CHAPTER 3
BACKGROUND OF THE TEMPLES

Situated on the south bank of the Brahmaputra, Guwahati city is dotted with many ancient temples of different times and different deities. These temples consist of three major cults, i.e. *Shaiva*, *Shakti* and *Vaisnava*. Sukreswar, Umananda, Vasisthasram, etc. belong to the *Saiva* cult while Kamakhya, Ugratara and Chatrakar temple on Chatrakar hill belong to the *Shakti* cult and are also very important *sakti peeths* of India. Among these, the Kamakhya Devalaya is very famous worldwide. Here, seven other temples are found known as *Dasamahabidya* having different forms of *Shakti* around the Nilachal Hill along with the main temple of Kamakhya. Janardan Devalaya and Pandunath Devalaya have Vishnu as the presiding deity and thus they belong to the *Vaishnava* cult. Nabagraha temple is the only temple of *graha upasana* (planet worship) in this region and was known as the centre of astronomy from ancient times.

On the north bank of the Brahmaputra ancient temples of all the above mentioned cults are found. There are four ancient temples in this area. These are namely, Aswakranta Devalaya having Vishnu as presiding deity, Manikarneswar Devalaya and Rudreswar Devalaya having Shiva as the presiding deity and Dirgheswari Devalaya having Goddess as the presiding deity.

3.1 Geographical and Historical Background of the Selected Temples

a. Kamakhya Devalaya and its Surrounding Temples

Kamakhya Devalaya, the famous temple of Goddess in the form of *Shakti* is located on a hill named Nilachala in the North Western part of the Guwahati. The
Brahmaputra River flows touching its foothills. The temple of Kamakhya is situated on a height of about 525 feet from the mean sea level and its geographical coordinates are 26°09′59.14″ North and 91°42′19.85″ East. In ancient times Kamakhya temple was accessible from four sides of the hill and each path had different names. The path in the north was known as the Swargadwar, south was known as the Singhadwar, east was known as the Byaghradwar and west was known as the Hanumantadwar. Earlier the pilgrims coming by the boat used the paths of north and west sides but due to natural causes these paths are now extinguished. Now, the Kamakhya temple is accessible and by the road in the south or the stairs in the east and by foot path from the west (Pandu area of the city). It is about 10 km away from Paltan Bazaar Railway Station and 7 km away from Kamakhya Railway Station. Dinesh Goswami Road passes by the main entrance from where the approach road to the top of the hill starts (Plate 3.1).

In the main temple of Kamakhya three forms of Dasamahabidya are worshipped. It has four chambers namely, the nritya- mandap, the pancharatna, the chalanta griha and the garbhagriha, the first or outermost chamber is the nritya- mandap and inside the wall of it there are stone inscriptions of two Ahom kings Rajeswarsingha and Gaurinathsingha of 1831 A.D. and 1860 A.D. respectively. The second chamber is the panchratna and it is rectangular shaped. Adjacent to the pancharatna, is the chalanta griha. It is square shaped and here a small moveable idol of the Goddess is found. On its walls images of Koch king Naranarayana and different deities, etc. are sculptured and some stone inscriptions are attached. The innermost part or the garbhagriha is next to the chalanta griha and it is lower than the other chambers of the temple. Here the Angapeeth of the Goddess attached with a Shivalinga. The Angapeeth or Yonipeeth is a square
shaped stone and always remains wet by the water of the natural spring that flows below it. It is said that the length of the Yonipeeth is about 1.5 feet in length and 1 foot in breadth (Ekabahu dvadasa anguli) (Goswami, 1998). About half of the Yonipeeth is covered by cloth and flowers, etc. and remaining part is worshipped by the pilgrims. On the eastern side of it Matangi (who is also considered as Saraswati) and Kamala (Lakshmi), two forms (rupa) of the dasamahabidya are exist side by side.

In front of the temple there is a balishal (specific place where animal sacrifices are performed). Now several buildings are constructed in recent years in the temple complex for the use of different purposes like, library, museum, office, etc. Thus, with the passage of time, the touch of modernity is felt within the temple complex (Fig. 3.1).

The main temple of Kamakhya is surrounded by minor and subsidiary temples and those are collectively known as Nanan Devalaya (other different temples). Among these temples, the other seven dasamahabidya temples and Shiva temple are eminent. On the Nilachala hill, different other temples are also found and among these temples Jai Durga Temple, Bana Durga Temple, Namath Kali Temple, Hanuman Temple, Ganesh Temple, Shitala Temple, etc. are worth mentioning (Fig. 3.2).

The situations of the temples of dasamahabidya are described below:

**Kali Temple**: This temple is situated on the eastern side of the main temple of Kamakhya. Here separate bhog ghar and homghar are noticed with a balishal.

**Tara Temple**: This temple is situated in the middle of the Kali Temple and Kamakhya Temple. Here also separate balishal exists.
Dhumavati Temple: This temple is situated on the southern side of the main temple in between Kamakhya and Bhairavi temple. It is also known as Kushmandi and Koteswari Pith. This temple has separate hom ghar and balishal.

Bhairavi Temple: Bhairabi Temple is situated in a downward position on the south of the Kamakhya temple. The shrine of this temple is divided into three parts, namely, Hara, Heruka and Tripura Bhairabi (Goswami, 1998). This temple has bhog ghar, homghar and balishal. There is a kunda (pond) named ‘Bhairabi Kunda’ which is also known as Kaso Pukhuri (pond having turtles). This pond is the shelter of turtles and different species of fish.

Chinnamsta Temple: The temple of Goddess Chinnamsta is situated on the eastern side of the main temple of Kamakhya.

Bagala Temple: Bagala temple is situated on the Agnikon (south eastern corner) of the main temple. The shrine of the Goddess is situated on a huge stone. At present, the temple is reconstructed. This temple has bhog ghar, hom ghar and balishal.

Bhubaneswari Temple: The temple of Bhubaneswari is situated on the top of the Nilachal Hill. Its elevation is about 690 feet from the mean sea level. This part of the hill is famous as the Brahma Parvat. The birds’ eye view of the Brahmaputra River and the city from this area are very beautiful. The temple has bhog ghar, hom ghar and balishal.

Besides the temples of Dasamahabidya, there are five Shiva temples in the Nilachal Hill. These are- Kameswar Temple, Siddheswar Temple, Amratkeswar Temple, Kedereswar Temple and Koutilinga Temple. These Shiva temples are
known as the Panchapeeth of Mahadeva. There are a number of kundas (ponds) in the hill in the proximity of the temples like the Saubhagya Kunda, Wrin Mochan Kunda, Amrit Kunda, Durga Kunda, Gaya Kunda, etc.

This famous Shaktipeeth has different legends. Kalika Purana says that Sati being unable to bear the insult to her husband Shiva by her father Daksha Prajapati breathed her last. In the grief of losing his consort, Shiva wandered about the world carrying the dead body of Sati on his shoulder. Frightened at this, all the Gods and Goddesses requested Vishnu to put a stop to the penance of Shiva. Vishnu then followed Shiva and the body of Sati was cut off into pieces one by one with his Sudarshana Chakra. As a result, different parts of her body fell on fifty one different places on the earth which became sacred places. The genital part of Sati fell here and the site become famous as the Kamakhya Peeth. In another place, the same work says that the mountain represent the body of Shiva himself and when Sati’s organ of generation fell on it, the hill turned blue for which it is called Nilachala (the hill of blue color). The Goddess who resides in Nilachala is called Kamakhya because she came here sacredly to satisfy her kama (amour) with Shiva.

About the origin of the temple building, there are two legends. According to the first the Indian cupid Kama was sent by the Gods to put an end to Shiva’s mourning after the death of Sati and to awake him again in the passion of creation. Shiva became furious at this and Kama was burnt to ashes by the angry glance of Shiva. Rati, the wife of Kama having no other way began to cry. On seeing this, the other Gods suggested her to preserve the ashes and to pray Shiva. On being pacified, Shiva brought back Kama to life without his original grace and charm. Shiva
however agreed to restore Kama to his former self on condition that a temple on the genital part of Sati was to be erected by Kama. This was done and Kama got back his own rūpa (original form). It is, therefore, said that the temple of Kamakhya was built by Gods with the help of Biswakarma, the carpenter and architect of Indian mythology. The other legend relates the construction of the temple with Naraka, the legendary king of ancient Assam. According to this legend, Naraka was made the king of Pragjyotishpura and was placed in charge of Goddess Kamakhya. He was further advised by his father not to worship any other God except Kamakhya. Naraka made his capital at Pragjyotishpura and settled a number of brahmans at Kamakhya for the worship of the Goddess. One day when Goddess Kamakhya appeared before him, Naraka was captivated by her charm and made overtures of love to her. But the clever Goddess made a condition to marry her. Thus, to fulfill the condition as laid down by the Goddess, Naraka almost completed the construction of a temple, a pond and a road from the foot of the hill to the top within a single night. It is therefore said that the temple of Kamakhya was built by Naraka. However, nothing is definitely known about the time of first building and its builder.

It is from the rise of Koch dynasty in the sixteenth century that the history of the Kamakhya temple is known. A woman of Mech community showed the shrine to Venusingha, identified with Koch king Viswasingha, who after sacrificing a pig and a cock resolved to build a temple of gold at the site. The original temple was destroyed either by the natural calamities or by the attacks of invaders and Naranarayana alias Malladev built the temple of brick and mortar on the basement of the old temple. The two stone inscriptions now seen at the entrance chamber of the
main shrine declare that king Malladeva and his Brother Sukladhaja (Chilarai) had built the temple in Saka 1487 (A. D. 1565).

History says that Kamakhya temple received endowments from the Koch and Ahom Kings and Koch King Naranarayana and his brother General Chilarai were very closely associated with the temple of Kamakhya. The temple and the people attached to it received large endowments in different periods from the kings of different dynasties. For example, Koch King Naranarayana made a large grant of land along with 140 men to the temple of Kamakhya. The other endowments made by the King includes akhandapradip and utensils of gold, silver and copper, an umbrella, articles for using in puja and rupees 25,000 (Sarma, 1975). During the period of Mughal occupation of Kamrup, the Emperor Aurengzeb issued a fishery grant in the Brahmaputra River to a priest of Kamakhya. The grant was made to the priest for certain service to be rendered to the temple. The land and men grant made by the Ahom kings to Kamakhya and other temples is found from the reign of Sivasingha (1714-1744 A.D.). The king granted 400 puras of land to 72 brahmans of Sualkuchi village, who were assigned to worship the Goddess Kamakhya along with Ugratara and Pandunath (Neog, 1960). Sivasingha made an endowment of land to Bhubaneswari temple also. Another Ahom King Pramattasingha appointed one brahman as the bardeori with a grant of 12 puras of rupit and 4 puras of bari land in Saka 1670. King Rajeswarsingha granted 95 puras of land to a bardeori of the temple. King Lakshisingha reissued a grant of 18 puras of land to a goldsmith of the temple in Saka 1697. The same King also granted 8 puras of forest land to a napit (barber) of Kamakhya in Saka 1700. Another two bardeoris of Nilachala were
assigned a *Brahmottara* grant of 108 *puras* of land in four different villages. King Gaurinathsingha made a *Brahmottara* grant of 36 *puras* of land to two priests of Nilachala in *Saka* 1710. The same King granted 10 *puras* of land to a *chandipathak* of Kamakhya temple. An *athpariya* of the temple was also granted 20 *puras* of land and for the purpose of supplying *naivadya* of each *sankranti* day. With all these grants Kamakhya temple turned into a great *zamindary*. An estimate made in 1905 A.D. shows that the Kamakhya temple possessed a total of 21155 bighas of land at different places of greater Kamrupa region (Adhikary, 2001).

**b. Ugratara Devalaya**

This temple is located in the Uzan Bazar- Latasil area of the city having its coordinates of 26°11'21.63'' North Latitude and 91°45'13.08'' East Longitude. It is situated in a plain area having residences of local people in its north, east and south sides and the Lamb road in the west side which is the entrance of the temple. It is only a few meters away from the city bus stoppage. There are two tanks beside the temple campus known as the ‘*Jorpukhuri*’ (twin tanks). The temple has concrete boundary on all its sides and the entrance is in the middle of the western side of the temple complex. There are two temples in this campus. One is of the presiding deity of this devalaya, i. e. Ugratara (Angary Tara) and another is of Lord Shiva. The main temple of the Goddess is in the middle of the complex with a kitchen (*bhog ghar*) and a store room attached with it in its right side. The Shiva temple is in the south eastern part of the devalaya campus and it is known as the ‘*Akshaiva Bhairab*’ temple. A two storied building which is used as an office of the temple management committee and also as a shelter of the priests and other workers is situated on the
southern boundary of the campus. On the other hand, on its northern side, a building is under construction which will be used for performing various religious activities of the pilgrims (Fig.3.3 and Plate 3.1).

The main temple is composed of three parts. The outermost part is the long Naamghar where pilgrims can sit or perform religious activities as per wishes. The place for lighting earthen lamps and agarbattis is also provided there. This part of the temple is covered with iron grills and doors in three sides. Its eastern side is attached with the second chamber. This chamber has idols of Dakshina Kali and the puja is performed in the northern direction. This chamber has connection with the kitchen (bhog ghar) and the store room (bharal ghar). The innermost part of the temple has a kunda and it is believed that the naval part of Sati the wife of Shiva is under this kunda. Here also puja is performed and the pilgrims can touch the water of the kunda. It is believed that by touching its water one can get the salvation and his soul will be free from rebirth into the earth.

The Shiva temple has two chambers- the first chamber has earthen idol of Goddess Saraswati and the second or inner chamber has a large stone cut Shivalinga of about two feet of height.

Goddess Ugratara is generally identified with Tikhsnakanta and Ekajata of the Buddhist pantheon (Adhikary, 2001). It is believed that after the Daksha Yajna, when Shiva was roaming with the dead body of Sati, Vishnu with his Sudarshan Chakra polysected the body of Sati. Wherever the parts of Sati’s body fell, there rose shrines. Here the navel fell and thus the place became one of the most important shrines in Hindu religious belief.
UGRATARA TEMPLE AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

1. UGRATARA TEMPLE
2. SHIVA TEMPLE
3. NAAMGHAR (PLACE OF PRAYER)
4. OFFICE AND LIVING PLACES OF THE WORKERS
5. JATRINIBAS (REST HOUSE FOR VISITORS)
6. GARDEN
7. GATE OF THE TEMPLE (TORAN)

Fig. 3.3
According to the rock inscription attached to the temple, it was built by king Sivasingha and made grant of land and man to its priests. Queen Phuleswari excavated two tanks near the temple known as the *jor-pukhuri* (twin tank). The upper portion of the temple was destroyed by the great earthquake of 1897. The present temple is constructed recently equipped with modern amenities by the managing committee.

The temple received a joint grant of 400 *puras* of land along with the other two temples- Kamakhya and Pandunath during the reign of Ahom king Sivasingha. A Copper-plate Inscription mentions another endowment of 9 *puras* of *bhogdhani* land made by Sivasingha in *Saka* 1661. The grant also mentions eight functionaries including 3 *bardeuri*, two *deori*, one *chandipathak*, one *supkar* and one *tithikar* all from the *brahman* caste and thirteen *gots* of other functionaries including *athpariya*, *bhandari*, *balikata*, *khalasara* from *sudra* caste. It also records the festive days to be observed in the temple and a detail budget of income and expenditure of the endowments. A Copper-plate of king Rajeswarsingha of *Saka* 1685 (A.D. 1763) mentions the grant of land to two *bardeuris* of the temple in three different occasions which includes more than 100 *puras* of land. The grant also included *paiks* from different villages to these two *bardeuris* of the temple (Adhikary, 2001).

c. **Chatrakar or Mangalchandi Devalaya**

Chatrakar or Mangalchandi Devalaya is situated on the top of an umbrella shaped hillock near the bank of Brahmaputra River in the Uzan Bazaar area of the city. This temple is situated in 26°11′45.71″ North Latitude and 91°45′43.89″ East Longitude. It is about 2 km away from the city bus stoppage and about 400 meters
from the road which passes by the bank of the river. The temple and the hillock are surrounded by the residential buildings.

The presiding deity of this temple is Goddess Manglchandi. The top of the hill where the shrine is located is of umbrella shaped and hence the hill known as Chatrakar (umbrella-shaped). In Yogini Tantra its mention is found as Chatrakargariri (the umbrella shaped hill). There are thirty two (32) steps which lead to the top of the hillock. There are three temples in a line on the eastern side of the temple complex. In front of these temples there is a large concrete area which is used as the naam ghar. The bhog ghar (kitchen) and bharal ghar (store room) are in the south-east corner of the campus. The office of the temple management authority, living place of the priests and other workers, rest rooms for the pilgrims, etc. are in a two storied building on the southern boundary of the Devalaya complex. A large yajnya kunda is constructed recently in the northern side of the complex. There is a Toran (gate) of Ahom age on the hillock at the end of the steps. On the two walls inside the Toran, two stone inscriptions of King Kamaleswarsingha of Saka 1721 are found. There is enough open space in the temple campus (Fig.3.4 and Plate 3.1).

The first temple among the three from the north contains two Shivalingas and an idol of Lord Ganesh. Of these Shivalingas one is the original Shivalinga of the temple and the other was donated by a devotee. On the other hand, the idol of Ganesh was established later by the temple authority. The second temple has stone idols of ‘Radha-Krishna’ with Gop-Gopinis in dancing form along with a tree, cow and water depicting the scene of doul. Beneath this idol, Narayan Sila or Salegram and idols of Krishna blowing his flute and Shiva made of brass are established in an
asana. The third temple is the main temple having the shrine of the presiding deity of this Devalaya. Here the idol of the Goddess Mangala Chandi is established. Near this idol, there is another idol smaller than the main idol which is the replica of it. It is known as Chalanta Murti (moveable idol) which can be brought outside the temple at the time of some festivals. The main idol of Mangala Chandi is made of ashta dhatu (eight metals). There are other two idols found in this third temple of which one idol is of Goddess Durga and another is of Goddess Kali. Another portion of this temple which is known as the Jogmahal contains Narayan Sila or Salegram and two newly established idols of goddesses Lakshmi and Kali.

The legend related to the establishment of this temple describes that during the reign of Ahom King Kamaleswarsingha (1795-1819), one of his Barphukans handled successfully a rebellion against the King. After dominating the rebellion, the Barphukan’s wife dreamt a beautiful lady introducing herself as the family deity of the revolutionary kings Haradatta and Biradatta. She stated that she was in a pond inside the palace in the form of idol and also said to the Barphukan’s wife to rescue and establish in the southern part of Chatrakar hill beside the two existing temples of Lord Shiva and Radha-Krishna. Accordingly the king Kamaleswarsingha was informed about the dream and the rescued idol was established here and a temple was built (Sarma, 2009).

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King Kamaleswarsingha made arrangements for regular and daily worship of the deities in the temple by granting land and men. According to a Copper-plate of the king of Saka 1722 (A.D. 1800), he brought two brahmans of two different clans from Kanauj and appointed as the priests of the temple. The priests received a brahmottara grant of 22 puras of land. King Lakshmisingha also granted a certain area of land and a number of men to the shrines of Chatrakar (Adhikary, 2001).

d. Dirgheswari Devalaya

Dirgheswari Devalaya is one of the famous and important centres of Goddess worship in Assam. Dirgheswri Devalaya is situated in the north eastern boundary of North Guwahati. The temple is situated on a hill named Dirgheswari which is also famous as Sita Parvat. The height of the portion of the hill where the temple is situated is about 1000 feet from the foothills. The scenic beauty and the serene environment of the surrounding area of the temple are very attractive. Presiding deity of this temple is Goddess Dirgheswari.

The temple has three parts or chambers. The first or outer part of the temple is an elongated naam ghar. The second part known as Jogmahal is two or three feet lower than the naam ghar. In the Jogmahal, Shivalinga and an idol of Lord Shiva
are established on the left hand side and on the right hand side the idol of Narayan and the Salegram are established in an aasan. The innermost part contains the main shrine and it is again about four to five feet down than the Jogmahal. This part contains shrines of Goddess Durga, Goddess Kali, Lord Ganesha, a Shivalinga and the angapeeth of Sati.

On the right side of the temple the bhog ghar is situated while on the left side a building for the temple management, the priests and other workers is located leaving a courtyard in between. On the left side of the temple the stone curved padajugal (feet of the Goddess) of the Goddess is seen. A temple has been constructed here. In front of the main temple, a huge building is constructed for distributing the bhog among the pilgrims. Here about one thousand people can sit to eat the bhog. Behind this building, a stream coming from the hill flows down and pilgrims use it for washing their hands and feet before entering the temple. Here, idols of Hanuman, ‘Chaturbhuj Vishnu’, Shiva, Yamraj with his bull and sage Markendeya are eminent. There is a kunda in the temple complex which is believed to be the yajnya kunda used by sage Markendeya (Fig. 3.5 and Plate 3.1).

There are two stone cut idols of Lord Ganesha on the way to the temple each on the right hand side of the staircases. The first idol of Ganesha is believed to be the largest stone curved idol in Asia.

Goddess Dirgheswari is said to be one of the eight Yoginis of Kamakhya. The Goddess is also known as Bagheswari because Bagh (Tiger) is her bahan (Carriage). This temple is also known as ‘Gupta Kamakhya’. Legend says
that the temple stands at site where the left thigh of Sati (wife of Lord Shiva) fell (Adhikary, 2001). On the other hand, the great hermit Markanda had his hermitage here. Makandeya Purana, the shortest among the 18 Puranas was written in this Dirgheswari Devalaya by Sage Markanda (Saikia & Bhattacharyya, 2009). In this puran the mention of this place is found.

The stone inscription attached to the temple says that Panidihingiya Borphukan under the order of King Sivasingha built the present brick temple of Dirgheswari in 1735 A.D. Another rock inscription found there says that the main entrance to the temple was built in Saka 1659 by Tarun Duara Phukan, an official of Ahom king (Adhikary, 2001).

In Saka 1661, Sivasingha endowed the temple with a large number of men including the priests and other functionaries to maintain the worshipping to be performed in the temple. A copper-plate inscription of Saka 1661 records that Tarun Duara Phukan under the order of Sivasingha appointed 4 gots of brahmans and 50½ gots of Sudras of different castes for the services of the temple. The temple was also endowed with one Dighari bil for fishery purpose. King Rajeswarsingha presented a japi (a kind of board hat) made of silver weighting 216 tolas (one unit of weight) for covering the image of the Goddess Dirgheswari. Rajeswarsingha also endowed the temple with 426 puras of land and 53 gots of paik belonging to different villages (Adhikary, 2001).

e. Sukreswar Devalaya

Sukreswar temple is situated on a small hillock named Hastachal in Panbazar area of the city and its geographical coordinates are 26°11′17.27″ North and
The presiding deity of this temple is Lord Shiva. There is a Shivalinga of about six feet of height in the main temple. Another smaller Shivalinga is seen in the left side of the entrance of the main temple. Near this Shivalinga, a raised concrete area is found where devotees light earthen lamps filled with mustard oil or ghee (clarified butter) and incense sticks. This exists in the North West corner of the long naam ghar and there is a door between the Shivalinga and this raised area. On the other hand, in the north eastern corner of the naam ghar or in the right hand side of the entrance of the main temple there are idols of different deities placed in the wall and on a pavilion of about one metre height. The doors of the main temple and the naam ghar are in a line and devotees sit in both the sides of the naam ghar leaving way to the main temple in the middle of it. Here tilak and sacred thread are given to the devotees. In the left hand side of the temple there is a three storied building. Its ground floor is used as the office of the temple management committee and as living quarters of the priests and other workers. The first and second floors are used as the jatrinivas for performing various activities of pilgrims (Fig.3.6 and Plate 3.1). There is a big drum in the varanda of the temple. A small courtyard is in front of the temple building and its surrounding is covered by the settlements of local residents.

The belief related to Sukreswar says that the Shivalinga which is being worshipped here was established by sage Sukracharyya and he started worshipping Lord Shiva. It is believed that the Shivalinga of this temple is one of the twelve jyotirlingas of the world. The deity Shiva of this temple is worshipped here in the
Plate 3.1: Photographs of the Temples
form of phallic symbol. It is also known as Dakshayini Bhimasankar (Bhattacharyya, 2001).

It is known that a Shivalinga was worshipped at this site at the time when Rudrasingha conducted a survey of holy shrines. King Sivasingha extended royal patronage to the temple by granting land and men. But King Pramattasingha built a brick temple on the ruins of an old temple (Adhiakary, 2001). There is a rock inscription of Rajeswarsingha in this temple.

It is found that the Sukreswara temple received grants of land and men from the Ahom Kings. A certified copy of Copper-plate Inscription bearing the date 8 Kartik, Saka 1680 (A.D. 1758), records that eleven gots of paiks from brahman caste, and 55 gots from sudra caste were assigned to the temple by Rajeswarsingha (Adhikary, 2001). The Inscription also mentions that an endowment of 243 puras of devottara land was made to the temple. A fixed amount of the revenue collected from the said land would be spent in the daily and regular puja-seva in the temple as specified in it.

f. Basistha Devalaya

This temple is located in hilly terrain on the southernmost part of the city. The coordinates of this temple is 26°05′ 40.32″ North and 91°47′ 05.24″ East. The temple is far from the hustle and bustle of the city with a beautiful natural environment. The temple is situated on a hill known as Sandhyachal Pahar and is surrounded by hills in its three sides- north, west and south and the road from the city ends in the east at the premise of the devalaya complex. In the northern side of the road near the temple the shops containing materials used in the worshipping process exist while in the
southern side of it the parking place and a market complex of different shops and tea stalls, restaurants, etc. are found. After crossing this area, a building is found of which ground floor is used as the office of the management committee and the first floor is used as the Basistha Mandir Urban Public Health Centre. Beside this building, there is a small room to keep the foot wares of pilgrims. At this point three routes or directions are found. The first from the north goes upward in the north-west direction to reach the building constructed by the temple authority for performing the functions of pilgrims like, marriages, annaprashan, churakaran, etc. The second or middle path goes to the main temple which is in the east-west direction. In the south of the temple, the pujari griha or the living place of the priests and other workers is constructed. The bhog ghar (kitchen) where the bhog is prepared is attached with the main temple in the northern side. The main temple has three parts. The outermost part is the naam ghar which is an open place. Here pilgrims can perform naam- prasanga and other activities. The second part is separated from the naam- ghar by half walls having an entrance in its middle. In its northern side, the idols of different gods and goddesses are established in a small raised platform. The third or innermost part of the temple is in a downward position and there are steps from its entrance which is in its east. The steps end at a cave like rocky place and this part is about circular in shape. The main shrine is found in a downward area of stones with water which is known as kunda. The shrines of Golokeswar Shiva, goddess Tara and Mangaleswar Shiva exist in separate forms in two different kundas.

The third route goes downward in south-west direction and leads to the streams and the Ganesh temple. There is a small bridge and by crossing it one can
go to the Manasa temple situated on the other bank of the streams. All the three routes are connected with each other or it may be said that the end of each of these are interconnected. The stream Kanta or Vasistha Ganga flows from the hills in the north-west to southward direction and then divides into three streams- Sandhya, Lalita and Kanta. These three streams again meet in a place flowing eastward and create the Divyakunda or Mahakunda as described in the Kalika Puran (Fig. 3.7 and Plate 3.1). Near this kunda, another kunda is found which is known as Vasistha Kunda. Beside these kundas near the south bank, a chair like stone is found amidst the water and it is believed that this seat was used by the great sage Vasistha in doing meditation. The streams then enter in the plain area flowing as one stream and thereafter known as Vasistha river.

There are many mythological stories related to Basisthashram Devalaya. From the time of Puranas, it was famous as the hermitage of great sage Basistha and centre of Vedic meditation. The legends in the Kalika Puran say that King Nimi lost his physical appearance as a result of the curse given by Basishtha. On the other hand, Basistha also lost his physical appearance (deh) due to the counter curse by the king. The sage then following the advice of Brahma meditated Vishnu here to regain his physical appearance (Adhikary, 2001). Satisfying Vishnu, he flowed down Sacred Ganga by three streams known as Sandhya, Lalita and Kanta. Basistha took bath at the confluence of these three streams which is known as Basistha ganga and regained his worldly figure (Neog, 1960). The sage did sandhya here regularly hence the place is known as Sandhyachal. According to another description in Kalika Puran, two pilgrims named Betal and Bhairav were sent by a sage to learn the ‘mantras’ of Shiva.
BASISTHA TEMPLE COMPLEX AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

1. BASISTHA TEMPLE
2. NAAM GHAR (PRAYER HOUSE)
3. BHOG GHAR (KITCHEN)
4. JATRINIBAS (FUNCTION HALL)
5. PUJARI GHARA (LIVING ROOMS OF THE PRIESTS)
6. GANESH TEMPLE
7. NAAM GHAR OF THE GANESH TEMPLE
8. OFFICE OF THE TEMPLE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE & BASISTHA MANDIR URBAN PUBLIC HEALTH CENTRE

Fig. 3.7
worship from Basistha (Sarma, 2002). From this it is known that this place was famous for Shiva worship. The other legend says that the king of Kamarupa, Naraka became irreligious as a result of the intimacy with Bana, the ruler of Sonitpur and began to harass the *brahmans* and even neglected the Goddess Kamakhya. At that time Basistha came to worship Kamakhya, but was debarred by Naraka. Basistha then came to Sandhyachal towards the east of Nilachala and began his meditation (Adhikary, 2001).

The temple of Basisthashram was built during the reign of Ahom king Rajeswarsingha. A Copper-plate Inscription of *Saka* 1675 of king Rajeswarsingha records the grant of land, men and money to the temple for *puja-seva*. King Lakshmisingha in *Saka* 1694 gave *brahmottara* land to some of the *bardeuris* of the temple. The certified copies of the grant records that Lakshmisingha granted 6 *puras* of land to four *brahman* brothers. Another charter says that 8 *puras* of land was granted to other two *bardeuris* of the temple. The *supkar* and other *bardeuris* of the temple also received land grant from King Lakshmisingha. (Adhikary, 2001).

g. Umananda Devalaya

Umananda Devalaya has its unique location at the top of a small river island known as Bhasmachal or Mayurdweep or Peacock Island amidst the Brahmaputra River. It is situated in a geographical coordinate of 26°11'48.20" North and 91°44'44.02" East.

In the northern side of the island the Chandrashekhar Mahakal temple is found and beside it the temple of Baidyanath Shiva is situated. The entrance is in the western side of the courtyard of the temple. The upward staircases end at the
entrance or the *toran*. In the north of the staircases the Haragauri temple is found. On the other hand, in the lower part of the western side of the island a temple of Hanuman is constructed in the middle of 1970s. The well constructed staircases connect different parts of this small island. An open place covered with trees is found from where the upward steps to the main temple start. This island is home of rare golden langoors and the scenes of playing the langoors on the trees steal the minds of pilgrims (Plate 3.2).

There is a long chamber in front of the main shrine and is known as *chalanta griha*. *Bhog ghar* (kitchen) is in the south of the main temple and the *bharal ghar* (store room) is in the east of the main temple. The main shrine of Umananda Shiva exists in the innermost part of the temple which is known as the *garvagriha*. It is lower than the other parts and pilgrims have to go downstairs to visit the deity. The *Shivalinga* exists here amidst the stones and surrounded by the *Salegrams*, *Nandi-Bhringi*, etc. the water flow which is known as the Ganga exists north of the *peeth*.

Here Shiva is the main deity. A legend says that in the beginning of the creation, Shiva sprinkled *bhasma* (ashes) and imparted knowledge to his wife Parvati, at this place (Adhikary, 2001). According to another legend, here Shiva meditated in grief of losing his wife *Sati* which was interrupted by *Kamadev*. For this, *Kamadev* was burnt to ashes by the fire of Shiva’s anger and hence the hillock got the name Bhasmachal (Bhattacharyya, 2009). On the other hand, it is said that for the check of the pleasure of *Uma* (the consort of Shiva), Shiva is here forever, therefore it is known as Umananda.
Plate 3.2: Photographs of the Temples

- **BASISHTHA TEMPLE**
- **BANESWAR TEMPLE**
- **RUDRESWAR TEMPLE**
- **MANIKARNESWAR TEMPLE**
- **PANDUNATH TEMPLE**
- **JANARDAN TEMPLE**
There is no information about the temple building built earlier to the reign of Ahom king Gadadharsingha. The king built a Shiva temple there in Saka 1616. The temple was badly damaged by the earthquake of 1897 A.D. Besides the main temple, two more small temples are seen. The one left to the main temple is called Chandrasekhar temple and the other lies in front it but towards left and is said to have been built by king Kamaleswarsingha (1799-1810). There is a rock inscription of Gaddharsingha of Saka 1616 in the temple. The earliest extent document relating to land granted to the Umananda temple is of Mughal Emperor Aurungzeb. He re-assigned certain area of land to the Doloi of the temple and his son. It is also mentioned that the revenue from the said land amounted to rupees 30 of which rupees 20 would be spent for ‘the holy low and high hills’ and the remaining rupees 10 were allotted for the maintenance of the two priests. (Goswami, 1939) On the occupation of Guwahati by the Ahom after 1681 A.D., Gadadharsingha built the brick temple of Umananda in A.D. 1694 and granted land and men. On the other hand, King Rudrasingha granted land and 54 men to the temple in Saka 1619 (A.D. 1697) (Neog, 1974). In Saka 1661 (A.D. 1739), the King made arrangement for the daily and regular worship at the temple and assigned 16 gots of brahman paik and 129 ¾ gots of Sudra paik of different villages. Four tailors belonging to Muslim community were assigned to the temple on Saka 1715, by one official of King Sivasingha. In Saka 1694 (A.D. 1772), Lakshmisingha declared a boat and 159 gots of paiks belonging to both brahman and sudra castes as Adani and were assigned to the temple for the maintenance of two akhandapradipa (Neog, 1974). A charter of Gaurinathsingha records that the King made all arrangement through his officials to light
the *akhandapradipa* of the temple. The King also donated different materials used in worshipping made of gold and brass. In that charter it is also mentioned that the King donated 6 persons to the temple to blow the *kaliya* (a musical instrument) at the time of worship of the deity (Adhikary, 2001).

**h. Baneswar Devalaya**

Baneswar temple is situated in Panbazaar area of the city and it is on the opposite side of the temples of Sukreswar and Janardan. The geographical coordinate of this temple is 26°11’14.04” North Latitude and 91°44’28.16” East longitude. Baneswar Devalaya has relatively smaller campus among the devalayas selected for the present study. The temple complex is covered by boundary walls. Settlements and business establishments are in its three sides while in the northern boundary there is Mahatma Gandhi Road. This temple building has two chambers lying back to back. The first chamber is smaller and it has two *Shivalingas* and its door is south facing. The second chamber is elongated and has two parts. One of it is used as *naam ghar* where the devotees perform *kirtan-bhajan*, etc. the other part contains the main shrine which is a *Shivalinga* and this part is few feet lower than the remaining area of the temple (Fig. 3.5 and Plate 3.2).

The presiding deity of this temple is Shiva. It is believed that Lord Shiva gave one thousand *Shivalingas* to the King Bana of then Pragjyotishpura. The king established one of those thousand *Shivalingas* here when he came to meet another powerful king Narakasur. Since then it is known as Baneswar Shivalinga and the temple is as Baneswar Devalaya.
This temple was built by Ahom King Lakshmisingha in Saka 1691 and issued grants of land and men to it for performing daily puja-seva. A charter of Chandrakantasingha, another Ahom King records that the king reissued the grant of 81 puras of land made by the former King Lakshmisingha to the temple. These lands were scattered in different amounts in different villages. The temple received a grant of men including seven gots of brahman paiks and forty five gots of sudra and ganak paiks of different paraganas. Thus, the temple received land properties at different locations and men from several places (Adhikary, 2001).

i. Manikarneswar Devalaya

Manikarneswar Devalaya is situated in Rajaduar area of North Guwahati. The temple is on a hill named Manisaila or Manikarneswar and its geographical coordinates are 26°12′26.05″ North Latitude and 91°44′53.57″ East Longitude. Lord Shiva is worshipped regularly in this temple. This sacred place is situated near the confluence of the Mangala River (Barnadi) and the Brahmaputra River. Manikarneswar temple is easily accessible from Guwahati by boats and ferries. On the other hand, an all weather black- topped road approaches the hill and there are concrete staircases for the visitors to reach the top of the hill for visiting the temple. But now the temple is in a dilapidated condition and there is no modern construction in the temple complex is observed (Plate 3.2).

It is told in Kalika Purana that invaluable gems, pearls, gold, ruby and other precious stones were looted from beneath the seas, heaven and earth by King Narakasur and he got them deposited in the shape of a mountain and the King built a beautiful palace on that place. The mountain thus is known as the Manikarneswar. According to
Kalika Puran, the temple and its *Shivalinga* were established by the King Narakasur (Sarma, 2009). According to another legend, after *Dakshya Yajna* when Lord Shiva was roaming around with the body of his wife Sati on his shoulders, rested under the *bel* tree situated on the Manisaila or Manikarneswar hill. In this place a temple was established and it became famous as Manikarneswar Shiva (Das, 2009).

One King Debesheswar built a temple over the *Shivalinga* in first century. This was ruined in the great earthquake and a new was erected during the reign of Ahom King Rajeswarsingha in 1755 A.D. (Sarma, 2009). Director of Archeology says that this brick built temple was raised upon a star shaped ground plan of a stone temple of 10th -11th century A.D. The temple seen at present in a dilapidated condition was broken in 1897 A.D. There was a pond named Manikarna or Manikarnika but it has now merged with the Brahmaputra.

King Rajeswarsingha made the arrangements for daily and regular worship at the temple of Manikarneswar in 1755 A.D. A Copper-plate Inscription of King Gaurinathsingha reissued a grant of land to Thaneswara, the *Bardeuri* of the temple. The grant includes 24 *puras* of *rupit* land in Baregaon in Patidarrang *paragana*. It also mentions another grant of 12 *puras* of *bari* land in Makampubgaon in 1782 A.D (Adhikary, 2009).

**j. Rudreswar Devalaya**

This temple is situated in Rudreswar village of North Guwahati. The terrain of the temple area is plain and its Latitude and Longitude are 26°13’06.43” North and 91°43’41.22” East respectively. Lord Shiva is the presiding deity here. At present there is one pond found in front of the temple campus. The temple is surrounded by the
residences of local people. Now Rudreswar temple is seen in a dilapidated condition. There is a raised platform made of the ancient bricks found in front of the main temple which is not observed in any other temple selected for the present study (Plate 3.2).

Rudreswar Devalaya was constructed by King Pramattasingha in 1749 A.D. King Rudrasingha, the father of Pramattasingha camped in North Guwahati and prepared for an invasion of Bengal. But the King fall sick and breathed his last at this place on 13 Bhadra of Saka 1636. The King’s dead body was taken to Charaideo, Sivasagar and was buried there. After that his son Pramattasingha constructed this temple in memory of his father and established the Shivalinga named Rudreswar in this temple (Adhikary, 2001). Thus, the names of the village and the temple became Rudreswar. Pramattasingha appointed different categories of people and granted land to regulate the worshipping of the temple.

The small temple of Rudreswar received a devottara grant of 55 gots of paik including their paikan lands from Pramattasingha. The land and men belonged to Patidarrang, Kacharimahal, Barbangswar, Pachimpar, Pubpar, Barbhag, Uparbarbhag, Nambarbhag and Sarubangswar paraganas. Each paik was given 2 puras of land (Adhikary, 2001).

**k. Janardan Devalaya**

The hillock on which Janardan devalaya is situated is known as Mandarachal and it is few metres lower than the hillock where Sukreswar devalaya is situated. The geographical coordinates of this temple is 26°11′16.62″ North Latitude and 91°44′27.58″ East longitude. The main entrance of the temple premise is in northward direction. The office of the temple management committee is in the right hand side of the entrance or in
the south-east corner of the temple complex. On the other hand, Manikulashram a school of Sanskrit education run by Janardan Devalaya is in the left side of the entrance. There is an open space or courtyard in the middle of the complex. The yajnya kunda where fire sacrifices are performed is situated next to the office of the management authority. There is a small Shiva temple in the eastern side of the main temple. In the western side the living place of the priests and other workers are constructed. The jatrinivas or the function halls are situated in the northernmost part of the temple complex.

The main temple is an elongated building consisting of different chambers. The first chamber of the temple building contains idols of different deities cut in the walls. The next chamber has stone idols on a pavilion of about one foot of height on the floor in the north east corner of it. The door of the main temple is in the eastern side. In the main temple the idol of Vishnu is found on a raised platform of about one metre. In front of this idol, there is a small round shaped deep kunda which is now covered with grills. There is another long chamber from where the idol and the kunda of the main temple can be seen and here the religious functions of the devotees are performed.

In Janardan devalaya, on the bank of Brahmaputra River various religious activities are performed and pilgrims can go to the river for taking bath or other purposes using the steps. This ghat of the river is used for all the religious activities which need water bodies for its completion, especially for the rituals performed for the departed souls.

The Janardan Devalaya is dedicated to Vishnu. It is found in Yogini Tantra that Mandar Parvat is a place of Vishnu and if one worships Vishnu here facing towards east,
his predecessors for hundred generations will gain salvation. Another legend says that Prahlad worshipped Vishnu here to face his father Hiranyakashipu’s atrocities. Vishnu killed Hiranyakashipu and installed Prahlad in the throne of Kamarupa. Later Prahlad introduced the Vishnu worship at Mandargiri. The present Janardan Devalaya is said to be on this Mandargiri. On the other hand, according to other legend, king Bali performed here a *yajnya*. In this *yajnya*, Vishnu appeared in his ‘dwarf’ incarnation and made Bali to go into the *patal*. Then one of his commanders named Jana fought against Vishnu and was demolished by Vishnu with his *Sudarshan Chakra* (Sarma, 2002). Since then Vishnu is worshipped here and known as Janardan Vishnu.

The brick temple of Janardan was built by Ahom King Pramattasingha in *Saka* 1666. This shrine received grants from several kings. King Sivasingha appointed one *brahman* as the *bardeuri* of the temple by giving him 12 *puras* of *rupit*, 8 *puras* of *pharingati* and 6 *puras* of *kathiatoli* in *Saka* 1664 (A.D. 1742) (Neog, 1960). Lakshmisingha created a *brahmottara* endowment to the *gitapathak* of the temple with a grant of 7 *puras* of *rupit*, 10 *puras* of *baotali* and 7 *puras* of *bari* land (Adhikary, 2001).

1. **Aswakranta Devalaya**

Aswakranta Devalaya is situated in a very serene environment on the north bank of the river Brahmaputra. Its distance from Fancy Bazaar, Guwahati is about 3 kilometers by waterways. One can come to this place via Jalukbari and Saraighat Bridge from the city (Sarma, 2003). There are two temples in Aswakranta Devalaya. One of which lies in a lower terrace overlooking a precipice contiguous to the Brahmaputra River and the other on the top of the hill. Besides these two temples there is another sacred place on the river bank east of the hill which is known as the Gayatirtha. It is
believed that the stones found here bear the footprints of Lord Krishna and the horses of his chariot. Therefore it is known as Vishnupad (the stone having footprints of the Lord Vishnu) also. Here, religious activities for the salvation of dead parents or forefathers or relatives are performed.

The temple on the hill is the temple of Anantasayee Narayana and is also known as the upar devalaya (devalaya situated on the top). The temple was constructed by Ahom King Shivasingha. In the innermost part of the temple which is known as the garbha griha, the idol of Anantasayee Narayan exists and it was sculptured in a stone of about 150 centimeters of height. It is said that it is the only idol of Anantasayee Narayan found in Assam and one of the important among the few found in all over India. It is believed that this idol was brought by a sage from Nepal and he dreamt to establish it in this place. Therefore, the Nepali pilgrims often visit this temple. In the middle part (chalanta griha) of the temple one stone idol of Sri Krishna playing his flute exists. In the walls of the chalanta griha one rock inscription of King Shivasingha of 1720 A.D. is found.

Another temple known as Kurma Janardan is situated in the foothills on the bank of the river Brahmaputra. The present temple was constructed by the Darrangi Raja during 1604-1633 A. D. The main shrine of this temple is of Kurma Janardan - the second avatar of Lord Vishnu as believed in Hindu mythology. The bigrah exists in an about 2.5 feet deep rectangular garbha griha. In the chalanta griha, the idol of Chaturbhuj Basudev is seen. In the walls of the temple, idols of various deities have been sculptured (Plate 3.3). It is said in Purana that there is no other holy place equal to
Aswakranta in this universe. Four hills namely, Chandrakut, Godanta, Soma Saila and Joyata surround this holy place (Sharma, 1982).

Ahom King Sivasingha made arrangements for daily and regular worship, and appointed a number of functionaries. But, the sculptures and carved stones lying in and around the temple revel that the site contained at least one stone temple of about 11\textsuperscript{th} -12 the century A.D. The ancient temple was ruined in 1897 as a result of the great earthquake and after this in 1901, a new temple came to its being under the patronage of Lord Kurzon. (Sharma, 1982)

Aswakranta devalaya is also associated with legends. It is believed that while Krishna with Rukmini came from Kundil Nagar near Sadiya in Upper Assam after their Svayambara crossed this place on his way to Dwaraka. His cavalry (i.e., Aswa or Aswabahini) was attacked, i.e. Akranta by Naraka, the King of Kamrup (Sarma, 2002). Another myth regarding the Devalaya is that when Shrikrishna came to kill King Narakasura, his horses of chariot became tired and took rest in this place. Therefore the place is called Aswaklanta (Aswa- horse, klanta- tired) (Choudhury, 2009). On the other hand, another story relates that Arjuna was brought Saptadola by Krishna when Abhimanyu was killed. On the way to Saptadola the horses of Krishna’s chariot become tired here and this place become known as Aswaklanta (Adikary, 2001). Thus, all these legends say that the place was visited by Lord Krishna.

The temple of Aswakranta received endowments from Ahom king Sivasingha. The king appointed one brahman as the priest of the temple and granted him 20 puras of land. Another brahman was appointed as the Gitapathak and he received a grant of 145 puras of land. A Copper-plate grant of Sivasingha records that 12 puras of pharingati
and 12 puras of bari land were granted to the Shiva deori of the temple in Saka 1711 (Neog, 1974). Gaurinathsingha donated two families to the temple and were assigned to the duties of mudoi (trader). Another grant of the King mentions that one brahman was appointed as bhog randhani (cook for the offerings) of the temple in Saka 1715 and was given 12 puras of land(Adhikary, 2001).

**m. Pandunath Devalaya**

Pandunath Devalaya is located on the bank of the river Brahmaputra in Pandu area near Maligaon. It is situated at the western foothills of Barahparvat which is regarded as the continuation of Nilachala hill and its geographical coordinates are 26°10′20.99″ North Latitude and 91°41′17.03″ East Latitude. The temple is situated on an undulating topography of the foothills and the river is next to the temple building. For this the temple faces the problem of bank erosion time to time. The Pandunath Devalaya is surrounded by the river Brahmaputra in the north, old Kamakhya road in the south, Art of Living building in the east and Pandunath Village in the west. The old Railway Station of Pandu is near the temple.

Pandunath temple was reconstructed covering the stone cut idols of different deities scattered on the foothills of Barahparvat. Here, one Ganesha temple, one Vishnu temple and one Shiva temple is found. In the Ganesh temple, six idols of Lord Ganesh is found of which five were curved beautifully on a big stone and the remaining one is curved on another stone. In the Shiva temple, the shivalinga is worshipped. On the other hand, in the Vishnu temple, Vishnupeeth, charan of Vishnu (feet of Vishnu), Sudarshan Chakra, etc. are observed. In another place the stone curved idols of Chandra (Moon) and Surya (Sun) are noticed and though the temple has not been constructed here yet,
regular worshipping is performed. Besides these shrines, a bhog ghar and a bharal ghar are constructed. This temple has facilities of dormitories for the pilgrims to stay at nights (Plate 3.2).

Vishnu is the presiding deity in Pandunath Devalaya. The legend of Naraka found in case of Kamakhya is connected with Pandunath also. The two demons Madhu and Kaitava were killed on the Varah hillock which is situated to the east of the Basakuta hillock by Madhava (Vishnu), a Bhairava of the Mother Goddess Kamakhya. On the other hand, the YOGINI TANTRA says that Trilocan Shiva (Shiva having three eyes) resides on the Pandusila and that Pandunath is located on the south bank of the Lohitya where Shiva is worshipped. Another legend describes that the Pandavas during their agyatbas lived here for some days and visited Goddess Kamakhya. Before visiting Kamakhya they worshipped Ganesha and Lord Pandunath. Since then it was ritual to visit Pandunath devalaya first to the Kamakhya devalaya. (Das, 2009)

The rock inscription attached to the temple records that it was built by Koch King Raghudevnaarayana in Saka 1507 (Adhikary, 2001). The copper plate inscription of Ahom King Gaurinathsingha in Saka 1707 describes about the land grant made by the King (Neog, 1960). King Rajeswarsingha placed his guru Natigosain in charge of the Pandunath temple.

Koch King Raghudeva provided regular worship in this temple. But his son and successor Parikshitnarayan used the temple as a rampart. (Sarma, 1975) Ahom King Sivasingha granted 400 puras of land to the priests of Pandunath, who were also the priests of Kamakhya and Ugratara (Neog, 1974) Rajeswarsingha assigned the temple under the charge of Natigossain from whom he received initiation. (Bhuyan, 1975)
Lakshmisingha appointed one man as the *deori* of the temple in *Saka* 1695 and granted him 65 *puras* of land. In *Saka* 1690, King Gaurinathsingha granted 13 *puras* of land to the *Gitapathak* of the temple. A grant of 165 *puras* of land was made and a tax of 4 *annas* was levied per *pura* yielding revenue of 41 rupees and 4 *annas* annually which would be spent on *nityanaivedyas* (daily offerings), *nityabhog* (daily food offerings) and the offerings of other festivals. Chandrakantasingha settled one functionary of Pandunath in Guwahati to worship the royal deity and he was granted 31 *puras* of land in total. Thus, the temple of Pandunath received royal patronage till the last days of the Ahom rule (Adhikary, 2001).

**n. Nabagraha Devalaya**

Nabagraha temple is located on a hill known as Chitrachala in Silpukhuri area of Guwahati City. The geographical coordinates of this temple are 26°11′27.5″ North and 91°45′55.32″ East. This temple can be reached by different roads and is accessible throughout the year. The immediate surroundings of the temple in north and west are free. However, in the south of the temple there is the road and in the east a children park in maintained (Plate 3.3).

The temple of Nabagraha constructed during the Royal period was damaged in the earthquake of 1897 and the present structures seen here are constructed under the initiatives of the temple management committee with the help of the devotees. In side the temple stones representing the planets of Indian astrology are worshipped. Each shrine is covered with cloths identical to the planets like white colour for Moon, blue colour for Saturn, etc. on the right side of the entrance of the temple building idols of Ganesh, Shiva, Vishnu and Lakshmi, etc. are established. The temples of Ganesh and Shiva are
Plate 3.3: Photographs of the Temples
constructed on the back side of the main temple. There is a *yajnya griha* (pyre house) with *yajnya kunda* on the right hand side of the temple. There are two buildings in front of the temple on both the right and left hand side. These buildings are named as Jyotish Bhaban and are used as the office and living place of the priests and other workers.

The Kalika Puran says that Brahma, the creator of the universe, sacrifices a planet at this site for which the entire area came to be known as Pragjyotishpura meaning the city of Eastern Astrology (Barua, 1976). Thus it can be said that the tradition of worshipping the planets was very ancient in this site. The temple house nine *Shivalingas*, representing the nine planets of the Hindu astrology (Sarma, 2002).

It is found that the temple was built in 12th century A.D. which was rebuilt by the Ahom king Rajeswarsingha in *Saka* 1674. There is a tank in the plain area of the southern side of the hill which is known as Nabagraha tank or Silpukhuri dug in *Saka* 1675 (Adhikary, 2001).

Ahom king Rajeswarsingha made endowment of land and men to the temple for the maintenance of daily *puja-seva* of the temple. An inscription mentions that the *puja-seva* of the temple suffered due to shortage of *paiks* and hence the *Barphukan* appointed new servitor during the reign of Kamaleswarsingha in *Saka* 1732 (Bhuyan, 1975). The mention of the functionaries like *barichoa*, *khatowal* and *bhogdhani* suggestes that the temple possessed *bari* (garden), *khat* (Eastates) and *bhogdhani* lands (Adhikary, 2001).

### 3.2 Management System of the Temples: Then and Now

The kings of different dynasties in different periods extended patronages to the shrines scattered all over Assam. The temples selected for the present study are not of exception and got royal patronage. The kings constructed and reconstructed the buildings
of these shrines and provided all the facilities to maintain the daily puja- seva. The kings brought Brahman families from the mainland of India especially from north India and engaged them in doing the puja- seva of the assigned devalayas (temples). The kings in different times gave land and other properties to the devalayas and the brahmans who are engaged to maintain the devalayas. The properties given to the temples were moveable as well as immovable. The movable properties include utensils, different images made of metals including gold and silver, boats and traders free from all taxes and punitive measures, cow, buffaloes, elephants, etc. On the other hand, immovable properties were the temple buildings and huge quantity of land. Besides these, men were assigned to each temple from different castes to make the daily and regular worship. Some of them were priests, some were to assist the priests and some were to maintain the temple establishments.

To maintain the temples’ affairs Dolois were selected with royal permission from the Brahman families engaged in worship of the respective devalayas. The men from these families are known as the bardeoris. The Dolo was the chief officer of a Hindu temple and his main duty was to collect the rent of land donated to the temple and to utilize it for the maintenance of temples. The Dolo also received land, men and other property out of grants made to temple. At that time, the entire expenditure of the devalayas was maintained from the production of these land properties.

During the last part of Ahom reign due to natural as well as political and economic changes the temples had to face many problems. There grew a series of disputes among the different functionaries regarding the management of the temple affairs. During British administration the management of the temples and its properties
were gone more or less in the same line as those in the reign of Ahom kings. But, with the enactment of Assam Act IX, 1961 the land properties of the devalayas had gone to the hands of the government and changes occurred in the machinery of the management of the ancient temples of Assam.

In present days these ancient temples are managed by the committees consisting of members of Govt. officers, bardeuri and local people. In some temples, such as Dirgheswari, Aswakranta, Basisthashram, Chatrakar and Nabagraha, still the designation of Doloi is prevalent and he is selected from the bardeuri families of the respective temple and is responsible for the management of the temple’s activities. It has been observed that the Doloi of Chatrakar and Dirgheswari are not directly involved in the daily worshipping of the temple but in the other three temples mentioned above, the Doloi of the temple act as the priest and participate in the daily worshipping with other priests. In case of other temples, instead of the Doloi the Secretary of the committee is responsible for the overall management of the temple. The secretary should be a bardeuri and is either selected or elected by the other bardeuris of the temple. The number of members in the management committees and its tenure of work, etc., are different in case of different temples. Generally, the DC of Kamrup district or the Circle Officer of the Revenue Circle of the temple area is appointed as the president of the management committee. The Doloi or the secretary and the working president or in some cases vice-president of the committee and members are selected or elected by the bardeuris of the temples and one or two religious persons of the locality of the temple area are nominated in the committee as the members. The tenures of the management committees are found to be 3 or 5 years and after the completion of the tenure, new committees are formed. In
Kamakhya temple the management committee is known as the Kamakhya Debuttar Board and this board is responsible for the management and development of Kamakhya temple. At present the Govt. of Assam gives a fixed annuity to the temples against the land properties acquired from the temples. But the amounts of the annuity received by these temples are very less to maintain the regular activities of the temples. Therefore, the main portion of expenditure is managed from the donations of the devotees.

**Summary Statement**

In this chapter, the geographical and historical backgrounds of the selected temples along with their present management system are presented. In the first section, the geographical and historical backgrounds of all the temples are described. The locations of the temples, their physical settings, accessibility of the temples etc. are depicted along with the maps and photographs. On the other hand, the historical backgrounds of each of these temples are also discussed. All of these temples have mythological importance in the Hindu religion and also had great impact on the society in ancient times. Besides the mythology related with the temples the historical aspects are also described here. It is important to note that all of these temples received patronages from the kings of different royal dynasties and among those the Ahom kings were major patrons of these temples. The kings bought *brahman* families from different parts of India to serve these temples and settled them in the villages of Assam and gave them land and other properties. They also assigned different categories of people from different castes to serve the temples and these people also received land and other properties from the kings. Thus, the kings offered patronages to the temples by giving land, men and other properties.
In the second section, the management systems of the temples are discussed briefly. It helps to know the changes in the functionaries of these temples through time and in present days how the temples run. The properties of the temples no more remain in hands of the priests and other functionaries and as the result the pattern of the involvement of the people from the families upon whom the responsibilities were laid have been changed.

References


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