in the metal hoards of Narakaṣur hill, Kahilipara datable to 11th C.E. The figure stylistically appears to be similar with the metal images of Chunda and Sri-Vasudhara from Chittagong District of Bangladesh. (Plate-257).

Another important feature, kirttimukha ‘the face of glory’ is one of the essential symbols of Indian and South-East Asian art tradition, which was also found to influence the art of this region. Kirttimukha as a symbol was present in Indian art forms from the beginning of the present era and has been more explicit from the tenth century onwards. It was similar to the Chinese Tao Tieh , the ‘Devore’ datable from the second and first millenium B.C.E. ; in medieval Europe it is found in Notre Dame la Grande in Poitiers ; in the Church it is known as the ‘Green Man’. The face of Glory is known as Grasamukha in Western India ; and as Rahur-mukha in Eastern India; lord of wood in Assam. The sculptures found in Kamrup District show the formation of stella with kirtimukha and vidyadhara on the top from 10th C.E. onwards, though its shape was different from time to time as found in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. This apart, Kirtimukha, as the temple components found at Kamākhyā, Madan Kamdev, Hayagriva

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26 Sivamurthy , Calambur The art of India , Harry N. Abrams Incorporated Publishers, New York. 1977 , p. 394 Fig. 518 and 520.p.390.

27 ASIAR,1946-37,p.58 ; referred to Deoparvat archaeological Site in Golaghat Distrit of Assam, cited in The Hindu Temple, Vol II , p. 324, about 300km. from Guwahati.
-Madhava temple etc are more stylized in the 11th-12th C.E. like the rest of the Indian art style. (Plate-38).

The plinth of the Madan Kamdev temple at Baihata Chariali in North Guwahati is that of a Pancaratha temple with decorative motifs and angašikharas, resembling the temple architecture of Mukteswar temple of Orissa of 9th-10th C.E. in the decoration of the outer surface and gradient of the Sikhara. The motifs like gaja-vyala, kirtimukha, bharabahaka, gana, pillar capitals with bracket figures, Caitya Gavaska etc. which were characteristic features of Orissan temple architecture can be traced at Madan Kamdev temple at North Guwahati. Similar motifs of gana, gaja-vyala, bracket figure and angašikharas are found at Pingaleswar in Karara and Dol-Gobinda in North Guwahati, Nilachal hill and other places of Guwahati like Uzan Bazar, Judges field (now at Assam State Museum). Stone relics in mutilated condition which were components of a stone temple of early medieval period were found at Kamakhya in the Nilachal Hill. Sculptures having carvings of bust of female figures with heavy ornamentation which appears to be semi-divine Nymph or apsara and may be stylistically similar with the surasundari of the Sun temple at Konarak in Orissa datable to 8-12 C.E. (Plate-37) are also found at Kamakhya. Surasundari or 'celestial beauty' is identified with the image of Sakti and found to be carved on the walls of the temple. The puspsakundala and hara adorning the sculpture exhibits similarity with the Surasundari of the Sun temple at Konarak in Orissa.

Another important feature of Orissan architecture is that of Indian craftsmanship with sensuousness and love inspired by Tantricism. The same expression is found in the panels of erotic scenes as parts of the temple components at Khajuraho and other temples of Orissa of 10th-11th C.E.. Similar depiction is found in the panels of erotic sculptures at Madan Kamdev and Pingaleswar archaeological site in the Kamrup District. Like the Orissan temple style of Khajuraho, the adhisthana of the grabhagiha of the Madan Kamdev temple at Baihata Chariali in North Guwahati bears panels of erotic figures in the adhisthana of the temple. The sculptures showing bestiality on

the panels of both the temples exhibit similarity with Lakshmana temple of Khajuraho in Orissa. The *vimana* up to the *varanda* level of the Kamākhya temple decorated with floral motifs, foliages, friezes and sculptures are stylistically and architecturally similar to the early medieval temples of Orissa like the Lingaraja. The original plinth of the Hayagriva-Madhava temple at Hajo has five *tharas* and is similar to the *pabhaga* of the monolithic Kailasa temple of Ellora. 32

The Ambari inscription of Samudrāpala datable to 1232 C.E. mentioned establishment of a Sattra institution at Yogihati by the king indicates royal patronage for the development of art and crafts in the region. Thus it indicates existence of the Sattra institution even before the introduction of Vaishnavite Sattra by Srimanta Sankardeva in 16th C.E. Even now there exists a Vaishnavite Sattra near Ambari known as Ketekibari Sattra, which might be co-related with the Sattra establishment of Samundrapala. 33

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. Due to lack of royal patronage the artisans either gave up their earlier professions or were engaged in the war effort by the royal authority. Art activity of this period deviated from earlier art style and a regional art form emerged as we found at most of the temple building activity of Kamākhya in Nilachal hill, Hayagriva-Madhava temple at Hajo, Siddheswar temple at Sualkuchi, Merghar ruins at Chaygaon, Manikarneswar temple, Aswakranta temple in North Guwahati, Chatrakar temple, Umananda temple, Sukreswar temple at Panbazar, Basistha temple etc. where rebuilding or reconstruction of the temple were done either by the Ahoms or by the Koches. During this period, it appears that the artisans lost their earlier working spirit and skill which reflected in the making of the sculptural art, both in quality and quantity. Though the artisans known as *silakuityas* were still there and some specimen of their work were found at Ambari- the ten-handed Natarāja figure, sixteen handed Mahisamardini, Ganga, Yamuna, Sūrya, Vishnu in continuation of the earlier art style. During this period the artists based their art style on folk elements with features like flat face, broad nose, thick lips and low relief. The

sculptures are depicted in profile but are frontally carved. The figures are stiff and disproportionate and do not conform to the norms of the Hindu iconographic texts. Such elements can be found on the walls of the Aswakranta, Sukreswar, Hayagriva-Madhava, Basistha, Siddheswar and on a few sculptures at Nilachal hill. The stone panels at Merghar, Chaygaon having carvings with the figures of warrior carrying swords on either side of his waist, other panels with carvings of social scenes as well as Saivite figures; metal sculptures of a deity and a Garuda found at Jamabari Mirza (Plate-70, 259) are some of the evidences of the similar art form of the region. The Koches reconstructed the sikhara and antarala of the Kamākhyā temple with the masons and artisans from Koch Bihar already accustomed with the Islamic architecture, in hemispherical shape of Dome and sikhara like Minarates and Guldastas of the Islamic architecture. Thus the Kamākhyā temple had been reconstructed having antarala and mukha-maṇḍapa of do-cala type by the Koches. The repeated invasion of the Mughals from the west by this time is also reflected in the changes of the art form of the region. The Mughals during the course of their invasion, brought with them artisans, painters and musicians etc. who later on involved themselves in the art activities of the region. This is reflected in different features of making of the sculptures like headgear, dress and other architectural components at Kamākhyā temple along with other temples like Chinnamasta, Bhubanesvari, Siddheswar, Bhairavi, Kali, Tārā, Kamesvar, Kamalesvar, Pandunath in Nilacala hill representing a blending of Indio-Islamic architecture. Similar architectures are also found in the Hayagriva-Madhava, Kamesvar, Kamalesvar, Kedar temple at Hajo which were reconstructed by the Koches on the ruins of early medieval temples. (Plate-260)

The carvings of the devakosthas or niche on the outer walls of the temples with a pointed arch on the top as found in the Nilachal hill, Aswakranta, Basistha, Sukreswar temples and Siddheswar temple of late medieval period art is also a typical feature of Islamic art style. The original plinth of the Manikarnesvar temple at North Guwahati is stellate plan (star shaped), based on triangles with unique six projections appears to be datable to the early medieval period upon which brick temple was built by the Ahoms in the later period. According to Pradip Sarma, this is one of the rare examples

of such star-shaped stone temple-plinth, which is perhaps not found anywhere in India.\(^{36}\) However we find examples of stellate plan in the shrines of the Hoysala builders in the Hoysalesvara Temple at Halebid and Dodda Basappa Temple at Dambal.\(^{37}\) Thus all these temples rebuilt in the later period reflects influence of the Indo- Aryan art from Gupta age of North India to the Pala-Sena and Mughal art of Bengal, as well as the Vesara style of the Deccan, with regional and indigenous feature imbued in it. The terracotta boat at Navagraha hill is however unique in character and perhaps indigenous to the region.

As regards iconographic representation, the sculptures of Kamrup District as in the rest of India, follows the earlier Indian texts like the Agamas and the Purānas, though we find assimilation of some regional and indigenous characters in it. In India, the worship of God, both in iconic and anionic forms was prevalent from the earliest period even after the making of images in their respective symbols like Linga and Yoni representing Śiva and Devi; Vishnu-pada (foot-print representing Vishnu); foot-print or tree worship representing the Buddha.\(^{38}\) In the Kamrup District of Assam, we also found both these representations as found in its Indian counterparts. Earliest reference of aniconic worship may be made of pithas at Nilachala hill, Ugratara and Basistha which represents non- anthropomorphic worship of non-Aryan cult subsequently Aryanised as sakti pithas. It has been observed that at Ambari archaeological site, we found some of the Chaturvingsati icons of Vishnu- the twenty-four forms of Visnu which were carved as per canonical norms. Mention may be of the figure of Kesava, Trivikrama, Achyuta, Purushottama, Sridhara, and Adhokshoja.

Even though the icons were made as per the ancient Indian Śilpasāstras, there were some variations from the canonical texts like the Purānas, Agamas and Silpasāstras. As for iconographic differences of the sculptures, mention may be made of the sculptures of Navagraha at Chitracala hill where the cult of Navagrahas had been identified with the nine linga and yoni-pithas placed on a octagonal base. The Navagrahas were worshiped corresponding to the respective dhanyamantras of each

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graha as per scriptures. Further the Yajnavalkyasutra mentions the performance of grahayajna for prosperity, nourishment and safety of life. Nowhere in India the icons of Navagraha are identified with Linga - Yonipithas. Some of the figures of Navagrahas in Chitrachal hill were depicted with different iconic representations as found in the depiction of vāhanas and ayudhas in hands of the deities. The Purānas, Agamas and Silpasastras mentioned depiction of Navagraha relief either in a group or separately in asana or sthanaka posture in medieval temples as a protector for safety of the temples. Thus the concept of nine grahas as depicted in Navagraha temple poses intriguing for scholars and maybe it was fixed within niche of the inner side of the garbhatari in later periods from the ruins of earlier temple components without following the iconographic norms of ancient texts. The Kālikā Purāṇa (Ch.79, V.142-144) refers to worship of Navagrahas in Chitrachal and worship of Devas at Kajjval in east of Chitrachal. Kajjval may be identified as Kanvachal in east of Navagraha (Chitrachal) hill where as many as thirteen Śivalingas and Yonipithas in Bapuji housing Colony were found. Further the figure of Brahmā at Basistha temple is shown as carrying pustaka in his four hands, instead of other usual ayudhas i.e rosary, kamandalu, sruk, sruva, ajyasthalī, abhaya and varada mudrā of the deity. His vahana, hamsa is also found to be missing. At Madan Kamdev archaeological site, there are three figures of parsadevata found on three sides of the adhisthāna of the exterior of the temple-wall of the garbhagriha of the main temple, though they are in mutilated condition. All the three figures of the Goddesses are seated on a dead corpse. Out of these three figures, upper portion of one of them is missing. Of the remaining two figures, one had three faces which were carved with the face of a female deity in the middle with face of a lion and varaha on either side. The Goddess carries gada in right upper hand and pasa in left upper hand, while her lower two hands are missing. The deity has three vahanas depicted below on the pedestal – appears to be two birds maybe vulture in the middle and swan in the left and an animal, bull in the right. While the other figure has three female faces and carries pustaka in the upper left hand and the

41 Barpujari, H.K. The comprehensive History of Assam, vol-I, Publication Board, p.408.
42 Das, P. History and Archaeology of North-East India, Agam Kala Prakashan, p.38.
other hands are found missing. This figure is seated on corpse in lalitasana posture with vahana—an animal may be bull pedestal. It may be mentioned that such iconographic representations are not found in the Ancient Indian Texts in reference to a particular deity. Some earlier scholars interpreted the figure as Baikuntha-Vaishavi or Brahmāni, but the figures are not found to be depicted as per iconographic norms of earlier texts. As mentioned in the Agamas, the Goddess Brahmāni has four faces and holds śula and akshamālā in two of her hands while other two hands are in abhaya and varaḍa mudrā under palasa tree, while the Vishnudharmottara refers to Brahmāni as six handed carrying kamaUUalu, akshamālā, sutra, śruva and varaḍa and abhaya mudrā The deity has goose or hamsa as her vahana. Vaishnavi has sankha, chakra, gada and padma if four handed; and abhaya and varaḍa mudrā if six handed with Garuda as her vauhana.43 But at Madan Kamdev archaeological site none of the three figures exhibits these iconographic norms. Hence it appears that the Saivite temple of Madan Kamdev has been influenced by Tantricism and the figures of Parsadevatas representing the consorts of Brahmā, Vishnu and Śiva in one form as Biswarupini Mahamaya as protector of the world.44 Such iconographic features of Goddesses are perhaps not found anywhere in India.

Another reconstruction work at the Hayagriva temple of Hajo exhibits irregular setting of sculptures on the ruins of the earlier temple. The irregular and haphazard settings of the sculpture on the outer wall of the garbhagriha of the temple represent inferior craftsmanship of the artisans of the late medieval period.45 The sculptures were carved in profile and round in shape with stiff attitude. The costume of the sculptures exhibits Vaishnavite influence as found on the temple walls and the figures of Jay and Vijay are carved on the batchora of the Hayagriva-Madhava temple. (Plate-60). In the late medieval period the Vaishnavite institutions of Assam under Srimanta Sankardeva and Madhavadeva brought about revolutionary changes in the religious, social and cultural life of the people which in turn is also reflected in the art style of the region. Iconographic representations depicting the Vaisnavite style was found at Jaya-Vijaya and Ganeśa figure at Basistha, and figures of Venu-Gopala playing flute at Kamakhya.

44 Bhattacharya, Debendra Nath, Kālikā Purāṇa, ch.v, (translated) Bani Mandir.
Wooden sculptures of this period specially found at the Sattra institutions of Assam which developed in late mediaeval period also exhibits similar art style. (Plate-71).

Another important feature of the cult of Indian deities are the images of River-Goddesses in Dvara-sakhas or door-jambs of the garbhagriha. The carvings of River-Goddesses, Ganga and Yamuna of the Gupta temples as celestial body originates in heaven and descended to earth is also found in this region. River Ganga is regarded as sakti in her sacred form and purifies the devotees from all the evils. The figures of Ganga and Yamuna are found during the course of excavation at Ambari and datable to 13th-14th C.E.(Plate-253-254). Both the figures are provided with snake-canopy which resembles the figures of River Goddesses carved in Amaravati reliefs. In the sculptures of the late medieval period of the region up to the 18th C.E., a regional style has developed, having the impact of Pala-Sena art style of the earlier period with deviations and innovations revealing lack of uniformity in art form. Further the art style of the sculptures also exhibits South-East Asian influence in the physiognomy and facial traits in the Kamrup District. In this connection mention may be made of the kiratamukuta of the sculptures at Kamākhyā, Madan Kamdev and figures of Sūrya wearing avyāga.(Plate-182).

In view of the above, a conclusion may be arrived at, that the art and iconography of the Kamrup District represents similarity with the art activities and features as found in the Indian counterparts of Central India, Orissa and Bengal as well as that of South-East Asia and Bangladesh, having imbued regional and indigenous features in it.

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