CHAPTER VII

RELIGION

The Ahoms when they came to the Brahmaputra valley had with them their own religion and culture. But what this religion was can be fairly surmised from the religious works that have come down to us, and also from the rites and rituals performed by them. The religious treatises which they brought consisted mainly of manuals and astrological books.

The religion of the Ahoms was originally based on fundamental beliefs in supernatural powers. The Tai-Ahoms believed on the infinite power of the Great God whom they called Phat-Tu-Ching and Phat-Lai-Bet who created the whole world.

According to their chronicles, the Ahom royal family which ruled the Brahmaputra valley was descended from Khun-lung, the son of Thenkhām, the nephew of Lengdon, the Lord of Heaven. Lengdon was the principal God of the Ahoms. However, the Ahom people in general had a number of gods and spirits whom they worshipped and propitiated for their protection, general welfare and cure from illness and evils. They believed that in this world of phenomena, all visible objects have invisible spirit of gods presiding over them, and the forest, the rivers, the hills, the paddy fields and even the households had their presiding deities for whom they made offerings. This belief of the Tai people in the supernaturals has its essential similarities with the Hindu belief in nature.

1 Golap Chandra Barua, Ahom Burañji, 1930, p.1  
2 Ibid., p. 13  
3 Ibid., p. 15  
4 Ibid., p. 15  
5 Golap Chandra Barua, Ahom Burañji, 1930, pp. 8-9  
6 Ibid., pp.3-4
Since their first settlement in this new land they had performed religious ceremonies called Om-Phē Sai-Phē, Rik-Khvan and Me-Dam-Me-Phē. The worship of Lengdon, the Lord of Heaven and other gods is called Ompha. During the days of the kings it was performed with great elaboration when a large number of pig ducks, fowls, goats, cows, buffaloes, large and small, were sacrificed. Saiphē was a congregational worship done by the people, and Rik-Khvan was a kind of state ceremony performed as a victory celebration in which the priest invoked long-life of the king and the country. These ritualistic practices of the Ahoms continued long after the formal acceptance of Hinduism by their monarchs.

Coins issued by several Ahom kings, syupungmung, Syujatphā and Syupātphā aie Gadāiharasimha bear legends with prayer to Ahom gods, such as Phā, Leng-don, Phā-tu-ceng, and Phā-Tā-Rā. The legends are in Ahom script and these record the prayer made by the kings, 'I bow down to Lengdon'.

There is no trace of image worship by the Ahoms. Literary source however, refers that the image of Chum-Sheng is said to have been brought by Jiu-ka-phā from his ancestral home and was regarded as the tutelary deity of the Ahom rulers which was worshipped till the end of their rule.

1 Padmeswar Gogoi, Tāi-Ahom Religion and Customs, 1976, p. 12
2 Ibid., p. 12
3 Ibid., p. 13
4 H.K. Barpujari (ed.), The Comprehensive History of Assam 1994, p. 246
5 Padmeswar Gogoi, op.cit., p. 15
6 M.C. Das, Ancient Treasures of Assam (2nd ed.), 1984, p. 24 (The Coins are preserved in the ASM )
7 Padmeswar Gogoi, op.cit., p. 32
8 Mrs. Leslie Milne, Šáns at Home, 1910, p. 19
The Ahom priests belonged to the families of Deodhās, Mohāns and Bailung performed all rites and rituals in all Ahom ceremonies. They acted also as the political advisers of the Ahom kings at the beginning of their rule. However, after their conversion into Hinduism they were relegated only to priestly functions and divination. The priests were indispensable in the coronation to bless the monarch.

**Hinduisation of the Ahom Rulers:**

Hinduisation of the Ahoms was primarily due to consideration of practical necessity and political expediency. The monarchs followed a liberal religious policy from the very beginning of their rule. They were not bigoted adherents to their faith, and tolerated all religions - Islam, Buddhism, tribal cults and all sects of Hinduism. Epigraphs lend strong support to the claims in the chronicles to the fact that the Ahom kings patronised all persuasions of different communities by making liberal grants and establishment of religious institutions.

There is no evidence of the influence of Hinduism both in the royal court and among the Ahom people up to the reign of Tao-Kham-thi (A.D. 1380-1389), the seventh king in Siu-kā-phās line. According to some chronicles Hindu influence firstentered the Ahom court during the reign of king Syudaṅphā, nick named Bāmuni Kowanr, (A.D. 1397-1407) for he was brought up in a Brāhmaṇ family. King Syudaṅphā brought the Brāhmaṇ family in

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3 Ins. Nos. 20, 26, 30, 33, 39, 41, 170, 192, 247
gratitude, and settled it close to the capital at Caragua on the Dihing (upper Assam). In addition to that the king made the Brāhmaṇa his confidential adviser, who brought with him to the capital his tutelary deities of Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa Śalagṛām (black stone representing the Vignakas of Lakṣmī and Nārāyaṇa)¹. Since then Hinduism as practised by the Brāhmaṇas in Upper Assam began to grow under the royal patronage.

Brāhmanical influence considerably increased in the Ahom court and kingdom during the reign of king Syuhummung (A.D. 1497-1539), who is said to have adopted the title svarganārāyaṇa, a Sanskrit rendering of the Ahom god Lengdon, the Lord of Heaven. This title was conferred probably on the kings at the coronation by the Brahmap priests. However, his inscription at Sadiya (Ins. No. 1) bears his Ahom title Chao-Phā (Chao - Lord or king, Phā: Heaven) means "Heavenlyking". This title both in the Ahom (Chao-phā) and its Hindu form (svarganārāyaṇa) was held thereafter by the Ahom kings. Gait⁵ points out that from Syuhummung onwards, this new title svarganārāyaṇa was affixed by the Ahom kings on their official documents. Syuhummung was the first Ahom king to adopt the saka era of the Hindus.

The Ahom monarchs had embraced Hinduism on their own accord. Perhaps they realised that it was politically dangerous to adhere to a religion which was practised only by a minority of the people and would be convenient to accept Hinduism, the religion of the majority of their subjects. It is also

¹ Ibid., p. 36
³ Gait, A History of Assam, 1963, p. 87
⁴ Śakas and Parthians, the foreigners from central Asia came to India in search of conquest and settled in India. Nāhāpōnā the greatest of Kshahararatha Satraps, is credited to have commenced the saka era in 78 A.D; Śatish Ganjoo, Dictionary of History, 1990, p. 245; Pratap Ch. Choudhury ed. Asom Burahi Śara, 1964, p. 17
reasonable to believe that the Ahom monarchs thought it wise to become one with their subject by embracing all men into their social fold for political strength.

The stone-pillar\(^1\) and rock inscription\(^2\) of Syusenphā, known as Pratāpsimha (A.D. 1603-1641) of saka 1538, inscribed in Assamese and Sanskrit language in Assamese script is a clear evidence of the acceptance of Hinduism in the Ahom court. Herein for the first time the king is titled as śrī-śrī svargaṇārāyaṇa, a Sanskrit equivalent of Chāo-Phā.

An important point to be noted in the inscription, which had assured the gradual penetration of Hindu influence is (as we have already stated in the Technicalities), the use of auspicious symbol (ॐ)\(^3\) or words like siddham (let there be success) and svasti\(^4\) (let there be welfare to all) which are found at the beginning of numerous early inscriptions\(^5\) of the Hindus. It gives evidence of acceptance of Hinduism by the Ahom rulers in the early part of the 17th Century.

Numismatic records also unfold the formal acceptance of Hinduism by the Ahom kings. The legend on the obverse of the coin of Jayadhvajasimha (A.D. 1648-1663) contains, śrī śrī svargaṇārāyaṇa devasya (deva), saka 1570\(^6\):

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1 Ins. No. 2
2 Ins. No. 3,
3 Ins. No. 2, 26, 49, line 1
4 Ins. No. 2, 3, 28, 224, line 1
5 Deopāni Viśnu Image Inscription (9th century); Khanāmukh Copper Plates of Dharma Pāla (first half of the 12th century), quoted also in M.M. Sarma op.cit., pp. 96, 116, 129, 226, 306
6 The coin is preserved at the treasures of ASM; M.C. Das, Ancient Treasures of Assam 1984, p. 24
and the reverse - śrī śrī hari-hara caraṇa parāyaṇasya (devoted to Lord Viṣṇu and Lord Śiva). A.W. Botham has identified svarganārāyaṇa with Jayadhvajasimha who ascended the throne in saka 1570 and this view has been accepted by Gait and others. Buranji refers that Jayadhvajasimha struck octagonal silver coins with legends inscribed in Sanskrit language in old Assamese or Devanagri character. It is, therefore, quite convincing that after the formal acceptance of Hinduism, Jayadhvajasimha struck coins with legend in Sanskrit language in Assamese script.

Acceptance of Hinduism by the Ahom kings is also supported by another coin of the same type of Syupungmung alias Cakradhvajasimha (A.D. 1663-1670). The legend runs on the obverse śrī śrī svargadeva-Cakradhvajasimha saka 1585, and the reverse śrī śrī śiva-rāma-padravinda-parāyaṇasya (devoted to the lotus feet of Śiva and Rāma (Viṣṇu).

The terms Hari-Hara (Viṣṇu and Śiva) and Śiva-Rāma (Śiva, and Viṣṇu in the incarnation of Rama) of the legends are the name of the Hindu deities accepted by the Ahom kings in the middle of the 17th Century. The names of the deities are identical with the deities of the two composite Hari-Hara and Śankara-Nārāyaṇa images of 8th century, that were recovered from the Deopāni site of Golaghat district of Assam, which are now preserved in the ASM.

1 A.W. Botham, (ed.), Catalogue of the Provincial Coin Cabinet, 1930, p. 452
3 S.K. Bhuyan (ed.), Assam Buranji, 1945, p. XXI
4 The coin is preserved at the ASM; M.C. Das, Ancient Treasures of Assam, 1984, p. 24
SECTARIAN DEVELOPMENT OF HINDUISM:

Hinduism of the Ahom kings falls into two distinct stages. (i) The Period of Neo-Vaiśnavism and (ii) the period of Śaivism and Śaktism. The first stage starts with Jayadhvajasimha (A.D. 1648-1663) and ends with Ratnadhvajasimha, (A.D. 1679-1681) and the second from Gadādharasimha (A.D. 1681-1696) to Gaurināthasimha (A.D. 1780-1795).

(i) The Period of Neo-Vaiśnavism:

In the matter of religion of the Ahoms a new phase began towards the closing decade of the 15th century when the powerful Neo-Vaiśnavite movement with its powerful appeal began to gain ground all over the country under the leadership of Śrī Śankaradeva and Mādhavadeva, the chief vaiśnavite apostles of Assam. In challenging the Brahmaical cult that pervades the society which was caste-oriented and class-dominated, Śankaradeva adopted the most simple but a very ingenuous means, the Bhakti (devotion) cult. It was casteless and attracted the general population against the caste-dominated-Brahmanical Hindu religion. He preached the Eka-Bhakta-vahat is, surrender to one godhood. The Neo-Vaiśnavite movement brought about an era of religious transformation among the common people and introduced refinements into the social habits of these people. Though the Neo-Vaiśnavite movement of Śankaradeva (A.D. 1449-1568) was the product of the social circumstances of

1 Surrender to Kṛṣṇa, the incarnation of God Viṣṇu through congregational prayer was initiated by Śrī Śankaradeva and Mādhavadeva, the neo-vaiśnavite apostles of Assam. Śankaradeva combined diverse elements of culture, indigenous and foreign, in dress, tune, instrumental music, art and dance into as attractive local pattern, as to serve as a medium for congregational prayer to God. He flourished in the 15th and 16th Century A.D.

2 Padmeśwar Gogoi, op.cit., p. 20
the time, at earlier phase it could not penetrate into the Ahom kingdom\textsuperscript{1}. Vaiṣṇavite gopala deva\textsuperscript{2} tried to preach the tenets secretly and to establish satras\textsuperscript{3} in eastern Assam.

The Ahom kings at the beginning suppressed the Vaiṣṇavite activities on political ground that they could not tolerate any institution that might divert the attention of the people from the main purposes of the state and divide up their allegiance between the temporal and spiritual authorities. The powerful monarch like Pratāpsinī̄ha who had to be always busy with defending the kingdom against the Mughal invasions could not compromise with the faith which might endanger the unity and solidarity of their kingdom. It may also to be noted that perhaps the Ahoms and the tribes of the Mongoloid stock at this period were not much impressed by Vaiṣṇavism and the language might also acted as a barrier to the propagation of the faith among these people.

In the religious history of Assam and of the Ahoms a turning point started with the twentieth Ahom monarch Sutāmlā who assumed the Hindu name Jayadhvajasiṁha (A.D. 1648-1663)\textsuperscript{4}. He was the first Ahom monarch to receive initiation (śaraṇa)\textsuperscript{5} with all formality from a Vaiṣṇava abbot, named

\begin{itemize}
  \item[1] Ibid., p. 21
  \item[2] Ibid., loc. cit.
  \item[3] An Assamese 'Vaiṣṇava' monastery, consisting of the Adhikām (head of the sattra) barracks for his Bhakats, a small image of Viṣṇu or one of his incarnations, the Bhāgavat or any allied scripture, a wooden throne-like dais, cāmar, canopy, drum and a nāṁghar
  \item[5] Śankardeva formulated śaraṇa as Nāṁ (dharma), Deo (God or Kiṣṇadeva), Guru (spiritual guide) and Bhakat (Bhaktasarīgī̄ha); p. Gogoi, op.cit., p. 20
\end{itemize}
Niranjana Deva in the year A.D. 1654 which was his sixth regnal year. Having initiated to (sarana), Jayadhvajasimha founded the Auniati Sattra (Vaishnava monastery) at Majuli in Sibsagar district, and Niranjana Deva was the first Satradhikan (abbot) of the sattra. Chronicle records that Jayadhvajasimha made a grant of land and paiks for the maintenance of the sattra during A.D. 1653-54, where the image of Govinda Thakur, which had originally belonged to Kuruabah Sattra was placed. Banamali Gosain, who had been living in Cooch Behar was brought to Assam at the instance of Jayadhvajasimha, and the former founded one sattra at Jakhalabandha in Nagaon district, one at Jatkara in Majuli of Sibsagar district and another at Raangalibahara on the Southern bank of Brahmaputra, called Baikunthapur which is commonly known as Dakshinpat because it was situated on the Southern bank of the Brahmaputra.

Vaishnava preachers, however, did not interfere with the ruling class in the discharge of their legitimate duties in conversion. The Ahom monarchs and nobles became followers of this new faith which had become the order of the day and, in fact, Vaishnavism did not produce any change in their temperament. The literary evidences allude to the acceptance and influence of Vaishnavism in the Ahom court and kingdom are confirmed by the sattra institutions that had established in different parts of Assam under the liberal grant and endowments of the Ahom rulers for their maintenance.

1 P. Gogoi, op.cit., p. 17; S.K. Bhuyan, Anglo-Assamese Relations, 1974, p. 18
2 Maheswar Neog, Pabitra Asam, 1960, p. 60
3 Ibid., p. 60; S.K. Bhuyan (ed.), Assam Buranji, 1945, p. XXI
(ii) The Period of Śaivism and Śaktism:

Gadādharasiṃha (A.D. 1681-1696) who ascended the throne in A.D. 1681, however, considered Vaiṣṇavism to be too passive and mild for a ruling class required to maintain their domination by force of arms. On this basis, he disfavoured the growing wealth, grandeur and influence of the Vaiṣṇava pontiff (Sattraṇḍḥikār), who he thought, were potential sources of danger to monarchy and capable of diverting the loyalty of the subjects to themselves (Vaiṣṇava gurus). Considering this, Godādharasiṃha is said to have initiated plundering of Vaiṣṇava monasteries, and killing or expelling of their heads, which however, was stopped by his son Rudrasiṃha.

Gadādharasiṃha’s Hindu proclivities, specially his devotion towards Lord Śiva is apparent from his own inscriptions. The epigraphic terms, Viśveśvara pada paṅkaī..... svargadeva śrī gadādharasiṃha (devoted to the lotus feet of Viśveśvara (Siva), saka 1605) and gadādharasiṃha aṁhayā..... śrī mad umānandopari maṭha macēkarat (Umānanda temple was erected under the order of king Gadādharasiṃha, saka 1616) denote Gadādharasiṃha’s leaning towards Śaivism. The same inscription (saka 1605) also refers that the king appointed Govinda Cakravarty, a Brāhmaṇ to perform the rituals in the Viśveśvara temple of Biśwanāth (Śoṇitpur district). An inscription of saka 1617 records Gadādharasiṃha granted land and servitors for the maintenance and service of the Umānanda Śiva temple which proves his devotion towards Śiva. These records has pointed to the fact that Gadādharasiṃha was essentially

1 S.K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, 1974, p. 18
2 Ibid., p. 18
3 Ins. No. 20, lines 1 - 2
4 Ins. No. 25, lines 7-8
5 Ins. No. 26, lines 2-3
a Śaiva and made endowments for the Śaivism. Gait\(^1\) observes that the reign of Gadādharasimha marked the ushering of the Śakta (Śiva and his consort Dūrgṛ̣) faith.

The religious history of the Ahoms, however, took a new turn with the accession of Rudrasimha (A.D. 1696-1714) whose reign was marked by the activities of different religious belief within Hinduism. His devotion towards Śiva is recorded in his earliest land and servitor grant inscription of saka 1619 which reads ...

\[\text{pada-pādāravinda-śrī-umānandeśvara-}
\[\text{carana-ṛṣumareśvara rudrasimhenā}(\text{dedicated to the venerable feet of Umānanda Śiva}).
\]

An inscription of saka 1621\(^2\) refers that Rudrasimha appointed Bāgīś Bhatacharyya as priest of the Nandikesvar Śiva temple and granted him Dev. land as maintenance to perform the ritual duties. In saka 1622\(^3\) king Rudrasimha established the Śiva temple at Sibsagar and dedicated four Brāhmaṇ families and granted land for ritual performances in that temple. These evidences lead to show that Rudrasimha was a Śaiva (devotee of Śiva).

Rudrasimha’s devotion towards God Viṣṇu is apparent from his inscription of saka 1622\(^4\) which records the establishment of Keśavarāi Viṣṇu temple and appointed Brāhmaṇ families for it’s rituals. His deep devotion towards Viṣṇu is also indicated in a chronicle\(^5\) stating that Rudrasimha caused a tank to be excavated and dedicated it to God Viṣṇu.

\(^1\) Gait, \textit{A History of Assam}, 1963, p. 288
\(^2\) Ins. No. 28, lines 1-3
\(^3\) Ins. No. 31, lines 10-15
\(^4\) Ins. No. 32, lines 5-8
\(^5\) Ins. No. 33, lines 5-6
\(^6\) Ins. No. 36; \textit{Report}, p. 5
Rudrasimha was a devotee of Sakti also. His cannon inscription of saka 1618 reads on the reverse, śrī-śrī-bara-gaurī-padāṃbujā-madbukarasya (dedicated at the lotus feet of Śiva and Dūrghā). After Hinduisation, the Ahom kings before Rudrasimha were not devotee of Sakti as Sakti worship was not recorded in any of their earlier records. From Rudrasimha onwards, the Ahom kings used to worship goddess Dūrghā along with the worship of god Śiva and God Viṣṇu.

Sivasimha (A.D. 1714-1744) was the first Ahom king to embrace Sākta form of Hinduism initiated by Kṛṣṇarāma Bhattacharya Nyāya-Vaśiṣṭa and his son Ramānanda. Since then, the latter Ahom kings had Sākta Gosāins of Kṛṣṇarāma’s line, as their preceptors.

Sivasimha’s Sākta faith is expressed in his own inscriptions at the early part of his reign which prove that he was a staunch Sākta. The land-grant inscription of Sivasimha of saka 1637 for the priest of the temple of Kāmākhya, Pandunāth and Ugratāra contains, candikā carana ... maharāja sivasimha (devoted to the feet of goddess Dūrghā) alluded to his adoption of Sākta Hinduism. His wife Phuleśvarī of non-Ahom origin, the first chief queen, had also received her initiation in Sākta religion from kṛṣṇarāma Bhattacharya. She became a devout disciple under the influence of the Brāhmaṇas, more than her husband and assumed the name Pramatheivarī, the another name of goddess Dūrghā. King Sivasimha, queen Phuleśvarī and the chief nobles of the court adhered to the Saktī cult and began to grant endowment to propagete the Saktī worship.

1 Ins. No. 37, line 1
2 P. Gogoi, *op. cit.*, p. 39; Kṛṣṇarāma Bhattacharya was later known as Parbatiyā Gosāin’ in the buranjis.
3 Ins. No. 39
4 Ins. No. 39, lines, 1-4
5 Ins. No. 61, lines, 4-6; Gait, *A History of Assam*, 1963, P. 289
Soon after Sivasimha's accession, his wife Phulesvari was raised to the status of *BarRaja* (chief king) of the kingdom, on the advice of the Sakta priests in order to avert an evil moment of fall of the royal power (*chatra bhaṅgryoga*). Since a Rā以防 is not installed as a monarch in the Ahom system, she was called *BarRaja* (Chief king) which is recorded in the cannon inscription of *saka* 1651 runs as, *śivasimha-narendra-mahāśi-śrī śrī svarganārāyaṇī ... bhārattra pramathēsvāri* (pramathēsvāri, queen of Sivasimha installed as Chief king) which exhibited the Śakta influence upon the Ahom administration.

The over-zealous Śaktaism of Sivasimha followed by the conversion to that faith of his principle nobles introduced a new factor in the social and political life of the people of Assam. The king and his nobles cherished the ambition of becoming devout Śakta worshippers and spent more times in religious observances. State obligations of the kingdom began to play a secondary part. The king patronised *Brāhmaṇas*, made endowments, erected temples and became direct and indirect propagandists of Śaktaism to increase their fold which undermined the very foundation of the Ahom Kingdom.

Inscriptions of Sivasimha itselfs testify to his devotion towards Śiva, Dūrgā and Viṣṇu. Rock Inscriptions of *saka* 1640 records the erection of temples and dedicated them to god Śiva at Niächal Hill of Guwahati. By an another inscription on silver idol refers his consecration of this idol to the Umnānanda temple of Guwahati. His deep devotion to Śiva throughout his reign is also expressed in his own inscriptions. Sivasimha's devotion towards

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3. *Ins. No. 64*, lines 3-4
5. *Ins. No. 43*, line 1-2;
6. *Ins. No. 47*, line 1-3
7. *Ins. Nos. 70, 85, 87, 113*
śakti (goddess) is recorded in his epigraphs. His inscription of Cāndikā temple of saka 16471 Ugratara temple of saka 16472 and the Dīrghēśvarī temple of saka 16573 clearly stated that he was a staunch Śakta.

Inscriptions of Śivaśīṁha reveals that he was a worshipper of God Viṣṇu. An inscription records that Śivaśīṁha appointed Āchāryya Cūḍāṇaṇi as priest to perform the rituals of Viṣṇu4 at “Kurma Mādhava” temple of Kamrup. The epigraphic term śri śri śivaśīṁhānäṃ pāṇḍava jānärdana-pada-parśva-padyaya, bṛhatphukkam phalguṭsava daulohayamkāri (under the order of Śivaśīṁha his Barphukan who was dedicated to the lotus feet of Viṣṇu, constructed the Janārdana Viṣṇu) temple. By an inscription of saka 16615 Śivaśīṁha appointed priest and spittion holder of “Hayagrīva-Mādhava” temple. Another epigraph of saka 1664 refers that the king granted 26 purāṇs of Brahma land to the priest of Janārdana temple for his maintenance. These records suggest that Śivaśīṁha was essentially a worshipper of Viṣṇu.

It is very interesting to not that though Śivaśīṁha was a staunch Śakta, built many temples and granted land and men for their maintenance, he at the same time showed due respect and courtesy to the Vaiṣṇava monks and made liberal grants and endowments for the Vaiṣṇava sattras6 and monasteries that were established in different parts of Assam, as a result of the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite7 movement.

1  Ins. No. 56
2  Ins. No. 58
3  Ins. No. 72
4  Ins. No. 46
5  Ins. No. 49, lines 3-4
6  Ins. No. 88
7  Ins. No. 100
8  Assamese “Vaiṣṇava” monastery
The Copper-plate inscription issued on 2 Bhādra, saka 16391 records a grant of 80 and half purās of land, granted as Brāh. to six Brāhmaṇas in the Barpeta and Bāusi-Paraganā of Kamrup and appointed Raghunandan Chakravarty as the Medbi(priest) for the propagation of śravāṇa and kīrtana2.

Another copper-plate inscription issued on 16 Bhādra, saka 16393 renews a Dhar grant of land and paik to the Medbi (Priest) of the Pāṭbāusi-Damodari Sattra of Kamrupa. It is seen that in both of these inscriptions, the salutation was made to Basudeva run as basudevaṅgri-yugalarībhujavṛṅgayita... sīvasimha (dedicated to the lotus feet of Vasudeva: Kṛṣṇa).

It is noticed that Śivasimha’s queen Ambikā Devī who was a devoted disciple of Kṛṣṇāraṁ Bhattacharya (Parbatīya Gosain), was also liberal in their endowments towards sattra. The Copper-plate-inscriptions issued by king Śivasimha and queen Ambikā Devī conferred land and men to the Barpeṭā Sattra in saka 1657 for its maintenance.

The epigraphic term, govinda padāravinda (devoted to the lotus feet of Viṣṇu) that recorded on the Balli Sattra’s Bellmetal-gong, and the donation of that gong to the Narowa Sattra in saka 16605 assured his devotion towards Viṣṇu and the Neo-Vaiṣṇavism.

To propagate and encourage Vaiṣṇavism through śravāṇa and kīrtana (congregational prayer), Śiva simha donated land and lake for fish towards the clergies (disciples) married and unmarried of the Sundaridīya Sattra of Barpeṭā, Deśa Kamrupa in saka 16606.

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1 Ins. No. 40, lines 7-12
2 Congregational prayer with devotional songs, music and dance
3 Ins. No. 41, lines 1-2
4 Ins. No. 71, line 5
5 Ins. No. 77, line 1
6 Ins. No. 79, lines 8-11
In fact the reign of Śivasimha witnessed the social divisions among the people as Saktas, Vaiṣṇavas and various sects. Only the Ahom priestly class continued to follow the old Ahom religion. It is observed that by adopting the Śakta faith, by supporting the Vaiṣṇava monks and sattras and by maintaining the orthodox Ahom rituals and ceremonies, king Śivasimha encouraged a state of "triarchy* in religion.

King Pramattasimha (A.D. 1744-1751) followed the same liberal religious policies adopted by his predecessor. His devotion towards God Viṣṇu and Śiva is confirmed by the terms janārdana caraṇa caraṇa2 (fertilised at the feet of Viṣṇu) in relation to the construction of Janārdana temple of saka 1666, and maheśvara caraṇa caraṇa3 (fertilised at the feet of Śiva) in erecting the Šukeśvara temple in the same saka (saka 1666). Simultaneously goddess Durgā or Śakti was also worshipped. The rock inscription of Kāmākhya temple, Śilghat of saka 1667, bears "bhadra-Śaka-Śrī Śrī Kāmākhya-mahādevi-pātanādi maya-mahābaya-nirmanāyi" (after salutation to goddess Bhadrakālī (Durgā), the Kāmākhya temple is constructed with stones). The epigraphic term, dharmottara-jīrnoddhara-pramāṇa-tamrapattaka-patrikeyarh5 (renewal of copper-plate of Dhar. land-grant), by which Pramattasimha renewed a land-grant in saka 1671 for the disciple of the Dakṣhinpāt Sattrā of Majuli, Jorhat, which was earlier granted by Jayadhvajasimha, denotes kings' faith towards Neo-Vaiṣṇavism.

1 S.K. Bhuyan, Anglo-Assamese Relations, 1974, p. 19
2 Ins. No. 111, lines 2-3
3 Ins. No. 113, line 2
4 Ins. No. 116, lines 2-8
5 Ins. No. 121, lines 5-6
King Rājesvarasirha's (A.D. 1751-1769) religious policies can be gleaned from his own epigraphs. The term, *maheśvara-carṇa-chaśyāṃsāraṇa* (under the shadow of the feet of god Śiva) of śaka 1677, *kāmākhyā-carṇa-ambhuja* (to the lotus feet of goddess Kāmākhyā) of śaka 1681, *pada parikajā śrī basudeva devata* (to the lotus feet of god Viṣṇu, śaka 1686) and the renewal of the Brāh. grant to Mahendra Brahmaṇ and his son Biśārada of śaka 1686 (jīrṇoddbāra) to propitiate the Neo-Vaiśṇava preachers is a good specimen of diverse religious belief observed by him.

King Lakṣmīśimha (A.D. 1769-1780) had also exhibited diverse faith in his religious policy. The epigraphic terms *kāmākhyā-pada-padmapadhabratas* (dedicated to the lotus feet of goddess Kāmākhyā) of śaka 1692, the Dhar. grant to Rāmadeva Mahājan, the Sattrādibājn(head of the sattrā) of the Pāṭbāusi Sattrā of Bāusi Paraganā of Kamrupa of śaka 1694, and the term *bara gaurī padacana.... pravartaka.... śrī śrī svarganarāhaṇadeva Lakṣmīśimha* (maintenance of the seating material of Śiva and Dūrgā by Lakṣmīśimha) of śaka 1695, is a clear evidence of his devotion towards Saivism, Saktism and Neo-Vaiśṇavism. The same inscription also records a nānkār grant (tax free land, granted to non-Brahman) to Jayanāraśya Kākati for erecting Nāṃghar (math), light lamp and performing śravaṇ and kārtana for the purpose of propagating Neo-Vaiśṇavism.

1 Ins. No. 141, line 3  
2 Ins. No. 147, line 1  
3 Ins. No. 162, line 1  
4 Ins. No. 160, lines 1-11  
5 Ins. No. 170, line 1  
6 Ins. No. 177, line 1  
7 Ins. No. 178, lines 1-2
King Gauriñāthasimhā (A.D. 1780-1795) who was said to be as bitter enemy of the Moamarias, (a rebellious sect of Māyāmarā Sattra of Upper Assam) adopted liberal religious policies with diverse religious belief. The epigraphic term, hari hari caraṇaṇa utphulla' (pleasure at the devotion of Viṣṇu and Śiva) of saka 1705 alluded to his devotion toward Viṣṇu and Śiva. The term .... padāraṇvinda-kāmākhyā-pada-padmārcanā ... devoted to the lotus seat of goddess Kāmākhyā of saka 1704, by which king Gauriñāthasimhā resolved to make one-lakh blood sacrifice to propitiate goddess Kāmākhyā. This is the evidence of king’s deep devotion towards Devī (kāmākhyā). The term, Śrī gośīndra padāraṇvinda-bhakti-rasika-śrīrīgauriñāthasimhā (Gauriñāthasimhā pleasure at worshipping the venerable Śrī Viṣṇu) denotes his devotion towards Viṣṇu. The same inscription records that Gauriñāthasimhā granted Devī land and servitors to the Āuniāṭi Sattra (majuli, Jorhat) to light the akhaṇḍa pradīpa in front of the idol of “Govinda Thākur” (Viṣṇu) in saka 1711. Another inscription of saka 1709 refers that Gauriñāthasimhā granted land and servitors to the Medhi of the Haridevi sect of Bajāli Paraganā, Kamrup, to perform śrāvana and kīrtana. These evidences has pointed to the fact that Gauriñāthasimhā encouraged the sattra institution and made generous grant for the propagation of Neo-Vaisnavism.

King Kamalēsvarasimhā (A.D. 1795-1811) erected three temples of Devī (maṅgala-candikā), Viṣṇu (keśava) and Śiva stand side by side on the

1 Ins. No. 196, line 1
2 Ins. No. 194, lines 2-3
3 Ins. No. 211, line 2
4 Ins. No. 211, lines 6-9
5 A lamp installed in a shrine and meant to be burning without a break
6 Ins. No. 206
7 Ins. 221, line 4
8 Ins. No. 222, line 4
Chatrākāra hillock of Guwahati in saka 1721 for regular worship of god and goddesses. His land and servitor grant inscription of saka 1722\(^1\) made to Visvambhara, the Sattrādhikam of the Bramachārī-Śattra of Nagaon (Assam), gives evidence that he encouraged to propagate the Neo-Vaiṣṇavism which pervades among a section of the society at that time.

King Candrakāntasimha (A.D. 1811-1818, second time 1819-1821) whose reign was marked by misery and despair of the people, made land and servitor grants to encourage the diverse religious belief of the time. The inscription of saka 1737\(^2\) records that king Candrakāntasimha made land and servitor grant to Gadādhārthākūr to conduct the worship at Muktināth Śiva temple at Bīswanāth (near Tezpur). He granted servitors for lighting ṛakṣita-pradāpīpa before the icon of “Gavinda Thākūr” of Auniati Śattra of Majuli, (Jorhat, Assam) in saka 1742\(^3\).

A land-grant inscription issued jointly by king Candrakānta and his queen Padmāvatī on Caiatra 13, saka 1743\(^4\) refers that the revenue of the donated land was to be spent for the holy festivals of the Hayagrīva Mađhava temple of Hājo, Kamrup. The evidences suggest that the Ahom kings followed their ancestor’s liberal religious policy with the grant of land and endowment and encouraged the different religious sects of the society.

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1 Ins. No. 227
2 Ins. No. 239
3 Ins. No. 245, lines 5-6
4 Ins. No. 248, lines 16-19
Catholicity of Religion:

The religious history of Assam from the beginning of the thirteenth to
the end of the eighteenth century may be called a period of expansion and
consolidation of Hinduism as the dominant religion of Assam. The liberal
religious policy and the catholicity of religion, that was existed in early Assam
shaped the religious policy of the Ahom rulers.

The worship of Śiva seems to have been the most popular form of
religion in early Assam. Chronicle1 refers that the king of Kamrupa were Śaivas,
which is proved by the epigraphic term, praṇāma deva... pinākina(Lord Śiva is
saluted) that appears at the commencement of the Dubi and Nidhanpur plates
of Bhāskara2. Vidyavinoda3 is of the opinion that in early Assam, religious
usages were liberal comprising Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism and this catholicity of
religion is indicated by the second copper-plate of Dharmapala in A.D. 1095-
1120, where in Lord Viṣṇu is extolled in the initial verse.

The auspicious symbol which has already been stated (chap.III),
that used at the commencement of the Sanskrit and Assamese language
inscriptionsof the Ahom kings bears significance4. Sirkar5 observes that this
symbol (।) or word (siddhān) used by the Ahom kings was in later time
indicated by a symbol of varying shape. In eastern India the same symbol
was written with the lower end curved considerably towards the right like

2 Dubi plates of Bhāskaravarmana, V. I (first plate) ; Nidhanpur Plates of
   Bhāskararvarma, V. I (first plate)
3 D. Sarma, op.cit., p. 149
4 Ins. No. 2; Ins. No. 26; Ins. No. 49
5 D.C. Sirkar, Indian Epigraphy, 1965, p. 92
and is called āṇjañ which symbolises the Tantric object of 
kundalinīnāḍī since some scholars believe that kundalinī is a symbol of 
“Tantricism”5.

Padmanāth Vidyavinoda’s conclusion is that the sign āṇjañ is a symbol 
of Mahādeva with his Śakti as the āṭṭa-devatā (one’s tutelary divinity or deity) 
of the kings of Kamarupa6. According to him the symbol signifies the liberal 
religious policies and practices of the ruling Kings7.

Some scholar observes that this āṇjañ is connected with the śatcakras 
(i.e. the mystic nerve centres) of the Tantras and probably stands as a symbolic 
representation of the kundalinī nerve which resembles a serpent8. 
Vidyavinoda’s view is that the symbol, however, does not indicate a state of 
avowed Tantricism in the reigns of those kings, but one of a liberal religion9. The invariable association of Śiva and Śakti indicates that Śakti here is not the 
Supreme Power, but is a constant companion of Śiva in bringing about

1 Ins. Nos., 74, 139, 223
2 Ins. Nos., 75, 113
3 Ins. Nos., 124, 222, 227
4 āṇjañ is an auspicious symbol used in the ancient inscription and legend, which 
was also used by the Ahom rulers at the beginning of their inscriptions.
5 PS, Bhūmikā, p. 11; cult of the tenets of the Tantras, i.e. a treatise written in 
the form of a dialogue between Śiva and Pārbati, inculcating the worship of 
gods and goddess
7 Ibid., p. 49
8 Tezpur Copper-Plate of Vanamāla (Middle of the 9th Century), quoted also 
in M.M. Sarma, op.cit., p. 96
9 D. Sarma, op.cit., p. 149
creation. Therefore अंजी (अंजी) as the symbolic representation, indicates the liberal and open-hearted religious policy exercised by the Ahom rulers.

**NON-INTERFERENCE AND TOLERANCE:**

*Buraṅji* reveals that the original religious cult of the Ahoms was completely different from that of the Hindus. The Ahoms, not being aware of the full implications of the Hindu faith were apprehensive that any innovation of the faith might be followed by a commotion in the land. The rulers, therefore, adopted a definite policy of non-interference and tolerance.

The Ahom kings, however, did not altogether abandon their ancestral religion and practices. A section of the Ahom people still adhered to their original faith and the ritualistic practices of Ahom-worship continued down to the end of their rule in the Brahmaputra Valley. Though all religious institution of the Hindus and Muslim received liberal patronage from the Ahom sovereigns, the Ahom kings continued to respect Ahom customs and Ahom priests were held in high reverence till the end.

Epigraphy unfolds that under the Ahom rule all communities had enjoyed their freedom of conscience. A good specimen of this is found in the inscription of Lakṣmīśinā issued on 1702* by which the king granted *pīrpāl* land, disciples, and share of the income of four *maqāms*

4. Ins. No. 192, lines 7-17
5. Lands given to the priest, institutions or other saintly person of the Muslim community are called *pīrpāl*. 
(holy places) to Anwar Haji Faqir, a saintly person of minority community, who was the Persian reader of the Ahom Court. It suggests that the Muslim social and religious life, governed by the Islamic codes were never disturbed by the liberal religious policy adopted by the Ahom rulers of Assam which make them success in becoming one community at large.

The pervasive spirit of religious toleration, supported by open-hearted recognition of all faith is the tenet of the religious policies adopted by the Ahom rulers in Assam. During the long-term of administration, the Ahoms maintained strict religious neutrality and never forced their ideas upon the Hindu inhabitants.