CHAPTER V

RELIGIOUS LIFE OF THE PEOPLE OF ANCIENT ASSAM

Religion played an important role in shaping the destiny of human life. Ancient Assam witnessed a rapid cultural transformation at the advent of the Aryans. Their migration to this region made a deep impact on the religious outlook of the people. The religious leaders responsible for the import of the Vedic religious system were the Brahmāṇas. The type of religion propagated by them may be designated as the Brahmāṇical religion. The origin of the Brahmāṇical religion goes back to the Vedas. It consisted of the worship of the elements of Nature, but later on in was developed into the worship of personified deities, but in the midst of which something like a doctrine of monotheism was worked out with many philosophical ideas. But during the preceding centuries before the ascendancy of the imperial Guptas the Brahmāṇical religion had been thrown into the shade by the growth of Buddhism and Jainism. During the period of the Guptas, the Brahmāṇical religion again witnessed new vigour. Vedic rites which Samudragupta made attempts to revive after a long period of abeyance had their staunch advocates in the Purva-Mīmāṃsā or Karma Mīmāṃsā. But during the Gupta

2. R.C. Majumdar, (ed.) Vedic Age, I, PP. 360 f.
The most noticeable features in the religious life of the people were the growing importance of Bhakti. Bhakti, that is, intense devotion to God conceived of as personal, a Saviour worthy of trust and ready to be gracious, is an important element of Vaisnavism and Saivism as expounded in the Gita and the Svetasvatara Upanishad. Devotion to other Adorable Being found vent in the construction by various sections of people in honour of Visnu, Kartikeya, the Sun, the Tirthankaras and the Buddha. Gradually the worship of innumerable gods and goddesses gave rise to special cults and sectarian rites and rituals. Towards the later part of the sixth century A.D. the Smartas made it a practice to worship the five gods, Panchadeva, Visnu, Siva, Durga, Surya, Ganesa, what is called Panchayatana puja.

Towards the end of the sixth century A.D. five Upanishads, one on each of the divinities, were put together and called the Atharvasiras Upanishad. Buddhism underwent a complete transformation and adopted some of the practices of Saivism and Saktism. Buddhism merged, more or less with Hinduism and in the Hindu pantheon Buddha came to be regarded as one of the incarnation of Visnu. Thus the extent of the Brahmanical religion may be best understood only if Vedic study and Vedic rites and rituals along with the form and extent of sectarian cults Siva, Sakti, Visnu, Surya, Ganesa and other minor gods are properly surveyed.

5.1. Brahmanical Religion:

The Brahmanical culture and religion had gained a firm footing in ancient
Assam at least from the 5th century A.D. The use of Sanskrit language in the Nagajari-Khanikargaon Stone Inscription and donation of land to the Brahmanas, the mention of bhagavan and the reference to Balabhadrasvamin in the Umācal Rock Inscription of Surendravarman, the establishment of an āśrama by Avaguna as mentioned in the Bargāṅgā Rock Inscription of the time of Bhūtivarman and a reference in the same inscription to the performance of the Asvamedha sacrifice by the same king proved this fact. Yuan-Chwang's statement that he saw hundreds of Deva temples in Kamarupa⁸ is a definite evidence of the spread of the Brahmanical religion in ancient Assam. The kings used to issue copper plate charters for granting revenue-free lands to Brahmanas. The Dubi and the Nidhanpur Grants of Bhāskaravarman were only reaffirmations of two earlier grants made by Bhūtivarman. The Dubi Grant describes Vajradatta, a mythical ancestor of Bhāskara to have studied the four Vedas along with the accessories (V. 4). He is also described to have performed a number of Asvamedha sacrifices (V. 5). Coming down to the historical period, the grant describes Balavarman to have performed a number of sacrifices accompanied by dakṣinās (V. 16). It is significant that the name of the mother of Mahendravarman was named Yajnadevi (also mentioned as Yajñavatī in the seal attached to the Dubi Grant, Nalanda Clay Seals and the Nidhanpur Grant). The Dubi Grant described Mahendravarman to have performed a number of sacrifices like god Indra (ije ca raja kratubhir mahendravat, V. 23). The seal attached to the Dubi Grant and the Nalanda Clay Seals describe Mahendravarman

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⁸. Waters, II, PP. 188 ff.
as the performer of two Asvamedha sacrifices (dvisturagamedhihārta), and the Nidhanpur Grant describes him as the very domain of sacrificial rituals. The Dubi Grant (V.31) describes Bhūtiparman to have performed an Asvamedha sacrifice. Candramukhavarman is also described to have performed the Yajnas quite often and to have given gifts to the supplicants (V. 37). In the seal attached to the Dubi Grant and the Nalanda Seals, Sthiravarman is described as the performer of two Asvamedha sacrifices. These evidences should suffice to give us the impression that the Brāhmanical religion found a fertile ground in ancient Assam as early as the beginning of the fifth century A.D., if not earlier.

The Brāhmaṇas who were responsible for the propagation of the Brāhmanical religion migrated to this land from various places of India. They belonged to various gotras, studies various Vedas and Sāstras. (discussed in Chap. IV). A distinctive feature of orthodox Hindu society is the series of rites and rituals. The Vedic Ritual literature, for its preservation and utilization, formulated a systematic curriculum, consisting of the six Vedāṅgas, viz. Śiksā (pronunciation) and Chandas (metre) for the reading and recitation of it; Nirukta (etymology) and Vyākarana (grammar) for the understanding there of; and Jyotisa (astronomy) and Kalpa (ritual) for the employment of it at the sacrifices. Special manuals on these subjects were composed as text books for the priests and specialists in the Sūtra style. The Sūtra works on Kalpa fall into two or three mutually complementary classes: (1) The Srauta Sutras, based on the Sruti or deal with sacrifices described in it. (2) The Smārta Sutras, based on Smṛti ('memory' or immemorial tradition).
The Smārta-Sūtras are divided into two categories (a) The Grhya-Sūtras, dealing with household ceremonies performed with the domestic fire by the married householder himself, in the company of his wife, in the interests of his family. They treat the five daily sacrifices (Panca-mahāyajña), and of sacrifices connected with certain recurring days, months, or seasons of the year (like the New and Full Moon sacrifices) and describe domestic sacraments (samskaras) that solemnize all the important stages of life beginning with conception and ending with death. (b) The Dharmasūtras, deal with ‘dharma’ in the sense of ‘duty or law’ as well as ‘custom or conduct’ and emphasize the religious, rather than the secular, aspect of customary law. (3) The Sulvasūtra contain rules for the erection and measurement of the sacrificial place and the fire-altars.

The spread of the Brahmanical religion in ancient Assam is revealed by the study of the inscriptions. The Nidhanpur Grant (L. 55) refers to seven shares allotted for the purpose of bali (worship), caru (oblation) and satra (hospitality). Satras are sacrificial sessions, which are to be performed by many a sacrificer, and only Brahmānas who have consecrated the three Vedic fires can engage in śāstras except in the Sarasvata satra. Their duration varies from twelve days to a year or more, and accordingly they are known as rātrisatra and Sāmavatsarika (carried on for a year or more.)

This is perhaps included in one of the Panca-mahāyajña or five great sacrifices i.e., manusya-yajña, the offering to mankind namely, the entertainment

of guests. Other four mahāyajña were (1) deva-yajña or offering to the gods, in which food was offered to five various deities; (II) the bhūta-yajña or baliharana, an offering of different foods which were laid on carefully purified places for certain gods and spirits; (III) the pitr-yajña or offering to the fathers (deceased ancestors) (IV). the brahma-yajña, or offering to Brahma, i.e. the study of the Vedas. Most of the Brahmanas of ancient Assam are described as having performed these sacrifices.

The Bargaon Grant (V. 17) refers to Devadatta, whose son was a regular performer of agnihotra. Agnihotra is a form of haviyajña, treated in detail in the Srauta-Sutras. It was performed every morning and evening, the essential point is the kindling of at least three sacred fires, to which offerings of cakes, grains, milk, honey etc. are made. In this Srauta rituals, the priest played the most prominent part.

The Nowgong Grant of Balavarman III (V. 27) refers to Devadhara, who in his capacity of an adhvaryu priest, performed vaitānika rites (rites related to three sacrificial fires) in due order without any confusion. (advaryaeva yena kṛtam vibhajya vaitānikam karamma nirakulena). According to the texts, the adhvaryu priest had to measure the ground, to build the altar, to prepare the sacrificial vessels, to fetch wood and water, to light the fire, to perform the homa (sacrifice) and whilst engaged in these duties, he had to repeat the appropriate hymns of the Yajurveda. In agnihotra, the homa was performed with a desire of sacred duty or sometimes with special desires. Elaborate rules are laid down in the Brahmanas and Sutras for

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11. Ibid.
offering the milk to the grhapatya and ahavanīya fires.14

The Khanāmukh Grant (V.17) refers to Ummuka, the grand father of the donee as a great sacrificer who severally performed the agnistoma and other sacrifices. Agniṣṭoma is one of the seven soma sacrifices, and it is an ekaha or aikahika (one day sacrifice). It is so called because in it Agni is praised or because the last chant is addressed to Agni15. In all soma sacrifices, the soma is offered strictly within the frame work of the three pressings (Savanas) of the soma (morning, midday, and evening ) and to a prescribed series of gods; Indra is the most important of them, the midday savana belonging to him exclusively, in addition to his share of the morning and evening pressings. The agniṣṭoma performed in Vasanta (spring ) every year, and on the New Moon or Full Moon day.

A salient feature of the Brahmanical religion was vrata or fasting. The Nowgong Copperplate Grant (V. 17) refers to king Vanamala who got absorbed in the spirit of Mahadeva by committing religious suicide by fasting unto death. Such act of self sacrifice are met with in the contemporary epigraphic records of other provinces also.16

Related with the Vedic idea of religion was the ascetic outlook on life. Tapas or ascetic practices formed an important part of the religious life of the Brāhmaṇas. The Uttarbarbil Grant of Balavarman III (V. 29), and the Kamauli Grant of Vaidyadeva (V. 27) refers to the respective donees as ‘sarvakarataponidhiḥ.’

Pilgrimage (tīrthabhramāna) was popular during this period. Pilgrimage to sacred places was considered meritorious. The Kamauli Grant (V. 26) refers to the merits of visiting the holy places. Tīrthas were associated both with temples and rivers. The Yogini Tantra classifies the tīrthas into vihī, upavidhi, pil[a, upapītha, siddhapītha, mahāpītha, Brahmāpītha, Viṣṇupītha and Rudrapītha. Most of them were situated either on the banks of rivers or on hill tops. The Kalīka Purāṇa devoted as many as four chapters to the description of the tīrthas of Kāmarūpa and most of these accounts are supported by the Yogini Tantra.

The Inscriptions of Vanamāla refer to the river Lauhitya who bears holy water from the mount Kailāśa. The Kalīka Purāṇa (83/38) recommends snāna in a number of Nadi-tīrthas (78) and states that mere bath in the Lauhitya leads to emancipation: Lauhitya-toeyah snāti sa Kaivalayamāṇāpyāt (83/38). The Yogini Tantra (II, 6-9) states that it purifies all sins: Lauhityāṁ nāma tattīrthāṁ snānānāsyaṁ patakaṁ. Inscriptions refer to ceremonial bath on different occasions. The Hāyunthal Grant (V. 13-14) refers to ceremonial snāna. The Nowgong Grant of Balavarman (V. 32) refers to kriyāngasnāna.

Dānas formed a very important aspects of the Brahmanical religion. The earning of merit through charity, as enjoined by the Smṛitis and the Purāṇas was common practice. Verses regarding dāna were cited in the inscriptions of the land grants from the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas. These verses affirm the beneficial nature of the gifts and proclaim the merits accruing therefrom and condemn those who...
who deprive the grantees of land to future evils.

Certain religious gifts were known as great gifts (mahādāna). According to Agni Purāṇa, the mahādāna were ten, namely, gifts of gold, horses, sesame, elephants, maids, chariots, land, house, bride, and a dark-brown cow. In some Purāṇas they are, enumerated as sixteen of which tulāpuruṣa is the chief. In the Silimpur Grant king Jayapāla of Kamarūpa is said to have made a tulāpuruṣa gifts, which consisted in giving away a quantity of gold equivalent to one’s weight. The Tezpur Grant (V. 29) of Vanamāla records that Vanamāla made an endowment of lands, including gold, elephants and girls to temple. But of all these gifts, the gift of land, both bhumi and agrahāra, was regarded as the most meritorious. The Nidhanpur Grant (V. 27) laid down that the donor of a piece of land resided in heaven for sixty thousand years in happiness. The Nowgong Grant of Balavarman (V. 32) refers to gift of land to young Brahmaṇa after completion of study (samāvartana) to enable them to marry and settle down as house holders. Aparārka quotes from the Kalika Purāṇa in dealing with this naivesikdāna. By such provisions the donor believed to enjoy all religious merits and he lived in heaven in happiness.

All gifts were made according to Hindu text, and particularly after snāna and on auspicious days. The Nowgong Grant (V.32) refers to gift after taking a bath. In the Uttarbarbil Grant of Balavarman, the gift is recorded to have been made

19. Matsya Purana, Ibid.
at the time of annual worship in connection with Sakrotthana (V. 30). The gift recorded in the Nowgong Grant of Balavarm has been made at the time of Visuvat (kalevesuvati, V. 31). P.N. Bhattacharya points out that there are two such auspicious days which may be referred to as Viṣuvat kala, viz., the last day of Asvina and the last day of Caitra, and here probably the last day of Caitra is meant.22 This corresponds to the popular Assamese festival of Bahāg Bihu which is even now treated as the right occasion for making gifts. The time of making the gift in the Ulubari Grant of Balavaran III. (L. 51) is given as Uduksamkramana which corresponds to the time of the Maṅg Bihu. The time of making the gift in the Coratbari Grant of Ratnapala (L. 67) is given as Dhanuḥsamkramana, and that also decidedly coincides with the time of the Maṅg Bihu. The date of gift is recorded in the Bargaon Grant of Ratnapala (V. 20) as the Viṣṇupadi samkrānti (Samkrāntau viṣṇupadyām). This is same as Viṣuvat kala and this should correspond to the last day of Caitra and as such to the occasion of the popular Bahāg Bihu festival.23 It is significant that the time of making the gift is recorded in the Kamauli Grant also as the Viṣuvati of Vaisakha (V. 28). The gender in the word viṣuvatī (from viṣuvatī) implies that it refers to the (Viṣuvati) samkrānti, which is also in the same gender.24

The kings made the gift for earning religious merits (puṇya) not only for

22. P.N. Bhattacharya, K.S., P. 87. n. 17.
themselves but also for their parents. In the Tezpur Grant of Vanamāla the gift has been made for the religious merits of the parents (matāpitripūnyahetoh, V. 32). In the Parbaṭiyā (L. 57) and Uttarbarbil (V. 32) plates the grants have been made for gaining religious merits as well as fame for the parents and the donor himself. In the Nowgong Grant (V. 32) Balavarman desires to share the merits arising out of the munificence with his parents in the other worlds (yadiha phalam tat pitror mamāpi lokottaram bhuyat). In the Ulubari Grant the gift is made for increasing the religious merits of the parents and of the donor himself. (V. 23). In the Coratbari Grant of Ratnapāla the gift is made with a desire to have welfare (datta ksemam abhiṣpata, L. 51 ff), and in both the later grants of the same king (V. 20) the purpose is clearly stated to be puṇya and yasah for the parents and the donor himself. In the Assam Plates of Vallabha (L. 38) the act of charity is meant for perennial residence of the mother in the heaven. The singular devotion for the parents on the part of the Kamarupa kings implies their allegiance to the traditional Upanishadic teachings asking the children to worship the mother and the father as gods. 25 The Bargangā Rock Inscription records the charitable deed of establishing a religious asylum (asrama) with a view to securing longevity for king Bhūtivarman (L. 2-3). In the Nidhanpur Grant it is admitted by way of quoting a typical bhūmidāna prasāmsa (a verse in praise of donation of land) from the Brihaspati Samhita, that the donor of a land gets the privilege of residing in the heaven for sixty thousand years (V. 26). This is in conformity with the traditional Brahmānical religion

25. Ibid.
practised in other parts of India in the corresponding period of history.

5.2. Saivism:

The earliest inscription referred to Siva is the Dubi Copperplate Inscription of Bhāskaravarman. The grant (V. I) refers to “that God Sasisekhara who is to be meditated upon, who wears the moon as the crest jewel, who is lovely, who holds the Pinaka bow and whose body is bedecked or besmeared with ashes”. This verse is repeated in the Nidhanpur Copperplate Inscription of the king also. The Dubi Grant (V. 21) compares Ganendravarman with Ganendra or Ganesa, the son of Siva. Verse 28-29 compares king (Nārāyanavarman) with the Lord of the Bhūtas (Siva) and states that “just as Siva begot (his son) Kartikeya in the daughter of the mountain (Himavat) for the welfare of the people, so also he (Nārāyanavarman), the residence of good qualities, begot Mahabhūtavarman, the abode of prosperity.... crowned him king he who was like a second great element (mahabhūta) and famous for his armour of strength”. Verse 53 refers to Gaufī as the mother of Skanda or Kartikeya (Siva’s son). In verse 59, “Saṅkara who pacifies endless troubles” is compared to Viśnu (Lokesa), while verse 62 compares Supratisthitavarman and Bhāskaravarman with Vināyaka (Ganesa) and Kartikeya, the two sons of Sambhu who were “adored by the world”. The Nidhanpur Copperplate Grant (V.2) proclaims “Victory to the unsullied form of Mahesvara, endowed with his own riches”, “having a girdle made of the Lord of snakes, that destroyed the body of Kama.

The inscriptions of the Salastambha dynasty also give us an idea of the
concept of Siva prevalent at that time. Vanamālavarmadeva’s Tezpur Copperplate Inscription (V. 2) invokes the deity in the following words:

“May that deity with a bow, on whose head the waters of the Ganges, thrown about by the recaka vayu, have assumed the beauty of mass of stars, purify you”.

Balavarman III’s Nowgong Grant (V.1) refers to “the lustre of Rudra that splits the darkness of the earth, conduces to the peace of the world.... all things are changed”. In the king’s Uttarbarbil Grant (V.1) refers to the “energy of Rudra which manifests itself at the end of the night of universal destruction and dispels the darkness of the world (and ) brings peace to the world”. In both the grants Mahādeva is equated with the Supreme Being in verses 16 and 17. Again, the Bargaon Grant of Ratnapala (V.1) we find a similar concept in the reference to “Sāṅkara, who though one like the Supreme self shines forth with extensive qualities in various forms in the world through his conscious will, who becomes manifest with the revelation of his auspicious τανḍava dance incessantly like a cavalier on a horse of good breed showing out his movement, who is the witness, as it were, to the wealth of his own dancing performance through images reflected on his own nails.....” In the Gachtal Grant of Gopala (V.3) the river Lauhitya (Brahmaputra) in spate is compared to Lord Siva dancing the τανḍava. The Bargaon Grant (V.2) refers to the auspicious power of Sāṅkara engaged entirely on the annihilation of the column of sin, while verse 11 refers to Siva as Hara who is capable of conquering enemies in battle single-handed. In the Visnu image from Deopani, we find a vivid description of Hara (Siva) who is called “the Lord of the three worlds, who puts on the king of
serpents as the sacred thread, who has the Bull as his mount, and who illumines the world with the moon of his crest”. The inscription also refers to Siva as Sthānu. In the Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla, Pasupati (Siva) is equated with Mahāvarāha (Vishnu). Similarly, the Kamauli Grant of Vaidyadeva, (V.18) describes the king as “Paramamahesvara and paramavaiṣṇava”. Siva is said to be the slayer of the demon Andhaka in the Subhānkaraṇa Grant of Dharmapāla (V.19). This has a reference to the story contained in the Mahābhārata where the demon Andhaka (signifying the darkness of ignorance) falls in love with Siva’s consort Parvati and desires her, leading to a war with Siva. However, on the point of being killed, Andhaka praises Siva and begs his forgiveness. So Siva pardons him and appoints him as the chief commander of the ganaś, renaming him Bhringīśa or Bhringirīśī.²⁶

At a much later date, in the inscription of king Dharmaṇa, we find the king invoking the Ardhayuvatisvara (Ardhanarīśvara) form of Śiva-i.e. half male and half female. Both the Khandamukh and Subhānkaraṇa Grants of the ruler begin with an invocation to this deity “who is the foremost of all gods, who wears a blue lotus (indivarā) and the jewel of the hood of the snake as the ornament of the ears, whose person is besmeared with saffron, applied to the large and high breast, and with ashes, and who is, as it were, the only embodiment of both the erotic (Śriṅgara) sentiment and the sentiment of anger (Raudrarasa)”. The Siva Purāṇa relates the circumstances leading to the emergence of this form of Siva to make Brahma realize “that the union of the male and female principles alone leads to creation.

²⁶. Cited in R.S. Gupte, Iconography of the Hindus Buddhists and Jains, PP. 43.
The Linga and Yoni to which worship is offered, are symbolic of the male and female generative organs. They symbolise the supreme creative principle. Another account of the Ardhañārī form states that Parvati, the consort of Śiva, became one with him when the risi Bhringī persisted in offering worship to Śiva alone and not to Śiva and Parvati both, as others did.27

That Śiva’s consort received homage is quite clear from the inscriptions themselves. She is generally referred to as Mahāgaurī as, for instance, in the Tezpur Grant of Vanamāla. She is the daughter of the Himalayas (Himavat) and the mother of Skanda or Kartikeya in the Dubi Grant, as stated earlier. She is also the mother of Śiva’s other son Ganésa or Gānendrā, mentioned in the same grant. In the Yajnayavalikya-smṛti, he is appointed as Gaṇapatī, chief of Śiva’s ganas (hordes) and his mother is Ambika-Parvati28. The Gauhati Grant of Indrapala (V.1) refers to Śiva being defeated by Gaurī in a game of dice and being taunted thus, “Oh gambler, I have today won in gambling all your belongings, such as the club, the axe, the bull, the crescent moon and the like, but I return to you all these; only let Ganga remain as my slave for fetching water”. The same grant in verse 14 refers to Parvati as Śiva’s devoted wife. In the Khanamukha and Subhaṅkarapataka Grants of Dharmapala, verse 11 refers to Girija (Parvati) as the consort of Śambhu. The Khanamukha Grant (VV. 19-20) calls her variously, Parvati and Gaurī, beloved of Śambhu.

The inscriptions indicate that quite a number of the kings of the ruling

27.Ibid., pp. 43-44.
28. Ibid., p. 48.
dynasties of ancient Assam were devotees of Siva. In the Tezpur Grant, (V.5) there is a reference to Bhagadatta worshipping Siva after attaining the overlordship of Pragjyotisa by penance or meditation (tapasya). But in the Parbatīya Copperplate Inscription (V.5) of the same ruler, there is a reference to Bhagadatta's brother Vajradatta who "going over to the forest propitiated Isvara (Siva) by penance." This clearly indicates that the deity was worshipped in the forest through penance. In the Sankara-Nārāyana image from Deopāni, which begins with an invocation to Omkara (the manifestation of the Supreme self), we find reference to "singing the name of Nārāyana and Sāṅkara, the spouse of Gaurī." However, at the same time the deity was also enshrined in temples. The Tezpur Grant (V.24) clearly refers to the "Himalayan-high temple of Lord Hatakesvara at whose feet bow with devotion the host of the best of gods", while verse 29 refers to the "Kāmakūta mountain on the peak of which Śrī Kāmesvara and Mahāgaurī, their feet placed on the foot-stool glowing with the mass of rays from helmets of the gods and demons are residing....". Again, the Gauhati and Guwākuchi Copperplates (V.15) of Indrapāla, refers to images of Siva being installed in white washed temples. While demarcating the boundary of the land granted in the Guwākuchi Copperplate Grant, there is a reference to lands granted to (temples of) Mahāgaurī and Kāmesvara. In the copperplates of Vallabhadeva there is a reference to the establishment of an alms-house for the distribution of food (bhakta-sala anna sattra) near a temple of the god Mahadeva (Siva) and the endowment of a number of villages for its maintenance. The Tezpur Rock Inscription" refers to Harjaravarman as being
devoted to Lord Mahēśvara, while in the Ḥaṇḍah śastra the king’s epithets include Paramēśvara, Paramabhāṭṭaraka and Paramamahēśvara. In the Tezpur Grant Vanamālaśvarman is described in the lines following verse 29 as “Saiva to the core, with his mind devoted to Paramēśvara.” Thus it is apparent that both these rulers were devotees of Siva who is also regarded as the Supreme Being or Paramēśvara.

In Balavarman III’s Nowgong and Uttarbarbil Copperplate Inscriptions, his ancestor Vanamālaśvarman’s devotion to Siva (Mahādeva) is clearly stated in verses 16-17: “having observed the vow of abstinence from food and drink, (he) merged himself in the glow of Mahādeva” and was “absorbed into the energy of Lord Siva”.

The inscriptions also contain descriptions of Mount Kailāśa, the abode of Siva. Vanamāla’s Tezpur Grant (V.1) refers to “the huge mass of golden stones of the beautiful Kailāśa Mountain”. Balavarman III’s Nowgong and Uttarbarbil Grants (V.2) refer to the musk deer “residing in the plateau of the Kailāśa Mountain”. In the Bargaon Grant (L.33-34) of Ratnapāla, in the description of the king’s capital Śrī Durjaya, refers to the peak of the Kailāśa Mountain as the abode of both Paramēśvara (Siva) as well as Vītessa (Kuvera).

The study of the inscriptions reveals familiarity with the different concepts of Siva as found in early Indian literature. In Vedic literature, the name “Siva” occurs only as an adjective, standing for auspiciousness applied to several gods, including Rudra, and the deity does not find a place in the Vedic pantheon. 29 The Vajasaneśī Śamhitā states “Agni, Asāni, Paśupati, Bhava, Sarva, Īsāna, Mahādeva, Mahādeva, Mahādeva, Mahādeva, Mahādeva, Mahādeva, Mahādeva, Mahādeva. 29. Vajasaneśī Śamhitā, 3.63, cited in I.K. Sarma, The Development of Early Sāiva Art and Architecture, PP.21-22.
Ugradeva, are all forms of the same god.\textsuperscript{30} The Vedic Rudra was a terrible god, probably a non-Aryan deity, offerings to whom were made outside the towns limits. Gradually, as a synthesis was effected, Rudra the Inauspicious metamorphosised into Siva the auspicious and was regarded as the consort of Uma, the daughter of the Aryan deity Daksha Prajapati. However, Siva was still regarded as inhabiting cemeteries, wearing deerskin, smearing his body with ashes, and ornamented with a garland of skulls.\textsuperscript{31} While assimilating Siva into the Aryan fold, the deity was given the function of destruction and elevated to the same position as Visnu, but the Siva Purana regards Siva as performing the triple acts of creation, preservation and annihilation.\textsuperscript{32} While the Vedic Rudra is sometimes identified with Agni as both could destroy prosperity and cause suffering, in his benevolent aspect he was Sambhu, Siva the Auspicious. As Saivism developed, Siva came to be regarded by his followers as the one and only Lord, Isvara and as the Supreme Being Mahabhuta, he uses maya (prakrti) and became Mahesvara.\textsuperscript{33} The Satarudnya text refers to him as a mountain dweller, Girisa while the Atharva Veda makes Rudra the ruler of all two-footed and four-footed animals, Pasupati. In the Pauranic period Rudra changed into Siva, a Supreme Deity, assuming the forms of both Brahma and Visnu, becoming the soul of the universe. He carries the cakra, trisula, khatvanga, and parasu and wears a griddle. His Yajnopavita is made of serpents; he

\textsuperscript{30} Cited in R.S. Gupta, Iconography of the Hindu Buddhists and Jains, P. 36.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., PP. 36-37.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., P. 37.
laughs, sings and dances in ecstasy and as the supreme dancer he is Nataraja.

Thus we can conclude that the concept of Siva, as indicated by the inscriptions, reveal that in ancient Assam, the deity was much revered and the people were familiar with the different aspects of the deity, as found in early literature, as well as with the Pauranic myths and legends associated with Siva.

5.3. Saktism:

Sakti, the mother goddess, conceived as power both creative and destructive has been an object of worship in India from early times. During the Indus Valley civilization, the worship of the female principle appears to have been in vogue among the Harappans as has been proved by the terracotta images of the goddess and the ring stones. The adoration of female entity can be traced in the Vedas also, where Vak, Usas etc. are identified with supreme god head. But the Epics and the Puranas are mainly responsible for the consecration of this female entity in Hindu pantheon and unfolding her diverse aspects supported by various myths and legends.

The different female divinities, such as Umā, Ambika, Durga, Parvati, Haimavatī, Kali, Mahakāli, Bhadrakāli, Karali, etc. came to be associated with the wife of Siva, and the relationship between the Saiva and the Sakta cults grew up.

The Sakta cult rose into prominence in the early centuries of the Christian era.

34. Ibid.
38. Mahābhārata, XII, 284-51.
The references found in the Mahabharata, of the goddess Durga and Kali which, according to Payne, belong to the 3rd or 4th century A.D., throw interesting light on the Sakta cult of this period. There are two Durga hymns that bring out several traits of the great goddess to be found in the later Tantric texts. The goddess was worshipped by offerings of flesh and wine, and this practice continued in later Tantrism. The mother-goddess of the Proto-Austroloid tribes was merged with the great Aryan mother-goddess, and the Saktas imbibed several non-Aryan habits. The sect absorbed not only Buddhistic elements but also foreign mother-goddess traits like those of Ishtar.

The Sakta cult was gradually tending towards Tantrism during the period of the Guptas. It is found that the Divine mothers were more than one, and they were accompanied by female dakinis. The mother-worship was associated with magic rites. The divine mothers were seven in number. In the Candi mahatmya of the Markandeya Purana, it is said that the goddess was created by the combined energies of all the gods together. This possibly shows that all the gods were ultimately united into one. The same work described some of the achievements of the goddess, and refers to her daily and autumnal worship.

The reference to magic practices in the inscription shows that the Tantric rites had already appeared in the field of Brahmanical religion, and reached

42. Ibid; “Brahmi-Mahesvari-Caiva Kumari Vaishnavi tatha, Mahendri Caiva Varahi Camurgā Sapta-Matarah.”
prominence during the 7th century A.D.

The worship of the God Siva and the mother-goddess accompanied with mystic rites as prescribed in some of the Tantras and the Tantric rites were gradually encroaching upon the religious sects following the Brahmanical faith.

"Saktism, in the sense of a definite sect with scriptures of its own, if not confined to the north-east corner at least had its head-quarters there." Wilson believes that Assam or at least North Bengal, in a great degree furnished a source from which Tantrism and Saktism proceeded. Traditionally the Sakta cult is considered to have its centre in Kamarupa with its chief temple at Kamakhya. Kamakhya, Kala, Kama, Kamada, are the different names of the goddess.

The name of the goddess, Kamakhya, does not appear in the early literature, and the word, according to Kakati, is non-sanskritic in origin, an Austroic word meaning ghost or dead body. Kamakhya formerly a goddess of ghosts and spirits, was worshipped in a smasana or cremation ground.

According to the Kalika Purana, the genital organ of Sati fell down on the Nilacal hill. When Sati (the Mother goddess) died of shock due to the insult suffered by her husband, Siva from her father Daksha. Siva began to carry her corpse being unable to bear separation and Visnu cut the body to pieces with his discus from behind, and these pieces fell on the earth and became auspicious pithas.

46. Eliot, Visnu Purana (preface)
47. B.K. Kakati, Assamese, Its Formation and Development, PP. 53f; M.G.K., P. 40;
‘Pīṭha’ means ‘āsana’ or seat. The different pithas in India are supposed to be the dwelling places of the Devī (the mother-goddess) : and so are called ‘Devīsthānas.’ To a Sakta devotee the word ‘Pīṭha’ further bears a special significance, which includes the places, where it is believed, the different parts of Sātī fell. The original number of Sakta pīthas was four, but with the passage of time the number gradually increased to seven, eight, nine, ten, fifteen, eighteen, fifty one and, finally, one hundred and eight. As the majority of the authentic sources like Tantrasara, Jñānarnāve, Pranatosani etc. record the number as fifty one. People belonging to the Sakta faith and religion adhere to this number, especially in the eastern part of India, since the works were composed there. Most of the 51 pīthas are located in Northern India. Kamākhya, one of the four original pīthas, is situated in Kamarupa, on the Nilācal mountain. The mountain represents the body of Siva himself and at the time of the falling of the genital organ on it, the mountain turned blue in colour. The goddess hereself as called Kamākhya, because she came there secretly to satisfy her amorous passion (Kāma) for Siva. Thus the derivations of the Kalika Purana make the mountain both a grave-yard and a secret love-tryst of the goddess. Regarding the establishment of the Pīthas, as Chattopadhyaya believes, “this story has possibly at its background the influence of the Buddhist legend of the creation of the stupas on parts of the Buddha’s body in different places”

Naraka, hailing from Mithilā, is credited to be the first ruler who introduced the worship of this yoni goddess Kamākhya in the kingdom of Kamarupa.

49. Saṃdakalpadrumah.
After Naraka, Kamakhya was no longer the primordial Mother goddess, and was treated as Parvati, the amorous wife of Siva, living in secret love with Siva. Another theory identifies the goddess Kamakhya with Tripura, the Virgin goddess of beauty and sex. A considerable section of the Kalika Purana has been devoted to the rites of her worship. The cult of Virgin worship (Kumari puja) and the sexual aspect of the Devi worship seem to be derived from the cult of Tripura. Kaumari or Kumari, the Virgin goddess of South India. Kakati believes that the Yoni goddess of Kamakhya migrated into Assam with the migration of the Austric peoples.

In the epigraphical records we find traces of the prevalence of Saktism in ancient Assam. In the Dubi plates of Bhaskaravarman (Vv. 51 and 53) Nayana Devi is compared to Durga (and Parvati). Nidhanpur plates refer (I. 87) to a donee named Kalisvami which signify that the cult of Kalighat was already popular to certain extent. In the same plates (V. 20) queen Syama Devi is compared to Karttayugi which means a goddess who deserves to be referred to as Kritya. Kritya Yuga is identical with Satya Yuga. Hence Kritya might be referred to as Satya also. In the Mahabharata goddess Durga is addressed as Satya. Durga being identical with Kali, the term Karttayugi may mean Kali. On the other hand Syama is just another name of goddess Kali. That is how there is the propriety of comparing queen Syama Devi with Karttayugi (Kali). Reverential reference is made in the Tezpur (II. 10-11) and Parbatiyala plates (II. 39-40) of Vanamala to the presence of God Kamesvara and

53. B.K. Kakati, M.G.K., P. 43.
goddess Mahāgaurī on the top of a hill called Kamakūtāgiri. On the strength of the Kalīka Purāṇa (64.48, 18-42) it may be presumed that Kāmesvara means god Śiva, Mahāgaurī goddess Kamakhya, and Kamakūtāgiri is the name of the Kamakhya hill or the Nilaparvata. The inscriptions of Vanamāla give the impression that the water of the river must have already become purified by washing the slopes of the Kamakūtāgiri before coming to the region of the city of Hādapesvara. The Kalīka Purāṇa refers to Natakasaila, the place of regular dalliance of Gaurī and Hara, which may be identified with Kamakuta. M.M. Sharma suggests that Kamakuta was in all probability identical with the present Bamuni hill to the east of modern Tezpur where extensive ruins of stone buildings are lying scattered. In the Deopānī Visnu Image Inscription, Visnu paid homage to Hara and said that goddess (Devi) is adorable and identical with Visnu. Again in the legend of the seals as well as the texts of the Tezpur Copperplate Inscription of Vanamāla begins with the auspicious sign āṇji. The symbol appears in the succeeding inscriptions also. The symbol ‘S’, āṇji, according to P.N. Bhattacharya, is the form of the snake shaped Kundalini that resides in susumna. This Kulakundalini is the Sakti of Śiva that remains coiling round the svayambhu (self-begotten) linga at muladhara (the lower nervous system of Indian anatomy).

In the Bargāon Grant of Ratnapāla (V. 2) the water of the river Brahmaputra is poetically conjectured to be “the auspicious power (sakti) of Lord Śaṅkara,  

57. P.N. Bhattacharya: Mahadeva, the Istadeva, of the kings of Kāmarūpa, J.A.R.S., II, PP. I-6.
intently engaged in destroying the whole host of sins”. Mention is also made to a playful quarrel between Gaurī and Sambhu in the Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla (V.1). In the same epigraph (V.14) queen Durlabhā of Purandarapāla is compared to goddess Śiva belonging to Sambhu. The Guwākuchi Grant of Indrapāla (I.49-60) refers to a plot of land chartered in the name of goddess Mahāgaurī and Lord Kāmesvāra. In the same inscription (II. 71-2), King Indrapāla is named Haragirijacarṇapānakajarajoranjitottamāṅga, i.e. one whose head is coloured with the dust of the lotus feet of Hara and Girija. These evidences show decisively that king Indrapāla was a follower of the Śakti cult; temples in the name of the goddess were built under his patronage and he assiduously followed the cult by studying the Tantras. In the Khanāmukh Grant of Dharmapāla the maṅgala verse is addressed to the goddess in the Ardhayuvaṭisvāra form. In the eleventh verse of the same plate queen Ratnā belonging to king Harsapāla is compared with goddess Girija belonging to Sambhu. In the Subhāṅkarapātaka Grant of Dharmapāla (V.19) Pāuksa, the mother of the donee and the wife of Bharata is compared to goddess Parvati, the spouse of Śiva, the killer of Andhaka (parvati-va dayitandhakadvisāḥ).

It is seen from the above discussion that various manifestations of the goddess are popular in ancient Assam. Śiva was directly associated with Śakti which got its physical manifestation in the shape of Gaurī which we have seen in the Tezpur Copperplate Inscription of Vanamāla and in the Guwākuchi Grant of Indrapāla. The Tezpur Grant refers to the temple of Kāmesvāra-Mahāgaurī and the Guwākuchi Grant refers to the temple of Mahāgaurī-Kāmesvāra. The Bargaon Grant also shows
one new motif, where both Śiva and Gauri were playing dice. Later on Śiva and Parvati acquired a unity and both were coalesced into one. The Khanāṃukh and the Subhaṅkarapātaka Grant of Dharmapāla (V.1) invokes the God Ardhayuvāṭisvara. Śakti or Bhagavati was also equated with Viṣṇu also. This new motif of the goddess we have seen in the Viṣṇu Image Inscription of Deopani. Another important fact of the Śakti worship is the reference of Tantra as a subject which was studied by Indrapāla.

The word tantra is used in many ways in the Hindu religious scripture. It has a deep philosophical meaning enveloping with spiritual knowledge. Tantra got its own system of formula and disciplinary system of practices. The word tantra is used by great philosophers and commentators according to their own systems of Sadhana in different names as Vaiṇaisīka Tantra by Śankarachārya for Kṣanabhagavada of the Buddhist system. The philosophical systems of Kapila and Gautam are also known as Kapila tantra and Gautam tantra Śaṅkara's formula of discipline calls Śaṅkhyā a tantra as he takes it as a trusted branch of spiritual knowledge. So tantra is a sadhana with its own system of discipline and some specific formula of practices.\(^58\)

The Tantras is a system with physical existence of the body and mantra and perfection of cosmic energy. It is said that Tantra is the branch of esoteric cult which gives the sense of realization of the absolute with the vibration of the mantra sadhana for the attainment of the absolute truth of perfection of spiritual

\(^58\) D.C. Sircar, Evolution of the Tantras, Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. IV, P. 211.
knowledge. We find in Kasikavritti that the word 'Tantra' is derived from the root 'tan' meaning 'to expand'. It thus expands one's mental faculty and leads one through the spiritual path enabling one to realize the supreme Absolute. This, in other words, is the realization of Liberation.

Tantra is a mystic process of spiritual cult which shows the way to liberate one's self from maya and crudeness of the thorny and valueless desire of the world. It is said that the word 'Ta' is the bija-mantra (acoustic root). It is a process of meditation (sadhana). One who realizes the Tantra sadhana can attain the path of salvation -Nirvana. Tantra Sadhana is the science of meditation which purifies the heart and soul by consuming the nectar of deep spiritual knowledge and enables one to free oneself from all kinds of bondage by illusion or maya of the world.

Saivism and Saktism are the two main sources of tantra. Sri L. P. Sing says 'Saktism represents the beginning of Tantra sadhana and Saivism is the culminating point of the spiritual march' 59. Siva-Sakti is the cosmic creator of the whole universe. The supreme creative energy dwells only in the union of Siva-Sakti. This is Tantra sadhana. This supreme power creates the energy to realise the spiritual knowledge to get free from the worldly desire of the four great truth Dharma, Artha, Kama, and lead to the sublime path of Moksha-Salvation that is nirvana. This indigenous cultural tradition runs through out the ages in India and Assam is an exception because most of vital parts of Tantra sadhana existed at Kamakhya on the top of the Nilacal hill from time immemorial. In respect of antiquity and importance,

59. L.P. Singh, Tantra.
Kamakhya surpasses most of the shrines in other parts of India and particularly of
the eastern part. On the basis of the Hevajra Tantra (c 8th cen. A.D.), the Kalika Purana (c. 10th Cen. A.D.) and Yogini Tantra (more or less the same period), S.K. Chatterji asserts that Sakta Tantrism fully established itself in Assam by the time the above works were composed.

Siva and Sakti worship in the new form of religion is known as Tantra of non-Aryan origin. Tylor in his primitive culture analyses Tantra as all its elements the use of magic and charms, the revolting rites, the use of wine, the belief in the efficiency of mantras and sex worship are found in other primitive culture all over the world and the high antiquity of the cult is pointed out by all. The non-Aryan elements are systematised by the Aryans.

The Tantra is divided into two parts - one is orthodox and the other form is heterodox. Orthodox Tantra is a combination of both Hindu and Buddhist practices, mostly established in mid India, P.C. Bagchi pointed out that the mystic character of the heterodox system is a formation of foreign elements found in Kamarupa, which is the famous centre of Tantric cult. Most of the scholars think that Tantrism is of foreign origin. H.P. Sastri quotes from the Kubjika Tantra to show its foreign origin. Both the Ugratara of Dikkaravasini and the Ugratara of the Nabhipitha are identical and seem "to be a Brahmanic Sakta adoption of the

61. Ibid., P. 13.
Mahāyāna Buddhist cult of Tara. It is significant that in the Kalika Purāṇa (80.43.4) the expression ‘Vajrapushpa’ is given as a mantra for the adoration of Tikṣṇakāntā and this very expression occurs in the sacred formula Om Odiyānāvajra pushpe svahā etc. in the Buddhist Sadhanamala.

Tantrism is closely associated with Kāmarūpa-Kāmākhyā, the mahāpiṭha of the Tantras, the famous centre of Tantric cult. Hutton remarks that this probably originated with the incorporation into Hinduism of a fertility cult which preceded the faith in Assam as religion of the country. Assam is the land of non-Aryan elements and contributed to the origin and growth of the mystic cult mixed with the Tantric faith, and developed ideas and created conception of cosmic energy of fertility and mother goddess, who was worshipped with some, system of scientific discipline, indulging in gratification of sensational desire to get ultimate release from the world.

5.4. Vaiṣṇavism:

Vaiṣṇavism signifies the particular theistic religion of which Viṣṇu is the chief deity of worship. Viṣṇu was recognised as an aspect of the Sun in the Rgveda. But Viṣṇu was only a minor god during that period. In fact there is little connection between the cult of Viṣṇu of the Vedas and the Bhakti cult or what may be called the sectarian Vaiṣṇavism of later times. The concept of Bhakti or

68. Hutton, Man in India, VII, PP. 228-32.
69. R.C. Majumdar, The Age of Imperial Unity, P. 431.
supreme devotion and the idea of a god of grace first appear in the later Vedic
texts. The Śāndilya Sūtram (1.1.2.) defines ‘Bhakti’ as Pārunuraktiṁśvara.
Svapnesvara defines ‘Bhakti after verse I.I. of his Śāndilya Sūtram. Bhandarkar
thinks that the origin of the Bhakti doctrine may be traced to the Upanisadic idea
of Upāsana or fervent meditation, which magnifies what is meditated upon and
represents it in a glorious form in order to excite admiration and love.\textsuperscript{71} Some
scholars find an early reference to the Bhakti doctrine in the rule in the Astadhyāyī
(IV. 3.98) of Panini (5th century B.C.) for formation of the words ‘Vasudevaka’ and
‘Arjunaka’ in the senses of a person whose object of Bhakti is Vasudeva and a person
whose object of Bhakti is Arjuna.\textsuperscript{72}

The Bhagavad-Gītā which seems to contain the earliest dogmatic
exposition of the religion characterised by Bhakti represents Vasudeva, otherwise
called Krṣṇa and identified with the god Viṣṇu as well as with the supreme spirit, as
a scion of the Vṛṣṇi (i.e. the Yadava-Satvata- Vṛṣṇi) family. The earliest reference
to the Bhagavatas is found in the Brahmasūtras.\textsuperscript{73} In the Bhagavata Purāṇa, the
highest Brahman is stated to have been called Bhagavat and Vasudeva by the Satvata
people. In the Santiparvan of the Mahabharata in reference to the Gītā states that
the Satvata or Bhagavata Dharma was taught first by Vasudeva-Krṣṇa to Arjuna. It
has to be noted that the word ‘satvata’ was used together with Sūri and Bhagavata
Dharma in the sense of a devotee of Vasudeva Viṣṇu in a canonical work of

\textsuperscript{71} D.C. Sircar, Early History of Vaisnavism, The Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. IV, P. 112.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
Vaisnavas. The Gita speaks of the Bhagavata religion as Yoga. The names Ekantika and Tanmaya appear to refer to the Yoga aspect of the Bhagavata.

In the Baudhayana Dharma-Sutra Visnu is identified with Narayana. There is a reference in the Satapatha Brahmana (XII. 3.4.) to a Purusa (a word used often in the sense of the supreme spirit) named Narayana who is stated to have thrice offered sacrifice at the instance of Prajapati. Narayana is not here identified with Visnu or any of the Adityas. Elsewhere in the same work (XIII. 6) mentions Purusa Narayana as the performer of a Pancaratra satta (sacrifices continued for five days) who obtained as a result superiority over all beings and "become all beings." Some scholars trace the name Pancaratra or Pancaratrika applied to the Bhagavatas (or to one of their important branches) to this five day satta attributed to Narayana. In the earlier times the deity used to be worshipped according to a procedure prescribed in a set of text known as Pancaratra Samhita. The Pancaratra form of worship is marked by the predominance of the rituals common to the Tantric-Sakta cult besides mantra and yantra. The Pancaratra Samhita marked the first emergence of Sakta principles in the Vaisnava sect.

The Taittiriya Aranyaka (X.II) contains a passage in which Narayana, Vasudeva and Visnu are regarded as one and the same deity. Here Narayana is also called Hari and 'the eternal deity,' the 'Supreme and Lord.' Several passages of the Mahabharata support the identification of Vasudeva, Visnu and Narayana as found in the above passages.

75. Ibid.
work. Probably the followers of the Narayana were originally called Pancaratra and were later merged into the worshipper of Vasudeva-Krsna.

The Vyūha doctrine is one of the principal tenets of the Pancaratra system which was absorbed in the Bhāgavata religion, as well as of the later Śrī-Vaisnava philosophy. According to this doctrine, Lord Vasudeva in his ‘para’ aspect is the highest object of bhakti. He created from himself the vyūha (phase of conditioned spirit) Sankarśana and also Prakṛti (the indiscrete primal matter of the Sāṁkhya). From the association of Sankarśana and Prakṛti arose the vyūha Pradyumna and also manas (buddhi or intelligence of the Sāṁkhya). From the combination of Pradyumna and manas sprang the vyūha Aniruddha as also ahaṁkāra (consciousness), and from the association of Aniruddha and ahaṁkāra arose the mahābhūtas (elements with their qualities) and the god Brahma who made out of those elements the earth and all that it contains. While Vasudeva alone possesses the six ideal gunas or qualities, viz., jñāna, balā, virya, aishvarya, sakti and tejas, each one of his three emanations possesses only two of the said gunas in turn.77 This philosophical interpretation of the relation of Vasudeva with other deified heroes of the Vṛṣṇi clan is apparently a later development. The Gītā, the earliest religious text of the Bhāgavatas, does not refer to the vyūhas, although they are referred to in several other (presumably late) sections of the Mahābhārata (e.g. a section of the Bhīṣma-parva, the Narāyanīya section of the Śantiparva, etc.). But these references do not give a consistent account of the vyūhas. Bhandarakar thinks that, out of the

five prakrtis of Vasudeva (viz. the five elements, mind, buddhi, egoism and jiva) as mentioned in the Gītā, jīva, mind and egoism were later on personified into the vyūhas Sāṅkarasana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. The Mora inscription of the first century A.D. speaks of ‘bhagavatāṁ vṛṣṇīmāṁ Pāṇcāvīrtāṁ pratimāḥ’, the images of the group of five divine heroes of the Vṛṣṇi family. The Vāyu Pūrāṇa (XCVII. 1-2) mentions the five Vamsāvīras of the Vṛṣnis and they were Sāṅkarsana, Vasudeva, Pradyumna, Samba and Aniruddha. They were apotheosized and worshipped with the title bhagavata about the beginning of the Christian era. Sāṅkarṣāna also called Baladeva, Balarama and Rāma appears to have been a more important figure and his independent worship spread over a wide area before the birth of the Christ. In later times the devotees of Sāṅkarṣāna appear to have merged themselves in those of Vasudeva. The independent worship of other Vṛṣṇivīras was gradually declined. Even the worship of Sāṅkarṣāna lost its popularity owing to the increasing enthusiasm for the worship of some of the avatāras of Viṣṇu since the age of the Imperial Guptas.

Thus the Vedic conception of the Solar god Viṣṇu and the Brahmānical one of the cosmic god Narāyana were merged in that the hero god Vasudeva -Kṛṣṇa of the Epic; and thus formed the composite cult picture in the developed phase of the cult.

According to Dr. P.C. Bagchi, the composite cult of Vaisnavism, formed through syncretism of various cults and perceptible in Guptan Bhagavatism, was

79. P.I.H.C., 1944, PP. 82-90.
established in Bengal in the Gupta and the post-Gupta period.\(^{80}\)

Vaisnavaism was a predominant aspect of Brahmanical religion during the Gupta period. From the days of Samudragupta's son Chandragupta II (A.D. 376-414) the Gupta emperors were the most influential advocates of the Bhāgavata form of Vaisnavism. Their patronage seems to have been one of the causes of great popularity of this creed all over the country from the fifth century A.D. The age of the Guptas witnessed the evolution of Neo-Vaisnavism from the tribal form of Bhāgavatism which was originally practised by the members of the Yadava-Satvata-Vṛṣṇi clan.\(^{81}\)

The Umācal Rock Inscription of Surendravarman records the establishment of a cave (temple) dedicated to Lord Balabhadra. As discussed above, Balabhadra was one of the Vyūhas or emanates of the Supreme deity Vasudeva and the Vyūha doctrine is one of the important aspects of Pāñcaratra mode of worship. Thus the epigraph stands as a testimony to the prevalence of the Vaisnava cult as early as in the fifth century A.D. We know that the worship of Lord Balabhadra was popular upto the beginning of the Gupta rule in North India and no where in the Gupta time the worship of this deity was prevalent in India.\(^{82}\) Therefore the worship of Lord Balabhadra svāmī in the 5th century Assam is a very important fact of religious history of Assam. The 7th century Dubi Copperplate Grant of Bhāskaravaran (V. 68) while referring to the invasion of Kamarupa by the Gauḍa army, compares

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Bhāskarvarman and his brother Supratisthitavarman with Acyuta (Krṣṇa) and Balārāma. It seems that now Balārāma was worshipped as an avatāra of Viṣṇu.

In the Bargāṅga Rock Inscription king Bhūtivarman is described as Paramabhagavata, implying that he was a great worshipper of Viṣṇu. Personal names very often work as an index to the deities worshipped by the persons concerned. Thus it is very likely that Bhūtivarman was actually a worshipper of Viṣṇu so far as his father was named as Nārāyanavarman, as borne out by the seal attached to the Dubi Grant, the Nalanda Clay Seal and by the two copperplate grants of Bhāskaravarman.

In the copperplate land grant charters, the kings of the Kāmarūpa kingdom trace their lineage from Vaṁha Viṣṇu, i.e. Viṣṇu in his Boar incarnation. The Dubi Copperplate Grant (V.2) refers to the episode of the rescue of the Earth by Varah-Viṣṇu and begetting a superior son Naraka, the progenitor of their dynasty which is invariably repeated in the copperplate grants of the three ruling dynasties of the Kāmarūpa kingdom. Yet we do not have any mangala verse addressed to Viṣṇu in the epigraphs prior to the third copperplate grant of Dharmapāla. By the time of the Kamauli Grant (A.D. 1142) the invocation to Śiva has been dispensed with and is replaced by only a salutation to Viṣṇu. Again the Dubi Copperplate Grant (VV. 53-54) compares Bhāskaravarman’s father Susthitavarman to ‘Viṣṇu’, the protector of the three worlds; and records that his mother, the queen, was delighted by him just as ‘Devakī was by Lord Krṣṇa, the enemy of the demons’. Verse 7 of

83. N.K. Bhattasali, E.I., XXVII, 18-23.
the grant refers Narayanavarman as Narayana, the holder of the Cakra and his consort as Padma. In verse 59 Siva is said to be like Lord Visnu or Lokesa. Verse 60 refers to Visnu as the ‘holder of the dazzling discus’. Verse 38 refers to the seventh avatara of Visnu, Rama, son of Dasarath.

In the 7th century Nidhanpur Copperplate Grant (V. 4) Visnu is referred to as the holder of the wheel or Cakrapani. In verse 19 of this grant refers to him as Hari and he is said to hold the goddess Laksmi to his bosom just as a miser hold his wealth. Amongst the donees of the Nidhanpur Grant we have Brahmanas with the following names signifying popularity of the Vaisnava cult: Visnughoshasvamin, (Gauratreya) Narayanasvamin, Visnusvamin (Gautama), Visnusomasvamin, Visnupalitasvamin Narayanakundasvamin, Janardanasvamin, Kesavasvamin, Visnubhutisvamin, Visnudattasvamin, (Maudgalya), Visnusomasvamin, Sudarasanavamin (Bharaspatya) Janardanasvamin, and (Bharaspatya) Narayanavamin.

The 9th century Hayunthal Copperplate Grant of Harjaravarman refers to Devi Kamalanivasinī (i.e., goddess Laksmi L.23). His son was named Vanamāla, a synonym for Visnu while the names of his (Vanamāla) officers all revealed Vaisnavaite leanings. His Mahāpratihāra (chief usher) was called Janāradana, while his chief councillors were Śri Govinda and Madhusudana (VV. 27-28). The Tezpur Copperplate Grant of Vanamāla (VV. 13-15) refers to Viṣṇu’s dalliance with a host of gopīs (milk maids) thus incurring the ire of his consort Laksmi who was born on earth to become the queen of Harjaravarman, the donor’s father. The same
references are to be found in the Parbatiya Copperplate Grant of the same ruler. Verses 13-15 of this copperplate repeat the story of Kṛṣṇa being enamoured with the gopījana. In addition Viṣṇu is also called Rathāṅgapani or one who is matchless in valour (VV. 13-15). In the Ulubāri Grant the name of the grand father of the donee is Visnudeva. The Uttarbarbil and the Nowgong Copperplate Grant (V. 3), both issued in the last quarter of the 9th century A.D., Viṣṇu is called Upendra. In the Bargaon Grant of Ratnapāla (c. 920-960 A.D.) Viṣṇu is called Hari in the form of a Boar. In the Suwalkuchi Grant of Ratnapāla, (VV. 17-18) the name of the father of the donee is Vāsudeva, and his wife is compared with Lākṣmī, who is said to be adorable to the whole world. In the second verse of the Gauhati Grant of his grand son Indrapāla Varāha-Viṣṇu is equated with Śiva Pasupati and called the Lord of the whole mankind. Verse 9 of the grant compares Indrapāla’s grand father Ratnapāla to Rama and Kṛṣṇa due to his commendable qualities and also as Varāha (L.33). Verse 4 of the Grant also refers to Parasūramā, son of Jamadagni, the sixth incarnation of Viṣṇu. The Guwākuchi Grant of Indrapāla refers to (V.22) Vasudeva, father of Kṛṣṇa and a friend of Nanda, a source of delight to Puruṣottama. It compares the donee to Hari who was illustrious and a well wisher to the cowherds and was accepted by Yaśoda as a son although he had taken birth from Devakī (V. 24). There is also a reference (L. 54) to a temple dedicated to Lord Vasumādhava. The prose portion of the grant (L. 61-62) gives us 32 names of king Indrapāla among which are comparisons to Viṣṇu which give a fair idea of the different qualities of the deity. He is called Lākṣmī bharodbahanāeyuta or like Viṣṇu who holds Lākṣmī
to his bosom; Narasiṁhavikrama or like Viṣṇu in man-lion form and as brave as lion; anatakṣatravamsa bhaṅgava or a destroyer of the Kṣatriya kings like Parasurama.

This grant also contains four drawings etched on the metal plate. These are the symbols associated with the deity Viṣṇu, viz. Garuḍa, Padma, Sankha and Cakra. The first is the Vahana or vehicle of the deity and the last is his weapon, wheel. The second and the third, the lotus and the conch shell, along with the other symbols, including the Gada or mace are identical with the deity. According to the principles of Vedic symbolism, the vehicles and weapons of the deities are always identical with the deities concerned. In Nirukta (7-4) it is said that all the associate objects like chariot, horse and weapons are identical with the deities. According to the principle, the four pictures symbolise Lord Viṣṇu. ⁸⁴

The Gachtal Grant of Gopala (V2) refers to Viṣṇu in his Boar incarnation as the source of the world, as Brahma, the creator arose from the lotus in his naval and hence he is called Padmanava. Here Varaha Viṣṇu is mentioned as adīrghadeva, or the Dwarf god (i.e., Vaman). Verse 4 calls Hari the primeval deity who had saved the earth in his Boar incarnation. V. 22 refers to Laksṇī (Kamalakara) and Viṣṇu (Puruṣottama) together. Verse 23 refers to the name of the son of Indrapāla as Gopāla, which is significant in this context. Verse 24 compares Gopāla with Rāma, the vanquisher of Rāvana. V. 32 refers to Balabhadra, son of Sambhrama who composed the eulogy of the Grant. The Khanāmukh Grant of Dharmapāla refers to the Boar incarnation of Viṣṇu. Verse 17 of the Subhaṅkarapāṭaṇa Grant compares

⁸⁴ M.M. Sharma, I.A.A., P.206.
Ramadeva of Sravasti with Rama of Ayodhya. In those two grants there is a reference to an unusual friendship between Lakṣmī and Sarasvati (V. 9). In the earlier grant the name of the father of the donee is Viṣṇu. The wife is said to be like Lakṣmī of Hari (VV. 19-20).

In the Puṣpabhadra Grant of the same ruler, for the first time of all the Grants of Kamarūpa kings, we have a salutation to Viṣṇu in the Boar incarnation in the mangala verse. Here Viṣṇu is said to have the insignia of Garuda in his banner (V. 2). There is a reference to a temple dedicated to Sri Madhusūdana (L. 18). Here the donee is also Madhusūdana. The donee Madhusūdana is said to have worshipped at ‘the lotus feet of Lord Madhava’. It is noteworthy that Sri Dharmapāla granted with this charter the largest plot of land ever donated to a single Brahmana by any one of the Kamarūpa kings. It might have been because of the Brahmana donee’s having been attached to the worship of Madhava from his boyhood. The total absence of any trace of the Saiva and Sakta cult and the preference to Viṣṇu in the Puṣpabhadra Grant cannot be simply passed as an accident. It stands as strong testimony to a deliberate tendency towards Vaiṣṇavism, because the Kamauli Grant of Vaidyadeva, which comes next to the chronological order, begins with a salutation to Vasudeva.

The Kamauli Grant of Vaidyadeva and the Assam Plates of Vallabhadeva, the donor salute Lord Vasudeva. In verse I of the Kamauli Grant refers to Hari in his Boar incarnation. Verse 4 of the grant refers to Rama winning Janakabhū i.e. Sītā and to his killing Rāvana after crossing the ocean. L. 47 refers to Vaidyadeva as the
great devotee of Siva and the great devotee of Visnu In a word of blessing (V. 31)
it is said that those who would honour the charter would enjoy the heaven for long
and then finally retire forever to the adorable abode of Visnu. The name of the
father of the poet is also given as Murari which is an epithet of Visnu (V. 33)

The Assam Plates refer to Visnu who has assumed the form of a hog (V. 2).
The inscription (L. 54-56) again refers to the Boar incarnation of Visnu where it is
said that who ever violates the recommendations of the present charter would be
punished by the foremost Varaha (agro varaha).

One Visnu image bearing inscription and two composite Hari-Hara image
both bearing inscriptions discovered in the Deopani area are very important to
study the development of Vaisnavism in ancient Assam The Visnu Image
Inscription of 8th century A.D. pays homage to Hara but says that goddess
(Bhagavati)is identical with Visnu. and is worshippable for the Sudras, the twice
born and women. The stone Visnu image was installed in a temple for the devotees (bhaktas)

The Hari-Hara Stone Image Inscription (8th century A.D.) refers to the
donation of a Hari-Hara image with the chanting of hundred names of Lord Hari.

The Saṅkara-Nārāyaṇa Stone Image Inscription (8th century A.D.) refers to
the chanting of prayers to Saṅkara and Nārāyaṇa before the consecration of the
idol in the family temple.

The above discussion reveals the history of Vaisnavism in ancient Assam. It
seems that in the 5th century A.D. worship of Lord Balabhadra was popular and
royal patronage also extended for the worship of the deity. In the sixth century
A.D. the Bargāṅgā Rock Inscription of the time of Bhūtivarman refers to Bhūtivarman as Paramabhagavata. But in the seventh century A.D. the Dubi Copperplate Grant traced their lineage from Varaha Visnu. This inscription as we see refers to a number of names of Visnu viz. Kṛṣṇa, Balaraṁa, Acyuta, Cakrapāṇi, Nārāyaṇa and popularity of various Visnu myths and avatars. But he was not the prime deity of Kāmarūpa. Siva was invoke in the mangala verse in the copperplate inscriptions of the Kāmarūpa kings.

But an early approach between the two is seen in the Dubi Copperplate Grant where it is stated that Siva is like to be Visnu or Lokesa. The two inscribed Hari-Hara images from Deopāṇi confirmed that approach. The inscribed Visnu image from Deopāṇi indicates syncretism between Vaisnavism, Saivism and Saktism. The Sāṅkara-Nārāyaṇa Image Inscription states that some chanting of prayers to Sāṅkara and Nārāyaṇa was performed before consecrating of the idol in the temple. The Hari-Hara Image Inscription also states that the idol was given to the son of Kakhya with chanting of hundred names of Hari. All these references show the religious toleration, spirit of syncretism and catholicity of mind of the people. Visnu worship was open to all- Sudras, twice born and women. The clear mention of the Bhaktas in the Visnu Image Inscription (L.4) show that the cult of Bhakti was gaining ground in the religious life of the people and the mode of worship of Sāṅkara-Nārāyaṇa and Hari was nāma-samkirtana. Sāṅkaradeva, the Neo-Vaisnava apostle of Assam popularised the cult of nāma-samkirtana as a mode of paying homage to the deity in the 16th century A.D. and he received the inspiration for
this cult from the Sahasranama-khanda of the Padma Purana. Now this inscription shows that most probably the cult became prevalent in Assam as early as in the 8th century A.D. But while the Neo-Vaisnavism was to denounce all forms of puja, the above mentioned inscriptions show that namasamkirtana was offered to the idol of Sankara-Narayana and Hari. Even the Vaisnava donee of king Dharmapala’s time engaged himself in all the details of a puja of Madhava. Therefore what ever trace of Vaisnavism we find during this period was presumably of the Pancaatra type.

Another significant feature of Vaisnavism of this period is the adoration of Laksmi. Inscriptions of ancient Assam show that Visnu holds Laksmi to his bosom.

Avataraas of Visnu was very popular in ancient Assam. Varaha, Parasuram, Rama, Narasimha, Vamana and Krishna are mentioned in the inscriptions. The most important avatara in the later Vaisnava cult of the province is Krishna, whose account became the main theme of early Assamese literature. The Krishna legend seems to have formed an essential element of Vaisnavism in Kamarupa as early as the 7th century A.D. References have been made to Krishna’s sportive childhood as Gopala, who though born of Devaki was brought up by Yasoda, and was the delight of the Gopis. The knowledge of the Vasudevism in Kamarupa prior to the spread of Neo-Vaisnavism is mainly confined to the Kalika Purana (83-89-187). The worship was followed by the Pancaatra system.

85. Ibid., P. 311.
5.5. **Sūrya Worship**:

Sūrya, the Sun god is highly venerated by the Hindus. The worship of the Sun God Sūrya can be traced back to RgVedic times. The Rg Veda (X. 158.1) invokes Sūrya, Vata and Agni for protection from heaven, air and earth respectively. He is often called the eye of Mitra, Varuṇa, Agni and other gods. He is also identified with the Avestic hvare “Sun” who has swift horses and who is the eye of Ahura Mazda. In the early Vedic period Sūrya is frequently referred to as Śāvitrī, Puṣan, Bhaga, Vivasvat Mitra, Āryaman and Viṣṇu. These different names of the deity embody his different aspects like ‘stimulator’, ‘beneficence’ distributor of wealth, the first sacrificer’ and ‘the ancestor of the human race’. In Vedic literature Sūrya is said to be one of the Ādityas. The Vedic gāyatrī is the invocation of the god, which shows that the deity was held in high esteem, and his worship was popular.

The earliest reference to the Sūrya sect is to be found in the account of the Classical Greek writers, who refer to the Indians as worshipping Soroadeios or the Sūryadeva. With the rise of Vaiṣṇavism, the importance of Sun god declined, as Viṣṇu originally a Solar deity, absorbed the elements which had been attributed to the Sun god in the earlier days.

In the pre-Christian epoch there were two distinct Saurya sects, one Indian having the Vedic deity Sūrya as its supreme god and the other foreign with its own

88. R.C. Majumdar, The Vedic Age, P. 366.
89. Ibid.
90. R.S. Gupta, Iconography of the Hindus, Buddhists and Jains, P. 366.
Sun god, Helios or Mithra wearing a characteristically foreign dress (Udichyavesa). The foreign sect was centred in the region of North-Western India, and in the later period it could influence the sect following the Vedic cult.\textsuperscript{92} According to Rowland the Saurya sect, existing in the North-West, was influenced to a large extent by foreign elements; and the Sun-worship in other parts of India became somehow associated with Buddhism.\textsuperscript{93}

In the early centuries of the Christian era, the Magian Sūrya sect made considerable progress in North India, which was due to the Saka influence. The Sakas had imbibed strong Iranian elements in their culture and later when they settled in India they became Indianised\textsuperscript{94}. Among the Sakas the Māgas were regarded as high class priests, and they performed the priestly functions of the Scythians in India. They introduced a new form of Sun-worship into this country. The Magian Sūrya cult was gradually expanding its ground at the cost of the indigenous sect.\textsuperscript{95} The Scythians were mainly responsible for the unification of the two different Sūrya cults prevalent in India.\textsuperscript{96} The Magian Sun cult had extended into the Madhyadesa region by the time of the Guptas.

It is contended that in the third millennium B.C. there was an Alpine immigration into Eastern India. These Alpines lived in or near the Iranian tableland, before their entry into India and came into contact with the common ancestors of

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid, PP. 173-174.
\textsuperscript{93} B. Rowland, The Art and Architecture of India Buddhist Hindu and Jaina, P. 53.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{95} J.N. Banerjea, Development of Hindu Iconography, PP. 139-40.
\textsuperscript{96} S. Chattopadhyaya, Evolution of Hindu Sect. PP. 178-79.
both the Vedic and Avestic Aryan speaking people. It is not improbable that Māgian priests were included in the groups that came to ancient Assam, and that it was they who introduced Sun worship into the region.

Inscriptions of ancient Assam throw light regarding the prevalence of the Sun worship in ancient Assam. The inscribed Sun image from Narakaśur hoard states that “this illustrious and magnificent (image of god) Aditya Nārāyana was made during the reign of the king Harjaradeva”. This inscription suggests that during the reign of Harjaravarman (c. 855-835 A.D.) the Sun image was made for the worship of the Sun god.98

The inscribed Sun image from Kāki states that in the reign of Sri Vanamāladeva the Sun image was given over to Bhaṭṭa Ravi who was the grand son of Vasistha. This inscription proved that during the reign of Vanamālavarman Sun worship was prevalent in ancient Assam.

Another inscribed Sun image discovered in Titabor where the name of the sculptor was inscribed. All these images assigned to the 9th century A.D.

In the Gauhati Grant of Indrapāla, there occurs the expression “tathagata-kārita-adityabhattacharaka-satka-sasana bhavisabhumi”. Hoernle takes the word aditya to mean the Sun-god. P.N. Bhattacharya suggests that the expression

Aditya Bhattaraka also might refer to simply a scholar (Bhattaraka) 102

Archaeological finds, however go a long way to prove the prevalence of the worship of the Sun god. Ruins of temple discovered in Tezpur town, which according to Banerjee 103 was a gigantic temple dedicated to Surya, belonged to a period between the 8th and the 10th centuries A.D. Quite a number of images of the Sun god have been noticed in Assam. Besides these many door lintels bearing the images of Navagraha, mostly found along with the Trinity, which may indicate the popularity of Sunworship in Assam side by side with the Saiva and Viṣṇu cults. Majority of these images belonged to the 10th-12th century A.D. 104 From the inscriptive and iconographic evidences, it seems that majority of the cult existed from the 8th century to 12th century A.D. As the majority of the images belonged to the 10th to 12th century A.D. the cult seems to have become more popular during that period 105.

Ancient literature contains reference to the popularity of Sun worship in ancient Assam. The Markandeya Purana (canto 109) refers to Pragjyotisa as Udayacala, the land of sunshine, wherein stood a temple of the Sun. Tarânâtha’s History of Buddhism in India contains an important account of Arya Dhitika, a Buddhist monk, who flourished as early as third century B.C. Dhitika converted a Brähmana named Siddha who worshipped Sun in Kamarūpa to Buddhism, who built

102. P.N. Bhattacharya, K.S., P. 129 n.3.
104. N.P. Deva Choudhury, Historical Archaeology of central Assam, P. 118.
a Mahācāitya and lavishly entertained the Saṅghas all around. This surely stands as an evidence to the popularity of the Sun worship in ancient Assam.

The Kalika Purana refers to two important seats of Sun worship. It refers to Ravikṣetra situated on a hill called Tattva to the west of the river Trisrotā. This is identified as the Sri Surya Pahār in the district of Goalpara which contains a large number of sculptures of great iconographical significance. The most prominent one is in the form of a large outer circle containing one smaller inner circle. Within the inner circle there is the figure of a four faced deity who may be identified as god Kasyapa or Prajapati, the father of the Suns. In between the inner and the outer circles there are twelve identical figures arranged around the figure of Kasyapa in the form of lotus petals. These are the figures of twelve Ādityas or the twelve Suns.

The Kalika Purana further refers to the Citrāśaila, also called Prakparvata, as a centre of worshipping the nine grahas now identified as the Navagraha hill in the city of Guwahati. The present temple of Navagraha has been constructed during the time of the Ahom king Rajeswar Singha in Saka 1674 (1752 A.D.). But on the basis of the date of the composition of the Kalika Purana, the tradition of the Navagraha-worship may be traced back to the ninth or tenth century A.D. The antiquity of the Sun-worship in ancient Assam is testified by the Kalika Purana (38-121) where Viṣṇu after installing Naraka on the throne of Pragjyotisa, says, ‘o

106. Taranatha, The History of Buddhism in India, P. 47.
109. Ibid.
son! Mahādeva, Brahmā and myself are established in this place and Candra and Sūrya also reside here permanently."

At Citrācalā we find Sūrya in the aniconic linga form. Although the present temple was built in the 18th century A.D., the site was always held sacred as the abode of the Navagrahas. The Kāmrūpar Buranji records that Ahom king Rūdra Simha compiled a list of existing tīrthas of Guwahati and the area around it. The Citrācalā is included in this list as the abode of the Navagrahas. In the aniconic form Sūrya is known as Ravi. The linga representing the Sun is placed in the centre and surrounded by eight other lingas representing the other celestial beings, in eight directions at equal distances, thus forming an octagon. According to D. Chutia, "the aniconic representation of the grahas are a manifestation of the fusion of the predominant Saivite cult and the Solar cult." The temple of Navagraha bears the remnants of a legacy of the Solar cult and planetary worship in Pragjyotisapura. B.N. Sastri endorses this view when, with reference to the nine lingas representing the nine grahas he states "As Siva is made identical with Sūrya in the Purāṇas, Siva is being worshipped in the form of the grahas." According to Shastri the Markandeya Purāṇa, the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa and the Sambha Purāṇa, "asserts the identity of Aditya with Siva". Thus, the deity was also worshipped as one among the nine celestial beings or Navagrahas.

114. Ibid, P. 46.
A tradition of astrological studies remains intimately connected with the cult of worshipping Sūrya and the grahas. The Kamauli grant refers to Daivajnās (Astrologers) (V. 8). The name Pragjyotisa may be shown to be connected with the practice of astronomy. The Kalika Purāṇa (38-123) says: “In the early times Brahma staying here created a star, and that is why the city is called Pragjyotisa”. In the light of this Gait takes the term Pragjyotisa to mean the city of eastern astrology. K.L. Barua associates this etymology with the temple of Navagraha.

A distinct system of astronomy for calculating the almanac has been developed in Kamarupa from ancient time. This system is called Kamarupiya Nibandhariya Khandasadhya. A treaties on this system has been composed by one Mihiira in about 665 A.D., and manuscripts of the same are found in large numbers in Kamrup District. Some scholars attribute this tradition of planetary worship of ancient Assam to Iranian influence. It is maintained that ‘a people of the Alpine stock, speaking an Aryan language of the Paisachī variety and proceeding from Iran, migrated into Eastern India and diffused there a culture long before the advent of the Vedic Aryan influence.

5.6. Ganesa Worship:

The Lord of ganas is one of the important members of the Panchadevatās. Ganesa, the son of Siva and Parvati and one among the Saivitic deities, he became most supra-sectarian as all sects agree in doing him honour as “the bestower of

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success” (siddīda) and “the remover of obstacles” (Vighnēśvara). The cult of Gāṇeṣa started in India from about 5th century A.D. according to Bhandarkar, Getty and Banerjea, though the cult was known even earlier than the Gupta period as the reference is made in the Vedic mantra. In theṚgveda he is Vṛhaspati and Brahmaṇāspati. In various references it is elucidated how the sharp horned Vṛhaspati came to be identified with the one tusked Gaṇapati.

In theṚgvedic mantra (2/23/1) Brahmaṇāspati is asked to come down as Gaṇapati. Amongst the devas he is Gaṇapati, the wisest amongst the wise, the supreme amongst the intellectuals, the most successful king and the lord of all hymns. In anotherṚgvedic mantra (10/112/9) it is Indra who is referred to as Gaṇapati. He was the first god.

In theYajurveda mantra (23/19) in a hymn to Brahmaṇāspati or to the Rising Sun, he is referred to as Gaṇapati amongst the gods, the beloved amongst the loved ones and the king of all abodes. In Krisṇayajurveda’s Maitreya Samhita, Krisṇayurveda, Tatṭtviya Aranyaka’s Narāyan Upainshad and in Gaṇapatyārthavāsirshoupanishad these three hymns are analysed. He is known and meditated upon as the one with the face of an elephant, having one tusk and a bent snout. Thus the concept of Gāṇeṣa is from the Vedas. Mingling into one with Brahmaṇāspati, Vṛhaspati and Indra he is a great divinity. In him is manifest the

121. A. Getty, Ganesa, P. 10.
122. J. N. Benarjea, P. 354.
123. A. Getty, Ganesa, P. 10.
forces of energy, knowledge, preservation and destruction\textsuperscript{124}. When the god became the god of a sect is difficult to ascertain. The worship of the god appears in the Yajñavalkya Smṛti and in inscriptions of the eight and ninth centuries A.D.\textsuperscript{125} The theology appears in the Upanishad called Gaṇapatitapaniya which belonged to 6th century A.D.

The Gaṃesa Purāṇa proclaims Gaṇesa the eternal Brahman, the Omkār. He is saluted first whenever any work or puja is initiated. The name omkār is chanted before all hymns and here we find Gaṇesa being honoured.\textsuperscript{126} During the Gupta period Gaṇapati became one of the Panchadevata. The Agni and the Garuda Purāṇas give direction for his worship in Panchayatana puja.\textsuperscript{127}

The inscriptions throw scattered light on the prevalence of the Gaṇapatya cult in ancient Assam. The Nidhanpur Grant of Bhāskaravarman begins with symbol Om. The Tezpur Rock Inscription also begins with the symbol. But in the later inscriptions we see the use of anj symbol. In the Kamauli Grant we see the use of anj before Om. In the Assam Plates the anj is represented by Kielhorn in the text by the syllable Om. Om is the representative of the Vedic Brahma, where as anj is the symbol of the Tantric divinity ‘Kuṇḍalinī’.\textsuperscript{128}

The Dubi Grant (V.21) states that king Gaṇendravarma was similar to Gaṇendra (i.e. Ganesa). In V.62 of this grant two sons of Supratisthitarvarma were

\textsuperscript{124} S. Nirmalananda, Hindu Gods and Goddessess, P. 204-205.
\textsuperscript{125} J. N. Farquhar, An Out line of the Religious Literature of India, P. 206.
\textsuperscript{126} S. Nirmalananda, Hindu Gods and Goddessess, P. 204-205.
\textsuperscript{127} J.N. Farquahar, An Out line of the Religious Literature of India, P. 206.
compared with Skanda (i.e. Karttikeya) and Vinayaka (i.e., Ganesa). The Nidhanpur Grant (V.II) states that queen Gandharvavati begot a son from Kalyanavarman who was named Ganapati and incessantly raining gifts (dana varsa), was endowed with innumerable qualities for the extermination of the Kali age like Lord Ganapati, who has an incessant flow of ichor, is endowed with innumerable qualities for the extermination of strife. Thus in the seventh century A.D. the concept of Ganapati was popular in ancient Assam. The Kamauli Grant of Vallabhadeva invokes him as Lambodara (VI) after the salutation to Vasudeva. The Kamauli Grant of Vaidyadeva bears a seal of the god. A copperplate grant of 1392 A.D. opens with the adoration of Ganapati ‘namo ganapataya vande’.

Quite a number of images of Ganesa have come to light in Assam, belonging to a period from 6th to 12th century A.D. or still later. Almost all the temples have the images of Ganesa particularly on the door lintel. Besides these, stray icons and rock cut images of Ganesa were discovered in large numbers. Without the prevalence of the Ganapatya cult, it would not have been possible to find large number of the images of this deity. The worship of Ganesa as a major deity is still popular in Assam.

The epigraphic as well as the iconographical evidence may indicate that the worship of Ganesa as a major cult was more popular during the 11th to the 13th century A.D. under the patronage of some of the Kamarupa rulers.

130. M.M. Sharma, I.A.A., P. 204.
5.7 Indra and Minor Deities:

Indra:

Indra is the god of thunder, lightning and rainfall. In the Rgveda there are 250 Suktas dedicated to Indra alone. More than 50 Suktas were dedicated to Indra with Varuna and few other gods. Indra strides over nearly a quarter of the Rgveda.

In Rgveda Indra is the king of the gods (3/46/3/ and Lord of the Universe (5/30/5). Since birth he is an unvanquished warrior and a terror to his enemies. Victory is not possible without Indra. People seek his shelter at times of warfare (2/12/9). The Rgveda has described various anecdotes depicting the valour of Indra.

The unconquerable Indra of the Vedas has often been found vanquished in the Puranās. The Kalika Purāna (40, 14-15 a ) refers to the defeat of Indra thrice and snatching away the pair of ear-rings of Aditi, which was used to emit all types of jewels and ambrosia and could ward off misfortune and danger.

In the Inscriptions of ancient Assam valour of the kings was compared with Indra. The Dubi Grant (V.3) states that Naraka defeated Indra in the forefront of a battle field and snatched away the ear-rings from his mother. V.2. of the grant refers to Vajradatta who was as powerful as Indra, the holder of the bolt. VV. 18-19 of the grant states that, “Kalyānavarman who...... was equal in strength to Indra....... and retired in course of time to become the guest of Indra.........”. V. 31 of the grant refers to Mahabhūtavarman who was like the king of gods, famous for his valour and after having performed a horse-sacrifice, retired to the abode of Indra. Thus Indra became a symbol of power and valour for the Kamarupa kings. The Bargaon
Grant of Ratnapāla (L. 43) Durjjayā is compared with the abode of Vāsava i.e. Indra. The Uttarbarbil Grant of Balavarman (V. 30) the gift is recorded to have been made at the time of the annual worship in connection with Sakrotthāna. Sakrotthāna or the Pūrūhūta was a festival, celebrated in honour of Indra. The Kalīka Purāṇa (V. 79-46-48) gives the dhyānamantra of Indra and then devotes a whole chapter (Ch. 87) to the description of the procedure and efficacy of the Saktrotthāna festival.

The Guwākuchi Grant (L. 64) refers to Indrapāla as 'vipksabalabhita' which means an Indra to the enemy. Another title mentioned in the grant (L. 60) is 'Uddhatabhṛdasanipata' which means 'like the thunderbolt (Indra) destroying the flying mountains, he is a thunderbolt like destroyer of the arrogant.\(^{131}\)

The Khanāmukh Grant (V. 4) compares Brahmāpāla as Kulaścāla and states that he was similar to Indra (prācipati), Prācipati is an epithet of Indra. Indra as one of the eight dikpālas (or masters of the quarters), is the Lord of the eastern quarter (pracīḍik).\(^{132}\) (V. 7) of the grant refers to Indrapāla who became the foremost among the successful persons by performing sacrifices which gladden Indra. V. 17 of the grant refers to the grandfather of the donee as a great performer of sacrifices like the agniśṭoma in which Indra was the most important among the prescribed series of gods and the midday Savana belonging to him exclusively.

The Copperbell Inscription of Śrīkumāra who was like Indra and the killer of Indra became the protector of the worship of Indra and the bell was given by him

\(^{131}\) Ibid., P. 235.
\(^{132}\) Ibid., 272.
(the king) for the use in the worship of the deity.

Thus the references to Indra in the inscriptions and the Copperbell inscription which belonged to the 8th century indicates the worship of Indra in ancient Assam and royal patronage for performance of the worship.

The worship of Indra is supported by the two handed rock cult image of the deity at Pandu and an image found at the Chatrakāra temple at Guwahati and the bronze image found at the Narakāsur hoard. The elephant depicted in the Seals of the Kāmarūpa kings may also be suggested as an imitation of the Vahana of Indra, the Airābata.

**Kuvera:**

The Bargāon Grant (L. 34) compares the city of Durjjayā with the peak of the mount Kailāsa inhabited by the god Kuvera. The Kalika Purāṇa (79.1) refers to a temple of Kuvera situated on the Darpana hill. It is enjoined that Kuvera should be worshipped in the first day of the Suklapakṣa of the month of Kartika (79.6).

**Sarasvatī:**

The Khanāmukh Grant (V. 9) refers to Sarasvatī (i.e., Bhāratī, the goddess of learning).

**Brahma:**

The Nidhanpur Grant (L. 134) refers to the Lord Brahma who was born of the lotus and the cause of the origin, arrangement and destruction of the Universe. The Tezpur Grant (V. 17) refers to Brahma as dhāta. In the Guwakhuchi Grant (V.21) Brahmana Somadeva was said to be an incarnation of Lord Brahma himself. The
Puṣpabhadrā Grant (V. 19) refers to Satadhṛti which means the creator. Satadhṛti is a rare word which is also not noticed even in the Amarakośa. The Gachtal Grant (V. 1) refers to Lord Viṣṇu as adīrghadeva who is the source of the whole creation as Padmañabha, i.e. Brahma.

Vāyu:

The Tezpur Rock Inscription (L. 6) compares the speed of the boats of stationed at Haruppesvara with the consorts of god Pavana.

Agni:

The Ulubārī Grant (V. 26) compares the lustre (mahasa) and the divine splendour resulting from the knowledge of the Vedic lore (dvijavarccasa) he could laugh loudly at (i.e. could surpass) even the Fire god (i.e. Jatavedas or Agni)

Yama:

The Gachtal Grant (V. 14) of Gopāladeva refers to Indrapāla of wonderful and aweful lusture got engaged in repeatedly uprooting the family of the enemies at ease with the arrows that pierce through the temples of the elephants, those rows of (chopped of ) heads falling on the broad white umbrellas behaved, as it were, as an offering of (red) lotuses in silver plate to the god of death i.e. Yama.

5.8 Buddhism:

Buddhism is an offshoot of Hinduism, which was propagated by the Great Buddha in the 6th century B.C. This period is a landmark in the Indian history, which left great religious influence upon the society. Buddhism originally was a

133. Ibid.
purely ethical concept without formal worship of any god head, even Lord Buddha himself. But towards the end of the first and the beginning of the second century the Mahāyāna system of Buddhism with new ideas and practices developed in India. The Mahāyāna is, on one side, the acute Hinduizing of Buddhism on the other the humanizing of the old discipline to make Buddhism more suitable for cultured Indian layman and for the men of many races migrated to and settled in India.\(^{134}\)

In Assam the extent of prevalence of Buddhism is a matter of great controversy. Kāmarūpa was not included in the Asokan Empire and not a single Asokan edict has ever been discovered in the Kāmarūpa region nor is there any mention of Kāmarūpa in early Buddhist literature. R.C. Majumdar recorded these facts and opined that ‘Kāmarūpa retained Brāhmanical religion to the last.’\(^{135}\) N.K. Bhattasali holds the view that there was no trace of Buddhism in Assam till the time of Yuan-Chwang and this region remained the last stronghold for Brāhmanical religion.\(^{136}\)

Yuan-Chwang who visited Kāmarūpa during the reign of Bhāskaravarman wrote in his accounts that the people “have no faith in Buddha, hence from the time when Buddha appeared in the world even down to the present time, not a single Saṅgharama has been built as a place for the priests to assemble. Whatever Buddhists there were in it, performed their acts of devotion secretly. There are as many as hundreds of Deva temples and different sectaries to the number of several

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134. J.N. Farqhar, An Outline of the Religions literature of India, P. 103-112.
135. R.C. Majumdar, Ancient India, PP. 270 ff.
Elsewhere it is narrated that when the Chinese pilgrim was at Nalanda, Bhāskara had heard of him and sent messengers to Nalanda to invite him. Yuan-Chwang at first declined to accept the invitation. But his old Buddhist teacher Silabhadra convinced him that it was also his duty to go to Kamarūpa on the invitation of its king who was not a Buddhist. The pilgrim at length yielded, travelled to that country and was received by the king with great honour.¹³⁸

These observations convinced some scholars that, 'the people had no faith in Buddha' and the few who followed the creed had to perform their act of devotion in secret, instruct, 'evidently in fear of persecution,' by the ruling monarch who was an ardent Saiva.¹³⁹ In fact though not a Buddhist 'the king was in the habit of treating 'accomplished Śrāmaṇas with respect'. This is further confirmed by his attitude towards the pilgrim and the Buddhist faith as a whole. Bhāskara was an active participant in the Kanauj and Prayāg assemblies. Again he is reputed to have made a last request to Yuan-Chwang in the following manner : 'If the master is able to dwell in my dominions and receive my religious offerings, I will undertake to found one hundred monasteries on the Master’s behalf'.¹⁴⁰ Evidently, these were stages in his growing attachment for Buddhism as a way of life.

Taranātha, the Tibetan historian, in his ‘History of Buddhism in India, refers to the introduction and prevalence of Buddhism in Kamarūpa even before the time of Bhāskaravarman. According to him, the Buddhist teacher Dhitika converted the

¹³⁷. Watters, II, 186.
¹³⁸. Ibid., I, P. 348.
people of Kāmarūpa from Sun worship to Buddhism. Further he refers to one Asvabhava who preached the Mahāyāna doctrine in Kāmarūpa. The cult of Sun worship was prevalent prior to the advent of Buddhism. Dhitika flourished in the 3rd century B.C. Tarānātha also writes that Matriceta, who is identified with Asvaghosa by the Lama, prior to his conversion to Buddhism “defeated in debate the Buddhists in Odivisa, Gauḍa, Tirahuti, Kāmarūpa and other places.” The generally accepted date of Asvaghosa is circa 100 A.D. This also shows that even in the first century A.D. Buddhism entered into Kāmarūpa. Tarānātha also suggested that a Buddhist preacher named Asvabhava preached the Mahāyāna doctrine in Kāmarūpa. Asvabhava flourished around 600 A.D. Tarānātha says that Asvabhava was a follower of Mahāyāna quite early in his life. He preached the doctrine to over a thousand upāsakas and upāsikās. “He once went towards Kāmarūpa’ with his disciples where some of them were bitten by a venomous snake, but they were all cured by Asvabhava with the charm of his Tāramantra.

Reference has been made in Kalhana’s Rajatarangini that king Meghavahana of Kashmir married a Prāṇīyotisa princess named Amṛitaprabhā who caused a lofty Vihāra called Amṛitabhavana constructed for the benefit of the bhikṣus. Stunpā, the spiritual guru of her father, who hailed from Loh, also built a stupa called Lo - Stunpā. King Meghavahana of Kashmir flourished in the fifth century A.D.

142. Ibid.
144. Tarānātha, History of Buddhism in India, PP. 253 ff.
145. M.A.Stein (tr.), Rājatarangini, III, VV. 9-10.
and in all probability Amritaprabhā was a daughter of king Balavarman of Kamarupa.\textsuperscript{146} It is strongly believed from this account that a remote ancestor of Bhāskaravarman became Buddhist and Buddhism spread into Kamarupa long before the visit of Yuan-Chwang.\textsuperscript{147} M.M. Sharma suggests that Balavarma was a powerful king which is proved by both the Nidhanpur (V.9) and the Dubi Grant (V.15) and his territory comprised of a portion of Tibet also. Stunpā most probably belonged to the Tibetan portion of territory and he was termed as ‘Desyabhīkṣus’. Therefore the Rajatarangini’s reference does not stand as an unquestionable testimony to the prevalence of Buddhism within the traditional limit of Kamarupa during the fifth century A.D.\textsuperscript{148}

A good number of rock-cut Votive stupas have been found at Sri Surya Pahār. S.K. Sarasvati has placed them in 1st century A.D. A rock-cut caverns ascribed to the early period are also seen in the lower level of the site. Sarasvati has placed another rock-cut Votive stupas found there datable to 3rd / 4th centuries on stylistic consideration.\textsuperscript{149}

Similar rock-cut Votive stupa is also noticed at Pancharatna hill. Rock-cut caves are also noticed at Pancharatna as well as at Jogighopa.

The excavation at Baitbari has revealed the existence of a sprawling township with Buddhism, Hinduism (Saivism) and the amalgamation of the two being widely practised in the area.\textsuperscript{150}

\textsuperscript{147} M.A. Stein (tr.), Rajatarangini, M.M. Sharma, I.A.A., PP. 18ff.
\textsuperscript{148} M.M. Sharma, I.A.A., P. 0.18-0.21.
\textsuperscript{149} R.D. Choudhury, Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam, PP. 112-113.
\textsuperscript{150} A.K. Sharma, Emergence of Early culture in North-East India.
At Bhaitbari a mud-cum-brick stupa on the north-western fringe of the fortified township was located. The mound is located to the east of the road from Phulbari to Tura. It is just in front of the water-way entrance to the fortified town and is surrounded on all sides by the low-lying fields. The 5°75 metre high mound from the ground level has a maximum diameter of 30 meter at the bottom. It is the first Stupa discovered in Northern India. It has a square plane at the base. In between the two rows of boxes on right and left are the stairways leading to the top, where the final stupa upon the summit of the truncated pyramids forms by the terraces. The steps on the southern side were found intact almost up to the top. Traces of evidence show that the box chambers were available in each of the four directions.

The whole structure is built on a pyramidal fashion with receding tiers on brick platform. About 34/5 metre long square Vedika was raised by laying a brick platform around the dumped earth for the dome or anda. Above it is the 31°5 metre long medhi followed by three receding terraces (Bhūmi). The terraces have been formed by constructing box chambers, which are enclosed by brick walls 13°5 metre. Above the topmost step and box the remaining space upon the top is filled with rammed earth. Evidences show that the super-structure consisting of harmika, catrāvali and kalasa existed in the original structure. Enough space available between the remaining part of the anda and bhūmi was used pradaksīna path.

Clusters of brickbats on the four cardinal directions in the periphery.

151 Ibid
152 Ibid
main stupa indicate the presence of Votive stupas.\textsuperscript{153}

The archaeological evidences show that the region was inhabited prior to 3rd-2nd centuries B.C. and these Buddhist stupas were built during the early century of the Christian era or a little earlier. Buddhism which spread far and wide during the early centuries of the Christian era, must have entered Kāmarūpa during the time of Emperor Asoka. Thera Dhitika became responsible for the spread of Buddhism in Kāmarūpa.\textsuperscript{154} Bhāskaravarman seems to have been deeply influenced and inspired by Buddhist teachings. From the time of Bhāskaravarman, Buddhism grew up side by side with the Brāhmaṇical religion.

From the latter part of the 7th century A.D., Buddhism underwent radical changes, developing into several forms of mystic cults known as Mantrayāna, Vajrayāna and Tantrayāna.\textsuperscript{155} The Tantric Buddhism mixed with Tantric Hinduism found its way into ancient Assam. Both the Tibetan and Indian sources show that the later Buddhism in the form of Vajrayāna was prevalent in Assam.\textsuperscript{156}

Vajrayāna or Tantric Buddhism is described by Wintemitz as a queer mixture of monastic philosophy, magic and erotics with a small admixture of Buddhist ideas.\textsuperscript{157}

Tathāgata Guhyaka, dated about A.D. 600, contains instructions for esoteric worship, meditation, and Yoga practice, magic spells, diagrams and postures and in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{153} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{154} N.P. Deva Choudhury. The Antiquity of Buddhism in Assam, J.A.R.S., Vol. XXXIX, Nos. 1 & 2, PP. 212.
\item \textsuperscript{155} B. Bhattacharya, ‘Origin and development of Vajrayana’, I.H.Q, 1927, PP. 733-46.
\item \textsuperscript{156} B. Bhattacharya, Introduction to Buddhist Esoterism, P. 46.
\item \textsuperscript{157} Wintemitz, II, P. 388.
\end{itemize}
obscenity and superstition. B. Bhattacharya observes that the Vajrayāna took into account all the good things, tenets, philosophical notions and theories and incorporated all that was best in Buddhism and probably in Hinduism also and it was owing to this that it attained great popularity. It satisfied every body, the cultured and uncultured, the pious and the sinful, the lower and the higher ranks of people and devotee.

It is very difficult to make a categorical assertion of the Kāmarūpa kings who became Tantric Buddhist or adherents of the system of Vajrāyana. P.C. Choudhury writes, 'the reference to the death of Vanamala by religious suicide, and the abdication of Jayamala in favour of his son, as he considered this world to be vain and human life as a water drop, may indicate that they had come under the influence later Buddhism'. But examples of voluntary abdication could be found 'at all times and in all parts of India', and sometimes the abdication was followed by religious suicide. Therefore if Vanamala fasted unto death and mingled up with the light of Lord Mahesvara, it need not have been owing to any Buddhist influence. The simultaneous reference to Mahesvara in this context clearly negates the plausibility of the association of any Buddhist idea.

In the Gauhati Grant (L.51), in connection with the demarcation of the boundary of the donated land there occurs the word 'tathāgata'.

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160. A.L. Basam, The Wonder that was India, PP. 94 ff.
"Tathāgata - Kārīta-ādityabhāttaraka - satka sāsana - bhavisabhūsimne." Hoernle translated this passage as 'the Bhabisha with the still existing charter of holy Aditya (or Sun god) made by Tathāgata etc. With reference to Tathāgata, P.C. Choudhury suggests that "near the land, donated by the king, existed a Buddhist Chaitya over some relics of the Buddha, for which endowment was formerly made". M.M. Sharma suggests that the construction of the expression is such that Tathāgata appears to be the agent of the action (of issuing a sasana) meant by the word ‘karīta’. Hence, the conclusion becomes irresistible that here the word Tathāgata does not refer to the Buddha but to the deceased (Tathāgata) king Ratnapala, who might have made a land-grant in the name of god Aditya (i.e. Sun) or in the name of a Brāhmaṇa scholar of the same name. The Subhankarapataka Grant (V.18), Bharata the father of the donee is compared to Sākya. This reference shows that the poet had the knowledge on the contemporary society, Buddha and his life. The simile was most probably prompted by a reference to the city of Sravasti just little earlier in the same context. This reference is not strong enough to prove the prevalence of Buddhism in ancient Assam.

The Puspabhadra Grant of Dharmapala (V.7) states that "Oh, future kings, listen to this hearty appeal of king Dharmapala, you should give up your false pride in your sovereignty which is as fickle as a flash of lighting but should never give up Dharma which leads to eternal bliss". K.L. Barua suggests that the Dharma very

163. P.N. Bhattacharya, K.S., P. 129n.
166. P.N. Bhattacharya, K.S., P. 156 n.
probably referred to the "Sahajia dharma or the Vajrayāna cult then prevalent in Kāmarūpa". The concept of dharma in this connection, more likely is the same as that was in the case of the third maṅgala verse of the Nidhanpur Grant of Bhāskararava. In the case of the Puṣpabhadra Grant Dharmapāla had diverted his allegiance to Viṣṇu from the deities of the Tantric cult. Therefore it is not reasonable to suppose that the word dharma mentioned in this grant has anything to do with any form of Buddhism.  

Thus the inscriptions of ancient Assam are not enough to prove the prevalence of Buddhism in ancient Assam.

The Stone Inscription of Samudrapāla bears testimony to the maintenance of a savāsīka satra at Yogīhāṭi in the year 1154 Śaka. If savāsīka satra means a residential monastery it might be possible that this was a monastery of the Buddhist siddhas practising the esoteric sādhanās of a Tantric religion. If Samudrapāla was a scion of the Pāla dynasty of Assam it can be imagined that the last king of this dynasty might have adopted the Buddhistic faith and religion and attained the status of a preceptor. The Tantric-Buddhist literature locates some important centres of the faith in Assam and associates some eminent Buddhist Acaryas with ancient Kāmarūpa.

The Sadhanāmālā mentions four Pithas or sacred spots of the Vajrayānists, viz., Kamākhyā, Śrīhāṭ, Purnagiri and Uddiyāna. According to B. Bhattacharyya all

the places belonged to the east. This identification partially warrants the prevalence of Tantric Buddhism in ancient Assam.

Regarding the siddhas, one of the most prominent siddha was Saraha or Rahulbhadra who was born at Roli in Rajñī in the eastern part of India. He converted king Ratnapāla to Buddhism along with his Brahmaṇa minister. Saraha's birth place Rajñī is sought to be identified with the principality of Rāṇī on the west of the city of Guwahati, and king Ratnapāla of the Pāla family of Kāmarūpā. In the opinion of Grünwedel, another Siddhācārya Dārikapā credited with the composition of at least one Cāryā and described as a disciple of Luippā, was identical with king Indrapāla of Kāmarūpā.

Anangavajra or Gorakṣa was the disciple of Pādmavajra. Gorakṣa or Anangavajra was the son of king 'saskyon' in eastern India. “If this Gopāla is taken to be king Gopāla of Kāmarūpā, the son and successor of Indrapāla, then the line of the Pāla's of Kāmarūpā we have a convert in every alternate generation from Ratnapāla”. But in the copper plate grants of Ratnapāla, Indrapāla and Gopāla there is nothing to indicate the prevalence of Buddhism in their kingdom.

171. Ibid., P. 340.