SECTION V: SATIVISM, ITS GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN ASSAM

SIVA

The worship of Siva has a great antiquity in Assam. To become a sectarian faith it took long years of evolution and only in the days of the epigraphical kings of ancient Assam it tended to become a sectarian faith. In this respect, of course, the epigraphs are not clear enough. However, a few traces of sect-belief in terms of a few words can be traced in the epigraphs. By the time of the great Vaisnava revival which flooded Assam in the 16th century A.D. under Śaṅkaradeva, it ceased to survive in its former grandeur, only the remnant of the faith and belief in Siva survived in the society in a modified form.

For the convenience of our survey we will divide the stages of the growth and development of the cult into three periods, viz., (i) early period, which comprises the pre-historic days including the reign of Naraka and Bhagadatta; (ii) the second stage includes the kings of the epigraphs and the (iii) last stage begins with the advent of the Ahom kings, Sukēphā, in 1229 A.D. to the present day.

(i) Early Period: The period stretches from pre-historic times to the reign of Bhagadatta, the mythological hero of the Mahābhārata war. The Mahābhārata, a few Purāṇas composed outside Assam and the epigraphs of the kings of Assam afford us with some glimpses about the worship of Siva in ancient Assam. Only the H.K.P. and the Y.T., two local compositions, narrated vividly about the forms of worship
and some of the worshippers.

There was a primitive form of Saivism as well as a conception of Siva among some tribes of Assam. They had the tradition of some local gods, who were more or less equivalent to Siva in nature. The Boše group of people had their Siva in the name of Sibrai or Gilā Dama-brā or Sāthau Brāi etc. According to late R.N.Brahma, Sibrai is no other than Siva. The Boše-Kachārīs believe that Sibrai protects men from diseases, keeps away the wild beasts from the corn field, protects cows and buffaloes, help one to win the battle and he is the lord of wealth as well as the liberator of the sinner. The worship of Siva is known as Hama Hherai among the Boše-Kachārīs. He is worshipped with the sacrifice of a pig. At the time of Hherai performance not only Siva is worshipped but also his son and two grandsons, his attendants and minister are similarly propitiated with offerings of animal sacrifices. The ancient Boše kings of the Kapili Valley had the belief of a Burā Devatā (an old god), the chief of the fourteen devatās, who was a horned god like the one found in the Mahanandāra seal. K.L.Baruah thinks that the conception of Burā Devatā, Siva Pasupati, is indicative of their contact with the Mediterranean Pundras of northern and central Bengal. Like these people the Tiprās have a group of fourteen gods and the Supreme God is Mitāi-Katar, who is identified with Siva.

The non-Hindu World, a branch of the Chutiās of the Boše

425. बोळी - वैशाली असम, p 215.
427. बोळी - वैशाली असम, p 216.
428. Ibid., p 264.
429. Ibid., pp 145-146.
431. Ibid., p 38.
group, worship Giricāgiri (Budha-Budhi) and Picādemā of the like nature of Hindu Siva. On the other hand the early religion of the Chutiās entailed human sacrifices to the Mother Goddess Kesāikhātī, who was assimilated to Tantrism. Mr. S.I. Chatterjee comments that the religion of the Chutiās was "a primitive kind of animism in which a great goddess to whom human sacrifices were offered obtained highest honour." The custom remained in vogue to the last part of the 19th century A.D., when the Āhom king Caurīnāth Śimha banned it for good.

Other non-Aryan tribes of Assam such as the Lāluṅgs and the Rākhā-Kochees had their own god equal to Śiva in nature in the name of Mahādevī and Khākī-Langamārā respectively. There is a tradition that the Lāluṅg tribe was born from the grandson of Śrī Luṅgā, who first is called Mahādeva. It is said that Śrī Luṅgā, who is Mahādeva, was born from Śiva. The name of Luṅgā's grandson was Lālang, for which the tribe came to be known as the Lāluṅg.

The above discussion obviously gives a clear picture of the belief in a god like Śiva, who prevailed among the non-Aryan tribes. These tribes had their own local cults at the head of which there was one and the same god in different names. We have already discussed the motifs behind the Aryanisation of the gods and the cults of these local people. The Aryans coming to this land syncretised all the cults and thus the cult of Śiva attaining strength and vigour expanded monstrously. The syncretisation opened another door: the feasts and

433. तुनिया, भूमि , pp 2, 15.
434. Ibid., pp 12, 17.
435. दप्तराणवाल सत्त, p VIII
437. Ibid., p 56.
438. तुनिया, भूमि , p 6.
439. दप्तराणवाल सत्त, Saka 1888, p 9.
festivals, the manners and customs of the tribes get easy entrance to the field of Saivism, which became the living religion during and after the days of the mythological kings.

The earliest introduction of Saivism in Kamarūpa has been ascribed, on the testimony of the Skanda Purāṇa, to a king named Jalpa. 441 From the narration of the Purāṇa it appears that the linga on which the king, Jalpa, was meditating during his retirement to the forest, was there from a remote past, for it is seen that the king having heard in the forest of the death of his sons and the priests became mortified with grief and he was then instructed by the sage Vasishtha to go to worship the said linga. 442 The linga came to be known as Jalpaśevara, because the king got merged in it. 443 The K.P. alludes to a story how the king of Parasurāma and refers to the kṣatriyas who surrendered themselves to Jalpiśa Siva for protection from Parasurāma. 444 Moreover, the Purāṇa refers to the widespread prevalence of the cult of Siva in ancient Kamarūpa with fifteen places sacred to the deity. 445 The Y.T., on the other hand, describes Kamarūpa as teeming with cretes of lingas. 446

There is every reason to think that the cult of Siva began in ancient Kamarūpa in linga form only. Without assigning any religious dogma and philosophical speculation to the concept of linga, we can construe that the crudest beliefs of primitive people in some of inanimate objects had paved the way for a Saiva cult to have its origin. Assam became the habitation of a large number of primitive people belonging-

444. K.P. 77/291.
446. 1/XI/36.
ing to heterogeneous culture from early days. She became the land most fertile for the growth and expansion of numerous crude motifs and beliefs round about the objects of nature, both animate and inanimate. Ancient Assam exhibits some remarkable specimens of neolithic objects, such as dolmens, menhirs, stone celts and some others, and the megalithic monuments. These objects are associated with the cult of fertility and of magical belief. Hutton observes a soul-matter belief in the megalithic monuments and wooden images of the dead practised by the tribes of Assam. The megalithic monuments are classified into two categories, the tall upright stones known as Mao Shinnirg or male stones and the flat horizontal or slabs as Mao Kyalthai or female stones. They are definitely phallic. K.L.Baruah quotes Hutton and Mills that "the upright menhirs and the sitting stones must be interpreted in the light of Khali, Systan and Naga monoliths and dolmens as providing phallic memorials through which soul-matter of the living, as of the dead, assists the fertilisation of nature, the upright stones representing the male and the flat slabs the female principles." According to Hutton the dolmens have actually been used as Siva temples. The childless Kanyak Nagas perform a ceremony on their phallic stone skull cists and the barren women embrace nakedly the stone slab carved with the image of Hanuman.

The cult of fertility and magic have been associated with the stone celts of neolithic culture of Assam. K.L.Baruah describes some of the magical beliefs connected with such stone implements in his paper entitled "Pre-historic Culture of Assam". It is stated that

448. O.I.,p 245.
452. O.I., p 247.

453. H.C.P.A.,p 56.
some hill tribes of Assam, such as the Hāgās and the Ābors, have expressed their magical belief in such implements that they had either fallen from the sky or they had been sent by god. Tribal magic as a normal feature of tribal religion involves sexual licence possibly anticipating magical effect on the fertility of the crop. The Khāsī-Syntangs, who were the original authors of Assam's neolithic culture, used to worship the ancestors by erecting tombs, kept the skeletons of ashes of the dead in hollow monoliths, which were believed to have represented 'a specialised form of phallic cult.' Like the neolithic phallic representations, the megalithic menhirs also indicate a phallic conception as their phallic shape provide.

From the above survey, although brief, it appears that the tribes of Assam exhibit some fetish and animistic beliefs since time immemorial. Moreover, some clue to the origin of the cult of Śiva appears from the survey. It is apparent that the tribes of Assam had a phallic conception closely attached to the menhirs, dolmens and such other objects. Mr. Chauk hyper aptly comments: "One element of the worship of the phallus is fetishism, a belief in crude magic, associated with objects, such as stones and trees." On the other hand, such worship definitely laid the foundation of Tantrikism in Assam. The traditional outlook around the phallic megaliths of the ages past definitely supplied materials for the growth of the linga cult, a symbolic representation of the cult of Śiva. Scholars assign the cult of the linga to the Austric people. The Austric-speaking

455. S.I.C., p260.
458. Ibid., p 389.
459. Ibid., pp 152, 155.
people of Assam, the Hståi-Syntangs provide an extensive megalithic culture of phallic symbols. Originally the symbols were some form of fetish worship. With the advance of civilization such symbols became more and more abstract, intellectualized and impersonal.\textsuperscript{460} In this process of advancement the older or primitive beliefs disappeared and the older one in a new guise opened new avenues to human understanding of and relation to the cosmos and his origin and destiny in it. Thus the linga associated with the worship of Siva although intellectualized and was given an abstract concept, the history behind it was the history of the primitive mind, i.e., the idea of fertility and procreation conceived by the primitive men. When an abstract conception of a spirit or of a god has been superimposed in the original fetish belief of the phallic megaliths, the worship on these as gods or goddesses came into existence.

There are a few traditions of the erection of numerous lingas in ancient Assam, which also support the view that linga was first conceived of as a god representing Siva. Tradition goes that the mythological king Śāṇa of Sonitpura collected as many as one crore of lingas with a view to have a second Kāśi at Viśvanātha, near Tezpur.\textsuperscript{462} Another tradition ascribes this to the sage Vyāsa.\textsuperscript{463} A similar tradition is also associated with the sage Ārvava, who ventured to have a second Kāśi at Negberiting, Vergaon by installing large number of lingas.\textsuperscript{464} We cannot altogether rely on such traditions, but they definitely bear some significance. Such traditions tell us that the cult of worshipping

\textsuperscript{460} The Symbolic Life of Man, p 52.
\textsuperscript{461} Ibid., p 70.
\textsuperscript{462} पत्रिका असम, pp 182-183.
\textsuperscript{463} Ibid., pp 183-184.
\textsuperscript{464} Ibid., p 88; J.A.R.S., Vol. VIII, p 10.
linga had a long history in ancient Assam.

We may, therefore, summarise thus: the belief in soul-matter amongst the tribes of ancient Assam had led to the erection of phallic-shaped megaliths representing procreation and fertility. Gradually the belief was replaced by a belief of a single god, evidently giving rise to a cult-faculty. The god was personified and endowed with some qualities. The idea of feeding the dead either out of fear of affection for him or to escape death-pollution gave rise to the sacrificial aspect. Possibly the fear for the god compelled the primitive people to offer sacrifices to him with the idea that he could be appeased with such offerings. Naturally the god appeared to be malevolent on one hand, and he could be appeased and made benevolent with appeasing offerings on the other. With the gradual contact of the Aryans the god was equated with Rudrasiva. It is to note here that the Aryans first conceived the malevolent god as Rudra and later attributed him with the qualities of Siva when the god appeared to them also benevolent.

With the conversion of the non-Aryan tribes of Assam to Aryanism, the manners and customs, religious beliefs and practices of the tribes also entered into the Aryan society. It is found that the tribes of Assam propitiated their ancestor-memorials with feasts and sacrifices of animals. They attached magical beliefs to these and other such objects. The magic associated with fertility gave way to sex licences. These are some sensuous features of Tāntrikism, which is closely associated with Saivism. As such Tāntrikism or Tāntrik practices had immensely influenced the growth and development of Saivism in ancient Assam. It is a point worthy to note that the influence of Tāntrikism

466. तांत्रिक असम, सा. 1888, p. 6.
in Śaivism could be felt strongly in ancient Assam. Literary evidence also supports this.

The K.P. refers to the Kirāta people of Kāmarūpa, who were said to have protested by Sambhu or Mahādeva.467 That these people were undoubtedly the worshippers of Śiva can be gleaned not only from the K.P. but also from the Mahābhārata, which describes the Kirāta people and incorporates an episode of Mahādeva in the guise of a male-Kirāta and his consort as Kirāta woman.468 The Kirātas, as appeared from the Mahābhārata, were "living on fruits and roots, clad in skins, fierce with their weapons, cruel in their deeds".469 The K.P. and the Y.T. have also emphasised similar natures of the Kirātas,470 which led us to guess that there were indulgence in eating, drinking and also in the association with women among the Mongoloid people. The K.P. and the Y.T. testify to the existence of all these licences. The Y.T. goes even further to designate the religion of ancient Kāmarūpa as belonging to the Kirātas and it prescribes all kinds of sex-indulgences, ghastly rites and ceremonies.471 As Śiva was their god of veneration, all the rites and practices of their own had become associated with the worship of Śiva. Mr. Kakati aptly remarks that "Śaivism in some gross form associated with wine and flesh was the prevailing religion of the aboriginal Kirātas".472

Śiva was the tutelary god not only of the different groups of people inhabiting the land but also of the ruling dynasty in the period under review. It is evident from the narration of the K.P. According

467. 38/101.
469. Ibid., p 10.
471. 2/11/13-18.
472. M.G.K., p 16.
to the Purāṇa, Siva appears to be chief leader of the Kirātas just like Skavrśya of the A.V. to the Vṛūtayas. The rulers before Naraka belonged in to the Tānava family. The first king was one Mahirangā Tānava and in succession to him Hāṣaka, Sambara, Hatna and Gaṭakāsura have ruled over Prāgijyotisa. Narakāsura is said to killed the last king. K.L.Barua refers to the name Mahirangā as a Sanskritised form of Mairang and rightly identifies the people of the race who then inhabited the country as the Kirātas or Mongoloids. The Mairang (according to the writer, owes its origin to the Boço language. The subjects of Ghaṭa-kāsura, the last king of the dynasty, were the Kirātas, who according to the testimony of the K.P. were the worshippers of Siva. As such a similar conjecture can be made about their king or the kings and say that the tutelary deity of these kings was also none but Mahādeva. We may refer here to king Bāna also, who ruled in Sonitpur. He was a contemporary of Naraka an belonage to the Asura dynasty. The Asuras are said to be the followers of Siva. The V.P. and the K.P. refer to Bāna as a devotees of Siva. The K.P. states that Naraka ha installed the Devi cult in Kamarupa expelling the Saivite cult, but Bāna, who came of a patriarchal society and whose tutelary deity was none but Mahādeva, persuaded Naraka against the settled creed of the latter and suppressed the patriarchal Devi cult with the patriarchal Saivite cult. Thus Siva as a tutelary deity in the dynasty of Prāgijyotisa was reinstalled. Therefore, we find Bhagadatta, who succeeded Naraka, as a

473. The family was also known as Asura. vide Chānd. U. p 1. "This shows that the epithet like Tānava and Asura were applied indiscriminately to all non-Aryan. E.H.K., p 18.
477. V.P. V/XXXII; K.P. 30/73.
follower of Siva. This is supported by the Mahabharata, which mentions Bhagadatta as the friend of Siva. Moreover, the Copper Plate Inscription of Vanamala speaks of Bhagadatta as the worshipper of Siva with humility and penance. The inscriptions mention that his brother Vajradatta, who succeeded him, had an unblemish faith on Isa (Siva). Thus it is apparent that the kings ruled in the period under review showed reverence to Siva as their tutelary deity.

By the time of Bhagadatta orthodox Saivism probably had flourished in Kamarupa and it is believed that Bhagadatta entered the fold of Aryan culture and he himself was Aryanised. Still then we have grounds to believe that the system flourished in Kamarupa had retained a separate identity as distinct from the orthodox orthodox one.

The inscriptions of the kings of ancient Assam right from the middle of the seventh century A.D., although mention invariably about the prevalence of Aryan religion and culture, left significant marks on the prevalence of a Tantrik form of Saivism. Perhaps the cult of Siva in its struggle for survival over Saktism, as revealed from the relation of Bana and Narakas, could not totally upset the latter, for which Saktism left traces of influence in Saivism. Probably a fusion between the two cults was established. Later on the implication infusion paved the way for expansion of Sakti with all gross forms of her worship. Sakti acquired such a strong ground in Saivism that the influence of the former led the latter to become more Tantrik in character.

In the growth and development of the cult of Siva in the early

479. H.C.P.A., p 115.
480. Tempur Inscription, v 5.
481. Bowgang Grant, v 8; Uttarbarbil Plate, v 9.
482. असमीया संस्कृति, p 282; H.C.P.A., p 115.
period we should have to deal another point of worth-discussion. The Navagraha temple near Gauhati exhibits nine lingas representing nine planets including the Sun, seated in a Yemiplitha. We know that linga is an iconic symbol of Siva. As such the nine planets represented by iconic symbols in the symbol of a Siva linga are very much unusual.

Dr. Tharmeswar Chutiā’s explanation in this regard is highly commendable and acceptable. Dr. Chutiā has pointed out that although Saivism was a flourishing religion in ancient Assam, “it had to make room for the solar cult to flourish. This was possibly what wanted to be done not at the cost of the already predominant Saivite cult, but through a fusion of the Saivite and the Solar cults. Incidentally, it may be noted that the Brahmanical Pūjas or performances, such as the śrāddhas, are usually begun with a brief worship of Śiva and invariably concluded with a Sūryārghya. This procedure might have facilitated this fusion of the Śiva and Solar cults, and an almost equal importance of both the cults.”  

The philosophical idea which the writer refers to as lying behind the procedure itself is this that Śiva is the Supreme Deity as well as Supreme reality and the grahas are the different agents and aspects of the Supreme Deity and reality respectively. Moreover, both Śiva and the grahas are worshipped for obtaining maṅgala or goodness. This motif also justifies the representation of the grahas in linga symbol.  

The fusion of the two cults signifies a strong basis for the overwhelming spread of the cult of Śiva in ancient Assam. It also corroborates our earlier view about the first representation of a god in linga form. Probably in ancient times all gods were represented in the

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484. Ibid., pp 103–104.
form of linga. When linga was taken to mean Śiva only, the other gods were ceased to be moulded in this form and in other words they were provided with other iconic symbols separately. Thus our inference may lead us to conclude that the fusion between the above two cults took place at a very early period when separate identity of other gods were not at work.

(ii) Second Phase of Development:— The period includes the epigraphical kings of ancient Kamarūpa from Bhāskarvarma to the last king of the Pāla dynasty.

Almost all the kings of the period under review made land grants to the Brāhmaṇas. We can know about the nature of the grants from their Copper Plate Inscriptions. These inscriptions throw light on the religious seal of the kings. At the commencement of each inscription the kings are found to invoke Śiva by way of a verse or verses of benediction inserted therein. All the inscriptions except one of king Haripāla, who made three grants, unambiguously record the devotion of the kings to Śiva, as all of them bear benediction for that of the deity at the commencement. Therefore, we can construe that the kings of ancient Kamarūpa were all worshippers of Śiva.

In the growth and development of the cult of Śiva these inscriptions have furnished us with several informations. They have recorded the consuming zeal of the kings towards the uplifting of the cult in ancient Assam. We have been informed by all the inscriptions that the cult of Śiva was a most flourishing religion for more than six centuries. By that period Śāivism became an institutional religion, as it is evident from more a few inscriptions, which go to record the erection of some Śiva temples in the State.485 Hsüan-Tsang also informs that

485. Tempur Grant, v 24; The agrahāra mentioned in the Nīlkanṭapur Grant of Bhāskarvarma was, according to competent authorities, no other than a Śiva temple.
he had seen hundreds of Deva temples in the state as early as the 7th century A.D. Some of these temples were undoubtedly of the Saiva, Siva. As such we can think that Saivism was becoming an institutional religion and that the kings of the period made good endeavours to make their religion to flourish with the support of a large number of temples.

Moreover, by this time Saivism tended to become a sectarian faith, as it is evident from the inscriptions. It is mentioned in the Doobi Grant that Bhāskarvarman was a follower of the doctrine of Māhesvara. 486 Harivarman is attributed to as Parama Māhesvara in his inscription. 487 Several epigraphs refer to the Māhesvara aspect of Siva. All these are clear indication of the religious tenets of the kings of ancient Kamarupa. It is obvious that the kings of the inscriptions were followers of the same doctrine, i.e., Māhesvara Saivism. As such it can be seen that a distinct Saiva sect came into existence by this period. The sect can be known as the Māhesvara.

The commentators of Saṅkara speak of four schools, of Saiva-Pāṣupata, Saiva, Kalāmuka and Kapālika. 499 In his Bhāṣya on Vaiṣṇava-sūtras at Saṅkara refers to the Pāṣupatas simply as Māhesvara. 490 The Māhesvaras, according to Saṅkara, maintain that Pasupati has revealed five topics. 501 Bhādarāka opines that the Saiva sects were thus known "by the general name of Māhesvara, and Pasupati, or the god Siva, was believed to be their founder". 502 Madhava refers to the Māhesvaras, who

486. v 55.
488. Nāhanpur Grant, v 2; Uttarabharbil Plate, v 18.
489. V.S., p 121; V.A.I., p 99.
490. V.A.I., p 99.
491. V.S., p 119.
492. Ibid., p 119.
Misaprove the doctrine of the Vaisnavas. He says that the Mahesvaras had adopted the Pashupata system.\textsuperscript{493} This has also been reported by Hsuan-Tsang, who mentions the Pashupatas worshipping in the temples of Mahesvara.\textsuperscript{494} It was perhaps that all the sects of the Saivas were at the same time known by the name of Pashupata.\textsuperscript{495} It has been proved by scholars that the founder of the Pashupata system was Lakulisa, who was the 23rd or the last incarnation of Siva.\textsuperscript{496} According to Banerjea, Lakulisa has systematised and organised the Pashupata system in the first half of the second century A.D. and that there was already an existing Saiva sect not dissimilar to the Pashupata in some of its rituals before Lakulisa reorganised it.\textsuperscript{497} This form of Pashupatism thus systematised came to be known by the name of Mahesvara-Pashupata in the Gupta and post-Gupta India.\textsuperscript{498} Referring to inscriptive and other literary texts, Banerjea further opines that the late Gupta and post-Gupta periods were marked by wide prevalence of the Mahesvara-Pashupata type of Saivism in different parts of India; for the kings and the chiefs of the period designate themselves as Mahesvara, Parama-Mahesvara, Atyanta-Mahesvara or Atyanta-Bhairava-bhakta.\textsuperscript{499}

The historicity of the prevalence of the sect among the later or post-Gupta kings throughout India may stand valid in reference to the kings of Assam, who also ruled in the easternmost region of India during this period. Incidentally the epigraphs of some of the kings of Assam refer to their relations with the contemporary Gupta kings.

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{493} Barsa Nataraja Samgraha, p 103.
\item\textsuperscript{494} V.S., p 110.
\item\textsuperscript{495} Ibid., p 110.
\item\textsuperscript{496} P.T.R., p 88.
\item\textsuperscript{497} P.T.R., pp 91-90.
\item\textsuperscript{498} Ibid., p 101.
\item\textsuperscript{499} Ibid., p 101.
\end{itemize}
Moreover, archaeological remains also corroborate the prevalence of the sect in ancient Assam. In the chaitya window from Pah Paradwala is seen the sculptural representation of Lakulliśa Siva seated with a rope tied round his legs. This is a fine specimen of the Gupta school of sculpture in Assam. As the period was marked by the prevalence of the Śaiva or Śaiva-Pāsupata Śaivism, the figure mentioned above would stand for an indication to the prevalence of the system in Assam too.

In this context we should have to discuss one more point. Some of the epigraphs have recorded that the kings were worshippers of Parama Śaheśvara and Parama Varaha. Ratnapala, Indrapala and Mahapala were described as Śri Varaha Paramesvara. The Gauhati Grant of Indrapala hails the victory of Mahāvaraha. Parama Varaha or Varaha Paramesvara is also interpreted as Varaha the Paramesvara, which evidently refers to the Boar incarnation of Viṣṇu. Therefore, scholars have traced here certain indications to Vaishnavism. But this is unwarranted by facts. Because, one of the epigraphs itself testifies to the identity of Śiva and Viṣṇu, the great Boar. In this context, P.N. Bhattacharya Viṣṇuvinod rightly points out that Mahāvaraha may stand for Śiva as well as Brahma apart from attributing to Viṣṇu also. We can refer here to Kuḍra, who is, according to the Śaiva, the royal boar of heaven. Moreover, it can be seen in the inscriptions that the kings

503. Khamānakh Grant, Line 13; Gaëtal Inscription, Line 61; Gauhati Grant, Line 33.
504. v 2.
506. Gauhati Grant, v 2.
507. V.M., p 75.
of ancient Assam had taken epithets indiscriminately to distinguish their valour and personality. But the epithets should not be taken so as to mean their leanings to this or that religion. The epigraphs themselves record the undivided faith of the kings over Siva. Therefore, we can say that Parama Varaha and Parama Mahesvara are identical with each other.

Although the epigraphs have recorded the existence of the Mahesvara sect, even then we cannot ascertain at the present state of our knowledge the exact nature of the system that thrived in Assam. Only we can say that the system of Saivism flourished in the pre-Arya period was known by the name Mahesvara or Mahesvara-Pasupata. Kalika Purana, which was composed in between 10th and 12th century A.D., also corroborates to the prevalence of the Pasupata sect. Furthermore, the same Purana relates to the Kapaikkas and their ritualistic practices. It appears from the Purana that the Kapaikkas were widely diffused in the state and they had introduced a Tantrik form of ritual in the worship of Siva.

That the system of Saivism flourished in the period was Tantrik in character can be guessed from the facts that the epigraphs have used a Tantrik sign called Anjali at the commencement of the opening verses. Moreover, they have recorded some of the Tantrik practices such as the dedications of Tevas to the temples and the worship of Siva and Sakti jointly by the devotees.

The tradition of worshipping Siva in the symbol of linga was a common feature. The epigraphs have recorded a few examples of the erec-

509. The Guakhudi Grant of Indrapala mentions as many thirty-two names of the king.
510. 30/172.
511. 35/13.
512. See Chapter II of this book.
tion of linga by some of the kings. The symbol taken in worshipping Siva and Sakti jointly was a linga embo treed in a yonipitha. Yoga practices were also attached to the worship. The epigraph of Vanarala mentions a form of yoga practice.  

Apart from all mentioned above, there are certain observations made in the epigraphs as regards the various manifestations of Siva. It appears from the mention of the names of the deity that the epigraphs conceive him both in his abstract as well as concrete aspect. The two Grants of Varmapala conceive the deity as an amalgamation of two principles - Siva and Sakti. Thus the epigraphs furnish with a philosophical speculation affording an abstract aspect of the deity. It seems that by the period under review the concept of Siva Shakti a fertile ground for its development and it took a distinct shape as a cult of the people of ancient Kamrupa.  

(iii) Last Stage of Development: This period covers the period from the days of the Ahoms to the present day. This period does not show any mark of significant development in respect of the cult. The cult gradually tended to cease its former importance. Yet the worship of Siva was still in vogue, and at least the conception of the deity remained green in the memory of the people. During this span of time he turned to be a deity of the common folk. He was much more humanised having been endowed with wives, children, household duties and with certain other peculiar characteristic traits which could attract the veneration of the common people.  

It is said that the Ahoms, who came to Assam in the first half of the 13th century A.D., noticed a primitive form of Saivism. This  

513. Tospur Grant, v 2.  
514. Xhonamukh Grant, v 1; Subhaśakarāṭaka Grant, v 1.  
515. N.V.M.S.I., p 4.
form of Saivism was commonly followed by the tribes such as the Beṣes and the Kachāris. The Kachāris in particular had practised this form of Saivism with sacrifices of animals and birds and by offerings of wine and cooked rice. History tells us that the hillock Garāidee contained a temple of Teva of the tribal people. The temple is identified with a Śiva temple. Līlā Gogoi holds that the Āhoms had great reverence for Śiva, who appeared to them as Būdāgosā or Būdātāngāria. Being originally the followers of Lao-tse, the Āhoms believed in sacrifices of animals, the tradition which the Āhoms retained throughout their rule. One chronicle of repute reports that Sukāphā haś propitiated Mahādeva with sacrifices of animals. The Āhom king Būdhisvargamārāyana alias Pratāp Sinha (1603-1641) is said to have propitiated Śiva before he was installed as a king. From the days of this king, it is told, Mahēsvara Char or Śiva temples came into existence. On the other hand, he was credited with the appointment of the Brahmaṇa priests supplanting the Āhoms, which evidently refers to the installation of the Brahmansic rites over those of the tribal rites. The reverence, so great indeed, paid by the Āhom monarchs to Śiva residing at Negheriting temple is well-known. Moreover, most of the temples erected by the illustrious Āhom monarchs belong to Śiva alone. Gait has observed that Saivism was one of the popular religions of the Āhoms. Of course, it is to be noted here that Saivism of this period was only

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516. N.V.M.S.I., p 4.
517. Ibid., p 40.
518. Ibid., p 39.
519. सावन्न सबस बृहस्पति (Second chronicle), Para 118.
520. अहोऽम जानी, p 40.
521. अहोऽम जानी (भुजाकार), p 37.
522. Ibid., p 37.
524. In his work पांडव असम, Mr. Neog has incorporated in details the erection of Śiva temples by the Āhom kings throughout the state.
525. N.A., p 287.
a temple-cult limited within the precincts of the temple. The tendency remains the same even to this day.

The characteristic feature of the cult is that like that of all the epigraphs Siva appeared in the Ahom period as a god inseparable from his consort, Gauri. A hymn found in an Ahom chronicle expounds this peculiarity. It is found in history that king Siva Simha (1714-1744 A.D.) was officially converted to the Sakti faith. He and his queen Phulesvarī exhibited great zeal in the new faith. It is true that a temple-cult survives with the patronage of the royal dynasty or dynasties. No doubt the Ahom kings patronised mass erection of Siva temples, but the elevation of Sakti and the royal patronage extended to it giving it a status of the royal religion came to be a greater factor in darkening the colour of Siva in Assamese society.

Like the Ahom kings, the Koch kings also showed the same veneration for the deity. The Koches even drew their lineage from Siva in the person of Hāuli. The first Koch king, Viśavasimha, was a patron of Mahism and he is said to have worshipped both Siva and Vīru. Naranārāyaṇa propitiated Siva both according to the Purānic and tribal rites.

The dynasties of the Ahom and Koch, though not all the rulers, minted coins in which their devotion to Siva was obviously visible. Most of the Ahom kings refer to their devotion to Siva and Pārvatī, while the Koch king Naranārāyaṇa is said to have offered his devotion only to the feet of Siva. Naranārāyaṇa's cousin king Cāhuḍeva offered his devotion to both Hari and Gaurī.

Naranārāyaṇa legalized two forms of worship, - the Sastric and

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526. देवकांड असम भुवनेश्वर (काँटेश्वर), para 236.
527. Kirita., p 64; Archaeology in Assam, p 22.
529. असमीय संस्कृति, pp 202-203.
530. Ibid., p 203.
the tribal. The tribal mode of offerings in worship generally included wine, blood and the flesh of animals. This form of practice was commonly observed during the medieval age. The Vaisnava biographies also point to such a practice prevailed in the medieval Assamese society. It is said that before Saikardeva could propagate Vaisnavism in Assam the people worshipped Bhairava-Siva and they had great faith on the deity. They offered him the blood of tortoise and goats and drank it as sacred drink.332

In the Vaisnava literature of Assam Siva appears to be a great Vaisnava, he is shown as subordinate to Hari and not an independent god as Hari is. As such he is also incapable of granting salvation to the souls.

Secular literature, on the other hand, portrays Siva as a householder, a cultivator, an old being having strong sex-levity, a mendicant and a great smoker of intoxicating drugs. He is thus much more humanised. His worship is meant for material gains. Thus he is seen in the aspect of a boon-giver deity. He can grant child to the childless. The tradition of worshipping Siva for a child is not a new one in Assam. Hutton points to the prevalence of such a belief in the tribal society. Medieval society was also not away from this trend. Saikardeva himself was born of such a boon granted by Siva to Sankara's father.334

Throughout the medieval period Siva was worshipped only in his linga form. Every temple of Siva contains linga as a symbol of Siva. Probably the worship of linga had a strong tradition, for which we have very little of his image in the province.

531. S.H.T., p 27; Purāṇa Aśokiniya Sāṃgītā (Bengal), vv 2673. 532. Ibid.
533. O.I., p 247.
534. चुँqueries (सामवकरण), Chap. II, Chap. V, v 2673; चुँqueries, p 20; शृङ्खलेय कादायकरिक, v 27.