CHAPTER-III

Different Religious Sects of Barak Valley upto 18th century
The reconstruction of the religious history of ancient Barak Valley is intertwined with the history of South-east Bengal because in ancient times the entire Barak-Surma Valley was known as Srihattamandala or Srihattarajya at various points of time and along with the neighbouring districts like Commilia, Chittagong and Noakhali, it is commonly designated as South-east Bengal (known in ancient times as samatata, Harikela etc). The valley is indeed a natural extension of the Indo-Gangetic Bengal plains and the geographical features tied the Cachar-Sylhet region with the neighbouring Samatata (Southeast Bengal, i.e., the districts of Comilla/Tipperah, Chittagong, Noakhali, etc) and Vanga (East Bengal i.e., the districts of Maimensingh, Rangpur, Dacca, Vikrampur etc).^1

The process of ‘śanskritisation’ in Barak valley might have taken place in the early centuries of the christian era or atleast before the 5th century since the Tripuri state formation started in the Cachar plains about the 5th century CE. According to a copper-plate inscription^1 a Tripuri king donated a tract of land, which later on came to be known as Panchakhanda in Sylhet to five Brahmanas from Mithila, one of whom was named Nidhipati. The incidence of a Vedic sacrifice by the Tripura king shows that the Brahmanical influence had already made its mark in the Barak-Surma valley before the Brahmanas invited by Adi Dharma Pha for conducting vedic sacrifice were granted land for settlement in the Panchakhanda area of Srihatta. In fact, the Tirthacurhamani Tantra and the Vayupurana referred to the Barabakra as a holy river. The antiquity of the civilization in the valley can also be inferred from the fact that two of the fifty-one mahapithas i.e., Grivapitha in Gutatikar and Bamjanghapitha in Baurbhag) associated with the Devi legend are found in this valley. These two centres are referred to in ancient texts like Mantracurhamani Tantra and the Tantra Curhamani. Srihatta also found mention in the Sadhanmala text of the Buddhists as a centre of Vajrayana.\(^4\)

The cave temple (Siva) in Bhuvan Pahad (Cachar). Unakoti in Kailasanahar (Tripura), Rupanatha cave (siva) in Jayantia parganas (Syhlet), Siddeshwar Siva temple in Badarpurghat (Karimganj) are important archaeological and religious cult sites. The Baurbhag Kali temple in Jayantiapur (syhlet) and the Bhairavi temple in Gutatikar (syhlet) are Mahapithas. The Hatakesvara siva temple in syhlet town, Tungesvara siva temple in Sayasthaganj, Brahmakunda in Tripura, Taptakunda in Jayantia pargana,
Madhavatirtha in Adamaitila and the Vasudevbari in Panchakhanda are also among the ancient sites. These sites and the related folklore and traditions suggest the presence and co-existence of the Sakta, Saiva and Vaisnava cults as well as those of the Buddhists.5

Although there is at least some evidence of the spread of Jainism, Buddhism and the Ajivika sect in Bengal in the pre-Gupta period, there is almost no reliable evidence at all of the spread of the Aryan Vedic or Brahmanical religion. There is no mention of Bengal in the Vedas, and all that there is in the Aitareya Aranyaka is derogatory. From philological and ethnological evidence it would seem that up to the third century CE Vedic religion and culture made no inroads into Bengal. The Jains, Buddhists and Ajivikas had made some attempt to spread Aryan religion and had achieved a certain degree of success but in regard to Vedic religion it would seem that there was no such endeavour. Indeed, there is no reliable evidence at all of the rise and spread of Aryan Brahmanism in pre-Gupta Bengal, although it is quite well known that non-Brahman heterodox religions spread in the east. The thoroughly refined Aryanization of Bengal, which sprang from an inspiration that was pan-Indian, began in the Gupta period. From approximately 150 BC to about 150-200 CE new elements were blended into the Indian religious stream from the religion and culture of the Mediterranean, the Scythians and the Kushanas of central Asia. The history of Bengal is closely connected with this great development in Indian history. As part of the political and economic unity of the Gupta Empire, Bengal was affected by the strong-flowing stream of religion and culture from all over India, and in time this region came to be a bordering participant in the culture of the whole of India. Regarding the establishment and spread of Vedic religion and practices, we get information from one copperplate after another that the Brahmanas had come to various parts of Bengal and settled as permanent residents, the purpose of the grant being construction or renovation of a temple, the provision of funds for the regular daily service, and worship of the deity. By the sixth century the current of Vedic religion and culture had reached the easternmost borders of Bengal. From the Nidhanpur Copperplate inscription of Bhaskaravarma, we learn, that during the reign of Bhutivarman more than two hundred Brahman families were settled in Panchakhanda village in Srihatta district. The seventh century Loknatha edict reveals that in Samatata the jungle had been cleared and a new settlement started, and all who resided there were
Brahmans versed in the four Vedas. Thus there is no reason to doubt that in this era Vedic religion and culture spread throughout Bengal.\(^6\)

**Saivism:**

The cult of Lord Shiva as traced in the epics and the puranas displays a complex character owing to its origin reflected in some elements of pre Vedic time. In the early and medieval literature he is known as the god of gods and is responsible for revelation of all the Agamas. Abundance of myths centering round the god in later scriptures discloses two opposite characteristics of the god, viz., the Vedic and the non-vedic.\(^7\) The hundred designations of Rudra in the Satarudriya section of the Yajur Veda\(^8\) display a well developed and distinct trait of Rudra on the basis of his two main opposite characters viz., the benign and the malign. In the Atharva Veda\(^9\) Rudra gets other designations like Bhava, Sarva, Mahadeva, Pasupati, Ugra and Ishana to which one more Asani is added in the Satarudriya Brahmana. Reference to these names of Rudra is also found in Sankhayana, Jaushitaki and other Brahmanas\(^10\). The conception of Shiva and Ghora is very clearly depicted in the Mahabharata.\(^11\) In the Astadhyayi of Panini, Rudra is also known as Sarva and Bhava. Besides, there are other names such as Girisa or Giritra\(^12\), Kapardin\(^13\), Trimbhu, Hara, Samkara, Tryambaka, Asutosa, Bholanatha, Bhavesha. From the post-Vedic period these different designations of the deity, amalgamated with the name of Rudra Siva. Moreover, the inscriptions bearing Kedareshvara, Yogasvami, Videshvara, Dhandheshvara, Amreshvara, Batesvara, Bhadreshvara, Dhaneshvara, Mandaleshvara, Someshvara, Jalpeshvara, Siddhesvara, Sulpani, Atulanatha etc also throw light on the wide and popular existence of this deity\(^14\).

Saivism or the worship of Lord Shiva was an important cult in ancient India which claimed a large number of adherents. The magnificent temples dedicated to Lord shiva from Amarnatha and Kedarnatha on the Western Himalayas and Pasupatha in Nepal, through Varanasi, Avanti, Ujjayani, Kalanjara, Somnatha, Sriraisal, Srikalahasti, Kanchi and Chidambaram besides many others to Rameshvaran\(^1\) situated at the gate of Lanka bears testimony to the fact.\(^15\) Siva of Bengal, atleast as found depicted in Bengali literature, is not exactly the same Siva with whom we are acquainted in the Brahminical literature, particularly in the Puranas.\(^16\)
Puranic Saivism was quite well developed in Bengal during the Gupta period. The various names and forms of Siva were well known, as were the two forms of the Siva phallus, the Vastulinga and the mukhalinga. It is learnt from the fourth Damodarpur inscription that the worship of Siva in phallic form developed in a remote outpost of northern Vanga in the fifth century CE. At the beginning of the 6th century CE, Saivism had been adopted by the court of Vainyagupta, and had spread throughout Eastern Bengal. In the 7th century CE, two eminent Saivas were the king of Gaura, Sasanka, and the king of Kamarupa, BhaskaraVarman. Depicted on the coins of Sasanka were Shiva and Nandi, the bull. The Shiva emblem of Nandi also appeared on the coins of the 6th century Samachardeva. From the testimony of the Asrafpur inscription it would seem that although the kings of the Khadga Dynasty were Buddhists, they were also greatly attracted towards saivism, the emblem of the bull appearing also on their royal coins.

Another Brahman king of this century, Lokanatha of the Bharadvaja gotra was probably a Saiva too. In the Paharpur plaques there is some evidence of the influence and extent of Saivism, there are both the Vastulinga and mukhalinga forms of Shiva. On a plaque on the wall of the sanctuary of the Paharpur temple Siva is depicted with the moon in his crown. The three eyes, the erect phallus, the crown of matted hair, the trident, the string of beads and the ascetics water pot, together with the god in some cases riding the bull, make it quite clear that the fully developed Shiva iconography of the Pala and Sena periods evolved from the iconography of this era. There is no evidence of Ganapatya Saivism in Bengal at this time, although the period produced an abundance of icons of Ganapati or Ganesa. At Paharpur alone there are a number of seated and standing images of Ganesha in stone, terracotta and metal. Among them is an image of the dancing Ganesha. There is no epigraphical or iconological evidence from this period of the Saiva Kartikeya. However, in the eight century Rajatarangini of Kalhana there is reference to a temple of Kartikeya in Pundravardhana. However, no particular sect adopting Ganesa or Kartikeya, or in later times Indra, Agni, Revanta, Vrihaspati, Kuvera, Ganga, Yamuna or the Mother Goddess, of whom there is epigraphical, iconographical and literary evidence, ever grew up in Bengal.

By the beginning of the 6th Century C.E, the worship of Shiva flourished under the patronage of Maharaj Vainya Gupta. The Gunaighar Copper Plate of Vainya Gupta
records a grant. In this record, a temple of Pradyumneshwara has been mentioned, rather incidentally, in connection with the demarcation of the boundary of the land grant. Most scholars have taken Pradyumneshwara as a combined form of Hari Hara, i.e. Vishnu and Shiva. The combination of Hari and Hara in one image forms the theme of this icon. In this aspect both Shiva and Vishnu are united in one image. Another important information of Shaivism is that the seal of the Gunaighar inscription bears the figure of a bull which is the vehicle of Lord Shiva.

The Asrapur plates point to the special favour offered by the Buddhist kings of the Khadga dynasty of Samatata in the seventh Century CE. Each of these plates bears a royal seal which contains in relief the figure of a couchant bull along with the legend Srimad Devakhadga. It evidently shows that the growing popularity of Saivism even attracted the mind of the Buddhist Khadga rulers. Moreover, the Saiva leaning of this royal dynasty is known from another inscription, where Prabhavati, the queen consort of Devakhadga, is said to have covered an image of Sarvani with gold. Sarvani is the Sakti of Sarva, one of the eight distinctive forms of Rudra mentioned in the Atharva-Veda. That Sarvani is the Sakti of Siva is also corroborated by a verse in the Khalimpur copper-plate of Dharmapala, where Sarvani is explicitly called the wife of Siva.

A number of Natesa images, though, generally common in South India, have come to light from South Eastern part of Bengal. A Natesa image with an inscription, dated in the 18th year of Ladaha Chandra is an exhibition of the idea presumably inconsistent with what is said earlier in regard to its popularization in Bengal by the Sena kings. The popularity and patronization of the Natesa images in the adjoining regions of Dacca is to be traced in several Natesa icons discovered from the vicinity of Ramapala, a village still bearing the name ‘Nateswara’ is the reminiscent of what is viewed above.

These Nateswara images are of two types having ten or twelve hands and dancing on back of his mount. The ten handed variety closely follow the description found in Matsya Purana where the emblems of the god held in right hands are Khadga, Sakti, danda, trisula and in the left ones are khetaka, kapala, naga, khattvanga. On the two other remaining hands, right shows varada and the left holds rosary. South Indian Bronze Nataraja figures, dancing on the Apasmarapurusa, are four handed. Nataraja images are found in Dacca and Tippera districts hold a vina across the brest by the first
pair of hands, the second pair, a serpent as canopy and the remaining pair is seen over the clotted hair marking time.  

We get some evidence of the prevalence of the Cults of Saivism and Saktism in the Srihatta region from 7th Century C.E from the ancient Copper Plate Inscriptions discovered in this region from 7th to the 11th Century C.E. From the Nidhanpur Copper Plate Inscription we get evidence that lands were granted to Brahmins well versed in the four Vedas. These Brahmins with different Gotras belonged to different Sects like Vaisnavism, Saivism, Saktism etc. The next Inscription which gives us information regarding the construction of the temple of Bateshwar shiva are the two Bhatera Copper Plate Inscriptions of Kesava Deva and Ishana deva. In the Bengali year 1279 (1877 A.D) in a village called Bhatera in Syhlet district two copper-plate inscriptions were discovered in a mound called ‘Homer Tila’ in the estate of Babu Jagachchandra Deb Choudhury, from a depth of about 8 feet in the course of removing old bricks from the foundation of an ancient building. There are 27 lines of Inscription in the first and 28 in the second. The first inscription opens with a salutation to Siva and then gives a genealogy of the four kings who are said to have belonged to the race of the Moon (Lunar Dynasty). The first ruler’s name is Navagirvana, his son is Gokula Deva, his son Narayana Deva, his son Kesava Deva. It was the king named Kesava Deva, the reigning monarch, who, the inscription says, granted lands to the extent of 375 plough measures, 296 houses, and a great number of slaves for the adoration of the lingam (Siva) of the name Vatesvara. One of the epithet used for Lord Siva is Srihattesvara (Lord of Srihatta or Syhlet).

Bhuvan Pahad:

The Bhuvan shrine, a cave temple of Bhuvaneswar Shiva is the most important historical relic in the plains of Cachar. This shrine is situated in the Sonai region and it demarcates the plains of the Barak Valley from the hilly tract of Manipur. From Matinagar, a garden bazaar about 15 miles from Silchar, one has to negotiate steep hill tract of seven miles to reach the peak of the hill about three thousand feet above the sea level. Two stone images, one of Bhuvanesvara Shiva, the presiding deity of the hill, and the other of his consort, Bhuvanesvari are installed on the top of the hill. Bhuvaneshvara Shiva commands great respect from the Hindus of Barak Valley. On the
auspicious occasion of śivaratri, thousands of people climb the hill to pay their homage to the God. About a mile away from the hill top, there is a tunnel and a cave. The District Census Handbook furnishes a detailed account of the cave. The tunnel is:

"about 10 ft. long and 18' x 9' in dimension dug under the rocky hill. This is known as yonidvara or vaginal passage. One person can crawl through this passage on his breast with difficulty. After crossing this 10 ft. long and narrow passage, there is a rectangular yard about 80 ft long and 30 ft. wide and about 20 ft. high and a wide tunnel absolutely dark. This is known as mel-mandap, i.e., assembly hall. From this hall runs a downgrade path easily passable, for distance of about 400 ft and it leads to the second assembly hall almost of the same size as that of the first, From the second hall another downgrade path from a distance of about 400 ft. leads to the third assembly hall. There are two stone images carved on the right wall of the hall but these cannot be identified due to darkness and also due to the moss having grown on them. From the third hall, there is a very narrow passage similarly downgrade for a distance of about 100 ft. In the centre of the passage, there is a block of stone with teeth like nodules protruding on all sides. One can pass through this passage through great difficulty and risk to his body. From this hall, there is an upgrade narrow path with faces of big boulders protruding on all sides. After a distance of 400 ft. there is a triangular stone in the centre of the passage leaving a very narrow slit like passage on two ends. Only a dare-devil can attempt to pass through these slits. Generally nobody dares to penetrate further. It is said that after travelling through this dangerous passage for a distance of half a mile, one can reach a wide rectangular plain yard where there is a linga of Shiva. It is also believed that there is an underground tunnel leading up to kamakhya hill near Guwahati. The tunnel passage and the assembly halls are the handiworks of ancient architects of great skill and imagination. These are not like the tunnel of Cherapunji or Muktapur-Rupnath, where the hill is of limestone. The rock of the Bhuvan hill is hard sandstone and quartzite boulders. Natural tunnels due to geological faults is feasible in limestone hill, but not in sandstone and granite hills to such a great extent.

Scholars are of the opinion that the pre-Aryan and Arya-Brahmanic culture have undergone an unification in this holy shrine. By a critical study of the statues of the shrine, it has shown the possibility of the creation of the works in the 10th or 11th century.
century of the Christian era. The statues and other stone works in the cave, however, seem aesthetically closer to the creations of the Pala period of Bengal. The Bhuban-shrine in Sonai region had emerged in the first millennium of the Christian era and its influence had spread in lands beyond the plains of Cachar during the period. Of the earliest population in Cachar-plains or in Sonai region, the Kirata and the Austrics were the dominating groups which were probably the earliest group of the people to make their appearance in this region, to whom the saivite Bhuvan shrine owes its origin. It is believed that a greater portion of the extremity of the North-east region including Sylhet, Barak valley and other adjacent places were at one time under the deep sea. The existence of salt-reserves in different parts of the valley also confirms it. Salt extractions were made even in the early British period in Hailakandi, Katigorah and other places in Barak valley. This things are referred to here because the basement of Bhuvan hills is believed to be the earliest rock formation in Barak Valley dating back to 2.5 crores of years, belonging to the Miocene period.

The remains of Bhuvan Hill present an intriguing picture as to the cultural background of the cult spot. The statues and images do not manifest any uniformity in style, skill and craftsmanship. The image of Bhuvanesvari is a massive figure with pierced earlobes dropping up to the shoulder. Its features do not bear any similarity to those of the known divinities. They are, instead, akin to those of a tribal woman. On the other hand, the supposed image of Bhuvanesvara, though does not conform to any accepted concept of Shiva, testifies to a superior artistic skill and refinement. The stone image is about 3'X9' high, a slim figure standing up with the left hand extending up to the left knee point. It has an elaborate hair style and the face, particularly the eyes, seem to be work of a skilled sculptor. Other images include a broken statue of Vishnu, Garuda and Hanuman which also fall under the same category.

From the remains of the Bhuvan shrine, it becomes evident that the Cult Spot represents different cultural phases. The gradual development of the different phases of the Bhuvan Hill into a cult spot involves the contribution of the different clans and groups of people through ages. However, due to lack of reliable and authentic sources it cannot be said for certain as to exactly when and which groups contributed to the
development of the different phases of the cult spot. Only some broadbased suggestions can be made as to the socio-cultural evolution of the Cult spot.

Cult Spots on the hill-tops are generally of late highland origin. Primitive agricultural people were lowlanders and so highland pastoralist occupied hill tops. Primitive pastoralist were nomadic people and Bhuvan hill was perhaps one of their seasonal camping sites. There is dearth of reliable sources to account for as to which group or clan these primitive pastoralist belonged. These early settlers may be identified with the Kiratas or Indo-Mongoloids who had to flee from Kamarupa under the pressure of the Aryanised invaders in the 2nd century BCE and ultimately moved towards the Eastern sea. These Kiratas were the early Saivites of Eastern India who worshipped Shiva in an unorthodox fashion with flesh, wine and women.

The second phase of Bhuvan sculpture was perhaps associated with the Tripuris or Tipras, an Indo-Mongoloid people, who subsequently built up a kingdom in Hill Tippera. Tripura’s Raj Vamsavivalli Rajmala retains the following:

*Kapila nadir tir bas chhari dila

Ekadash bhai mili mantrana karila

Sainva sena saney raja sthanantare gela

Barabakrer ujanerey khalangma rahila*

(Raja taking advice of his eleven brothers, left the bank of the Kapila river of Nowgong district of the Brahmaputra Valley.)

This tradition asserts that the Tripuris like their other Kirata brethren, had to leave the Brahmaputra Valley. Perhaps their migration followed the migration of the Saivite Kiratas mentioned earlier. The Khalangma is the tribal name for the upstream of the Barak which runs close to the Bhuvan hill. Some ancient brick buildings and tanks of Silchar and Hailakandi are also traditionally associated with the Tripura kings. The Tripuris of Tripura still retain a vague memory of their early settlement in Cachar on the bank of the Rukni which is not far from the Bhuvan hill. All these facts suggest that the Tripuris, before finally settling in modern Tripura, had a long sojourn in the vicinity of
the Bhuvan hill. That the Tripuris had a zeal for undertaking large-scale sculptural projects is manifested in the sculpture of the Unokoti hill of Tripura, where hundreds of images are carved under the open sky.

The third and final phase of Bhuvan sculpture is probably associated with Buddhism since some images including that of Bhuvaneshwara has a manifest affinity with the Buddhist deities. Kosambi furnishes us with a number of examples where a number of caves, originally inhabited by primitive cave dwellers, were ultimately developed and converted into cave monasteries.\(^7\) The mysterious cave of the Bhuvan hill might have undergone a similar transformation. It was perhaps originally a natural cave, converted and developed into series of halls by skilled artisans to meet the demands of the later period. It may be mentioned here that Buddhism spread in Burma and other adjacent areas from eastern India. According to Niharranjan Ray, at least one of the ancient land routes from eastern India to Burma did pass through Cachar and Manipur.\(^8\) And again, according to Kosambi, it was along the early trade routes that the cave monasteries grew up.\(^9\) Long travels, frequently undertaken by the traders and missionaries, demanded intermediate halting stations and to meet this demand, natural caves were enlarged and renovated during the Buddhist period and were converted into cave monasteries. Bhuvan cave, in all probability, grew into such a monastery and it was not unlikely that tradesmen, adventurers and the missionaries, who pioneered the cause of Buddhism in Burma, contributed considerably to the development of the Bhuvan cult spot into a Buddhist centre. Buddhist remains of the hill were perhaps the product of this period which may be identified with the later Pala period of Bengal.\(^50\)

Siddheswar Kapilasram:

Siddheshwar Kapilasram is one of the ancient cult sites of Barak Valley. The name of this valley is associated with the river Barak which has been referred or identified as Boro Bakra in our ancient Holy Scriptures like Purana. For eg., in the Boraho purana, we find the following slokes:

"Jasyaibang Nadarajasya Bakre Bakre Cha Punyadang
Tirthang Prasasthang Bikhyatang Borobokrong Tatah Smitam"
The sloka depicts Boro Bokro as a sacred place where people take a bath to widen their their path for 'Vishnu Lok' after eternal journey. Its clear from the above sloka that Boro Bokro is nothing but a river. The Sloka depicts that it's a place where the great sage Kapil attained enlightenment which is known as Kapil Tirtha where siddeshwar Horo (Lord Shiva known as siddeshwar) extsts. In reality, we find Siddeshwar Shiva Temple near Badarpur Ghat Railway Station on the bank of river Barak. It is believed that in the ancient period the idol of Shiva (shiva Linga) and the Ashram of Maharshi Kapil was situated on a hillock on the bank of the river. The idol of Lord Shiva was famous as Siddheswara as because Maharshi Kapil attained enlightenment worshipping the idol.

On the bank of the river Barak, to the east of the Badarpur ghat Railway station, there is an old shrine dedicated to Lord shiva and the place is called Siddeshwar or Kapilasram. The temple was built about two hundred years ago but it has been renovated recently. A huge image of Shiva Linga of black rock and a crude image of a bearded male carved on a stone slab are installed in an inner room. Besides these, there are some statuettes of stone and bronze placed haphazardly in the outer campus, some of them including two miniature images of the Buddha. Shiva is regarded as the presiding deity of this tirtha and is known here as Siddheswar. It is said that Kapila, the sage and illustrious author of the Samkhya philosophy worshipped the deity here and attained enlightenment. The affairs of the temple are looked after by some mohants belonging to the Giri sect of the Shamkarite monks whose headquarters are in Uttar Pradesh. Although no record is available, it is said that the management was taken over by these monks about three hundred years ago. Varuni is the principal festival associated with this cult spot. It is a bathing ceremony which takes place in the month of Chaitra. Every year on this particular day thousands of pilgrim accumulate from all over the Valley as well as from
Syhlet to take bathe in the holy water of Barak. A big fare continues for fifteen days. It appears that the bathing on the occasion of Varuni is a pretty old custom.\textsuperscript{52}

The cultspot of Siddheshwara was made to accommodate two divergent, if not rival cults\textsuperscript{53}. The principal festival of the holy site 'Varuni' does not have any direct relation to the worship of Shiva, nor does it takes place on Shivaratri or Shiva Chaturdasi. Moreover, neither do the participants in the Varuni bathing think it necessary to offer prayer to Lord Shiva nor do the votaries of Lord Shiva participate in the bathing ceremony of Varuni. Another point to be noted is that the votaries of Siddeshwar Shiva consists mainly of Upper Caste Hindus whereas the lower caste people participate in the Varuni Ceremony.

The cultural history of the country bears testimony to the fact that ancient cults generally survive among the people of the lower strata.\textsuperscript{54} Moreover, bathing ceremonies are perhaps survivals of the primitive cult of the water or river deities.\textsuperscript{55} Again Tirthayatra or Pilgrimage to holy places is almost inevitably associated with ritual bathing.\textsuperscript{56} Pilgrimage itself is a non-Aryan institution later adopted by the Aryans.\textsuperscript{57} The Varuni cult of Siddheshwar may be regarded as a pre-Aryan cult of some river Goddess, incorporated later in a modified form within the Hindu fold.\textsuperscript{58} It is significant that the Khasis who are considered to be one of the earliest inhabitants of this valley have retained an elaborate cult of river deities.\textsuperscript{59} The Khasis worship numerous water deities and the Kupli goddess is considered supreme amongst them. European travelers of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century testify that the river was held in superstitious fear by the Khasis who would not cross it after dusk.\textsuperscript{60}

The discovery of some pre-historic stone implements of Khasi variety in the North Cachar suggests that the Khasis inhabited the region not far away from Siddheswar in the days of antiquity.\textsuperscript{61} They were spread over the plain lands of Syhlet, before they finally confined themselves to the Khasi and Jaintia Hills.\textsuperscript{62} So they were one of the earliest dwellers of the region which now constitute the cult-zone of Varuni.\textsuperscript{63}

There are several traditions to suggest that the Khasis retained their political domination over the vicinity of Siddheswar till the Muslim invasion. The legend of Shah Jalal\textsuperscript{64} and Purah Raja\textsuperscript{65}, in all probability preserve some fragments of historical truth.
that even in the 14th century Siddeshwar and its vicinities were the residence of the earlier Khasi dwellers of the region, and Purah Raja was their last important chief. Regular Hinduisation of the Surma Valley started presumably in the 6th century. The pioneer of the new faith, the immigrant Hindus, obviously had to encounter the opposition of the local people, of which the Khasis perhaps formed a dominant composition.

Sri Sri Bhubaneshwara Shiva Temple at Chandragiri, Sonai:

Every year in the Bengali month of Kartik, about ten miles south from the Silchar town in a place called Sonai a huge mass of people from Barak Valley as well as from Manipur get accumulated to offer prayer to the Mahadev of Sri Sri Bhuvaneshwar temple situated in the Chandragiri hill. Besides the Manipuris, people of other communities also visit this temple but the Manipuris are more in number. This is due to the fact that the temple was established by the Dimasa king Raja Krishna Chandra. His wife Induprabha was a Manipuri princess. She was devout Vaisnava but at the same time she used to worship lord Shiva at her parents house before her marriage.

About two or three kilometer south from Sonai Bazaar, in the right side of Sonai-Palanghat road, there is a small mound called Shiv Tilla. Locally, it is also known as Chengur Tilla. Chandraguri is the Sanskritised form of Chengur. According to the Government record, the mound measures about 28 Bigha of land. There is a small pond below the mound. In the left side there is the beautiful Chandragiri park. One has to climb at least ten to fifteen small and large sizes of steps to reach the temple. There are two face to face brick built structures at a distance of about thirty feet. One is the famous Sri Sri Bhuvaneshwar shiv Temple and the other is an abandoned structure which was probably used as a rest house of the Sebaits.

The main reason for which this temple is historically so important are the two inscriptions inscribed on the wall of the Temple. The two inscriptions are in Sanskrit but the script is in Bengali.
Inscription No. I

In order to propitiate Sri Bhubaneshwar Shiva, Noble Joysingha Burman, the minister of His Majesty, the King, has completed (the construction of) the marvelous palace (temple) made of bricks of mine, situated in Chandragiri, in the city of Swarnapur, under the jurisdiction of Sri Sri, the Lord of Hidimba.

Inscription No. II

In the city known as Swarnapur, this marvelous palace is built with bricks for Bhubaneshwar. In the Shaha year when the sun ascends the Manmatha (the work was) completed.

The wise Sri Jaysingha, who was commissioned as the minister of Sri Maharaj, the Lord of Hidimba, has built the Shiva temple with bricks in the hill top of Chandra.

The information provided in the inscription I is clear, but the Inscription II contains an astrological puzzle, the portion could not be rendered in literal translation. The lines are as follows:

*Khetambar nagendu Sake

*Bhanu Sthithe manmatharasau-purnamiti*

From the inscriptions we learn, firstly, the temple was constructed during the rule of Hedemba, that is Dimasa; Secondly, the construction work was supervised by the minister of the king, Jaysingha Burman; thirdly, the place was known as Swarnapur, the hillock where it was placed was called Chandragiri, and the place was within the jurisdiction of Hedambya Rajya; lastly, the astrological puzzle indicated that it was completed in 1707 Shaka, that is 1785 A.D.

From the local sources various legends relating to the temple could be collected. It is said that Induprava, the Queen of Krishnachandra (1780-1813) had urged the king to construct the temple the temple like that of ‘Nongmaijinching’ (Nilkantha-shiva), in Manipur, her parental state, as Bhuban shrine was not easy accessible to her. As she was used to worshipping Shiva in Manipur, she kept up the practice here too.
The diety in Sonai is worshipped in Sunday following the practice of Manipur in the temple of ‘Nongmijinching’, an uncommon practice, as Śhīva is worshipped in Monday everywhere. It is said that the queen used to come to the temple annually on the Sunday of Suklapakshya in the month when ‘the sun ascends the Monmoth’. She used to stay for sometime at a place in Sonai named ṇandpur. Following the tradition, the Manipuris from all the corners of Cachar assemble in Sonai in the month of Kartik, Sunday of Suklapakhya, every year.

**Rupnatha Cave in Jayantia Pargana:**

The famous Rupnatha Cave in Jayantia Pargana is situated near Rupnatha. It is one of the most astonishing and wonderful pilgrimage site in Eastern India. The devotees in order to reach the pilgrimage travel in atleast two miles along the curve of the hill. One cannot find even a single trace of light inside the cave and the local people, mostly the ṇhasis, help in showing the path to the travellers or devotees to the pilgrimage site. Every Monday, a Brahmin priest from Jayantiapur comes to Rupnatha Cave to perform the rites and rituals of worship.

The darkness inside the cave is beyond imagination. With the help of some artificial light one can overcome the darkness and while cautiously proceeding one can find something like fringe or valance hanging from above. But on noticing carefully it can be seen that these fringes are nothing but different shapes of stone hanging from above.

After getting across these stone fringes and after proceeding a little bit one can find all around numerous countless stones of different shapes and sizes in the form of Shiva Lingas. It is astonishing to notice that some of the Shiva Lingas had continuous flow of water from their heads and if anyone tried to remove water with hands it was if no use because water again continuously flowed from their head.

After proceeding a little bit more one can come across a ‘Nakhatra Mandala’. This place has a peaceful environment and one gets great satisfaction and peace of mind on reaching the place. On looking above one looks with awe and admiration the view of thousands and thousands of Nakhtara being litted above. But to
ones surprise these Nakhtara are nothing but the thousand and thousand of droplets of water hanging from the stone roof.

Then one comes across an image of a thin Shiva Linga. In another place there are five stamps of stone. These are collectively known as ‘Pancha Pandava’. Then one comes across four big stone in the form of roots of a Banyan tree. These are known as ‘Charijuger Khamba’. Nearby lies another big stone which is referred to as ‘Bhairav’. Then one comes across a deep trench and it is known as Lakh Bhandhar.

Then one comes across the ‘Swarga Dwark’. The place called Swargadwar in the cave has a very peaceful atmosphere, one gets great satisfaction and happiness on reaching the place. After travelling in tremendous darkness for sometime when one reaches the place with tired mind and body, it gives tremendous pleasure to the travelers. A ray of light gets inside in this part of the cave from a small hole in the roof and slightly lightens up that part of the roof of the cave. The sight of this slightly lightening up of the roof gives a feeling of tremendous joy and pleasure and this is referred to as Swarga Dwark in the Cave.

After this place, one comes across another deep trench or hole. Unless being very cautious, one cannot pass through the hole. One can observe a number of stone tridents inside the hole and the name of this place is ‘Jogonidra’. After reaching ‘Jogonidra’, there is another place called ‘Pataal or Naagpuri’ It is said that this place is the resident of a large number of snakes which may not be very impossible. Generally, people do not proceed further after reaching ‘Jogonidra’.

It takes about half an hour for the devotees to travel from the entrance of the cave to ‘Jogonidra’. The Rupnatha cave is so huge that two to three hundred people can enter the cave at the same time with no one having contact with each other. On the entrance of the cave, we find the name of Raja RamSingha inscribed.

Unakoti Shiva Tirtha:

Unakoti, an important Shaiva centre of Tripura is situated at Kailasahar sub division of north Tripura district and is about 180 kilometres north east from Agartala. Unakoti of north Tripura is one of the holiest place in Northeast India as an abode of
Lord Shiva next to Kasi so far as its sanctity is concerned and so the devout Saivas gave it the above epithet i.e Unakoti (one less than a crore). As per prevailing legend and mythology, once Lord Siva was going to Kasi along with one crore of gods and goddesses and was compelled to make a night halt at this place with the instruction to the fellow gods to wake up before sunrise to resume journey for Kasi. It is said that in the morning no one could get up to set out for Kasi /iva himself. So, he cursed the others to become stone. To commemorate the legend Unakoti became a holy place or tirtha. Among the Unakoti sculptures are to be found two representations of Chaturmokha Lingas. The ekamukhalinga dated eleventh and twelfth centuries C.E is placed on the upward slope of the Unnakoti hills. A unique colossal head image of Shiva along with two female attendants on either side of the head gear of the god is carved on the rock wall of the Unakoti hills. Local name of the image is Unakotisvara. It has a vertically set third eye marked on the forehead, half-moon on the crest and trident as well as the accompanying figure of the bull, the female figures identified with Durga and Ganga on account of their respective vechiles lend support to this view.

**Hatakeshwar Shiva in Syhlet:**

In Mahalingeshwar Tantrakta, we get the reference of hundred names of Lord Shiva

"Nakulesh: Kalipithe Srihotte Hatakeshwar: I"

Gaur Govinda, the king of Srihatta offered prayers to Hatakeshwar Shiva who was enthroned in a mound called Minarer Tilla or some adjacent mound. During Shah Jalal’s invasion, Hatakeshwar Shiva was shifted to Jayantiapur.

**Tungeshwar Mahadev:**

We the reference of Tunganath Shiva from the sloka mentioned below:

"Khomaya: Purbebbhagesh Tunganathasthu Bhairav
Nabaratna Mahapitha Tunganathasthu rakhah: II"_ Tirthachintamanil

Tunganatha Shiva is enthroned in the bank of Khowai river. This place is also known as Navaratna as it is said that nine fingers of the Devi fell in this place. There is a myth
associated with the enthronement of Tungeshwar Shiva. Around eight hundred years ago one Shambhunath Bachaspati along with his family members left Rarh and shifted to Taraf. He had a cow which used to give milk every night. But it was found that the cow was missing every morning. On enquiry it was found that everyday in early morning, the cow goes to an unknown place and pours milk over a stone. Unable to know the reason of this strange act, Bachaspati was so scared that he did not dare to excavate the place. On that very night, Bachaspati had a dream which made him aware about the Navaratna Pitha. In the dream he was also ordered to shift the place of the Pitha. Accordingly, next day he along with his sons and other members went to the place and got it excavated. On excavation, a piece of stone was revealed and along with small nine holes in the stone piece measuring around one to one and a half inches were revealed. A small Shiva Linga measuring around the size of the finger was noticed in one of the holes. Bachasti then carried the Stone and enthroned it somewhere near his house. Tungeshwar Shiva is above the caste barriers and people from all the castes whether Brahman or Shudra can offer prayer to him.76

Brahma Kunda and Tapta Kunda:

Although Brahma Kunda is situated within the precincts of hill Tripura but it is essentially a pilgrimage centre of the people of Syhlet. It is located very near to the border line of Kashimnagar Pargana. BrahmaKunda has its origin in the following myth: it is said that in the Treta Yuga Parashurama in order to get rid of the axe attached to his hand moved from one sacred place to another. Finally, in BrahmaKunda he got off the axe from his hands and this is how this place became one of the pilgrimage centres. Every year in the sukla Asthami of Chaitra month, people come to have a bath in the Kunda. After having bath, the people generally proceed towards the temple of Krishnapur77.

Tapta Kunda is situated in the Paanchbagh Pargana of Jayantia. In the yuga of Madhukrishnatreodashi a huge number of people assemble over here to perform the rites of Tarpan (ancestor worship) etc. One significant thing about this place is that generally its land is quite warm but the water in the pool is cold. Probably it is due to the presence of some minerals deep within the land78. However, during the rainy season, the Kunda remains ten to twelve feet under the water.
Natha Religion:

The Natha Cult is an obscure religious Cult. It is essentially a yogic cult but among the innumerable yogic sects of India the cult is characterized as the Nath Cult due mainly to the fact that its stalwarts generally bear the title of Nath. The problem of the origin and development of the Nath cult in India, including the Nath Movement of Bengal is as yet shrouded in the mist of legends and myths. So, it is possible to form an idea of the extent of popularity which the cult enjoyed and is still enjoying in the soil of India but no definite history of its origin and development can be constructed due to lack of data available. 

Natha Religion is one of the ancient religions of India. This religion has acquired an important position among the different branches and sub-branches of Hindu religion. This religion can be said to be a part of yoga sadhana which was prevalent in India from pre-Aryan times. There are different opinions regarding the origin of Natha religion. According to some, Natha religion is a branch of Saiva religion. According to other opinion, Natha Religion is an outcome of Buddhist Mahayana. There are different views regarding the meaning of the word Natha. It is derived from the Vedic ‘gyat’ which means well educated, cultured, well versed in Shastras etc.

Natha religion is widely prevalent in Syhet and Cachar region. It is also prevalent in the adjacent areas of Tripura, Commilla and Noakhali. All these areas were once under the political domination of Kings belonging to the Natha dynasty. Patronization and preaching of yoga dharma and tantra was prevalent to a large extent. These area was designated as ‘Natha Mandala’ due to the wide prevalence of this community in the region. There are ample evidences to show the prevalence of Natha community and Natha religion in prevailed these areas around twelve to thirteen hundred years ago.

Copper Plate Inscription:

Few inscriptions which gives evidence of traces of the prevalence of Natha religion in these areas prior to 7th century CE are:
• Kalapur Copper Plate Inscription of Marundanatha
• Copper Plate Inscription of Gaurgovinda or Drumnatha
• Copper Plate Inscription of Loknatha

All these above mentioned inscriptions gives us information regarding the religion and its prevalence in the region.

**Kalapur Copper Plate Inscription:**

This Copper Plate Inscription is discovered from Kalapur village within Chautali Pargana of Syhlet district. From the inscription, it is revealed that MarundaNatha was the king of the dynasty of Srimangal. In the inscription mention is made of one ‘Srinatha’ who is referred to as the predecessor of MarundaNatha. The name of Srinatha is also mentioned in the copper Plate Inscription of Loknatha. It proves beyond doubt that both of them belonged to the same dynasty i.e Natha Dynasty. Both these kings reigned during 7th Century CE as is evident from both the inscriptions. But in both the inscriptions we get a long list of their predecessors which proves beyond doubt that these dynasties were prevalent long before 7th Century CE.

**Bhatera Copper Plate Inscription of Raja Gaurgovinda:**

Raja Gaurgovinda reigned during the first part of 13th Century in Srihatta. Although he was famous by the name Gaur Govinda but he was also known as Kesava Deva and Govinda Kesava Deva. Two inscription of this dynasty has been discovered from a village named Bhatera which is around 20/22 miles southward from the main town of Syhlet. In one of the inscriptions he is referred to as Drumnatha

*Govindabiro Drumnath Sangha:*

(Bir Govinda who was known as Drumnatha)

The title of Drumnatha being Natha gives us an indication of his being a ‘Natha’. 82

83
Saktism:

The concept of Sakti is the universal energy personified in the mother Goddess. The contents of Sakti worship though scanty and fragmentary are to be viewed on this historical background. In the period of the Rig Veda, the position of the deities conceived as the female energy was in a negligible state. However, certain hymns of the Rig Veda carry the notion of the duality in the creations of the Universe. Terms like Janitri, Pitara are highly suggestive in sustaining the faceted union of the heaven and earth who were conceived to be the progenitors of all the deities and the universe. Another important female deity Usha (dawn) at the time of Rig Veda is poetically imagined as the mistress of the sun. But in the Vedic literature, the place of Aditi is unique as being fancied as the personification of sky or of the universal nature. Sometimes, she is the sister of Vasus and in a later cosmogonic hymn, she plays the role of both the mother and the daughter aspects of Daksha-Prajapati. In one passage of the Atharva-Veda she is worshipped with her brothers and sons for protection. From the earlier literature, incidental evidences relating to the position of the supreme goddess can be gleaned, where mere appearance of some designations of the mother can hardly be recognised as having the role of Sakti worshipped by the saktas of the later age. Sri and Bhadrakali in the Sankhyayana-grihya-Sutra of the Rig Veda, Bhavani as the wife of Bhava in the Hiranyakesi Grhya Sutra, Kali and Karali mentioned in the Mundakopanishad, Haimavati and Uma as personified Brahmavidya in Kenopanishad, Ambika, the sister of Rudra in the Vajasaneyi-Samhita are all designations of the mother but bearing no concrete evidence of the development of her cult. It is the Taittariya Aranyaka of the black Yajurveda where Ambika is described not only as the spouse of Pasupati Rudra, but is identified with Devi. Two more designations viz., Katyayani and Kanyakumari in the Durga-gayatri of the same text furnish a point of significance in the later history of Saktism. Fragmentary evidences regarding the assimilation of some tribal goddesses in the development of Sakti cult are to be found in two Durga-stavas of the great epic as well as in the Aryastava of the Khila Hari-Vamsa. Siddhasenani, the dweller on Mandara, Kaumara, Kali, Bhadrakali, Chandi, Tarini, Vijaya, Jaya, Vasudeva bhagini, slayer of Mahisasura, Kausiki, Uma, Sakabhari, destroyer of Kaitabha, Svaha, Svadha, Saravati, Savitri, Mahadevi, Jambhani,
Mohini, Maya, Hri, Sri and Sandhya are names of the goddess found in one of the two stavas.

In a stanza of the Harivamsa, further source of tribal elements of the Mother is described where the supreme goddess is described as being worshipped by the Sabaras, Barbaras and Pulindas

\[
\text{Vasavi Tvam Mahadevi vaneshupavateshu cha I}
\]

\[
\text{Sabaraivaiv vvaraischaiva pulindaischa supujita II}^{77}
\]

The residence of the Goddess on Himalayas and Vindhya, her love for flesh and wine and sacrificial victim reveal her intimate association with the cult of fertility brought to India by the early invaders like the Mediterranean or the Armanoid race. Scattered evidence in regard to worship of such proto-goddesses in the Indus Valley region come to be known from the archaeological remains of Harappa and Mohenjodaro.\(^{98}\)

The Sakta cults of Bengal represent a particular distinctive feature of the religious life of Bengal and the extent of literature which flourished under the direct influence of those cults is also fairly large. The Sakta literature of Bengal generally belongs to the type of Mangala literature. Among the Sakta Cults, the more important are the cults of Candi, the consort of Lord siva, and the cult of Manasa, the serpent goddess. There are also Mangala-kavyas belonging to the cult of Goddess Sitala, Kamala or Laksmi, Sasthi and others, but the literature belonging to such cults is comparatively negligible both in quality and in quantity. So far as the religious history of Bengal is concerned, of the two Shivaism seems to be the older and the sakta cults, which are more often indigenous than Puranic, sprang up later in strong opposition to the former. In our literary records we find the Sakta cults often with daggers drawn with the cults that centred round the male deities. In this conflict with the other systems, particularly with the Sakta Saivism, the religion centering round the most indifferent and inactive, had to give way and the Sakta cults gradually gained ground.\(^{99}\)

The Dimasas are an offshoot of the Bodos of the Indo-Mongoloid ethnicity in the North-East of India. They are also known as Kacharis and Hedamas (f rankritisation of the term Hachengsha) who had at one time ruled the greater portion of Upper Assam,
right from Sadoa-Dibrugarh to the borderland of Nagaland; but had to move towards
west to settle at Dimapur (in the present Nagaland) from where they were, again, pushed
further southwards by the rising Ahom force; thereafter, they had settled at Maibong on
the bank of Mahur I in the present N.C Hills. The Dimasas, as a matter of fact, had
already made a progress towards the process of acculturation or Sanskritisation by
absorbing Brahmanical Hinduism by adopting sanskritised proper names, by seeking a
heritage in the epical tradition in their Maibong days. There are a large number of
examples of pre-Hinduised ruling classes and Royal families coming within the fold of
Aryanisation. In this context reference can be made to the Tantrik-Cult and the worship
of mother Kamakshya in Kamrupa in the medieval period ushering in an era of Sakta-
ism in the north-east which had evolved out of the pre-Hinduised animistic cult of the
tribal communities engineered by the agents of Aryanisation in the north east. Tantra or
Sakta cult had some common elements with the tribal cults for which the tribal in the
North east, the Dimasa or Kacharis or Bodos, the Koches, and the Ahoms could easily
identify themselves with it, and could embrace it and further enrich it in their own way.

It was in Maibong that the Dimasas had entered into an important state of
Sanskritisation. The two centuries of Dimasa rule with Maibong as the capital was very
important for them. The son of Dershengfa, the last ruler at Dimapur, had adopted
Sanskritised proper name, Nibhayanarayana for the first time, and thereafter we have all
the Sanskritised proper names for the Dimasa kings.

The Dimasas had adopted the Sakta cult in their first phase of Hinduisation.
The Bhabishya Puran states—

Hedemba desha cho madheya Ranachandi birajate

They began to worship Ranachandi as the royal deity, and introduced animal sacrifice as
per the sakta tradition that was current in Bengal. The Sakta cult made its appearance in
Dimasa court in two ways. Firstly, the cult of Kamrup-Kamakshya which permeated
through the north east in the ancient and medieval period had its entry in the Dimasa
court during Maibong days following their association with Ahom and Koches. The
other one representing the traits of Bengal version of sakta cult carrying the basic
philosophy of it had its entry through the Bengal frontier, and it paved way towards the
creation of numerous Sakta Padas i.e., Poetic compositions rendered in musical form which had taken the entire medieval Bengal by storm, the influence of which is still potent in the contemporary.

There are numerous myths and legends current among the Dimasas regarding their initiation to the Sakta cult. One such legend is of a dream oracle which instructed the king to find the deity by touching a fearsome snake in the river at a stipulated time in the dead of night. The king, however, dared not touch the head and could obtain only a golden sword instead of a promised idol by placing his trembling finger on its tail. This sword has been adopted as a symbol of Devi Ranachandi, and is worshipped even today. Ofcourse, this kind of legend with some variation is current among the various tribes in north east.

What gives the Sakta trait in Dimasa court a place of distinction is the advent of Sakta literature under the direct patronage of the kings. On the other hand, several religious songs like matri sangeet, malshi, thant, chautala gained popularity which in their totality placed Cachar in the Sakta tradition of Bengal version, one from the centre and the other from the periphery.

We have a number of songs composed by Maharaj Suradarpa Narayan, Ramachandradhwaj, Krishna Chandra and Govinda Chandra. These songs are still popular among the rural folks in the valley of Barak. The compiler put the name of the ragas at the top of the lyrics like malshi, bhatial etc.and also indicated which portion is to be used as dhua (repeating line). Ofcourse, malsi is a genre of Sakta songs, sometimes termed as Kalikirtan, not as a raga. But in form and structure these songs (available in verse form) are close to the ones composed in 18th century Bengal.

Following is a composition of Raja Suradarpa Narayan (1708-35) who lost his father at a tender age and ascended the throne as a minor under the care of the mother Chandraprava, the daughter of the royal family of Ahom. His mother was a great connoisseur of art, culture and patronised the pandit Bhuvaneshwar Bachaspati in his Bengali rendering Naradiya Puran.
Dina dayamoyi naam tomar

Sunita bharasa boro haiache amar

Puja jap tap kichu nahika amar

Tabe jadi kara kripa mahima tomar

Ami to kumati ati gati nahi arr

Bharasa kariachi kebal Sricharan tomar

Pranati karia bola Suradarpa Roy

Agna kara munda dia bhaji ranga paei II

Next to Suradarpa Narayan comes the poet-King Ramchandradhwaj Narayan. He composed a song:

Tran kara goe janani! Bipade pariachi

Bhakti nahijani ma goe! Sakti nahi sthir...

Pranati karia bole Ramachandra nripa

Anande kailash jaba bole Durga Shiva

Maharaj Krishna Chandra (1773-1823) had faced severe during his rule, and had to take shelter in many places outside the kingdom for fear of external aggression. A song composed in such a situation while he was spending days in the wilds of North Cachar the poet surrenders to the Goddess like a motherless child, and seeks her blessings

Janme sthan erri ailm mao tomar namti suni

Sthan man diya rakho tomar namer dhani II

Chau dike aranya majhe mao tomar namti jage

Krishna Chandra maharaje tomar charan magel

I have come away from my birth place
Listening to your clarion call

Your name echoes in the surrounding deep forest

The king Krishnachandra seeks your blessings

The 1st king Govinda Chandra (1813-30) is particularly known for his Vaishnavite poems which were meant for performance with accompanying dance, but he has his place in the Sakta literature too by composing a verse addressing Devi Durga:

\[ Jaya Durge! Taba charan kamala minati prachur \ldots \]

**Vamjangha Mahapitha:**

The Vamjangha Mahapitha is one of the fifty-one Mahapithas associated with Devi legend in this valley. This Mahapitha is also known as the “Faljorer Kalibadi”. The Vamjangha pitha is situated in the Baurbhog pargana of Jayantia. In the twelfth part of Viswakosh, it is found that “Faljor is a significant Mahapitha. It is said that the left leg of Devi Sati fell in this place and hence this place is referred to as the Vamjangha Pitha. This Mahapitha is situated 38 miles north-east of Syhlet town at the foothill. A stone built statue of Jhairav is also situated there. During the reign of the Jayantias, the Pitha received royal patronage but with the decline of the Jayantia kingdom, the condition of the pitha also declined. There is a myth associated with the evolution of this Pitha. During the reign of Bar Gosain (1548-1664), some young children were playing different kinds of games near a big stone slab. One of the children played the role of a Brahmin worshipper and another was playing the role of a goat who was to be sacrificed. The other childrens collected flowers and other items required by the child who played the role of a Brahmin for the purpose of worship. Then the big stone was worshipped by all the childrens. After the worship was over, the child who played the role of a goat was brought for sacrifice. Then a big dagger made of grass and leaves were used by the children for sacrificing the the goat child. But then a very surprising and astonishing thing happened. Through the blow of that dagger, the goat child was killed as his body and head fell apart. All the other childrens out of fear moved to their homes. Raja Bar Gosain on hearing this incident himself went to Faljor along with his gurudev who was a great tantric and great man of learning. He then proclaimed that stone slab to be
“Jayantia Devi” of Vamjangha Pitha. As earlier mentioned the stone built statue of Bhairav is popularly known as Kromodiswar.\cite{106}

**Bhairavi Temple in Gutatikar or Griva Pitha:**

In the 11th part of Viswakosh, it is written with much emphasis that the Griva Pitha is situated in Syhlet and here the Bhairavi is known as Mahalaxmi and Bhairav is known as Sarvananda.\cite{107} However, the actual place where this pitha was situated could has only be recently discovered. About a mile and a half south of Syhlet town, where Sati’s neck is said to have fallen when her body was dismembered by Vishnu, is the famous Griva Pitha situated in Gutatikar in Jainpur. Sati’s neck is represented by a piece of flat rock. Her Bhairab or guardian left to protect her by Siva, takes the usual form of a small upright pillar of rock shaped like a phallus. There is no temple over these remains, and hardly anything neighbourhood of Syhlet town.\cite{108}

"Griva paapath Srihatte Sarvasiddi Pradaayini

Devitantra Mahalaxmi Sarvanandacha Bhairav"\cite{109}

**Kachakanti Temple of Udharbond:**

The name and fame of the Mother Goddess Kanchakanti has spread far and wide now-a-days. Udharband, a place at a small distance from Silchar town has turned into a place of pilgrimage in Southern Assam only for the sake of Kanchakanti. Innumerable tales and hearsays relating to the glory and grandeur of Kanchakanti are current among the common people. Many devout persons from far off places throng daily in the temple of Kanchakanti aspiring to be blessed with divine grace by offering handful of flowers to the feet of the Mother Goddess. The main cause of the socio-economic transformation of Udharbond today is the Mother Goddess Kanchakanti. The place which was once a desolate deep forest, has transformed into a prosperous town, by degrees, only for the sublimity of Kanchakanti.

It is not known for certain as to when and by whom was Mother Goddess Kanchakanti installed in Udharband. It is said that during the reign of Koch kings Kanchakanti (Kancha Khauri) was found installed at Udharband.\cite{110} The Koch kings erected the temples of Šatyamadevi at Thaligram and Kanchakanti at Udharband and
employed the Bengali Brahmins of Syhlet as priests of these temples. This event occurred during the last part of the 16th century.111

Through the history of Cachar, it can be found that up to the first part of the 16th century B.C.E, the plain tract of Cachar was included within the territory of Tripura. Chilarai, the General and the youngest brother of Koch king Naranarayana, took the possession of Cachar in 1536 B.C.E after defeating the king of Tripura in battle. Chilarai went back to Assam keeping a group of soldiers to keep control over the newly occupied territory. A few years later, Gohain Kamal or otherwise known as Deovan Kamal Narayana, another brother of king Naranarayana was appointed administrator and came to Brahmapur (Kochpur or Khaspur) along with a good number of people. During the reign of Kamalanarayana, the following deities viz., Shyma (Thaligram), Kanchakanti (Udharband), Ranabauli, Chandai, Mal and Bhairav were worshipped with pomp and ceremony in cachar. Kamalanarayana also engaged some Koch men as Deuri or Devagrihi or sevait to these deities.112

Kanchakanti (Kanca Khauri) was found installed at Udharband. This Goddess was worshipped during the season of dreadful epidemic diseases. Human sacrifices were offered to the Goddess. Nobody would dare to go near the deity with an umbrella at hand or wearing red garments. Kancha kanti or Kancha Khauri is referred to as Kenchai Khanti Gosani and was not worshipped by the Koch alone. At Sadiya and other regions of Assam, Chutiyas and Dimasa kings also worshipped the deity.113 Kenchai Khanti is one of the manifestations of Goddess Kali. The religion of the Chutiyas was a curious one. They worshipped various forms of Kali with the aid, not of Brahmins, but of their tribal priest or Deoris. The favourite form in which they worshipped this deity was that of Kesai Khati, 'eater of raw flesh' to whom human sacrifices were offered.114

During the reign of Koch Kings Sakti cult was the predominant form of worship in Assam. The basic concept of Sakti cult is the worship of the mother Goddess. At this time Saktism was the predominant form of Hinduism in this part of India, where in fact it is believed by many to have had its origin. Its adherents base their observances on the Tantras, a series of religious works in which the various ceremonies, prayers and incantations are prescribed in a dialogue between Shiva and his wife Parvati. The fundamental idea is the worship of the female principle, the procreative power of nature.
as manifested by personified desire. It is a religion of bloody sacrifices from which even human beings are not exempt.\textsuperscript{115}

Mother Goddess Kanchakanti image has the mixed features of Durga and Kali. The Goddess is having four hands; she has freshly truncated head and falchion at her left two hands while her right two hands project the signs of boon and fearlessness. By her right leg, the Goddess is mounted on shiva and she is garlanded with chopped off heads: nevertheless she is not of frightful disposition. Like Durga in Kalika Purana, she is embellished with matted locks, a crest-jewel of half-moon, three eyes, face as beautiful as the moon, a lustrous complexion like the shining gold; she is beautifully installed, having brilliant eyes and budding youth, decorated with all the ornaments, studded with graceful teeth, having sharp and swelling breast.

Goddess Kanchakanti’s mixed form of Durga and Kali has its source in the form of Ekanamsha Kali as described in the Avantya Section of Skanda Purana. Ekanamsha Kali originates from the essence of both Kali and Parvati.

That is, amalgamated with the essence of the forms, you (Nisha or dark night) will be Uma and people will worship you as Ekanamsha. The idea is that Nisha (dark night) transformed Gauri into Kali (dark complexioned); again Kali, after shaking off her dark exterior, became Gauri. Thus goes the puranic story- Gauri was born dark in colour. When Shiva made a sarcastic comment about her skin complexion, Parvati by dint of her severe penance turned into fair complexioned.

The Sakti worship in the mixed form of Durga-Kali is in vogue in different parts of India. In Tantra literature, various images of the goddess have been conceived. As the Sakti worship became more pervasive with the passage of time, innumerable forms of the goddess came to be visualized and multi-variety idols of the goddess were also designed. Goddess Kachakanti of Udharband is likewise a wonderful image of the goddess having admixture forms of Durga-Kali.

The Kanchakanti temple previously was composed of a small shed, covered on all sides by reddish tin. There was also a small veranda in front of it. As scarcity of space in the small temple was felt, a beautiful temple was constructed anew under the supervision of Sri Kanchakanti Bari Mandir Parichalan Committee in the backside of the
previous one after dismelting it. The newly erected Kanchakanti temple was inaugurated 25 years ago on 1st December, 1979 CE. In the vicinity of the newly built Kanchakanti temple, one ShivMandir has also been constructed. Besides in course of time one Durga mandir and also a spacious Nat mandir came into existence.

Previously mother Goddess Kanchakanti was worshipped on every Sunday and royal worship was offered once in a year. Now Puja archana is held everyday. Annual grand puja commences on the 13th day of the lunar white fortnight in the month of Agrayana and following two days on the Saturday and Sunday a colourful annual function is observed. During annual festival songs and worship of the Mother Goddess Kanchakanti are performed and Prasad of the goddess is distributed. During the celebration of the annual Festival

**Devi Nrimata:**

The Goddess Nrimata is worshipped in a shrine at Barkhola, a large village Km from the Silchar town. Barkhola is one of the oldest village of Cachar district. It is a hindu dominated village. The shrine is not of any ornate design but the presiding deity receives universal homage from not only masses of this village but from other areas also. In the year 1736 the Kachari king Kirti Chandra Narayan appointed Maniram Laskar, a Bengali person as the General of Cachar district. Prior to this event, Maniram Laskar’s father Chand Laskar along with his whole family was residing in a place called Sonapur village. Maniram Laskar were eight brothers and it is said that the progenitors of the two younger brothers are still residing in the two Borkhola as the two Deblaskar family. According to a popular legend, Maniram through a dream was propheced by Nrimata to install her. Accordingly, Nrimata Devi was installed in Sonapur village in about 1742 BCE.

**Vaisnavism:**

"Vaisnavism", the word denotes the cult of Vishnu, the Vedic Solar God. But Vishnu in the epic and the puranic age was but the composite form of three divine entities, namely, the Vedic god Vishnu, the cosmic god Narayana and the human god Vasudeva-Krishna. In the Vedic literature, cycles of legends about some Krishnas are found. They are Rishi Krishna who is the father of Visvakaya, certain Asura Krishna
living on the bank of the river Amsumati, Krishna of Angirasagotra. Two Krishnas belonging to Harita gotra. It is apparent that these Krishnas were different from the Krishna of the Mahabharata. We find reference of the God in the Upanishads like in Chandogya Upanishad, certain Krishna, son of Devaki, is found to have been the disciple of Ghora Angirasa. The name Vasudeva occurs in the Parisishtas of some Vedic literature where conceptions of Vedic Vishnu, cosmic Narayana and historic Vasudeva are mingled to form the cult god of later Vaishnavism.

In the late Puranas and Harivamsa, we get streams of legends as regards the Gopal aspect of Krishna. But the term ‘Vaishnava’ to denote the followers of Vishnu had its origin in still later ages. The word Vaishnava to denote a follower of Vishnu is remarkably absent in the Padma Tantra but the synonyms to denote the followers of Vishnu are to be found in a verse which is quoted below:

Suris-Suhrit-bhagvatassat-Vatah Panchkalavit
Ekantikscha tanmoyascha-Pancharatrika ityapi II

From the above verse, the terms Bhagavata, Satvata, Ekantika and Pancharatrika were regularly used by the followers of Vishnu. In this context we can give reference of the epigraphical source which is a record of the Greek ambassador Heliodorus who erected a pillar with an image of Garuda in honour of Lord Vasudeva. In the inscription od second century B.C, Heliodorus designated himself as a Paramabhadagavata. The expression Vaishnava is also found for the first time in an interpolated passage of the great epic.

From Panini and Patanjali we get the early trace of Bhagavatism. From Mahabharata and the Puranas it becomes conclusive that Bhagavatism originated in Mathura and the adjoining regions. Epigraphic data from third century B.C to the first century C.E are the early documents of the history of Vaishnava faith. Besides the Besnagar pillar inscription of Heliodorous, another important record of second century BC from Nagari (Madhyadesa) gives in detail the commemoration of a shrine in the Narayana vataka by Sarvatata Gajayana where the images of the gods Vasudeva and Sankarshana were installed. From an epigraphic source i.e an inscription dedicated by Sodasa, son of Mahakshatrapa Rajubala (first century CE) recovered from the village
Mora near Mathura, it is proved that the five hero gods of the Vrishnis, viz. Sankarshana, Vasudeva, Pradyumna, Aniruddha and Samba were the objects of veneration. Thus it testifies the prevalence of Vaisnava faith in the form of hero worship. The doctrine behind the worship of this group of gods was recognised to be the ‘Vyuhavada’ which was the central theme of the Pancharatrikas. In course of time the worship of Samba became obsolete and rest four gods were known as four Vyuhas among the Pancharatrikas. According to the doctrine underlying the four ‘Vyuhas’ Vasudeva stands as the supreme god and Sankarshana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha are his emanatory forms. However, each Vyaha is Vishnu himself as is laid down in the text and from the four original Vyuhas emanation of three Vyuhas follows like from Vasudeva emanates Kesava, Narayana and Madhava, from Sankarshana emanates Govinda, Vishnu and Madhusudana, from Pradyumna emanates Trivikrama, Vamana and Sridhara and from Aniruddha emanates Hrishikesha, Padmanabha and Damodara. Again from the four principal Vyuhas another group of twelve Vidyasvaras (so designated in the Mahasanatkumara-Samhita) as given in the Padma Tantra. A total number of twenty four varieties of Vishnu (Chatur-Vimsati-Murtii) was formed by twelve sub-Vyuhas as well as by twelve Vidyasvaras. The development of twenty-four varieties of Vishnu was completed during the end of Gupta period.

Although the extent of Puranic religion and culture had no obvious emanations in pre-Gupta Bengal, yet engraved on the wall of a cave in Susuniya is a fourth century depiction of the discuss of Vishnu, below which is an inscription proclaiming Chandravarma as the worshipper of the Lord of Discuss. In Baligram in the first half of the 5th century, a temple was founded to Govinda and from the Vaigram inscription and the fourth and fifth Damodarpur inscription it is learned that in the second half of that century two temples were established in northern Vanga to deities by the names of Svetavaraha and Kokamukha. There is no doubt that Govinda is another name for Vishnu and it would seem that svetavaraha is another appellation of Vishnu’s boar incarnation. Some believe that Kokamukha is a form of Vishnu, others, Shiva. The Gunaighar inscription mentions a temple of Pradyumnesvara, also another form of Vishnu. In the 7th century, Lokanatha edict there is mention of the worship of Bhagavan Anantanarayana. It is learned from the Kailana edict of the same century of one Sridharanrata, an eminent Vaisnava and devotee of Purushtotma. It is thus clear that the
various forms and conceptions of the Puranic Vishnu was prevalent in Bengal during that time. The evidence is not only epigraphical but is to be seen in various Vaishnava icons obtained from various part of Bengal. It is clear from these icons that the Puranic Vishnu had found a place in Bengal during the Gupta period.\textsuperscript{128}

During the Gupta and post-Gupta era the forms of Vishnu with which we are familiar i.e Govinda, Kokamukha, Svetavaraha, Pradyumnesvara, Anantanarayana and Purusottama had taken on no special regional characteristics in Bengal. Atleast in the gupta period Vaishnavism had no relation with the four forms of the Pancaratra. Indeed it would seem that the Vaishnavism of this period had brought together into the one form the Rigvedic Vishnu, the Narayana of the Pancharatra, the Vasudeva-Krsna of the Satvata-Vrsni of the Mathura region, and the Gosala of such communities as the cow-herding Abhîras. This Vaisnavism became current in Bengal during the Gupta and post-Gupta era, and had become well established in the Pala period. Closely connected with Vaishnavism are the Krsnayana and Ramayana stories, which gained in popularity in Gupta times and after, evidence of which can be seen in the stone and terracotta plaques of the Paharpur temple. These plaques depict many of the Krsnayana stories, such as Lord Krsna's holding up of Mount Govardhana, the playfulness of the cowgirls, Krsna leading the herd of Vasudeva's cows, Krsna and Valarama and the young herdsmen, Krsna's boyhood, and so on.\textsuperscript{129}

Ancient inscriptions of Syhlet-Cachar region, especially the Copperplate inscriptions from 7\textsuperscript{th} to 11\textsuperscript{th} century B.C.E gives some information regarding the existence of Vaisnavism in Syhlet-cachar region. The available six Copperplate Inscription of Nidhanpur gives us information that the land was granted to about two hundred and five Brahmans for settlement in the donated land called mayurasalmala in the Chandrapuri Vishaya. The total area of the donated land is not known, but the names of Brahman donees, including their gotra and veda -sakha and the number of shares are clearly mentioned in the text. As one of the seven plates could not be recovered, the total number of donees and shares could not be ascertained. The available plates contain list of two hundred and five donees and they are given 159 11/16 shares. In addition to these, seven shares were allotted for the Bali-Charu-Satra of Ananta Narayana. and these shares were limited to the original grant of land and not extended to the enlarged lands either by
the river Kosika (or Kausika) or by the ganginika. Literally, Bali means ‘worship’. Charu means ‘oblation’ and Satra means ‘hospitality’. From the six copper Plate Inscriptions it can be inferred that among the Brahmans who were granted land maximum were the Vaishnavas as their names bore Vaisnava influence. Among the names of the Brahmans bearing Vaishnava influence mention may be made of Manorath Swami, Vishnu Ghosh Swami, Nandadev Swami, Sankarshan Swami, Narayan Swami, Vishnu Swami, Sudarshan Swami, Gopendra Swami, Madhusen Swami, Dhruvashome Swami, Vishnushima swami, Chakrdev swami, Narayankundu Swami, Golapnandi Swami, Vishnubhuti Swami, Vishnudatta Swami, Krishna Swami, Janardhandev swami, Vishnushima swami, Madhumitra swami, Madhu Swami, Sanatan Swami, Pradyumna Swami, Nandeshwar Swami, Govardhan swami, Sudarshan swami, Narayanbridhi Swami, Gopal swami, Janardhan Swami, Nandabhuti swami, Keshava Swami etc. Some of the names which are repeated here are repeated in the Inscription also. Among the two hundred and five Brahmans thirty two names bear Vaishnava influence. This to some extent gives us a picture of the evolution of Pre-Chaitanya Cult in Syhlet-Cachar region.130

\[Svamino(ah)arddhansascheti/\]

\[Balicharusatropayogaya saptansah/\]

\[Yadetat Kosikopachitakakshetram/\]

From the above slokas it can be inferred that probably the lands of Mayurasalmalagrahakshetra were originally donated by Maharaja Mahabhuti Varmannn for the maintenance of the Bali Charu Satra of a particular temple deity in that locality and a very large share of the donated field was allotted to a large number of Brahmanas required for the running of the Bali Charu Satra such as priest, cook, mahanta or manager and also learned scholars and pundits required for various purposes in connection with such a religious and charitable institution.

Bali Charu Satra is generally associated with the worship of Lord Vishnu. It is thus probable that among the newly emigrated Brahmanas, maximum were the devotees of Lord Vishnu. Thus it can be said that the newly
It is said that a stone image of Vishnu was discovered in the village Supatla near Nidhanpur during the Mughal rule while digging a pond. Since then this Vishnu image has been worshipped in the Vasudev Badi of Panchakhandha. And the Government also provides yearly pension for its maintenance since the Mughal time. This stone image of Vasudev is said to be identical with the Bali Charu Satra Vishnu image of Nidhanpur. However, this view cannot be accepted fully. But some argument can be placed in support of this view. According to the Khalimpur Copperplate inscription of Samrat Dharmapal of the Pala Dynasty of Vanga, during his period of reign, his Mahasamantadhipati, Narayan Varmma erected a temple of Narayana in a place named Subhasthali and Brahmins from Lata were brought to act as Sebait for the temple. The name of the village Supatla lying adjacent to the Nidhanpur village of Panchakhandha was probably derived from Subasthali. However, it cannot be said for certain that Supatla and Subhasthali are the names of the same place. But it will not be illogical to assume that during that period, places where Temples were erected were generally known as Subhasthali and the village Supatla was also bearing the same heritage.

About fifty years after the discovery of the Nidhanpur Copper Plate Inscription, the kalapur Copper Plate of Samanta Marundanatha was discovered. This Copper Plate Inscription can be discussed in association with the Tipperah copper Plate of Samanta Loknatha. According to the Kalapur Copper Plate Inscription, Samanta Marundanatha, by a CopperPlate Charter donated a plot of land in the forest region comprising an area of one pataka and two dronas, for the purpose of the Balicharusatra of God Ananta Narayana gifted in the name of the deity of the temple and Brahmanas.

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Purvavaka ttaye matapitro mama matputrasyacha silasya punyaya Jaya Svami Brahma Pradosha Svami jalatavibhukhandastamrapattasamaropya sarvavato bho-//

Patakah sthalih khandaih patakadorabapadvayadhika yathajnana tamrapattasamaropya pravittah jayasri putrasya chaiva sthiradevyastatputrasya cha punya tatreva//

Rakshanaya jayasvamina vayameva jnapita vishaye sambadha jala Sritantrena sthalih kanda dattakashetrapatake maya mathankarayitva bha-//

Bhagavato nantanarayanasya sasva balicharusatra pravitta//

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As mentioned earlier, some similarities have been noticed between the Kalapur Copper Plate Inscription of Swami Marundanatha and the Tipperah Copper Plate Inscription of Samanta Lokanatha. These are that both the inscription gives information about the grant of land for the construction of temple of Ananta Narayana in atavi bhukhanda i.e forest area.

Apart from these two inscriptions of hylhet-Cachar region which gives us information of about the prevalence of Vaishnavism in this region, there are other records of the rulers of South-east Bengal which gives evidence of the prevalence of Vaishnavism.

The Vaishnavite record from Kailan issued by the Paramavaishnava king Sridharana Rata. In this record the king has been shown as a devout worshipper of the god Purushottama. King Sridharan Rata was very liberal in administering his religious policy because himself a para-Vaishnava, he did not interfere with the religion of others and appointed one Jayanaga, a Buddhist, to a high ministerial post. He went so far as to grant some patakas of land to the aforesaid minister for erecting a Buddhist Vihara in the capital city.

After the fall of the Buddhist dynasty of the Chandras, the orthodox Brahmanical dynasty of the Varmans became powerful in east Bengal and they were undoubtedly staunch Vaishnava. The Vishnu-Chakra seal on the Samantasar (a village in Faridpur district), copper-plate grant of the reign of Hari Varman, a ParamaVaishnava, has undoubtedly proved his attachment with the Vaishnava faith. The Belava copperplate of Bhoja Varman issued in the fifth year of his reign from his capital city Vikramapura, records a land grant made by the devout worshipper of Vishnu, the Parameshwara, Parambhattaraka Maharajadhiraja. It is interesting to note that the kings and queens of the Varman dynasty have been compared with divinities like Vishnu-Krishna and Laksmi. From the study of the plate it can be inferred that the record is significant from various points of view. Firstly, the name of the preceptors of the Varman kings bear different appellations of Vishnu. This shows a great influence of the Vaishnava faith among the general mass of the society.
Though the Chandra kings were staunch followers of the Buddhist faith, yet the Mainamati plates of Ladaha Chandra and Govinda Chandra disclose that the later members of this family repudiated the Buddhist faith of their predecessors and they made grants of land in favour of a Vaisnavite or Saivite deity in the name of Vasudeva-bhattaraka or Siva-bhattaraka. Although these two kings are also conventionally called Paramasaugata, these documents make it clear that they adopted Pauranic Hinduism. Ladaha Chandra being specially devoted to the god Vishnu and Govinda Chandra to Shiva. The two records of Ladaha Chandra open with the Vaishnavite mangala:

Om namo Bhagavate Narayanaya

It is interesting to note further that Ladaha Chandra’s gifts were made in favour of the Vaishnavite god Ladahamadhava-bhattaraka, installed by and named after himself. Ladahamadhave, really means Madhava installed by or named after Ladaha and madhava is a well-known name of the god Vishnu-Krishna. Another copper-plate from the same place by Viradhara deva bears on both sides of its seal the wheel of Vishnu. King Viradharadeva who is regarded as an ancestor of Harikaladeva of the kingdom of Pattikera was a worshipper of Vishnu. Besides the representation of the Vishnu Chakra, the grant was made in favour of god Vasudeva under the name Ladahamadhava.

The Paikpada image inscription of the reign of Chandra king Govinda Chandra records the installation of an image of Vasudeva at Paikpada, (a village in Vikrampur, Dacca district), by Gangadasa, son of Paradasa. The record bears a testimony to the fact that Vaishnavism was popular among the merchant class of the contemporary society.

**Panchakhander Basudev:** During Hindu rule in Syhlet, in the Supatla village of Panchakhanda, there used to live one of the subordinate officials of the Jayantia king named Durgodoloi. He had a very ancient dry pond just infront of his house. While excavating deep into the pond, Durgadoloi found a vishnu and a Durga idol. It is said that he shifted the image of Durga to Jayantia and the Vishnu image to a renowned Brahman named BijoyKrishna. From then onwards, Vasudev had been worshipped in
this place and it is known as Vasudevpur after the name of Vasudev. In the occasion of ulla Rath a crowd of about six to seven thousand people assemble over here.  

**Jagannathpur Basudev:** Jagannathpur is located within the Sunamganj subdivision. There is a huge similarity between the Vishnu image of Panchakhanda and that of Jagannathpur. This image was enthroned at about 12th century C.E. People from far off places come to visit this place. According to the governmental records this image was enthroned during the reign of Shah Jalal but there is no evidence to prove it.

**Akhdas:**

**Bithangl Akhda or Ramkrishner Akhda:** At Bithangl, near Mymensingh boundary there is an Akhda under the management of the Jaganmohini sect. At one time there was neither ido nor Tulsi offering. Ojection was, however, taken at Brindavan at this disregard of what the ordinary Hindus hold sacred, and a more orthodox ritual is now observed. Ramkrishna, the founder of this place is held in the greatest veneration, and offerings are made at his shrine by men who desire off-spring or the increase of their herds. This section of the Vaishnavites at one time tried to worship an abstract God without shape or form, but this proved to be beyond the spiritual capacities of their disciples, and they sang the praises of Hari, Krishna, Ram and even Chaitanya. Bithangal has completely eclipsed the Akhra at Masuli near Habiganj, which contains the tomb of Jaganmohan, the founder of the sect. It is the wealthiest and most prosperous akhra in Syhlet, and is said to receive as much as forty thousand rupees per annum in the form of offerings from its disciples.

**Jugaltilar Akhra:**

The Akhra of Jugaltila is said to have been founded some two hundred years ago by one Jugakisore Mahunta, who is supposed to have been an incarnation of the deity. It is endowed with landed property which brings in from one thousand to fifteen hundred Rupees a year and has some eight hundred disciples.

**Chaitanya Movement in Bengal:**

Vaishnavism as an effective social and religious force emerged in Syhlet-Cachar region in the 15th and 16th century after the advent of Sri Chaitanya (1485) in
Bengal. The Bengal into which Chaitanya was born more than four hundred years ago is commonly looked back upon as the dark period of Bengal history. Chief among these was alien rule both in race and religion. Friction was the natural result. Repression and religious persecution became features of Hindu life. Naturally the religious life of the people was not wholly at ease.

Within Hinduism itself the oppressive aspects of the caste system were not lacking. The domination of the Brahman over much of society was the crowning feature of this social order. There was no escaping the rule of the Brahmanical hierarchy in all matters of worship. Irrespective of this Brahmanic control, the religious life was at a low ebb in Bengal at the time of Chaitanya's birth.

It is a mistake to think Chaitanya as in any sense the originator of Vaishnavism in Bengal. This faith had its adherents here for centuries, and although never very numerous they were not an unimportant group. Some of the chief figures among Bengal’s poets drew their inspiration from the Vaishnava scriptures. Jayadeva with his GitaGovinda, Vidyapati, Umapati and Chandi Das- these great names in Bengali literary history all owe much to Vaishnavism and witness to its influence long before Chaitanya’s day.

The worshipper of Vishnu can claim a long tradition, for this god is found in the Vedas. He early became a popular figure, around whom grew up a sectarian cult in which the incarnation idea played a prominent part. Very early in this Vishnu Cult, probably, appeared the image worship of the temples, as opposed to the worship of sacrifice of the vedic tradition. A distinctive feature also of this widespread cult was the rise of Bhakti as the heart of worship, an emotional service of love and devotion to the god. The figures of Rama and Krishna early arise as incarnations of Vishnu, and become supreme objects of devotion leading to the varied development of the sects. The great epics, the Ramayana and Mahabharata, enshrine the stories of Rama and Krishna and the theology that arises out of them.

Parallel with this development there arose the great Hindu Philosophies- the Vedanta, the Samkhya and the Yoga-all having great influence. Bhagawad Gita, a remarkable work identifies Krishna with the eternal Brahman, but retains his personal
nature and thus forms a truly monotheistic faith. After the philosopies and epics, there arose the Puranas, which are important in Vaishnava literature. They are full of mythology, but also contain much theology. Later came the Samhita, practical works each meant to be the guide book of some Vaishnava group in all matters of theology, ritual, construction of temples and images etc.

Of the great sects of Vaishnavism, the kri- Vaishnavas of the Tamil country are the most inclusive, forming their system of the whole of Vaishnavism and recognising the incarnations of Vishnu. The other sects are devoted to particular incarnations, with the figure of Krishna most popular. The Krishna of these sects, however, is very different figure from that of the Gita, and yet is identified with him.

The time and manner of the spread of the Radha-Krishna cult into Bengal is very difficult to determine. There is no history of the process, and the literary records are far from complete. It seems a reasonable supposition that the name appears and her cult begins at Brindaban some time in the 11th century, but what happened then is not clear. That it did spread is clearly shown by the fact of Jayadeva’s Gitagovinda, glowing verses in Sanskrit on Radha and Krishna written in Bengal about the end of the 12th century. The development of this cult in Bengal was coloured by conditions more or less peculiar to this province. In Bengal, this growth had a long history in Bengal, the earliest tantras, both Hindu and Buddhist, appearing about the 7th century C.E. These strange scriptures had a marked development on the erotic side, and produced a gross and debasing system both in idea and practice. The Śamachari school of the Ākta sect is the Hindu product and the Sahajiya cult seems/to have been its counterpart in the decaying Buddhism of the centuries previous to Chaitanya’s day. Emphasis upon sexual passion and the religious value of sexual intercourse is the characteristic of this trancitcism, based upon the exaltation of the female principle in the Universe. This is the sort of thing with which Vaisnavism came into contact in Bengal.152

Social Consequences of Chaitanya’s Bhakti Movement:

The social consequences of his religious experience came from the catholicity of his bhakti. He recognized no limits to be set to this absorbing experience, and the participation of men in it. That all men could find a place in common religious
worship and be counted as equal in the attitude of devotion was startling and revolutionary. He went far beyond the customs and ideas of his time in the direction of a brotherhood of bhakti. He accepted converts from Islam freely and one of the earliest of his disciples was a Muhammadan fakir, Haridas by name, who attained to great sancity in the sect and was buried by Chaitanya’s own hands at Puri. He repeatedly proclaimed his bhakti as being accessible to the lowest classes of Hindu society. He had the courage to preach a message of religious freedom which made a place for all in its cult of loving devotion. This gave his movement a tremendous appeal to the hearts of the common people. It was a religious worship in which the humblest, the most ignorant and the poorest of all could join. It was an emancipation of the common man from ecclesiastical tyranny that would have been a social as well as religious triumph could it have persisted. Temple worship remained, of course, it was ingrained in Vaisnavism, and occupied a very large place in the practice of Chaitanya and of his followers but in the flowering of the movement, in the enthusiastic days in Navadvip, the heart of it, certainly was the Sankirtan.

Vaisnavism under the Dimasa rulers in Cachar:

Vaisnavism in Cachar began to flourish thereafter and during the medieval period especially during the last part of Dimasa rule in 18th century Vaishnavism patroned by the Dimasa court gained intense popularity. Earlier Vaishnavism emerged from below i.e through the people of lower strata, but now Vaishnavism spread from above i.e from the Royal Court. Maharaj Krishna Chandra (1770-1813) following his matrimonial alliance with Manipur Court pre-dominantly a Vaishnavism influenced court showed an inclination towards Vaishnavism at the influence of the queen Induprabha. After his death, Induprabha was married to his brother GovindaChandra (1713-1830) and he at the influence of InduPrabha embraced Vaishnavism whole heartedly so much so that he arranged Rasho Utsav, composed a whole music of era ‘RashUtsav Lilamrita’ depicting Radha Krishna lila which marks a significant stage of Vaishnavism in the Dimasa Court as well as in Cachar in the 19th century. Numerous Akhadas and Shrines of the Vaishnavas began to crop up in various places of Cachar (Barak Valley) and Radha Krishna began to be worshipped in the Hindu families with a new vigour which continuous even today. Another most important notable thing is that
Vaishnavism in Syhlet-cachar region gained popularity not only among the Hindus but also among the muslims. There are over hundred muslim poets composing poems (kirtans) on Radha-Krishna theme in Syhlet-Cachar region. Besides that the greatest Sufi poet in Bengal of 20th Century, Hasan Raja had a great devotion for Vaishnavism which was expressed in his numerous songs.

Some of the excerpts of the Vaishnava songs composed by Raja Govinda Chandra Narayan are given below:

"Sharod Chandrika Heri Gaur Dijaraj I
Shange Range Bhiyarayi Bhagabata samaj II
Puraba Pariya Mane Bikol Antare I
Khone Uthe Khone Pore Dharani Upare II
Kotha Bridaban, Koyha Nikunj Kuthir I
Kotha Brajannagan, priyo Radha mor II
Brindaban Rashasthali Smariya Kator I
Bako nahi Shore Prabhu Bhaba Jyor Jyor II
Sri Gourango KrishnaChandra Lilamrita rashe I
Sri Govinda Chandra Nripa kobe jaani bhashe II

Ananda bardhan, Krishnahrita gopi chit
Bilolita Kundal Sravane I
Goptka Udyam Kori, Chale Shob BrajaNari

Jaate Ache Madan Mohan II"
Sharod Parbon Nishi, Snigdhomay Doshdishi,  
Chale Gopi Bridaban Prati I  
Shay Rashe Bonchita, Anugraha Akankhita  
Sri GovindaChandra Narapati II  

Jatek Romoni Bashi Rob Shuni Bahulini Shom Bhelo I  
Shut Pati Tahi Tyagiya Sabhi Rititi Gomon Kelo II  
Nashaye Shindur Parihari kau haar pari kotideshe I  
Bajon nupur bhuje pour Auliya chachor kesh II  
Ekhi Nayane Kaajoler Rekha Kinkini Golaye Dole I  
Daash Kishor Kohyi Nagari Madanuraage Bhole II  

Bhoyonkor Tomoshini, Ghor Jantu Nishebini  
Ehi Anuchit Obosthan  
Madhyakhinna Shugopini, Nobobon Biharini  
Braja Pati Koroho Prayaan II  

Aamra Brojer Naari, Rasharaaj aamra Brojer Naari I  
Aaniya Shodone, Aiche Koho Kene, Fukuri Jhuriya Mari II  
Kaashi Alapone Udaash Koriya, Ghorer Bahire Koyle I  
Sati Patigone, Atul Kalanke Jagat Maazhare Thayle II  
Aamra Obola, Kulabati Bala, Korile Pagli Prai I
Sufism:

Sufism essentially means spiritual meditation for the purification of the immortal soul. Sufism is a spiritual philosophy of Islam, the essence of which is to establish a direct relationship with Allah by purifying the soul. Sufism is not a separate religion but a tradition following Quran and the life of Prophet Muhammad. The purpose of Sufism is to purify the soul through fulltime remembrance of Allah. According to Sufism, meditation is the way to reach God. Sufis derived their inspiration from Hazrat Muhammad who forms the source of spiritual knowledge and teachings. Despite the fact that Sufism got its origin from the Quran, sayings of the Prophet, His and some of His disciples’ practices, yet it must be admitted that the later day Sufistic philosophy is not purely Islamic.

The question of the origin of Sufism had long been a controversy by western Scholars. Many of them, till the last generation, opined that the essential ideas of Islamic mysticism had originated from alien, non-Islamic sources. But Islam does not encourage mysticism in any form. And during the early days of Islamic practice, the notions were not perceived. Only during the Umayyad reign, its advocates practiced the mortifying soberness and asceticism, which were followed by the Jewish quintessences, Christain monks and Hindu yogis.

To study the advent, evolution and spread of Sufism in Barak Valley, it is necessary to look at the geographical history of the then Barak Valley. Though it
comprises of Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts of Assam today, but it reflects only the political boundaries. During the medieval period, modern Karimganj district, a part of Syhlet, was under the Muslim rule. On the other hand, modern Cachar and Hailakandi, the two other districts of present Barak Valley were under Tripura and Dimasa rule in succession. In other words, Cachar and Hailakandi never comprised a part of the Delhi Sultanate or the Mughal Empire. Though Barak Valley was politically divided during the medieval period, the process of cultural development went on with almost in homogeneous model over the entire Valley through ages. Thus, the socio-cultural history of Barak Valley extends from the present political area to the Syhlet district of Bangladesh. Politically, Syhlet had been fragmented, but the cultural assimilation between Syhlet and Karimganj remains intact even today. For this reason, the story of the arrival of Islam in the Valley goes with the story of the arrival of Islam in Syhlet. So, the history of the advent of Islam in Barak Valley cannot be constructed without submitting to that of Syhlet.

The conquest of Bengal by Ikhtiar uddin Bakhtiar kihiji in 1206 BCE paved the way for Muslim settlement in the valley, though it created a hallmark only when Sikandar Shah Ghazi conquered Syhlet with the help of Hazrat Shah Jalal Mujarrad, the saint-warrior, who can rightly be called the man behind the spread of Islam in the valley. But the substantiations of Muslims contact with the region even before the conquest are not lacking. Arabian traders in course of their trading activities used to visit the coasts and seaports of India and Bengal, and through trade they also had contact with the hilly regions of Bengal, Kamrup and Assam. A Persian writing, now preserved in the Bangladesh National Museum, Dhaka, may be referred to as an epigraphic source corroborating the arrival of Shah Jalal in Syhlet and accordingly the advent of Islam in this region. It was issued during the sway of sultan Ala-Uddin Hussain Shah of Bengal (1512-13 BCE) and records the Muslim conquest of Syhlet in the hands of Sikandar Khan Ghazi in 1303 BCE in the sway of Shams Uddin Firaz Shah.  

The advent of Islam in the modern Karimganj district goes back to the life time of Shah Jalal, i.e., 14th century BCE. As a matter of fact, archaeological remains found at different places of Karimganj prove beyond doubt that Islam could make its headway in Karimganj before 15th century.
The oldest inscription so far discovered in Karimganj district as well as pre-partioned Syhlet is a stone inscription, now placed on the wall of a recently built mosque at Hathkola village near Asimganj, about 25 kilometres south of Karimganj town. The inscription dated 868 A.H (1463 BCE) was issued in Arabic language by the caretaker of the royal palace of Sultan Rukn-Uddin Barbak Shah (1459-1474). The inscription refers that a mosque was built by the caretaker on the find spot which is situated near the southern boundary of Syhlet district of the British period.

Another inscription was found engraved in the remains of a mosque unearthed at a village named Suryadas (locally called Furuzdha) near Kaliganj bazaar about 15 km south-east of Karimganj town, now preserved in a local Madrassa named “Madinatul Ulum, Baghbari”. This inscription issued in 909 A.H (1502 BCE) clearly shows the extent of the Bengal Sultanate during the reign of Ala-Uddin Hussain Shah and consequently the extent of Islam in the region.

Another important source of the study of the advent of Islam in the Western part of modern Barak Valley is an inscription preserved in a Kali temple at a village called Pir-Nagar (now called Pinnagar) about 10 km south-ward from Karimganj town. It states that one of the generals of Muhammad Shah, son of Hussain Shah built a mosque at this place in 1539 BCE. The remains of the mosque are no longer in extent, but the inscription is indicative of presence of Islam in the locality in the early 16th century.

The archaeological evidences thus corroborate the tradition about the advent of Islam in the western part of Barak Valley during the 14th century and in all possibility, preached by Shah Jalal and his disciples. But as it has already been referred that the sway of the Muslim rule was never extended to the region now covered by Hailakandi and Cachar district of Barak Valley which had successively been under Tripura, Koch and Dimasa kingdom during the medieval period. Two Mughal invasions in the Dimasa kingdom are recorded in the primary sources but these historical events were passing phases in the history of the Dimasa kingdom and could not contribute any remarkable influence of Islam to the population of the region. No archaeological evidences or contemporary source is available to prove the influence of Islam in the region before 17th century BCE. In all possibilities, the preponderance of Muslim population in Hailakandi
and the presence of a sizable number of Muslims in Cachar go back to the policy of the Dimasa kings who encouraged peasants' migration from neighbouring regions, particularly from Syhet for developing wastelands and jungles into arable land.\textsuperscript{161}

By the beginning of the eleventh century BCE, there was a large influx of Sufi saints into India who had migrated from various parts of the Islamic world. Initially, they flourished mainly in the North Western part of India where they were engaged in spreading Islam or, in other words, the Sufi way of life.\textsuperscript{162} One of the earliest Sufi saints of the period about whom records are available was Shaikh Ismail, who came to Lahore in about 1005 BCE. He belonged to the Bukhara Sayyids, and was distinguished both for his secular and religious learning. The next Sufi saint, on whom information is available was Abdullah from Yemen, who began his preaching in Gujarat in about 1067 BCE.

Missionary efforts by the Sufi saints in Bengal as well as Assam can easily be perceived from the graves and shrines of Sufi mystics. One of the earliest of these belonged to the 13th century. Shaikh Jalaluddin Tabrizi, is said to have visited Assam and Bengal. But Dr. Enamul Haque provides an opposite view that the first Sufis who came to Bengal were Shah Sultan Rumi and Baba Adam who arrived at Mymensingh and Decca in 1053 and 1119 BCE respectively.\textsuperscript{163} In fact, it would be unhistorical to study Sufism in Assam isolating it from Northern or North Western part of India, because during the early stage, most of the Sufi saints who were preaching the Sufi tariqa (way of life) in Bengal were either the Khalifas (deputy) or the Murids (disciples) of the North Indian Murshids (spiritual guide).\textsuperscript{164}

The land of medieval Assam also did not remain far behind from the pious mission of the Sufi saints, who along with other parts of India entered Assam and found a very congenial atmosphere for their growth. This part of the country had always been fertile soil for the Sufis and preachers of different religions and its valley proved to be appropriate place for their religious devotion, mystic practices and prayer.\textsuperscript{165}

Like Bengal and Brahmaputra Valley, the soil of Barak Valley also did not lag behind in welcoming Sufism. The Qadiriya, Naqsbandiya and Chistiya orders are among the most widespread Sufi Orders in Barak Valley. The earliest mystic order was the Qadiriya Silsilah. This ascetic order of Sufism was instituted in 561 AH by Shaikh
Abdul Qadir Jilani, popularly known as Bada Pir Dastagir, whose Shrine is in Baghdad. The Naqshbandi is one of the major Sufi orders of Islam. The order is considered by some to be a sober order known for its silent dhikr i.e. remembrance of God rather than the vocalized forms of dhikr common in other orders. The Naqshbandi order is also notable as it is the only Sufi order that claims its spiritual lineage to Muhammad through Abu Bakhr, the first Caliph. The word Naqshbandi is a Persian word taken from the name of the founder of the order Bahaud-din Naqshband Bukhari. The Naqshbandiya Order is generally ascribed to Khwaja Bahaud-Din Naqshbandi, who died in Persia in 1389 CE. The Naqshbandi order was popularized in India through the efforts of Khwaja Baqi Billah, who came to India during the reign of Emperor Akbar. The Chisti Order was introduced in India by Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti who was one of the most renowned Sufi saints in India. Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti reached India around 1192 CE, shortly after the death of Prithvi Raj Chauhan. After staying for a short period in Lahore and Delhi, he reached Ajmer in 1195 CE and set up a Khanqah to spread his message of universal love and brotherhood. His simple, pious and ascetic way of life attracted a large number of people who came to seek spiritual guidance from him. The last great Sufi of this order was the famous Sheikh Nasirud-Din Mahmud, popularly known as Chiragh-i-Delhi. Sufism was a natural development in Islam, owing little to non-Muslim sources, though receiving radiations from the ascetical mystical life and thought. The outcome was an Islamic mysticism following distinctive lines of development. During early period, Sufism was a natural expression of personal religion which asserted a person’s right to pursue a life of contemplation, seeking contact with the source of being and reality, over against institutionalized religion based on authority, with its emphasis upon ritual observance and logistic morality, where the spirit of Quranic pity has flowed into the lives and modes of expression. Thus, Sufism was a ritual development out of these tendencies manifest in early Islam and it continued to stress them as an essential aspect of the way.

The presence of a galaxy of shrines, dargahs, Khanqahs and other places proves that Barak Valley has been a centre of Sufi activities since 14th century. The conquest of Bengal by Ikhtiar Uddin Bakhtiari Khilji in 1206 BCE paved the way for Muslim settlement in the Valley, though it created a hallmark only when Sikandar Shah Ghazi conquered Syhet with the help of Hazrat Shah Jalal Mujarrad, the saint warrior. He came
to the valley with three hundred and sixty disciples. Many of his disciples finally settled down and preached Sufism in every nook and corner of the valley, imposing worthwhile influence even on a large section of the hindus by the magic spell of simplicity, equality and brotherhood of Islam.

In the galaxy of the Sufi saints, Hazrat Shah Badar, the first prominent Sufi of Assam have received some attention from the modern scholars. He came to Syhlet with Shah Jalal in 1346 BCE, and entered the province of Assam from Arab land.

Hazrat shah adam Khaki was another prominent Sufi saint of the medieval period of the present Barak Valley of Assam. He was a contemporary of shah Badar and Khalifa of Shah Jalal Mujarrid whose Dargah can be found at the western part of Badarpur, adjacent to the Pwd Road, Badarpur, Karimganj of the present district of Assam. He flourished in the present Barak Valley during medieval period for his remarkable wisdom, spiritual power and personality. The Dargah had only three Khadims in the beginning but the number has increased to sixty six families at present. The land where the Dargah was established was not revenue free at that time and the British demanded revenue from it. However, the British seeing the popularity and importance of the Dargah made the land revenue free.

Shah Diyaud-Din, another disciple of Shah Jalal, was sent to Barak Valley to impart the value of Sufism, its theology, practices, teachings, spirituality among the local people. He was the first Sufi to establish the first informal Madrassa of the region near the Khadiman village of Badarpur in the present karimganj district of Assam. But unfortunately with the passage of time the Madrassa building and the adjacent mosque, along with the tomb, disappeared due to the erosion of the river Barak.

Shah Abdul Malik, another notable Sufi saint and comrade of Shah Badar was sent by his contemporary Shah Jalal to Barak Valley in order to assist Shah Diyaud-Din in his mission of spreading Islam. After his demise, he was buried towards the north-east of present Badarpur Bazaar and a beautiful tomb was built on it by his followers.

The outstanding Sufi Shah Sikandar is well known among the people of Barak Valley for his name has been recorded among those who propagated Islam as a missionary mission, being an ardent follower of Shah Jalal. He is said to be the nephew.
of a Sultan of Delhi. Before the arrival of Shah Jalal in Syhlet, he was defeated by Raja Gaur Govinda. Later on in 1303 BCE, Shah Sikander with Shah Jalal again came to Syhlet with a bigger army, commanded by himself and defeated the Raja. An experienced soldier, he proved himself strong and vigorous as a ruler and skillful as a diplomat. He ruled over Syhlet for sometime. This tradition is confirmed by an inscription of 1512 in which it is said that the conquest of Syhlet was affected by Sikander Khan Ghazi in the reign of Samsud-Din Firoz shah of Bengal (1301-1302 BCE) in 1303 BCE.

The name of Meer-ul-Afreen deserves mention here as a disciple and companion of Shah Jalal who passed a part of his life in prayer and austerity on the top of a hill near Dhaleshwari river in the present Hailakandi district. The place has become a centre of pilgrimage where people of different religion throng to offer nazar-o-niyaz for fulfillment of their wishes. The place of prayer on the top of hill and an ablution house on the bank of Dhaleshwari River can still be seen. Again, there still exists a Musafir Khana and a mosque near the ablution house. His footprints are still visible on a stone plate, believed to be his prayer carpet, in his prayer place.

**Buddhism:**

The evidence of the Chinese pilgrims or of the epigraphical and archaeological records does not help us much in ascertaining the nature of Buddhism that was current in Bengal before the Palas. We find mention of both Mahayana and Hinayana form of Buddhism. It seems however that in the historical evolution of Buddhism, Mahayana with its more liberal policy and generous ideal of the final goal could capture the mind of the public much more than Hinayanas with its strict monasticism and ethical rigorism and as a result Mahayana was fast gaining in popularity. During the time of the Palas however a tendency towards esoterism was manifest and Buddhism very soon underwent another great change from Mahayana to Vajrayana. Bengal holds a unique place in the history of Indian Buddhism for several reasons. Firstly, it was in Bengal that Buddhism survived and flourished the longest. Secondly, Bengal is said to be the home of what is called a degenerate and corrupt form of Buddhism known as Tantric Buddhism that developed during the Pala period. In ancient times, the area that is now known as Bengal was divided into several small kingdoms such as Samatata, Harikela, Anga, and vanga in the east, Tamralipti and Radha in the West and Pundra and Varendra in the north. That
Buddhism was firmly established in Bengal during Mauryan rule in the third century BC is evident from epigraphic and other sources such as a Mauryan inscription in Brahmi characters found at Mahasthana in the Bogra (northcentral Bengal) and a large number of Mauryan coins as well as other artifacts. It is difficult to say if Buddhism first made its appearance in Bengal during Magadhan rule, although it may be suggested that since Bengal was adjacent to Magadha (modern Bihar), perhaps Buddhism was not unknown to the people of western and northern Bengal bordering on Magadha. The Chinese traveler, during his travel I-tsing is said to have witnessed Ashoka’s stupas in several places such as Tamralipti (Tamluk), Karnasuvarna (Burdwan and Murshidabad) in western Bengal, Pundravardhana in northern Bengal and Samatata in eastern Bengal (now Bangladesh). With the death of Ashoka, the Mauryan empire came to an end when its last emperor, Brihadratha, was killed by his commander-in-chief, Pushyamitra. Pushyamitra is said to have revived the Brahmanic ritual of animal sacrifice forbidden during Ashokan rule. Pushyamitra is described in Divyavadana and by Tibetan historian Taranatha as a cruel persecutor of Buddhism. However, some Indian scholars, notably, R. C. Majumdar, R. S. Tripathy and H.C. Chaudhury, hold different views and argue that the Sunga kings were in fact quite tolerant of Buddhism during the Sunga period. They tried to show that Buddhism was still in a robust state even under Sunga rule by citing as evidence the erection of the gateways at Bharat and Sanchi during the Sunga period. The discovery of terracotta figurines at Mahasthangarh, two votive inscriptions recording the gifts of two inhabitants of Pundravardhana (both sites in northern Bengal) and a terracotta tablet found at Tamralipti (in southwestern Bengal) and exhibited at the Ashutosh Museum of Calcutta University all attest that Buddhism was surviving in Bengal during the Sunga period in the second century BC. In north-Western India, the Indo-Greek Kings patronized and uplifted Buddhism to a great extent. Kanishka, the greatest Buddhist emperor to rule India since Ashoka, raised Buddhism to the status of state religion and undertook various measures to promote its cause. These measures included sending missions abroad, building monasteries, erecting stupas and caityas, rock-edicts and pillar-edicts. It cannot be said for certain whether Bengal was a part of Kanishka’s vast empire. Although Kushana coins were discovered in many places of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa but it cannot be taken as evidence that Bengal as a whole or any part of it was under Kushana rule for the simple reason, according to, that coins
cross the frontiers of their origin and go far beyond by way of trade and travel. With the rise of the Gupta empire in the fourth century CE the religious history of India took a new turn. Gupta period has been referred to as the golden age of Indian Civilization because of the political integration and unity and remarkable progress in every field of Indian culture. Although virtually nothing is known about the state of Buddhism during this period however what is especially significant about Gupta rule in Bengal is that while Brahmanic Vaisnava and Saiva theisms were predominant, Buddhism was still flourishing in Bengal and other parts of India. The Guptas never treated Buddhism as a religious rival rather it was granted favoured position in that the Buddha was accepted as an *avatar* of Vishnu by the middle of the sixth century CE. The Chinese pilgrim, Fa-hein, visited India during the reign of Chandragupta II. Fa-hein stayed in Tamralipti for two years copying sutras and painting images. He noticed the existence of twenty-four sangharamas in the city which were all residential seats for the Buddhist monks. It was also noticed by the pilgrim that Buddhism at that time began to command reverence with the public in general. In the post-Gupta period, however, Buddhism is said to have met with repression and persecution very similar to what Buddhism had encountered at the hands of Pushyamitra in the second century BCE. After the downfall of the Gupta empire, in the midst of political disintegration several political powers emerged, of which the Pushyabhutis of Thaneswar in north India and two independent kingdoms, Gauda and Banga, in Bengal are worth special mention as far as Buddhism is concerned. Buddhism encountered severe hostility and repression from Sasanka of Gauda, who also captured Banga later. On the other hand Harsavardhana of Thaneswar was a great patron of Buddhism like Ashoka and Kanishka. Originally a worshiper of his two family gods, Siva and Surya (the sun), Harsavardhana, like Ashoka and Kanishka, became a devout Buddhist. There is no evidence that Harsavardhana ever ruled Vanga or Samatata although it is believed that he established his supremacy over Gauda (northwestern Bengal) after defeating Sasanka or after Sasanka’s death. After Fa-Hein another renowned Chinese pilgrim, Hiuen Tsang visited India during the 7th century CE in the reign of HarshaVardhana and visited Bengal. According to the description of Hiuen Tsang Samatata was ruled by a Brahman dynasty in the first half of the seventh century. This Brahmanic dynasty is believed to have been overthrown by the Khadga dynasty, the first Buddhist dynasty to rule an independent Bengal. The Buddhist Khadga rulers have
left two copper-plates found at Ashrafpur, beside an inscription engraved on an image of Sarvani at Deulbadi. The Ashrafpur plates were issued from the victorious headquarters at Karmanta identified by some with the modern village of Badkamta, 12 miles west of the town of Comilla. The Copper Plates referred to above give the genealogy of the Khadgas mentioning Khadgodyama, Jatakhadga, Devakhadga and Rajaraja or Rajarajabhatta. From one of the Ashrafpur plates we learn that king Devkhadga granted a piece of land measuring nine patakas and ten drones to Acharya Sanghamitra, head of several Buddhist monastic establishments. Another Ashrafpur plate records a gift by prince Rajaraja comprising six patakas and ten dronas of land in favour of the monastery of Sanghamitra. Both the charters begin with the verses in praise of the Buddha on the Buddhist religion. There is sufficient evidence to show that all the kings of the Khadga dynasty were Buddhist. Discovery of a number of Buddhist images from the villages around Badakamata mound in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and a recent beautiful image of Marichi from a village only four miles south-east of badakamata prove undoubtedly its Buddhist character. Another Buddhist dynasty connected with the same region was that of the Ratas, known from a copper-plate discovered at Kailan near Comilla. The charter was issued in the 8th regnal year of Sridharanarata, called Samatatesvara i.e. lord of Samatata. The same region more or less marked by Buddhist influences is noted in a copper-plate grant issued from Devaparvata on the southern end of the Mainamati hills by king Bhavadeva, son of Anandadeva. King Bhavadeva is described in the charter as a paramsaugata i.e. a devout worshipper of the Buddha. Two more grants of this dynasty have been discovered from the Salvan Vihara in the Lalmai Mainamati ridge near Comilla. One was issued by Anandadeva, son of Viradeva and another bore the endorsement of Bhavadeva, son of Anandadeva. Not long after the reign of Bhavadeva, the dynasty came to an end, and the Samatata country passed to the Palas. The existence of another Buddhist family in the region is revealed by a single copper-plate inscription discovered from the Bara-akhara temple in Chittagong. Paleographically it is datable to the ninth century. It is an incomplete land grant. The grant was made by a certain Kantideva, the king of Harikela from the city of Vardhamanapura in Harikela (Syhlet-Comilla Chittagong region). The rise of the Pala dynasty was the next remarkable event in the history of Indian Buddhism and so in the history of Buddhism in Bengal who ruled Bengal from the middle of the eight to the later
half of the twelfth century BCE. The Palas were the last Buddhist dynasty to rule Bengal and the only dynasty in India to reign for a period of four hundred years. Pala rule is held to be responsible for the rise of Tantric Buddhism. Epigraphic, archeological and other evidences also testify to the thriving state of Buddhism under Pala rule. The discovery of copperplates and inscriptions stand as evidence that Buddhism received lavish patronage from the Pala king. They built the great Odantapuri Vihar, the famous Vikramsila Vihar, Somapura Vihar at Paharpur of Rajshahi district. Besides Odantapuri, Vikramsila, Jagaddala, Troikutaka, Pandita, Devikota, Pattikeraka, Sannagara, Phullahari and Vikrampuri were also built during the Pala rule. Pala rule came to an end with the death of its last king, Rampala, and with Buddhism lost royal patronage for good. Meanwhile, two small Buddhist dynasties, namely Deva and Chandra, are known to have ruled some parts of Bengal in the second half of the tenth century CE. Two kings of the Deva dynasty, named Kantideva and Layahachandra, are believed to have ruled a small independent kingdom known as Harikhela, and Trailokyachandra and his sons, Srichandra and Govindachandra, established the supremacy in the eastern part of Bengal. The Salvan Vihar, the Buddha stupa and inscriptions found near the Mainamati hills in the district of Comilla testify to the fact that Buddhism was in a flourishing state under the rule of the Chandra kings. A good number of tantric scholars of Buddhism flourished during the period of the Palas. The art and iconography of the same period will bear testimony to the fact that by this time Mahayana began to be eclipsed by Vajrayana Buddhism. The icons of various Buddhist gods and goddesses of the period and also the representation of some gods with their respective female consorts in a state of union will indicate the introduction of the female element in the Buddhist religion of the time.  

Regarding the prevalence of Buddhism in ancient Barak Valley, the following verse from Purana attracts our attention:

\[ \begin{align*} 
Rupeswarasya & \text{ dikbhage dakshine muni-sattamah} \\
Budabakra & \text{ iti khvatah sarbbam papa pranasanah.} \\
Yatra tepe & \text{ tapah purbam sumahat Kapilo munih} \\
Yatra kapalikam & \text{ tirtham subham Siddheshwaro Hara.} \\
Yatra snavah & \text{ nara yati vishnuloka manuttamani}^{189} 
\end{align*} \]

Regarding the prevalence of Buddhism in ancient Barak Valley, the following verse from Purana attracts our attention:
The gist of the narrative is that the auspicious pilgrim-site Badabakra carries the legacy of saint Kapila and is known as the “kapalikam tirtham”; this is the site where the great fourteen siddhas engaged themselves in meditation. The cited verse turns our attention to the early-medieval religious landscape in the eastern parts of India where the Buddhist and the Shaivite siddhacaryas knowingly had been playing decisive roles in shaping the ethos of the masses at the wider bottom levels of the social pyramid. These Siddhacharayas came into prominence throughout Bengal and the rest of India as a sequel to the ascendancy of Vajrayana Buddhism during 6th to 11th century. The narrated Siddha-base within and around the present Siddheshwara Shiva temple site may be taken as a pointer to the site’s past linkage with the Vajrayana cult practices.190

More importantly, the recent discoveries of two Buddha statues, one near the Shiva Temple at Badarpurghat and the other near Karimganj town render definite proofs of the prevalence of Buddhism in this area. Of the two statues, the first one found near the temple complex at Badarpurghat is a stone statue seemingly of Dhyani Buddha Akshobhya. The statue is now kept in the Durga Mandir in Siddheswar Shiva temple complex at Badarpurghat. The other statue was found in the vicinity of Karimganj town. This statue is of Buddha and it appears to be made of brass. In many respects, this Buddha-statue, now kept in the Shiva temple at Karimganj shows a striking similarity to the bronze-statue of Buddha found in Yunnan province in China. The close contact that Barak Valley had been maintaining with Yunan in the past is evident from the record of correspondence among the British administrative officers in 19th Century. The two Buddha statues found near Badarpur and Karimganj towns render definite proofs of the penetration of Vajrayana pantheon into this area.191

Based on epigraphical evidences it has been pointed out earlier that till the late 11th Century Barak Valley constituted an integral part of Samatata kingdom of South-Eastern Bengal. Throughout the early medieval era, Samatata remained a stronghold of Buddhism where the Brahmanical orientation was correspondingly less in evidence.192

In the first phase, Vajrayana Buddhism was rapidly expanding its canvas on the one hand by introducing or incorporating several elements of tantric cult practices, and on the other hand by adapting itself to the popular language, signs, symbols and lifestyles. Nevertheless, in this phase Buddhist tantra was distinctly identifiable vis-à-vis the tantra of the devotees of Shiva or the tantra of the worshippers of the mother goddess.
Towards the end of the phase, however, the line of distinction between Buddhist and Hindu Tantric practices became progressively thinner and the growing overlap between the two schemes led to the emergence of many offshoot cult practices, the most important of which was the pantheon propagated and brought to practice by the Natha yogis. Noticeably, although the Nath-yogi pantheon appeared in the scene as an institutionalized religious order between the late 12th and early 13th century, it has been noticed that many of its constituent sub-sects were already in existence even before the Nath-guru Goraknath took the initiative of bringing these various lineages of Siddha tradition under a single umbrella to give shape to the institutionalized Natha-yoga order.\textsuperscript{193}

1. See Plate No. ii
18. Ibid.
20. Ibid., pp 70.
22. EHI, II, Pt.2, APP. B., pp. 170
27. Guha Upendra, Cacharer Itibritto, pp. 143-145
28. Rig Veda, X, 29


32. See Plate No. xxii.

33. See Plate No. xxiii.

34. District Census Hand Book, (1961): Cachar, pp. 8-9


36. Ibid, Pp.47

37. Bhattacharjee, J.B, Social and Polity Formations, op. cit, P.50


41. Choudhury, op. cit Pp 49


43. Ibid, Pp. 10-16

44. Choudhury, A Srihatter Itibritto (in Bengali), vol I, Part II, p. 49

Raja taking advice of his eleven brothers, left the bank of Kapila river (of Nowgong district of the Brahmaputra Valley) along with his army, and following the upstream of the Barabakra (the Barak river) ultimately settled on the bank of the Khalangma rahila


49. Kosambi, op. cit, Pp 100.

50. Guha, U.G, Cacharer Itibritta


121
52. Ibid. See Plate No.xix, xx, xxi and xxii.
53. Ibid, Pp. 33
55. Choudhury, op.cit, Pp. 33
57. Choudhury,op.cit, pp 34
59. Ibid, Pp. 356
60. Ibid, Pp. 16
62. Choudhury,op.cit, Pp. 36
63. It is said that Shah Jalal, after his conquest of Syhlet, sent one of his Generals to bring the vicinity of Siddheshwar under his effective control. But the General on his visit found the people of the area extremely panic-stricken due to the torture of a Demon and also found the people suffering from want of acute scarcity of drinking water as the water of the Barak was considered unfit for human consumption. It is believed that ultimately, Shah Jalal himself had to come and suppress the demon, rendered the water of Barak clean and fit for consumption and handled the situation. The legend associated with shah Jalal may be interpreted as the popular version of the saint’s remarkable success in dealing with the tribal folk whose regular nocturnal raids spread panic in the settlements of the new non-tribal immigrants.
64. Purah Raja was the ruling king of Badarpur and the surrounding regions in the last part of the 14th century. There is a semi historical account that he was a tribal chief with Hindu affinities and was finally ousted by a Muslim adventurer named Muhammad Torani.
66. Choudhury, op.cit, Pp 35
68. Ibid. See Plate No. xiii
69. Ibid. See Plate No. xiv

71. Ibid
74. “Larte Lingams, or stone pillars intended to represent the phallus, are situated three miles south of Jaintiapur, at Hatakeshwar on the left of the Surma in the Karimganj subdivision, where it is said to have been worshipped by Gaur Gobind, the last Raja of Syhlet.”_ Assam District Gazetteers vol. II (Syhlet) chap. III pp. 87
75. Choudhury, A, op. cit, Pp 75
76. “In the South-east corner of the Habiganj subdivision, there is a temple at Krishnapur, at which pilgrims worship after they have bathed in the sacred pool of Brahmakunds, which is situated just across the boundary of Hill Tippera” _Assam District Gazetteers vol. II (Syhlet) Chap. III pp. 89
77. “Another sacred pool is known as TampatKunda and is situated in pargana Panchbhag in Jaintia. This pool is said to become quite warm on the occasion of the Baruni and it is possible that the water has in reality some mineral properties.”
78. Dasgupta, op. cit, Pp 191.
82. Rig Veda, X, 29
83. Ibid., 110,9: 111,3,11, Yame dyaprapithivi janitri ubha pitara Mahayannajayatni
85. Rig Veda, X, 72, 4-5
86. Atharva-Veda, VI, 4.1.
87. Rig Veda, II, 14,15
88. Ibid., II,8,7.
89. Mundakopanishad,1,2,4
90. Kenoponishad, III,55
91. Mitra,R.L(1872): Taittriya-Aranyaka, Calcutta, Asiatic Society of Bengal *Namo hiranyavahave hiranyavarnaya hiranyarupaya hiranyapatiye, mbikapataye umapataye pasupataye namo manoh //
92. Ibid., X,1
93. Ibid., X,1.
94. Ibid, X, 1.7.
95. Dutta,
96. Dutta, M.N(1867): Harivamisa, Aryastava, ed, and tran, Calcutta, Chap LIX
98. Das Gupta, op.cit, Pp X1ii
100. Ibid. See Plate No. v and Plate No. vi
101. Ibid
102. Ibid
103. Ibid
108. Sarachandra Choudhury, Mahapitha Prakash.
109. Guha, op.cit, Pp.187
110. Choudhury,Sujit, Barak Upakatar Dukhini Varnamala, Pp 84
111. Guha, op.cit, Pp 188
112. Bhuiyan,Surya Kumar(1936): Kachari Buranji, Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Pp. 67
114. Ibid, Pp 77

117. Rig-Veda, 8, 86, 13. Avadrapso Amsumatimatisch thadiyahah Krsno Dasabhah

Commentary of Sayana to this verse. Krsnonamasuro dasasahasrasrasam-Khyairasurash

Parivri.


121. Shastri, Govindacharya (1911): Pancharatras or Bhagavata Sastra, JASB, Pp 935.


123. Mahabharata, Vanga End, XVIII, VI, 97.


125. Padma-Tantra, I, 2, 36.


128. Ibid.


131. Ibid, Pp 66

132. Lata- “Name of a country said to lie to the West of Narmada, it probably included Broach, Baroda and Ahmadabad and Khaira also according to some”- Apte’s Sanskrit English Dictionary.

133. Sujit Choudhury, Srihotto Cacharer Pracheen Itihaas, Pp 61


135. I.H.Q., vol-22, p. 269


125
139. Jash, op.cit, Pp. 51
141. Sircar, D.C., op.cit. pp. 51-52
142. Ibid., pp. 70-75, Mainamati plates of Ladaha Chandra, Regnal year-6
143. Ibid., pp. 52
144. Ibid., p. 52
145. Ibid., pp. 57-58
146. Majumder, op.cit, Pp. 258
148. Ibid.
149. Ibid
150. “The Akhda of Jugaltila is said to have been founded some 200 years ago by one Jugalkisore mahunta, who is supposed to have been an Incarnation of the deity. It is endowed with landed property which brings in from 1000 to 1500 Rupees a year, and has some or eight hundred disciples.” etc_Assam District Gazetteers vol II (Syhlet) chap III Pp. 88.
158. Ibid, Pp 24
164. Tamizi, Yahaha (1992): Sufi Movement in Eastern India, New Delhi: Idarah-I Adabiyat-I Delli, Pp 1,
165. Tamizi, Yahya, op. cit, Pp 35-36.
171. Tamizi, Yahiya, op. cit, Pp. 78; Ibid Pp. 23
173. Imperial Gazetteer of India (1909): Eastern Bengal and Assam, Calcutta, Pp. 240
174. Gait, op. cit, Pp. 238
175. Tamizi, Pp. 87
176. Tamizi, Ibid, Pp. 88

180. Ibid


182. Sen, op.cit, Pp. 278

183. H.Q., XXIII, PP. 221


186. E.I, XXVI, pp. 313

187. Chakma, op.cit.

188. Ibid


191. Ibid

192. Ibid

193. Ibid