Chapter VI

Cultural Life in Religious Establishments
The term culture is primarily concerned with the cultivating of the human mind. In its wider sense the term includes language, customs, institutions, traditions or human behaviour patterns socially acquired as well as socially transmitted by means of symbols through ages. Culture is related to a tradition(s) which is concerned with the passing on of a knowledge or of a doctrine through ages. (1) Culture has been described generally “as including such behaviour as is common to a number of men forming a distinguishable group and which is capable of transmission from one generation to another or from one country to another through various processes”. (1a) In our religious context one of the salient aspects of the Indian tradition is renouncement and in the context of the Indian tradition the renouncer is supposed to have represented the symbol of authority in the society to which he belongs. The renouncer sets the order of an alternative life-style different from the usual social life of the people. The renouncer in his/her order tries to create ideas / philosophies to find out the path to salvation from the worldly bonds. He is also known to have come closer to the lay community to lead it along the path to emancipation. Now, the group the renouncer forms has been called by the term sampradāya and not sect, because the word sect means a group of followers. (2) Thus a sampradāya essentially appears to have been a religious group with their followers / sects. The sects of renouncers maintained their distinctive life-styles or a parallel life, though apparently in relative
isolation, but actually in association with the lay people in the society. This earned them support from traders as well as kings, which monastically settled them with all the required necessaries for permanent sustenance. (3) This ensured their pursuasions of their respective religious cultures. They are known to have played a social role in the period prior to 600 AD. (4) The present chapter is concerned with the social manifestations of their sectarian religious cultures in eastern India during the early medieval period.

One of the salient features of the cultural life of the early medieval times is the spread and growing popularity of Bhakti ideology. The Bhakti tradition in the period laid emphasis on taking on the sufferings of the lay people and thus on the association with them in society. In other words the Bhakti ideology because of its social association could become an effective means of social integration. (5) Mainly as an outcome of this socially integrating ideology the monastic organizations which grew maintained social linkages with the lay community in society. Their social relationship was reciprocal by nature. It has already been noted that the monastic organizations received both royal and commercial patronage which led them to establish the complex networks of divergent services in connection with rural and urban economy. Thus the religious establishments had an access to a large local base in the lay people. Royal patronage was mobilised in order not only to achieve political legitimacy to the power of the king, but also to substantially enable the establishments to
influence the lay communities with whom the monasteries were socially connected. The exercise to socially influence the lay people could be really effective through the educational functions of the monastic organizations (vihāra / matha) or temple complex. (6)

One may begin with the well known case of the university at Nālandā, located within the Nālandā mahāvihāra. According to the Life, the courses offered by the university included the Great Vehicle, the Vedas, Hetuvidyā, Šabdavidyā, Cikitsāvidyā, works on magic, Atharvaveda, Sāmkhya as well as miscellaneous works relating to philological, legal, philosophical, astronomical subjects, Yoga – Sāstras and the Paninian system of Sanskrit grammar. (7) It does not seem to be irrelevant to say that endeavours were there at the university to analytically understand the function of the human intellect in the area of knowledge relating even to Vedic orthodoxy. Thus there developed the non-conformist trend in the exercise of knowledge. This is probably why Cikitsāvidyā (the knowledge of [the application of] medicine) was chosen as a subject discipline of study. Probably in relation to the subject of medicine, Yoga – Sāstras were accepted for study; because, as in the case of Cikitsāvidyā, so also in that of the Yoga – Sāstras, the aim is fundamentally to understand the structure of the human body to prolong life by using certain vegetables and minerals. (8) It appears therefore that the Nālandā university was an institution of learning with so high a standard that foreign students came to the university to solve their doubts. The students also from
China, Korea (Sin-lo [Corea]), Tibet (Tu-fan) came to study at the university, according to Hsuan – Tsang. (9) I’tsing writes that eminent scholars assembled to discuss possible and impossible doctrines and after the attainment of excellence of their opinions they became famous for their wisdom. (10) Admission to the university of so high standard was therefore very strict in order naturally to keep the standard with that of the subjects. According to Hsuan – Tsang, only two / three students out of ten applicants could be successful in obtaining admission to the university. (11) The teachers who taught the students were also eminent such as Śilabhadra, Candrapāla, Guṇamati, Sthiramati, Prabhāmitra etc. And the results of their teaching were carried by their students to foreign countries. Thus Kumārajīva, Guṇavarman, Paramārtha, Subhakarasimha Dharmadeva are known to have acted as missionaries in China. (12) Similarly foreign scholars also came to study at Nālandā. Thus Hian Chao, TaoHi, Āryavarmā from Korea, Korean Hwui – yieh, Tao – Shing, a Tokhara student, Tao – Lin etc are known. From different parts of India also scholars went to acquire knowledge from the Nālandā University. Probably Nāgājuna, Āryadeva, Diṅgāga (Kāñci) were associated with the university in acquiring knowledge therefrom. (13) Therefore the university of Nālandā appears to have been a catholic and cosmopolitan institute of advanced studies in different branches of knowledge.

Yet it was primarily a premier religious centre where the images of Avalokiteśvara, Buddha, Bodhisattva, Hāriti, Tārā were
worshiped. Along with these certain rituals were practised such as (a) the morning bath together; (b) the ablution of the image of the Buddha in the scented water with the accompanying music by girls and setting up the image in the temple; (c) Caityavadāna which was going round a Stūpa three times every afternoon chanting ślokas, reciting a sūtra and reading a selection from scriptures by Asvaghoṣa known as Service in Three Parts. At Nālandā the ritual was practised in the manner of going round from place to place, from hall to hall, chanting ślokas, and the Service. It was accompanied by monastic servants and children who carried incense and flowers. Some monks performed this ritual by themselves. They sat alone, faced the shrine, praised the Buddha in their hearts or went to the temple in small parties kneeling side by side in worship. (14) It is to be noted that the congregational mode of worship of a few deities was probably set aside and instead an individual mode of worship according to a particular system of śādhanā was pursued for each Tāntrika deity. (15) Thus Tantrayāna was gradually being adopted.

Mahāyāna is known to have become popular by absorbing local cults and as a result many local gods and goddesses were incorporated in the Mahāyāna pantheon. The Mother goddess cult and the concerned ritual practices are known to have been pursued for a long time. These subsequently assumed a particular form of worship in the Śakta religion. These rites and rituals based on the Mother goddess cult led to the development of a particular form of worship or śādhanā called
Tantra which influenced Buddhism as also other religions of India. Thus developed Tantrik Buddhism. (16) The Tantrik Buddhist pantheon included such gods and goddesses as Maitreya, Mañjuśrī, Avalokitesvara, Tārā, Māricī, Vajrasattva, Vajrayogini etc.

The images of Tantrik Buddhist gods and goddesses that have been found from the excavated sites at Nālandā include Maitreya, Siddhaikavira (the most popular form of Mañjuśrī), Arapacana (another form of Mañjuśrī), Vāk (also a form of Mañjuśrī), Mahārājalīlā Mañjuśrī, Lokanātha (the most popular form of Avalokitesvara), Khasarpaṇa (another common form of Avalokitesvara), Jātamukuṭa Lokesvara, Ārya Tārā, Aṣṭamahābhaya Tārā, Khadiravani Tārā (the most popular form), Dhanada Tārā (bestowing riches to the devotee), Piṭā – Māricī (invoked in connection with the Sun god and possibly an adaptation from the Brahmanical Śūrya), Yamātī (the destroyer of Yoma, i.e. Kṛṣṇa); besides Mahāsarasvati (the goddess of wisdom). (17) It appears that the monastery adapted certain popular deities in order to probably maintain its popularity. The worship of the goddess Dhanada Tārā probably meant the worshipers’ connection with the surrounding trade networks stated earlier.

The university also included brahmanical gods and goddesses such as Viṣṇu, Śiva, Vāsudeva, Gaṇēśa, Sarasvati, Śūrya etc. (18)
The availability of these specimens / images of deities may refer to the origin / practice of the concerned art activities at the university. This brings one to the statement of Tārānātha. According to him, a highly skilful artist named Dhiman lived in Varendra during the time of the Pāla king Dharmapāla. His son was Bitpalo. The father and his son produced many works in cast – metal, sculptures as well as paintings and thus developed a particular school. The followers of the father developed the Eastern School of Painting. Probably in association with this School certain works in painting were produced at the university of Nālandā. Mention may be made in this regard to the *Aṣṭasāhasrika – Prajñāpāramitā* Manuscript which was painted at the university in the 6th regnal year (i.e. 983 AD) of the Pāla king Mahipālavadeva. A *Dhāraṇī* manuscript was painted at the university in the 14th regnal year of Nāyapāla, i.e. 1041 AD. Another *Aṣṭasāhasrika Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript was painted in the 15th regnal year of the Pāla king Rāmpāla, i.e. 1088 AD at the university. Thus the university of Nālandā functioned also as a great centre of arts in eastern India.

In fact *vihāras* were essentially religious centres. And incidentally the cult of Avalokiteśvara was practised not only at the Nālandā mahāvihāra, but also the Āśrama – *vihāra* in Samataṭa in the early part of the 6th century. Avalokiteśvara is the foremost of the Bodhisattvas who, if worshipped, bestows the results prayed to the devotee. So Avalokiteśvara was worshiped with scents, flowers,
candals, incenses (gandha – puspa – dipa – dhūpādi ……); and the vihāra was named after the god – Avalokiteśvara – asrama – vihāra. (20) The monks of the vihāra probably sought, through this ritual, to socially compose the belief that if the god was worshipped properly, then the desired results could be achieved. Thus they endeavoured to popularise the cult of Avalokiteśvara.

Mahāyāna practices are also known from the Ba - ra - ha monastery at Tāmralipta. In this monastery the monks used to perform the worship of a Caitya and then the ordinary service. Now, a Caitya stands for the sacred building where the relics of the Buddha were preserved. So stūpa has been accepted as a name for Caitya. However, in the late afternoon / at the evening all the monks assembled and then came out of the monastery and walked three times around a stūpa offering incenses and flowers. All of them knelt down and one of them used to chant hymns describing the virtues of the Great Teacher, i.e. Buddha. He chanted 10/20 slokas. Then they returned to the place in the monastery where they assembled. There they sat down and then a reciter used to take his seat on the simhāsana and read a short sūtra from the ‘Service in Three Parts’ by Asvaghōṣa. Of the three Parts the first part contained 10 slokas in praise of the three Honourable Ones, i.e. the Buddha, Dharma and Saṅgha. The second part contained the Buddha’s words. And the third part contained prayers expressing the wish to bring one’s merit to maturity. The Tree Parts were well spoken (subhāsita) following one another. When the Sūtra – reciter came
down from his seat, the head priest bowed to the seat. And thereby he saluted the seats of the saints or Bodhisattvas and then he returned to his own seat, and in this way other priests performed the same thing. If there had been many priests, then three / five priests would have performed the rite and the rest would have saluted the assembly at the same time and then taken their seat. This is how the rites were practised by the priests in the Bha-ra-ha monastery in the Eastern Aryadesa as mentioned by I"tsing. (21)

In passing it is to be noted that the third part of the Three Parts brings out the priests’ wish for others’ well-being. In other words, the monks of the Bha-ra-ha monastery may be assumed to have thought of the welfare of the society to which they belonged. Herein lies the social significance of their ritual practice.

Apart from ritual practices, the Buddhist religious structures, represented by vihāras at Mainamati and Paharpur were no doubt the centres of sculptural art, still in the know of the daily life of different categories including the lowest ones of the society which they belonged to. These are apparent from images and terracotta plaques found from the excavated sites.

The images that have been found at Mainamati represent brahmanical deities such as Sūrya, Šrāvāni, Gāpesa, as well as also Tantrik Buddhist deities representing the Dhyāni Buddha, Akṣobhya,
Padmapāṇi, Manjusri, Tārā, Cunda etc. The images are endowed with stelae and prabhāvalī in the background. The images are dated to 7th – 9th / 10th century AD.

And the terracotta art pieces from Mainamati show a wide range of motifs. The motifs include human figures representing a boy, a girl, a warrior, a singer, a dancer, working female / male; demigods like Gandharva, Apsara etc; animals such as lion, elephant, deer, boar, monkey, horse, buffalo, fish, tortoise, etc; flora etc; peacock killing a snake, a pair of wrestlers etc.

The major antiquities found at Paharpur include sculptures and terracotta reliefs. Quite a good number of images have been found from the site. These are both brahmanical and Buddhist. The Buddhist images include a few bronzes of the Buddha, the Buddhist counterpart of Kubera, stucco heads, and a stone image of Hevajra with Sakti. An image of Bodhisattva Padmapāṇi has also been found from the site of Paharpur.

About two thousand terracotta plaques were found in situ and about 800 plaques found loose at the site of the Somapura vihāra. The size of the plaques ranges from 8 inches to 14 inches in length and 8½ inches in width. The plaque motifs include Tantrik Buddhist deities like Manjusri, Tārā, Padmapāṇi, brahmanical deities like Śiva, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Gaṇeśa, Sūrya, a mother with her child in the lap; a
female with a pot on her waist; a female waiting beside the door; a bent and skeleton figure with a bag hanging from his shoulder; an unshaved mendicant with a stick in his hand; a brāhmaṇa in worship; female and male figures with instrumental music players; a farmer with a plough on his shoulder; an archer on a chariot; male – female in lovely mood etc. The plaques thus illustrate the folklore of the society. Apart from these, flora and fauna have also been depicted on the plaques.

Antiquities from the Bhasuvihar site mainly include bronze images, terracotta plaques and inscribed terracotta sealings. The bronze images represent the Dhyāni Buddha, Akṣobhya, Avalokiteśvara, Bodhisattva, different varieties of Tara etc.

The terracotta plaques (generally 16 ½ inches x 12 ½ inches x 3 ½ inches and 14-15 inches x 9 ½ inches x 2 ½ inches) thematically represent the motifs such as human figures, animals, birds, geometric shapes, flora etc.

The vast majority of the inscribed terracotta sealings bear the personal names such as Jinarakṣita, Dharmadeva etc. Apparently they were associated with the vihāra. Inscriptions on the other seals could not be read satisfactorily. (22) So their connection with the vihāra is not understood.
The practice of decorating religious structures with narrative panels suggesting social connection is socio-historically significant to note. The appearance of the monastic structures at Manamati and Paharpur (c. 7th – 8th centuries AD) with decoration in the medium of terracotta art has been suggested to have introduced a new phase of art in Bengal. As years rolled on with the consolidation of the regional powers, so also gradually the art ideally went deep into the soil developing a regional identity of its own in practice. The wide use of terracotta plaques in the religious structures brings out the cultivation of the creative potentials of the terracotta artist in early medieval Bengal. The themes in the motifs on the religious structures are indicative not only of the process of socio-cultural interactions at the different levels of the society, but also illustrative of the artists’ fanciful imagination. It is important to note that the terracotta creations do not show any pantheonistic association with the monastic structures, nor the Buddha – legends. The creations appear to have been primarily architectural, but thematically social suggesting the awareness of the realities, as regionally conceived, of the early medieval rural society. Therefore it was a regional – cum – local (23) idiom of terracotta art. To this idiom belonged the local / village artist’s pictorial creations of the contemporary social realities. These the artist communicated through the socially effective and popular medium of the vihāras. (24)

Besides, the above-noted sculptures are apparently indicative of the Tantrik Buddhist practices at the vihāras.
Such Tantrik Buddhist rites are also known to have been practised at the Vikramaśilā mahāvihāra also. It appears from Tāranāth that the mahāvihāra was particularly known for studies in Tantrik Buddhism. Jñānapada, Dipāṅkara - bhadra, Bhavabhadra, Lāṅkājaya bhadra etc. were the outstanding scholars in the field of Tantrik Buddhism. (25) Tibetan scholars like Nag - tsho and his associates are also known to have come to the mahāvihāra obviously to study Tantrik Buddhism. (26) Thus the mahāvihāra became an international forum for meeting between Indian and Tibetan scholars on exchanging opinions on Tantrik Buddhism. This resulted into a considerable scriptural intercourse. Sanskrit works relating to Tantrik Buddhism were translated into Tibetan. The names of as many as thirteen authors / panyātis of the mahāvihāra are known to have been associated with the works of translation. They are : Buddhajñānapada, Vairocanaraśīta, Ratnavajra, Vāgīśvaraśītra, Vīryasirīha Ratanakarasānti Jetari, Prajñākaramati, Jñānasrimitra, Dipāṅkarasrījñāna, Abhayakaragupta, Tathāgatarakṣita, and Dharmakīrtī. (27)

A good number of upādhyāyas namely Mahāvajrāśana, Kamalakulisa, Narendra - Śrī Jñāna, Danaraksita etc are known (28) to have understandably scriptural-cum-academic, particularly translational affairs of the mahāvihāra under study. Dipāṅkara - Śrījñāna himself is also known to have translated into Tibetan a
number of his own works; in this work a monk named Viryasiṃha helped him. (29)

Besides there were 58 Sainsthās or Institutions within the campus of the mahāvihāra, in which 108 Pandits used to live. (30) Apparently the Institutions were academic and they might have been associated with Tantrik Buddhist studies in view of the mahāvihāra's wide and deep involvement in intellectual exercises in Tantrik Buddhism. Thus the mahāvihāra appears to have been an international centre of learning and as such it contributed much to acculturation between India and Tibet. It therefore appears that the acts of translating manuscripts were seriously / carefully performed at the university of Vikramasila.

This kind of information is also available from another recently known Buddhist vihāra of ancient Bengal. The Jagjivanpur copper plate refers to the act of writing in the Nandādirghikā vihāra (........lekhā [pa]nādi – arthe ......). (31) Now, a terracotta plaque has been found from the site of Jagjivanpur, which shows probably a manuscript on the lotus. (32) This may lead one to think that the act of writing a manuscript was performed at the Nandādirghikā monastery.

Occasionally it may be assumed that such acts of manuscript writing were performed by the Avaivarttika monks of the vihāra, who
resided there. Now the word Avaivarttika, according to Buddhist belief, requires a brief introduction in the occasion.

The human mind does not become pure even when it becomes the Bodhi mind. The Bodhi mind is like a stream of consciousness which changes every moment. The chain of momentary consciousness has neither a beginning nor an end. It operates together with the act-force and leads either to degradation or to emancipation, according to the actions done good or bad. The Bodhi mind is charged with impurities such as desires, memories etc which are all unreal. To purify this chain of consciousness is the aim of the Bodhisattva. But so long as impurities are not removed, the Bodhisattva shall remain subject to a series of transmigration either in the world of gods, or men or of animals etc. But with the removal of impurities one after another the Bodhi mind realises within itself an upward march through different spiritual spheres called bhūmis. The Bodhi mind stays in each only so long as it is not qualified to ascend to a higher sphere. Thus when the Bodhi mind crosses the ten bhūmis, according to the Dasabhūmikā Sūtra, it obtains emancipation and is rewarded with omniscience. The bhikṣus of the Bodhisattva group would ascend the terrace of omniscience and never descend from there. This is why an Avaivarttika is of unwavering conduct (avivartanāśīla) in attaining merit. Thus he becomes prepared to sacrifice his all for the benefit of suffering humanity. In other words, an Avaivarttika Bodhisattva has compassion for others. This conceptually tallies with the Vajrayāna
concept according to which also the Bodhi mind is qualified with Koruna (compassion). The ten bhūmis the Avaivarttika crosses are as follows:

1. Pramūdita (joyous),
2. Vimala (immaculate),
3. Prabhākari (Shining),
4. Archiṣṇatī (radiant),
5. Sudūrjaya (hard – to – win),
6. Abhimukhi (right – in – front),
7. Duraṅgamā (far – going),
8. Acala- (immovable),
9. Sadhumati (the stage of good thought), and

Thus the Avaivarttika monks with perfect wisdom and compassion believed in the philosophy of dissuading others from wrong path. And they formed a sect of the Mahāyāna order. This sect was settled at the vihāra at Jagjivanpur as the record shows — ary = avaivarttika – Bodhisattva – gaṇa. The monks of the same congregation are also indicated in the expression —– āsta – mahāpurusa – pūdgala – ārya – bhikṣu – saṅgha. Thus the vihāra appears to have been inhabited by the noble congregation of monks who included eight great Bodhisattvas namely Samantabhadra, Maitreya, Avalokiteśvara, Kṣitigarbha, Khagarbha, Vajrapāṇi, Mahāśrī and Sarvanivāraṇa – Vikśambhi. They belonged to the noble school of the Avaivarttika Bodhisattva. The word Bodhisattva consists of two words such as Bodhi meaning enlightenment and sattva which means essence; so he is Bodhisattva who is qualified with the enlightenment of essence. This brings one to the popularity of the ritualistic circle called mandala of eitht great Bodhisattvas with the
donors and makers of Buddhist icons, in eastern India from the pre-Piśā period. The figures of the eight great Bodhisattvas artistically appear as grouping around the Buddha / Avalokiteśvara. (39) The Piśā king Mahendraπāla of the Jagjivanpur cp monastically / institutionally settled probably this mandala in ancient Bengal. It is also to be noted that the word Bodhisattva has been directly connected with the Avaivartika school. So the expression asta - mahāpuruṣa - pudgala has been suggested to mean that the eight great Avaivartika Bodhisattvas were personal entities, crossed eight bhūmis and had perfect wisdom and compassion for others. (40) Although they had their own philosophical exercises, still they may be assumed to have had actually thought of others’ well – being. This is how the social relevance of their royally supported settlement is apparent.

Culturally brahmanical mathas also did not lag behind. According to the Tipperah grant of Lokanātha, Lord Ananta – Nārāyaṇa was adored by the chief gods, the Kinnaras, Gandharvas, Vidyādhāras, the chief serpent gods, Yakṣas etc (41) and set up in the temple caused to have been royally established in the forest area. In other words, local religious beliefs in supernatural powers may be assumed to have been provided royally with an institutional locus. Thus brahmanical culture was carried forward by bringing the local beliefs into its fold. The process of acculturation was carried on through the popular medium of the temple and it was supported supposedly by the matha.
Another deserted area of Śrīhāṭṭa was royally brought to the limelight of culture of ritual practice of Pañcamahāyajña through the institutional medium of the matha (bali - caru - satra pravṛttaye ----- brāhmaṇa pañcamahāyajña ...........). (42) In this way the brahmanical matha served as a centre of disseminating culture in the area wherein it was located. It has already been mentioned that there was a family of three generations' duration in Gaya, which supported a brahmanical āvāsa which gradually turned into a matha. The matha was the abode of only those ascetics who were respected and not deformed and engrossed in meditation (Vyanganarya - Va [ba] his tapodhanajanai sthātavyam = air = āśrame). (43) And this rule was enforced by those who were engaged in religious austerities (iti = etad = vratacārībhir = niyamitam bhūyād ........). (44) Their meditation and or religious practices were supposedly connected with the lord Viṣṇu who has been described in the record as Śrimad - eko Murārista[rī]ḥ tadanu muni - jano ------ Śrimān = Lokaikānātha bhuvana - hita - vidhātā. (45) So, the matha appears to have been the centre of the Viṣṇava religious culture and as such it had some influence over the people of the locality. This is probably why it became popular and so well known as the record shows labdha pratiṣṭhita mathaḥ. (46)

Welcome addition to the knowledge of the brahmanical matha’s role as a centre of learning is provided by the Paschimbhāg cp of Śrī Candra. (47) The plate refers to the worship of Jaimani (or Jaimini) in one of the mathas at Brahmapura. Now, in Indian tradition
Jaimani is well known as the founder of the *Pūrva - mīmāṃsā* school of Indian philosophy. To note the point occasionally, the *Pūrva - mīmāṃsā* interpretes the *mantras* of the *Vedas*. In other words, institutionally there was provided the scope for studies in the *Vedas*, particularly its *Pūrva - mīmāṃsā* school; and there were residentially settled students, as noted earlier, who studied this branch of Vedic knowledge. Therefore Jaimani’s worship in a *matha* along with supposedly an institution for Vedic studies does not appear to have been an unusual religious development at Brahmapur. Probably by the tenth century Jaimani as a traditional philosophical founder – author had become a celebrity. The cultivation of the *Pūrva - mīmāṃsā* school of Indian philosophy was popular in early medieval Bengal. And one of the great exponents of this school was Prabhākara who was celebrated as Gauḍa – mīmāṃsaka. In other words, a *Pūrva - mīmāṃsā* tradition was current in ancient Bengal. That current tradition might have been royally supported and the author was deified and worshipped in a religious establishment in the tenth century.

This connects one with the reference to the independent worship of the god Agni – Vaisvānara in a *matha* at Brahmapur. *Agni* is well known as the *Ṛgvedic* god of fire. And Vaisvānara is regarded as one of the seven seers / sages who composed the 79 – 80 *suktas* of the 10th *mapdala* of the *Ṛgveda*. The *suktas* are concerned with the invocation of the god Agni to grace one with blessings in real life. And prayers have been made to Agni to provide huge wealth to
him who composed the relevant mantras to propitiate the god. (49) So Vaisvānara was worshipped in a matha to ensure wealth in real life at Brahmapura. This is probably why Vaisvānara has been mentioned in the record as Agni – Vaisvānara in order to retain his divine feature as the bestower of wealth. So, a Vedic tradition appears to have been actively and institutionally pursued supposedly in order to cultivate its social relevance in the context of the Brahmapura settlement. Yogesvara is an epithet of Śiva. It means that Śiva was the lord of Yoga. And Mahākāla is the prototype of Śiva. Though a brahmanical deity, still the god was worshipped by the Buddhists. This may lead one to assume that in early medieval Śrīhatta there was a blending of acculturation between the brahmanical, particularly Śiva and Buddhist image worships. This might have been a continuation of the current tradition of acculturation between the Śaivas and Buddhists in early medieval Bengal. In this connection it is significant to note an inscribed image of (c. 11/12th century) Mahākāla with a close affinity to the Eastern school of Medieval Art in the collection of Ashutosh Museum, Calcutta. (50)

To note in passing, the tradition of such religious acculturation seems to have been pursued because of the existence of the differentiated ordering of various communities, as noted earlier, in the rural society of Śrīhatta. (51)
Regarding the cultural role of a brahmanical matha more valuable information are available from an inscription of the Pāla period. The inscription found in the ruins of Bangarh locally known as Sivbati (25 miles away from Balurghat, West Dinajpur) gives an account of the lines of Śaiva teachers associated with a huge matha at the place. According to the record the Śaiva teachers were namely Vidyāśiva, Dharmāśiva, Indraśiva, Sarvaśiva, Mūrtisiva and Rūpasiva who belonged to the Durvāśā sect. (52) The name – ending Siva indicates their belonging to the Mattamayūra subsect of Śaivism. The Mattamayūras were so – called because they behaved like the intoxicated (matta) peacocks (mayūras). (53) But rationally they may be supposed to have been a tribe with the peacock as their totem. Now, since the dance characteristic commonly belongs to both the peacock and the god Śiva, so the Mattamayūras may be assumed to have leant on worshipping Śiva through the worship of their totem peacock. Gradually they might have associated themselves with the doctrine of Siddhanta School of Śaivism (Siddhāntamārga) (54) which is known to have emphasised the catholic attitude to study philosophical systems so as to ensure the way to spiritual attainment and progress. (55) The Mattamayūras, according to the Ranod, Bilhari, Chandrehe, Gurgi epigraphs, were established and became popular subsect in central India and maintained their spiritual order from guru to sisya (gurusisyaparampara) and also sent their branches in different directions. (56)
Vidyāśīva’s disciple Dharmaśīva caused to be made a temple at Vārāṇasi where his guru Vidyāśīva used to live. Now the Pāla king Mahipāla I caused to be built a huge matha for Dharmaśīva’s disciple Indraśīva. (57) It is interesting to note that the temple with which the Mattamayūras were associated was called hypethral (golaki) or round temple and the matha which was constructed nearby the round temple was called Golaki matha. (58) The matha built by Mahipāla I at Bangarh was called Golagi matha and Indraśīva was the first Saiva ācārya among the Mattamayūra ācāryas, who was institutionally settled at the Golagi matha at Bangarh in early medieval Bengal. Probably the Pāla king came in contact with the Mattamayūra Saiva ācāryas of the Durvēśa sect in Vārāṇasi during his possible rule over that region. And the Pāla king was undoubtedly devoted to the ācāryas of the Mattamayūra subsect. Out of his devotion he caused to be built the Bangarh Golagi matha for Indraśīva. (59) This is how the Mattamayūras in association with the Pāla king came from Vārāṇasi to Bengal.

Now, the royal association of the Mattamayūras was probably rooted into their influential philosophical / intellectual exercises as well as philanthropic activities. This leads one to examine their cultural role in early medieval Bengal. According to the Liṅga Purāṇa (c. 800 AD – 1000), the way to liberation lies through the construction of Saiva temples, even if they become kuta (dwelling) and mandapa, as well as also additions to and renovations of Saiva temples. (60) The
verses 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20 of the Bangarh praśasti in consonance with the prescription of the Linga Purāṇa show that some ascetics of the Bangarh Golagi matha caused to be constructed Śaiva temples (kīrttih ....) as well as also undertook the excavation of large tanks (.....dirghikāh), the gardening of parks (......ārāma sataih .......) and charitable works for the sake of the people (yasmāt purṇa – manoratherthi phalaith .......). (61) In these charitable works Mūrtisiva of the Bangarh matha played the instrumental role perfectly realising his sense of religiousness, kindness and wisdom so as to remove the sufferings of the people at large (......dkarma – taroddhayā ...... tattva – jñāna – hutsānāranirabhūttasyātipunyātmānaḥ. (62) In other words Mūrtisiva endeavoured to make the Śaiva religion socially acceptable by performing philanthropic works on the one hand, on the other by refuting other philosophical systems intellectually. He is said to have refuted the doctrines of the Digambara Jainaś and Kṛṣṇaśaśvādatavādins (śāsvātita digambarārthaviraha – bhrāntiṁ tiroṣkurvati – Kṛṣṇaśaśvāta – Kathannirasya vahuso vṛddherabhavaṁ gupe). (63) The Digambara doctrine essentially emphasised that no property, even a piece of cloth should be possessed by a monk so that the attainment of Nirvāṇa is ensured; and no woman can reach the state of Nirvāṇa according to the doctrine. (64) In other words, their doctrine was not meant for all to achieve salvation. Kṛṣṇaśaśvādatavāda conceived Advaitavada as good as Vaiśnavas who did it as of the relation between Brahman and the world either in terms of difference or in that of identity – in – difference. (65) He refuted probably in order
to easily make the people understand the essence of the Śaiva philosophical system besides the abstraction of non-dualism (advaitavāda). Mūrtisiva’s reputation surpassed even that of Prabhākara (ācchadyaiva .... Prabhākara ..... gurun) (66) who was probably identical with the Gauḍa-mīmāṃsaka Prabhākara. (67) It was so much that scholars and goldsmiths announced that an amount of gold equal to the weight of Mūrtisiva would be given to him who could surpass the former in knowledge and wisdom as well as in the performance of glorious (socially utilitarian?) deeds. Mūrtisiva remained uncontested and no one was found equal to him ----

Vidvadbhiḥ sa – suvarṇakara – nivahaiḥ kāmaḥ tulōropita yat kirttiḥ = mna pariksita na hi samibhāvaṁ gata ākara. (68) In other words, Mūrtisiva may be assumed to have been successful in socially establishing the Śaiva faith in the midst of other philosophical systems.

The assumption is epigraphically supported by an inscribed portrait statue of Mūrtisiva, collected from Dogachia in the Nadia district. (69) The statue is 84 cm high and 41 cm wide, standing in the middle; broken off at the knee and the two hands are cut. The remaining part of the statue is 42 cm high and 46 cm wide, shows the feet on a lotus. The central figure is accompanied by two other figures on both sides. These figures are also accompanied by two male attendants occurring on the extreme sides. The pedestal shows the figures of a seated male and a female with their folded legs in
worshipping attitude. (70) Now, the inscriptions occurring on the pedestal of the panel describe the status of the figures –

\[ \text{Pandaṭita ayaja } śrī \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \]

\[ \text{Pandaṭita ayaja } śrī \text{ Mūrtiśivaḥ} \]

\[ \text{Pandaṭita ayaja } śrī \text{ Yadumahiyaśaḥ} \]

The expression \text{Pandaṭita ayaja} has been emmended as \text{Pandaṭita} = \text{agraja} meaning front-ranking scholar. (71) Therefore the three ascetics were understandably renowned scholars. And the panel may lead one to think it as a team of three scholars headed by Mūrtiśiva. All the scholars were respected in recognition of their scholarship, as the panel depicts. Two scholars were Śrī Mūrtiśiva and Śrī Yadu, but the rest is unknown by name.

Occasionally it should be mentioned that the two Mūrtiśivas ---- one of the Bangarh \text{prāṣasti} and the other of the panel ---- have been suggested to have represented one and the same person in view of his appearance in the Pāla kingdom during the period to which roughly belong both the \text{prāṣasti} and the panel. (72)

Now, on the basis of the provenance of the panel it may be argued that there might have developed another centre of Mattamayūra school at Dogachia in the Nadia district. Had it been so, then the panel would have been fixed there; but it has been found as a stray find from the place. And Dogachia does not offer any evidence of being a potential archaeological site. On the contrary, K.G. Goswami’s Bangarh excavations’ reports do not inform of the finding of any
image of Murtisiva from the site of Bangarh. It would indirectly lead one to infer that the panel showing Murtisiva was transported from Bangarh to Dogachia for the sake of its security. (73)

Be that as it may, the Bangarh matha appears to have been an institutional forum for Śaiva philosophical / intellectual exercises carried on by a number of eminent scholars. Consequently the matha became glorious. In this Mūrtiśiva played a significant role. This is probably why Mūrtiśiva's portrait (74) was made and installed in the temple at Bangarh. This is for the first time that a Śaiva teacher was sculpted in Bengal. (75) In other words, Mūrtiśiva appears to have been deified in the Bangarh matha. The Śaiva teacher's becoming a deity does not seem to have been an isolated fact. Śrī Candra's Paschimbhāg copper – plate refers to the temple of Jaimini the well known founder of the Purvamināṃsa school of Indian philosophy. The plate brings out that a great exponent of Indian philosophy, seven centuries after his appearance, was deified and worshipped. This tradition might have led to the deification as well as worship of Mūrtiśiva in the Bangarh matha, who was also a great exponent of Śaiva philosophy.

Having been inspired by the intellectual grandeur of the matha, its Śaiva ācāryas might have spread their cultural activities in Orissa also. In the recent past, on the passage wall of the entrance of the Somesvara temple (c. 950 AD) at Ranipur Jharial in Orissa there has been found a seated sculpture with both the legs folded and the hands
held near the breast. With the help of the inscription on the lintel over the entrance, the figure has been identified with Gaganasiva. The name - ending Siva indicates his belonging to the Mattamayūra school at the religious institution at Jharial. (76) In other words, the Mattamayūra Śaiva acārya Gaganasiva may be understandably assumed to have caused the temple (deula) to be established, where he institutionally founded the Mattamayūra school.

Another Mattamayūra acārya named Rūpasiva of the Bangarh matha revived the philosophy of the god Caṇḍīguru (.... idam = devasya caṇḍīguroh = magnam = darsanam = uddhāra) which had lost ground. (77) The preceding word deva indicates that Caṇḍīguru actually stands for Siva. So, the philosophy of Caṇḍīguru would mean a branch of the Śaiva philosophy, which had lost its ground. The philosophy was so - called because it gave importance to the female principle (Caṇḍī). It is to be noted that there was a temple of Bhavānī within the complex of the Bangarh matha (bhavāna = idam = avetya = asanna - Sambhuh = Bhavānīyaḥ). (78) The Śaiva acāryas of the Bangarh matha appear to have worshipped Śiva with Sakti. This is supported by the invocation to the goddess Carcīkā (Om namah carciyair) for the protection of the world. (79) This leads to the idea that the Mattamayūras of the present matha were for the welfare of the people at large. So, Yoga as emphasised by the Liṅga Purāṇa did not end in abstract contemplation only; it led to philanthropic activities (kriyā). (80) Their matha - centred activities make out that the
Mattamayuras launched a movement to disseminate their faith and altruism in different parts of the country. The expression Śiva – Śiye Harāvaropyaharato \(^{(8)}\) meaning Śiva gave Lakṣmī to his own disciple Hari (i.e. lord Viṣṇu) makes out that endeavours were directed to socially make the ordinary people understand the greatness of Śaivism in comparison to Vaiṣṇavism. This is probably reflected by Hari’s description as Śiva’s disciple in the record.

The record has been justly described as prasāsti of Mūrtiśiva. Because it was Mūrtiśiva who founded the intellectual / philosophical greatness of the matha and spread its cultural grandeur. Such an important prasāsti was composed by an expert in the six systems of Indian philosophy, he was Śri Kaṇṭha (Sattarkkartha – vivecanoru ....... yo vadi – dikṣā – guruḥ / Śrīkaṇṭṭhah ....... prasāstīni kaviḥ II). \(^{(82)}\) It is to be noted that generally the name of the composer of a prasāsti is not mentioned in the prasāsti in Bengal. Śrīkaṇṭṭha is the third composer-cum – poet after Umāpatidhar (Deopāḍā – prasāsti) and Vaḍaspati (Bhattabhavadeva’s prasāsti). \(^{(83)}\)

Last but not least is that the Bangārh record throws welcome light on the architectural and sculptural arts. The Bangārh matha was constructed on the model of a meru meaning a particular form of the temple of Śiva. \(^{(84)}\) The Linga Purāṇa (c. 800 AD – 1000) has prescribed, for the enshrinement of Śaiva images, a number of merus such as Prāsādameru, Nisāda – meru, Nilādriśekhara – meru, and
Mahendrasaila - meru. Of these the Mahendrasailameru was in conformity with the practice of the Rudras (Rudrasammatas). Now, if the Rudras are taken in the sense of a particular sect, then the other categories of merus may have been meant for the rest of the subsects of the Saiva system. Thus the Prasada - meru was meant for the Mattamayūra subsect, on the model of which the Bangarh maṭha was caused to be built. And the building of the image of Mūrtisiva and of the lion in the attic on the maṭha are noteworthy examples of artistic activities at the maṭha. These were built up presumably by the local artist. In other words, through the popular medium of the maṭha the local / village artist could express his artistic skills. And thus the maṭha was socially connected.

It therefore appears that royal endeavours were taken in order to culturally relate religious establishments with the people of the localities where these were situated. The same holds good also in the case of temples in the area under survey.

The institutional settlement (centring round temples) of brahmanas having Vedic affiliation for the performance of religious rites and rituals in different parts of ancient Bengal may be described as the process of the making of regional brahmanical tradition. Such a tradition – making process is apparently known to have been continued even in Kamarupa also. Hsuan – Tsang’s statement that he saw hundreds of Deva temples in Kāmarūpa evidently supports the
continuity of brahmanical religious culture in the country of Kāmarūpa. (88) The process related to religious terms can be substantiated by a number of epigraphic references available in both Bengal and Kāmarūpa during the period under review. For the sake of understanding the process the epigraphic records that have been checked may be grouped under two chronological heads such as

(a) the epigraphs belonging to 600 AD – 900 AD and
(b) the epigraphic records belonging to 900 AD – 1200 AD.

(a) Epigraphs from 600 AD to 900 AD:

The Dubi grant of Bhāskaravarman (AD 600 – 50) describes Balavarman as having performed a number of sacrifices with dakṣinās. (89) It is to be noted that the name of the mother of Mahendravarman was Yajnadevi, also mentioned as Yajnavati in the seal attached to the Dubi grant, Nālandā clay seal and Nidhanpur grant. The name brings out a clear indication towards the performance of a sacrifice. Mahendravarman is described in the Dubi grant as having performed a number of sacrifices like the god Indra (........ije ca rājā Kratubhir mahendravat .......). (90) These references leave the impression of the practice of brahmanical religions, particularly sacrifical culture in the early part of the 7th century AD. The sacrifical cult was understandably practised by the brāhmaṇa donees of the Dubi grant. The donees belonged to Kauśika, Māṇḍavya
and Maudgalaya gotras. Some of them followed the *Vājāsaneyi Samhitā* of the *Yajurveda*. (*91*)

The Nidhanpur grant (c. AD 620 – 43) was issued to a number of brahmanas who belonged to the gotras such as Agnivesya, Ālambāyana, Āśvalāyana, Kavestara, Kātyāyana etc and who performed bali (worship) and caru (oblation) and offered hospitality (*sattra*). Thus they may be assumed to have had introduced a religious culture understandably in connection with the local people of the Candrapuri – viṣaya wherein they were settled. The Vedic branches (*sākha*) to which they belonged are such as Carakya (*Yajurveda*) Chāndogya (*Sāmaveda*), Taittiriya (*Yajurveda*), Vājasaneyi (*Yajurveda*), and Vābhrṣya (*Rgveda*). They included 208 brāhmaṇas. (*92*)

Brāhmaṇas are also known to have been engaged in the culture of religious rituals. The Pala ruler Dharmapāla’s Khalimpur cp refers to the fact that the Lata brāhmaṇas and priests (*lāṭadvija devārca kādi.....*) performed worship and other rites (*puj – opasthān – ādi – Karmmane*) (*93*) supposedly at the temple of Nunna (Ananta) Nārāyaṇa. Such Vaiṣṇava ritual culture may have been spread to the villagers of the four villages noted earlier as granted to the temple.
The word Lāta may stand for the country of Rādhā (Burdwan division), which is mentioned as Lādha in the Jain Kappa – Sutta (Sk Kalpasūtra c. 1st century B.C.). (94) If this be so, then the expression Lātadvija would mean those brāhmaṇas who came to the province of Pundravardhana from the country of Rādhā; that is, they were the migrant brāhmaṇas from Rādhā. Probably these migrant brāhmaṇas were royally settled in association with the temple of Ananta – Nārāyaṇa in order to transform the whole of the area (where the gift villages were situated as noted above) culturally loyal to the court of the Pāla ruler. Cultural ties were also established between the Viṣṇu temple and the villagers of the villages granted to the temple. In maintaining such cultural ties with the local people the temple persons may be assumed to have played their role according to their rank. They were ranked vertically as the expression indicates ----- Lātadvija – devārca-kādi ; that is the brāhmaṇas who came from Rādhā were ranked higher than the priests (devārca-kādi ....) associated with the worship of the god in the temple.

Similarly, royal initiatives were also taken by the Pāla ruler Śūrapāla I to settle the association of the Śaiva ācāryas institutionally with the temple of Mihātesvara at Vārānasī; (95) obviously to support the religious practices of the ācāryas. The
sectarian affiliation of the Śaiva ācāryas may be suggested by looking at an earlier source.

Hsuan-Tsang saw at Vārāṇasi (Po-lo-ni-sse) a hundred or so Deva temples with about 10,000 sectaries who principally honoured Mahēśvara (Ta-tsei-tsai). Some of them cut off their hair, some tied their hair in knots and went naked and covered their bodies with ashes (Pāśupatas). The Chinese pilgrim saw also an apparently grave, majestic and really living statue of Deva Mahēśvara (about 100 feet high). The Pāśupata Śaiva ācāryas may be assumed to have continued their ritual practices supposedly at an establishment at Vārāṇasi. And their successors may be assumed to have been the Śaiva ācāryas of the grant of Śūrapāla I. These Śaiva ācāryas were entrusted with the management of the temple wherein the god was installed in the name of Śūrapāla’s mother Māhaṭa ----- Māhaṭesvara. Apparently the temple had existed before the god was named Mahatesvara. And the Śaiva ācāryas of the temple might have been the followers of the Pāśupata system and the temple belonged to the Pāśupata sect.

The Pāśupata ācāryas received royal support. Because they endeavoured to understand the worldly life in terms of reality. Accordingly they made the common people understand the society based on equality. In order to achieve it the
Pāśupatas practised folk rituals. The performance of such rituals based on the proper comprehension of the five main tenets (Kārya, Kāraṇa, Yoga, Vidhi and Duhkhānta) could lead the common people to recognise their fetters (Pāsās) and accordingly to solve the problems of worldly existence. (98) It therefore appears that the Pasupata endeavoured philosophically as well as actually to be in association with the common people. It is not difficult to understand that the Pāśupata of the Māhātesvara temple also maintained their relation ritually with the temple and actually with the ordinary people. Thus they spread their cultural influence in society.

That the Pāśupata acāryas actually maintained association with the common people is apparent from the Pāla ruler Narayana pāladeva’s Bhagalpur plate. The plate refers to the fact that the Pāśupata Saiva acāryas performed worship (bali), oblation (caru) and offered hospitality (sattra) (99) understandably to the common people. The reference to the word navakarmādi ...... (100) in connection with the association of the Pāśupata acāryas may allude to their involvement in the performance of works for the temple as well as for the sake of the ordinary people; the works for the people might have been charitable. This is how they maintained their public relations in order to make their Pāśupata culture socially acceptable.
Royal support to brāhmins' scholarly pursuits as well as religious culture is known to have been practised in Kāmarūpa also. The Hayungthal plate of the Mleccha king Harjaravarman (c. AD 815 - 32) refers to a brahmin officer Bhaṭṭa Śrī Kaṃṭha (Brāhmaṇaḍāhikāra – bhaṭṭasrīkṛṣṭha). (101) He was the officer – in – charge of the welfare of the brāhmanas and understandably of their scholarly pursuits. The Tezpur grant mentions the king Vanamāla (c. AD 832 – 55) as having patronised the religious cultural pursuits of the temple (Devaṣāram) with gold, silver, elephants, horses, women etc. (102) As in early medieval Bengal, so also in Kāmarūpa, such donations to temples were treated as religious merit – yielding deeds and so made on auspicious days (punyehani); it is apparent from Vanamāla’s Parbatiya plate. (103) Making donations on auspicious days in Kāmarūpa is also apparent from another Mleccha king Balavarman III (c. AD 860 – 80)’s Uttarbarbil plate referring to his gifting at the time of annual worship in connection with Śākrotthāna. (104) Now the ceremony of Śākrotthāna has been suggested to have been the same as the Bhatheli (Bha – sthali) festival still current in Assam when the god Indra is worshipped by setting up Indradhvaja according to the Vedic custom. (105)
As in Bengal religious gifting was promoted by orienting it to yielding merits for the donor and his parents, so in Kāmarūpa also the same thing happened. Vanamāla’s Tezpur grant describes his gift as yielding religious merits for his parents (matāpitrputryahetoh). (106) Balavarman III’s Nowgong plate describes him as having expressed his desires to share his merits out of munificence with his parents in the other world (Yadiha phalam tat pitror- mamāpi lokottaram bhūyāt). (107) Though a little earlier, the Bhauma – Naraka ruler Bhuṭivarman’s (AD 518 – 42) Barganga inscription records his district magistrate (visayāṃtya) Avaguna as having constructed an asylum (āśrama) with a view to securing longevity for his king (......āyuṣkāmam ...... Idamāśramam). (108) It is significant to note that Avaguna dedicated to his overlord the religious merit he acquired by building the asylum. Symbolically it is an important sign of subservience. And the dedication of religious merit to the king other than the family members of the donor happens to be a rare phenomenon in the pursuit of temple – based religious culture in eastern India during the period under review. The extent of brahmanical religious culture in Kāmarūpa may be better understood in its sectarian cults connected with Śiva, Sakti Viṣṇu etc. However, the god Śiva is known to have been significantly invoked and worshipped by the Kāmarūpa rulers from 5th – 6th centuries onwards. Harjaravarman has been described as
Paramamahesvara in his Hayungthal plate. (110) Vanamāla is known from his Tezpur plate to have caused to be reconstructed the temple of Śiva (Hātakasūlin). To note the point, there were attached to the Śaiva temple a number of Veṣyās who were understandably the devadāsīs who used to dance in the temple. (111) In fact, the devadāsī culture happens to be a traditional one in Assamese religion. (112)

It is said in the Tezpur plate of Vanamāla that the god Kāmesvāra and goddess Mahāgaurī were established on the Kāmakutāgiri (......Śrikāmesvāra – mahāgaurī – bhaṭṭārikābhīyāṁ – adhiṣṭhitā – śīrṣasāḥ Kāmakutāgireḥ). (113)

The references to the mountain called Kāmakutā and the god Kāmesvāra may lead one to suggest the goddess Mahāgaurī as the goddess Kāmākhyā whose temple on the Nilāchal mountain near Gauhati is well known. Now, the god Kāmesvāra and the goddess Kāmesvari are known to have been worshipped on the Nilaparvata in Kāmarūpa (Kāmarūpam mahāpiṭham tathā Kāmesvariṁ Śivam / nilāṁ ca parvataśreṣṭham nātha Kāmesvrām tathā). (114) The Nilaparvata has been described as Kamagiri in the Kālikā Purāṇa (e. 10th / first half of the 11th century AD) —— Kāmarūpe Kāmagirau nyapatad yonimaṇḍalam. (115) And that the Kamagiri is the same as Kāmakutā is apparent from the king’s Parvatiya grant. (116) It was clearly a perfect blending of Śaivism and Śaktism in
Kāmarūpa. Vanamāla was a devotee of Śiva as is apparent from his description Paramamāhesvara and so probably he allowed the temple-based Śaiva–Sakti religious culture.

The prevalence of Sakti cult in Kāmarūpa is epigraphically supported by the Nidhanpur grant which refers to a donee named Kālisvāmi. The name bears an indication towards the popularity of the cult of Kāli (i.e. Sakti) to a certain extent with the people in Kāmarūpa.

The Vaiṣṇava religious culture is also known to have been royally supported. The king Bhūtivarman is described in the Barganga inscription as Paramabhāgavata which implies that he embraced the cult of Viṣṇu. The Dudi plates refer to Devaki and Krṣṇa, Lokesa (i.e. Viṣṇu), Laksmini and Viṣṇu together, Bala (i.e. Balarāma) and Acyuta (i.e. Krṣṇa). The Nidhanpur grant refers to a number of brahmana donees namely Viṣṇuḥgosavāmi, Nārāyaṇasvāmi, Viṣṇusvāmi, Nārāyaṇakundasvāmi, Janārdanasvāmi, Sudarsanasvāmi etc implying their following the cult of Viṣṇu.

It therefore appears that the practices of brahmanical cults like those connected with Śiva, Viṣṇu, Sakti were pursued in order to make a brahmanical tradition of religious culture in eastern India and thus directed to provide it with a social
footing. The process is noticed more clearly in the epigraphic records of the period from c. 900 AD to 1200 AD. Attention may now be sought to this.

(b) Epigraphs from 900 AD to 1200 AD:

Sacrificial pursuits of brahmanical scholars are epigraphically known to have been royally promoted and patronized understandably in order to create a brahmanical tradition. The Bargaon plate of the Kāmarūpa ruler Ratnapāla (c. 920 AD – 60) mentions an agnyahita brāhmaṇa named Sadgaṅgadatta who regularly maintained sacrificial fire and remained engaged in performing six duties (ṣaṭkarmarata).

(121) The six duties of a brāhmaṇa according to the Manusāṁhitā (c. 2nd century B.C. to c. 2nd century AD), included sacrificial performance for own prosperity (Yajana), sacrificial performance for others’ prosperity (Yajana), studying (adhyayana), teaching (adhyāpana), giving religious gifts (dāna) and receiving religious gifts (pratigraha) (adhyāpanam adhyayanaṁ yajanaṁ yajanaṁ tathā / dānam pratigrahscaivaṣa t karmāṇyagajanmanah). (122) The brāhmin was royally supported with gifts because of his performing sacrificial rites understandably for social welfare (Yajana). Sacrificial performances by residentially settled Vedic scholars were performed to a great extent, according to the Guwahati
grant of Indrapala (c. 960 AD – 80); there were sacrifical centres with sacrifical posts (yūpas), as the grant shows ----- Yupaiḥ = yajña – grh – vāganāni. (123) Thus yajña – based religious culture was inculcated among the people of Kāmarūpa.

The Śaiva religious ideas were also royally supported in order to disseminate. The grants of Ratnapāla in the beginning pay homage to the god Śiva described as Śaṅkara and then His Śakti (Śaktiḥ śubha saṁkarī). (124) To note the point occasionally, the expression – Mahāgaurī Kāmesvaraḥ in the Guwakuehi grant of Indrapāla has been explained in the light of the similar expression ---- Śrī Kāmesvara – mahāgaurī occuring in the Tezpur grant of Vanamāla. It has been interpreted that earlier the Śaiva cult was predominant in comparison to the Śākta cult in Kāmarūpa in the time of Vanamāla; so the expression Kāmesvara – Mahāgaurī. But by the time of Indrapāla the Śākta cult had acquired prominence and popularity much greater than the Śaiva cult; so the fact is coded as Mahāgaurī – Kāmesvara. (125) In other words, the perfect blending of Śaivism and Śaktism in its social context is impressively apparent from the record. The blending was institutionally settled with royal land donation as the Guwakuchi record shows ----- Mahāgaurī – Kāmesvarayahdeva satkaśāsana. (126) Now, the word Satkaśāsana means ‘the holding of’ / ‘belonging to’. (127) Then it
is not difficult to understand that the expression *devasatkasāsana* meant something that belonged to the Deva, i.e. the deities Mahāgaurī and Kāmesvara. And this ‘something’ was apparently land as is the expression *pandaribhūmyoh* (128) attached to the expression noted above.

It is significant to note that the patron king Indrapāla is known to have been praised with thirty two names having no nominative case – ending. Now, generally gods are praised with several names as *ṣata nāma, aṣṭottarasatānāma* etc. But when a king is praised in this fashion, as *(Śrimat – Paramesvarapādānām dārimsat – nāmāni – amuni* (129)) it is to be understood that endeavours were there to deify the king with so many names. Of the names the name *Sakalalokasāṅkara* is important to note. The word *Sāṅkara* means one who does (*kara*) good / welfare (*sam*) understandably for others. (130) So the name given to the king indicates that he (i.e. the king) performed or caused to be performed good deeds ensuring welfare of the people of Kāmarūpa so much so that he was deified and remembered with the name *Sakalalokasāṅkara*. This is how his religious leaning to the god Śiva became socially meaningful.

Besides the Vaiṣṇava religion is also apparent to have been prevalent in Kāmarūpa. The Guwakuchi record refers to Viśu, Kṛṣṇa, Puruṣottama, Hari, Acyuta and to
Vasumādhavasatkāsana (I31) meaning the Vasumādhava (i.e. Viṣṇu) temple with the landed property.

It is significant to note at this point that the record refers to the pictures of garuḍa, padma, saṁkha and cakra well known marks of Viṣṇu. Now, the pictures were obviously drawn by a person named Aṣṭaka ---- Pusta siri Aṣṭahenta [Sk. Pustam Śrī Aṣṭakena]. (I32) (Sanskrit rendering is mine). The word Pustam means plastering / painting. (I33) So the pictures of garuḍa etc might have been drawn by plastering / painting by the person in the temple of Viṣṇu. In that case the temple might have had been a centre of art activity, of course religious. Thus Vaiṣṇavism also enjoyed social popularity besides the prevalence of Śaivism and Śaktism in Kāmarūpa in the second half of the 10th century AD.

The popularity of Vaiṣṇavism continued to increase. Gopālavārman’s (c. AD 990 – 1015) Gachtal grant refers to Viṣṇu’s boar incarnation (bhagavān mahāvāraha), his consort Lakṣmī (Purusottamasya mahiṣi Lakṣmīrvā). (I34) Such official acknowledgement may be indicative of the prevalence of the Vaiṣṇava religion in society. According to the Mainamati plates of Laḍahacandra (c. AD 1000 – 20), there was a temple of Mādhava (i.e. Viṣṇu) in Samataṭa. But the god was obviously named after the king ---- Śrī Laḍahamādhava – bhaṭṭāraka. (I35) So, the temple was a Vaiṣṇava one. Apparently the religious
institution incorporated the villagers of the gift-villages into one community of worship (136) bound to the temple. Thus the whole of the area wherein the temple was situated was brought to the limelight of Vaiṣṇava religious culture.

This is also officially supported by the Pushpabhadra grant of Dharmapāla (c. AD 1035–60) which refers to the god Viṣṇu in his boar incarnation (…..Vṛṣṇiḥ vapiṣṭho gurudad-vājaśya) (137) and also to a temple dedicated to Śrī Madhusūdana the most illustrious of all the brāhmaṇas (…..sakalaviprakulapradīpāḥ Śrīmān vabhūva Madhusūdananāmadhyeṣāḥ), who from his childhood worshipped the lotus feet of the god Mādhava (i.e. Viṣṇu) [yo vālyataḥ .... Mādhavapūṃdādmapuṣṭāḥ prapaṇca – racāṇām sucirām cakāra]. (138)

As the Vaiṣṇava religion was officially provided with an institutional locus, so also in the contemporary period the Śaiva religion was officially supported by the Pāla ruler Nayapāla because of its social utility. This is illustrated by the Siyan record referring to the royal construction of a Śaiva temple at Soma tīrtha along with the residential quarters of the physicians who rendered medical services to the people in general apart from the temple persons. (139) This is how the Śaiva temple played its social role apart from its primary role as a religious centre in disseminating religious culture.
In other words it was socially believed that the people could be brought/oriented to religious culture by rendering them some social services. This social service may have included medical service as well as socially composing the belief that one who causes to be performed sacrificial cult becomes free from sins and misfortune and reaches the abode of Viṣṇu. This connects one with the performance by a residentially settled brāhmaṇa named Udayakaradeva sarman of a homa during the Kanakatulāpuruṣa - mahādāna ceremony as recorded in the Barrackpore grant of the Sena ruler Vijayasena (c. AD 1096 – 1159). In order to hold this ceremony a mandapa was constructed. Then a brick-made platform was made at the centre of the mandapa. Over the platform an arch was made for holding the balance. The balance (tulā) must be decorated with the image of Viṣṇu, golden leaves, pearl garlands etc. Four homas are to be performed with Vedic hymns for Gaṇeśa, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Lokapālas etc. After the completion of the homas, Lokapālas are to be invoked with the Puranic hymns for Agni, Vāyu etc. Then the Yajamāna will give gold ornaments to the priests as fees for the rite. The sacrificial rite should be concluded with the sacrificer’s paying tributes to brāhmaṇas and respected persons. The poor persons are also to be donated with gifts.
Vallālasena’s (c. AD 1159 – 79) Naihati grant refers to the donation of land to the ācārya named Ovāsudevasarman for supervising the performance of Hemāśva – mahādāna sacrifice. (142) In this rite a golden horse was placed on the altar and accompanied with some materials like utensils etc. The Yajamāna invokes the horse supposed to be representing Almighty. After the completion of the rite, the Yajamāna will give the horse and other materials to the preceptor. Other brahmanas are also to gifted with other wealth and cows. By performing this ceremony the performer gets out of all the worldly sins.

Lakṣmaṇasena’s (c. AD 1179 – 1206) Tarandighi plate introduces the king as having donated a village in Varendra to the ācārya Īśvaradevasarman as fee for his rendering service to the performance of Hiraṇyāsvāratha – mahādāna sacrifice / (Hemāsvāratha – mahādāna). (143) The performance of the rite required the golden chariot with four / seven golden horses and two / four original horses had also to be yoked to the chariot. Inside the chariot a tutelary deity of the sacrificer was placed. Then the Yajamāna wearing white garments moves around the chariot three times and invokes God. The performance of the rite leads the performer to get out of all the sins and to be blessed with the boon of Mahādeva. Thus through the performance of such rites royal initiatives were taken to
inculcate among the ordinary people Puranic religious customs as well as culture. And the initiatives were taken to such an extent that a brahmana named Govinda-deva Sarman was residentially settled in Varendra and entrusted with the charge of the house of propitiatory rites \( (\text{Sāntyāgārika}) \), as recorded in the Madhainagar grant \(^{(144)}\) of Laksmaṇasena.

The grant refers to the two words \textit{aindrīṣṭanti} and \textit{mūlabhiṣeka} which deserve our attention. Vallālasena’s \textit{Adbhūtasūgara} has this verse:

\begin{align*}
\text{Bhaviṣyati – abhiṣeke ca}
\text{Paracakrabhayeṣu ca}
\text{Svarāṣṭrabhede aribadhe}
\text{Aindrisānti – stathesyate.}^{(145)}
\end{align*}

The verse makes out that the rite of \textit{Aindrisānti} was performed in order to avert some evil in connection with the coronation ceremony, fear of others’ conspiracy, civil war, killing of foes etc. Now, the word \textit{bhaviṣyati} used in case of the rite of \textit{Aindrisānti} brings out that the rite was performed in order to prevent untoward events which might arise out of the occasions noted above. The reference to the performance of \textit{Aindrisānti} along with the word \textit{Mūlabhiṣeka} may lead one to infer that Laksmaṇasena caused to be performed the rite of \textit{Aindrisānti} in order to word off some troubles anticipated in connection with
the hereditary coronation in the royal line. Santyāgārika Govindadevasārman apparently might have acted in the capacity of the supervisor of the propitiatory rite of Aindriśānti. Although these ceremonies were too costly to perform for the common people, still the belief to acquire the merits of heavenly life was socially inculcated among the people. This understandably influenced religious activities.

It therefore appears that endeavours were made to continue the process of disseminating religious culture. Since the Vedic yajñas had become obsolete and functionally redundant, ritual performances with Puranic regulations gradually became popular, because these Puranic performances were thought capable of bringing men out of the worldly sins and helpful in attaining heaven. This socio – religious spirit is reflected on the shift from the Vedic sacrifices to ritual performances with Puranic regulations as available in the Sena records. (147)

The modality of the making of a tradition based on brahmanical religion included active royal support not only to sectarian religious cults as well as to the performance of socially efficacious Puranic sacrifices, but also to building religious edifices. This brings one to religious art activities.
Religious art activities in Bengal have already been stated; while those in Kāmarūpa may now be regarded.

The political contacts and the existence of routes of communication between Kāmarūpa and Bengal as noted earlier might have facilitated artists to exchange their artistic views and idiom regionally. And the sculptures from the ruins of Pre-Ahom shrines have been suggested to have been influenced by the Pāla school of art. (148) Kāmarūpa rulers of the period under study have been epigraphically alluded to as great builders. In the Nowgong plate Vanamāla is given the credit of erecting a number of palaces which had many rooms decorated with pictures (...... viśālāpi bhūrikṛṣṭāśālā paṃkṭiḥ prāśādāṇām kṛtavicīrāpi ......). (149) In his Tezpur grant Vanamāla is said to have had newly repaired a fallen temple of Haṭaka - sūlin (Siva) ---- paṭitam Kāṭantarādālayaṃ saudhaṃ khitām - aravara - vrātārcitāṃgrheḥ punah / ....... Haṭaka - sūlinaḥ kṣītibhūtā navam caṇḍuṣā). (150) Ratnapāla is known to have caused to be built on the earth different types of whitewashed temples wherein Śambhu was enshrined (vasudhā suḍhādhaḥvalitaiḥ Śambhuḥpratisthāṣpadaĩḥ = yasya śrotiyamandirāṇi ....... nānāprakāraṇi = api). (151) Thus Kāmarūpa kings appear to have patronized art activities relating to religious shrines. The Pāla school of art to which the Kāmarūpa shrines are suggested to have stylistic affinity is
suggested to have developed out of the local art traditions; because these local art traditions were the consequent developments of the decline of the Gupta art tradition in south Bihar, West Bengal and Bangladesh. And these local art traditions gradually came into prominence in the Pāla age. This Pāla school of art might have influenced the Kāmarūpa school of art through the popular medium of religious edifices there.
References and Notes


38. Bhattacharyya Benoytosh, op. cit, p. 82.


48. Do, EDEP, p. 36.


cf. Chakravarti Ranabir, ‘Abhinna Devata, Bhinna Matha : 
Pracina Srijatthera Ekti Brahmapura’, Akademi

52. Sircar D.C, Silalekha – Tamrasasanadira Prasanga (Henceafter 
STP), Bengali, Calcutta, 1982, p. 89, slks 5 – 6;

53. Bhattacharyya N.N, Ancient Indian Rituals and their Social 
contents, Delhi, 1975, p. 134.

54. Tarkaratna Panchanan (ed), Siva Purana, Bengali, Reprint, 
938, adhyāya XXIV, slk 177.

55. Bhattacharyya N.N, GIRTC, p. 100, Col. II.

56. Mirashi V.V, ‘The Saiva Ācāryas of the Māttamayūra Clan’, The 
Indian Historical Quarterly, Vol. XXVI, No. 1, 
1950, p. 1ff.

57. Sircar D.C, STP, p. 87.


60. Tarkaratna Panchanan (ed), Linga Purana, Bengali, Calcutta, 
1396, pūrvvabhāga, adhyāya 77, slks 1 ff, 
particularly 12 ff.


64. Bhattacharyya N.N, GIRTC, pp. 54 – 55.


Medieval Period’, Journal of Ancient Indian History,


81. Sircar D.C, *STP*, pp. 90, 94


113. Sharma M.M, IAA, p. 99, Ls. 10 – 11; also see p. 111.


