6.1 Introduction

Wood carving in various purposes and uniformly as an expression of art prevailed in every human society since the beginning of the Indus valley civilization or back to the centuries. It is closely attached to the different aspects of human life. A number of references can be traced in the civilization of Harappa that they used timbers to construct roofs of their abodes which were flat and made of solid beams sheltered with smooth planks. Besides these, use of deodar (Cedrus deodara) and rosewood (Dalbergia Latifolia) to make coffins is noteworthy as both are known for its aroma and durability and still preferred for same purpose. Another instance of the trend of utilizing bur-wood (Zizyphus spp.) to make wooden mortar for thumping grains reveals their knowledge of the shock absorbing quality, seasoning properties and other relevant qualities of these timbers.

In the historic period around two thousand years back there are some evidences which confirms the knowledge of wood by the people of that period as plenty of wooden palisade built at Patliputra (Patna) were made in Sal (Shorea robusta) wood, which prevails an outstanding durability when it used in contact with soil. Another instance showing the acquaintance of those people that strength of timber is increased with the use of acacia is the erection of wooden gate at Sisupalgarh in Orissa. Later in the Vedic literature enough description can be traced about the domestic, commercial and religious use of timbers including the instructions of proper and suitable deployment of wood for different purposes. Wood has been used to made thrones of kings, components of bed, religious sanctum sanatoriums, images and idols of deities. For which suitable and durable timber were utilized specifically as prescribed in the Vedic scriptures similarly the seasoning process of the timber and those to be avoided for the
auspicious purposes. Moreover the instructions has been drawn for the selection and treatment of several woods for boat and ship building which shows the experience of utilizing wood in various occasions including the existence of particular class of the craftsmen in society is regarded as *vaddhaki* (carpenters) in Vedic culture. (K.A Choudhury: 1952)

India is a place of affluent diversity in every aspect and its productive soil provides the several kinds of woods, found in different of its regions which have been used as enormous source of raw material in variety of wood crafts as religious and secular sculptures and reliefs, decorative carvings, and inlay works. The vast cultural and ethnical diversity of the country persuaded the variety of design patterns, motifs, technique and subject matter to its different lands and societies and the dedicated wood carvers stanchly carried out the tradition of their ancestors in sense of technique, style and material. Wood craft is pervasively widespread in the panorama of human life from small articles of domestic use to panels, columns, door friezes, partitions, window frames, pillars, reliefs, free standing sculptures and many others. In Tamil Nadu the religious *rathas* (chariots) are employed with delicate wood carvings whereas under the patronage of *chola* dynasty of Tanjore and Pandyas of Madurai craftsmen produced plenty of wood carving.

Similarly in different regions wood crafts is prospered by the neighboring available wooden materials as in southern parts of India sandal wood has been majorly utilized in wood carvings especially Karnataka and some part of Kerala and Gujarat. Karnataka is well known for its decorative articles like boxes, trays, and small figurines yielded from sandal wood are subtle specimens of work of art and emanate appealing fragrance in this course the palace of Tipu-sultan adjacent to Bangalore is an outstanding specimen of wood craft. In Kerala craftsmen abundantly use the wood obtained from the coconut tree in traditional dwelling known as *Nalukettus*. The *Jharokhas* (lattices) of the palaces of former *Nawabs* (Rulers) of Palanpur (plate-6.01) are delicately decorated by carved wood, even some of the *havelies* (mansions) of remote Gujarat are entirely made
of wood and employed with minutely carved exteriors and interiors and painted ceilings moreover still the houses in older towns of Gujarat are adorned with carved facades and balconies are embedded with carving patterns (plate-6.02) of the *Jangla* (ledge). Rajasthan is popular for the vivid carved furniture and original woodcrafts mainly flourished under the royal patronage of Jaipur, and in the western district of Rajasthan like Barmer and Jaisalmer, teakwood is regularly utilized for carving animal figures geometric and floral designs on the rafter ends, pillars and brackets, openwork *jali* (lattice) window and door frames (plate-6.03). In Orissa wood carving is an indigenous craft endorsed with painted and plain wood carvings besides these carved furniture, wooden boxes, antique trunks and doors carved in teakwood are specialty of Puri of Orissa, these articles are adorned with colorful paintings. The splendid venture of artistic wood work of Orissa is the dignified trio of sacred images of Lord Jagannath (Krishna), Balabhadra (his Brother), and their sister (Subhadra) which enshrined in majestic shrine of Jagannath (Puri) (plate-6.04). In Assam wood carving is associated to royal palaces and *Satra* institutions of Assam emerged in early medieval period and continued to flourish up to eighteenth century. Considerably Assam has always been a wooded state of India, and abundance of variety of wood and timber have most expectedly supported the tradition of woodcarvings of the region, in spite of that cane and bamboo are the inseparable materials of the natives of North-eastern region which are extensively used to construct houses, furniture, utensils, instruments, ‘Jaapi’ the celebrated Assamese traditional sunshade, fishing tools like ‘jakoi’ and ‘khaoli’ and several house hold items like ‘Kharahi’ (basket), ‘chalani’ (strainer), and ‘dola’ (sieve), including variety of weaving accessories and musical instruments (plate-6.05,6.06,6.07).

### 6.2 Origin and development of wood carvings and reliefs in India

Wood has been a significant material for plastic arts, utilized by the craftsmen and artisans since ancient periods due its abundance of availability and natural characteristics like texture of surface, pattern of grain, varied color, and lofty smoothness moreover for its easy to carve or plastic quality which
makes it apart from the stone and metal. Consequently varieties of wood have been used by the artists and craftsmen according to their accessibility and characteristics in India, though teak and black wood are comparatively more popular and extensive. According to the craftsmen of Gujarat teak (Sagwan) and black wood (Sisam) are considered as gold due to their durability and persistence of quality to be shaped like gold. Besides these, other regarded woods are Sandal (Santalum album), Babool (Acacia arabica), Hal (Odina cordifolia), Neem (Azadirachta indica), comb-teak or Guman (gumelina arborea), Mahua (Madhuka indica), and Tartar (Tamarindus indica).

The tradition of wood carving after the Vedic period in India were comprehended mostly in the accounts of foreign excavators or travelers who visited India time to time and described their journey experience, as the two writers on behalf of the Megasthenes who observed and stayed in the court of Chandragupta Maurya around 324-300 B.C delineated that the main courtyard of the king majestic asylum encompassed by the series of ostentatious halls containing the embellished pillars of wood and each of the pillar was embraced with floral vines embossed by decorative motifs of birds and flowers in gold and silver. Moreover the dwellings of the city near to the bank of the river and the low lying areas were bountifully built in wood. Similarly the recognized Chinese traveler Hiuen-tsang during his visit of India in seventh century discussed about the sandalwood image of Avalokitesvara of Lord Mahavira which was placed in a temple situated on a hill near to the Pigeon Monastery of Magadha, presently in Bihar-Shariff of Bihar. Further a significant excavation of free standing sculpture of Mother and child from Mauryan period reveals the flourishing tradition of wood carving and importance of wood as a medium of sculptural art. It is the earliest example of wood carving and free standing sculpture in wood found in India and the adorable piece of art depicts a mother with two Childs, of which one she is carrying in her lap and other standing close to her left leg. (R.C Majumder: 1960)

Next to this the earliest significant specimen of wood carving is a relief work, carved on a door facade of a temple of around eighth or ninth century
found in Chamba of Himachal Pradesh (plate-6.08). The illustration depicts a carved chair from Niya with some decorative motifs of Gandhara language and seems persuaded by its contemporary styles of wood carving in India. Another important example of wooden sculptures of around twelfth or thirteenth century found in decayed condition is a corpus consist of a wooden capital with an central image of four armed seated figure of Vishnu, two images of Garuda, a pair of carved square wooden pillars and a divine damsel (Surasundari), are now preserved in Dhaka Museum, Bangladesh represents the proficiency of the Bengal wood carving traditions of that period. From the same period some wooden murals and figures can be observed on the ceiling of the Namaskara Mandapa (Prostration ceiling) of the Mahadeva temple at Katinamkulam in Kerala (plate-6.09) which portrays the nine flawless images of deities with the centre image of Brahma seated on his swan-mount and the beams supporting the ceiling consists five friezes with embellish adornments of bead, floral and geometrical motifs. Some other remarkable specimens from the next century includes the figurative and decorative carvings of the Namaskara Mandapa in the Tiruvampadi shrine of shripadmanabhaswami temple at Trivandrum (plate-6.10) and various flawless carvings on the decorative pillars, wooden tabernacle and the images of Jesus, Marry, cupids, and lamb at the St. Thomas church, Palur church and many other churches of Kerala. (K.K Dasgupta: 1990)

The noticeable tradition of wood carving started in the medieval period about the fifteenth century in the Assam where the particular class of craftsmen known as khanikars represented their skill and workmanship to decorate the shrines (Manikuta) and prayer halls (Namghar) of the Satra (plate-6.11). Several graceful reliefs portraying the narrations of the Vaisnavite religious scripts and tales of the incarnation of Lord Vishnu and Krishna and the free standing sculptural images of Krishna in different forms are made in the flow of Vaisnavism (plate-6.12, 6.13). Addition to this numerous series of the panels and window frills depicts the mythological illustrations with divine, human and animal figures decorated by floral and vegetable motifs are made in episodes in the interiors of the Namghar, carving of multileveled wooden throne called Simhasna
(lion-throne), and other thrones to pedestal the deity images and the holy books of Vaisnavism are the mile stones of wood carving tradition of region.

6.3 Practice of Wood Carving and reliefs in Assam

In tradition of wood carvings and sculptural art, wood has been used since the early medieval period to late medieval period in Assam for various purposes to carve the icons, idols, reliefs, thrones, decorations of door and window facades and many others object of art related Vaisnava culture. The background of wood carvings can be traced back in the early years of the seventh century as mentioned in the *Banabhatta’s Harshacharita*, Bhaskaravarman king of Kamrupa sent some presents including carved boxes with panels. The reference observed in the tezpur plate inscription of *vanamala* of 832-855 A.D indicates to the boats which adorned with various decorative ornaments might be alludes to decorative carving on wooden vessels and the wooden image of *Harihara* found in Deopani of ninth century A.D comprehends the tradition of carving images from wood in the ancient period. (B.N Mukherjee: 1981)

Later in the medieval period the practice of wood carving flourished in Assam under the royal patronage. According to an account on Assam namely *Fathiyya-i-Ilbrya* of Shihab-ud-din Talish, audience hall called *solang* of the imperial palace of King Jayadhvaja Simha erected on the sixty six finely smooth pillars, each of them are around four cubits rounds. The side walls of the palace have been wedged by the wooden lattices of several flawless designs carved in relief, and decorated from both inside and outside. The wood carving associated to *Satras* of Assam emerged in sixteenth century and continued to develop up to eighteenth century considerably Assam has always been a wooded state of India, and abundance of variety of wood and timber have most likely supported the tradition of woodcarvings in the culture and economy of the indigenous people. Thus people of Assam are well versed with timber, and woodcraft naturally flourished here. Though wood is a perishable medium, naturally the objects made of it were considerable to decay with the passage of time and climatic conditions. (S.K Bhuyan: 1947)
The different Satras of Assam have preserved only some of the specimens of wooden objects of art related to the past tradition. Whereas very less of earliest examples are prevailing, those hardly belong to the eighteenth century. Moreover, these objects have been recovered from an overlooked condition. The practice of wood carvings in the Vaisnavite shrines of Assam was intimately influenced to its contemporary developments in Vaisnavite literary tradition. Therefore these objects of art have never been made considering to the ritualistic purpose, and the subjects or theme of the woodcarving of the Satras was completely based upon the mythology narrated in the religious scriptures as the Bhagawata-purana, Mahabharata, Ramayana and the others. In spite of that adequate number of examples related to the bygone two centuries is survived in the Satras of Assam which are the astonishing visual supplements of the Vaisnavite literary tradition. (K.K Dasgupta: 1990)

In Satras, wood carving is primarily embedded to the prayer hall (Namghar), sanctum (Manikuta) (plate-6.14) and the gatehouse (Batchora) (plate-6.15). While the sanctum and prayer hall of Satras is essentially and delicately embellished with the wood carvings. For an instance Namghar, Manikuta, wooden doors including the jambs and lintels, windows, brackets, pillars, beams, and wall murals embellished in the prayer hall of Sundardaria, Jania Satra of Barpeta, Kamalabari Satra of Jorhat and many other Satras of the region (plate-6.16, 6.17). The establishment of Satras at different places rooted the evolution of a significant architecture pattern popular as Satriya style, accustomed by traditional indigenous architecture as well as by an explicit plan of construction at the level of implementation. The socio-religious and cultural development of the society in the Vaisnavite period and the devoted inmates of the Satras shaped the different practices and development of the Satra institutions which played an important role to delineate the various art forms including the art of wood carvings, its components and the indigenous principles of design and formation. There was no reallocation for building materials from bamboo, wood and thatch, as construction in brick and stone was not merely used in spite of some of the cases of exclusive royal privilege. Though the
architecture of *Satra* did not generally detached from the hut type houses in its plan and structural design but developed its preference for pretentiousness of elegance and decorative details in the *Namghar* and *Manikuta*. However, the *Satriya* architecture developed its own symbolism and opened a threshold to various arts including wood carving. Moreover the spacious *Namghar* or prayer hall provided the large space to fabricate the work wood carvings the eastern portion of the hall is decorated with the splendid *Simhasana* (lion-throne) to enshrine the image of Lord Krishna or the Holy Vaisnavite scriptures, the *Simhasana* itself is an inspiring object of art composed with three to nine levels of stages.

The initialization of wood carving can be traced back in the first well established *Namghar* or prayer hall was established by Mahapurusa Madhavadeva in the late years of the sixteenth century at Barpeta district of present Assam for conducting the congregational prayers in spite of other practices like dance and drama performances. It was popularly known as *Rangiyal ghar* an idiom similar in meaning to *Rangagraha* in Sanskrit. But soon it has been developed as the centre of *Satriya* dance and drama performances and celebrated as the first constructed premise for an auditorium in the medieval Assam. Since then the community prayer-halls of the *Satras* have been functioning also as premises for *Satriya* dance and dramatic presentations. According to some of the biographers of Sankardeva and Madhavadeva, the ‘*pat-duwar*’ or the principal door comprising the main entrance to the prayer hall was embellished with the carvings of floral and creeper designs called *Lata-kata*.

The motifs and design patterns of *lata-kata* were composed by Mahapurusa Madhavadeva himself as a collection of verses called ‘*Lata-kata Ghosa*’ with rendering of meandering creepers on wood. These motifs and design patterns of *lata-kata* has been imitated practically by the carpenters and wood craftsmen, those who have been engaged to furnish the wood carving of *Rangial-ghar*. Consequently this work of wood carvings of *Rangial-ghar* itself became a specimen and source of inspiration to its contemporary and later
artisans, to continue the legendary tradition of wood carving in the socio-religious culture. Later on, in the flow of Vaisnavism of Sankardeva and Madhavadeva several religious institution has been developed in the form of Satra including the feature of Namghar, Manikuta, kirtan-ghar and Ranghial-ghar to regular observance of the congregational prayers and various cultural and religious activities of Satriya dance and drama, accordingly progression of these traditional auditoriums of the several widespread Satra of seventeenth and eighteenth century institutionalised the culture of vivid art forms including the grandioso art of wood carvings. (N. Kalita: 1985)

6.4 Method and Material

Since the beginning of the human evolution wood has been probably connected to the every phase of the human life and it has been utilized to make the asylums and various domestic or utilitarian objects in form of utensils, furniture, agricultural equipments, wheels, several tools, vehicles, boats and in general an inexpensive fuel for preparation of food. In spite of that there are numerous of barks and wood like Neem (Azadirachta indica), udumbara (Ficus glomerata), vata (Ficus indica) including many others which have been utilized for medicinal purposes. Due to beneficiate the human life by several aspects, trees are received adequate affection, gratefulness and attached to many rituals and even worshipped in different cultures and societies of India. Similarly wood has been expansively utilized as a plastic material and to mould the creative urge of the artisans of all over the world since centuries. As it is abundantly available in different grain, variety, patterns, textures and colours, and found in the different pliable to solid nature which can be carved and yielded with more comfort compare to mettle and stone, makes it more adorable medium for the artists.

Wood in the means of expression in religious sculpture, reliefs, images secular art works, architectural adorations is cherished pervasively in the ancient and the medieval societies and the reference can observed in the literary records of India as Brihatasamhita of varahamihira and visvakarma-prakasa. perceptibly wood is a perishable material and cannot survive long in the moist climate, thus
availability of specimens are very fewer from the long back history however, the oldest surviving examples are a head from Saqqara in Egypt which is presently preserved the Cairo museum dated around 2350 B.C. and another Griffon head belongs to Pazyrik of china preserved in Hermitage museum of Leningrad datable around sixth-fifth century B.C. and this tradition of wood carving is still continued in modern by the several sculptors in abroad as well as in different regions of India as various kinds of woods are being utilized by the wood carvers in India as per its characteristics and availability among these Teak and Blackwood are more appreciated.(K.K Dasgupta:1990) Similarly in the state of Assam which is also renowned for its forests which persists valuable woods, bamboos and canes, the art of wood carving has been developed in region since ancient times and this tradition was carried out extensively under the patronage of Ahom Kings and the Satra institutions. It can be traced in the Assamese Buranjis the traditional chronicles that there were distinguished wood carvers and carpenters generally called badhai or Khanikar in the society who yielded various kind of articles for domestic and decorative purpose. Even the royal secretariat holds a distinct subdivision for collecting the good quality of wood from the forests in the direction of an officer designated as kath-barua. Moreover some of the Ahom kings also encouraged the craftsmen from outside and settled them in the Khanikar Khel (craftsmen-guild) in the state. (S.K Bhuyan: 1947)

Creation of a object of wood carving is started with collecting the good quality of wood from the forests and the process of seasoning of wood generally the most commendable natural method for seasoning the wood is processed by keeping the wooden logs and trunks exposed in the open air for some of the years (plate-6.18), sometimes this process of seasoning may be elongated for ten to twelve years. Though the seasoning of less resilient wood and bamboo are processed by submerge them in water for around six months. Further to prevent the wood from deformation and deterioration several significant materials as preservatives has been utilized for example Kanjhi Oil and sesamum oil are applied to sisam (Blackwood) and for teak, ramzai a kind of red earth mixed with sesamum oil utilized for veneering. The knack of wood carving perhaps passed
down in generations from father to son parallel to time, as the artist supposed to maintain their monopoly in style and technique due to individual ascendancy in the field, thus it is in the obscure that how the skill of wood carving has been developed chronologically from a basic medium to object of art (plate-6.19). Though perceptually the process of wood carving proceeds after collecting the material and cutting off in obligatory measurements, consequently the craftsmen marks the initial line drawings carefully by his hands using chalk or *ramzai* (red earth), thereby following that drawing carver removes the superfluous heaps through the gouges and chisels of variable sizes by dexterous strokes and gradually ensue to fine details (plate-6.20, 6.21), accordingly carver initiates carving with broad cutters and step by step proceeds to fine chisels to bring out the every details of depths and high points, sharp edges to smooth curves and low to high relief. In this process carver meticulously strikes his chisel on the wood by mallet with gentle and hard strokes as per requirement and by this carver cautiously coerce his chisel to enter superficial to medium and medium to deeper surface areas and ultimately carved out the deepest areas and details of high relief to furnish an object of art.

Therefore among the different tools chisels and gouges of different size and shapes are most imperative (plate-6.22), which may vary point of needle to three-fourths of an inch, apart from that other important tools are hand-saw, an adze, hammer, mallet, measuring string, hone to sharpen the chisels, and a file or sand paper to smoothen the surface moreover linseed oil, bee-wax, and other similar material are utilized for varnishing and veneering the surface to preserve and enhance the natural texture of the material. (K.K Dasgupta: 1990)

### 6.5 Wood carvings of Majuli

The progression of *Satras* in Majuli constituted the development of the different art forms as well as the wood carving moreover each village of the place have its own one or more community prayer halls known as the similar term of *Namghar* and *Kirtan ghar* in *Satras*, in spite of *kirtan ghar*, *Namghar* are more designated in structural grandness and details similarly in the terms of
embellishments of wood carvings. Consequently wood carving is an important art form which has been progressed in the proper response to the medieval Vaisnavite movement and persuaded by an impulse to gratify and adorn the worship places and the indigenous artisans employed their talents and calibre to create a variety of art works in wood carving and gradually it became a vital and popular art form in the society. The major objects of art, which are the essential features of almost all the Satras, can be sorted as various structures of Simhasanas (thrones), divine and semi divine idols and reliefs.

The central building of the Satra persist the spacious Namghar or prayer hall with Manikuta which provides the large space to fabricate the work of wood carvings. The Manikuta or sanctum sanatorium is situated in the eastern portion of the building and preserves the splendid Simhasana (lion-throne) to enshrine the image of god in the form of sacred tenth Book of Bhagawata regarding as the symbol of lord Vishnu or his Incarnation form Krishna (plate-6.23). The Simhasana is an admirable object of art and an important feature of each and every Satras. The Simhasana structurally made of gradually receding tiered stages varying between three and nine, however from the top end, super structure is called ‘Amahi-ghar’ (plate-6.24). It is the top stage and from below to it other tiers are positioned in chronological order of ascending measurement. As per design it appears like an imperial throne of the Assamese kings. Every stage of the structure is square or rectangular in shape and each corner of these stages consist the image of ‘Gaja-simha’ or the lion on elephant figures and intermittently these Gaja-simha figures are stands on the tortoise figures. Accordingly a Simhasana of seven tiers contain twenty eight Gaja-simha figures. It is not necessary always that, every throne will be lion-throne or Simhasana as there may be some other kinds of thrones like with the figures of peacock, geese, and elephants, on the corners and similarly these are regarded as Mayurasana, Hamsasana, and Gajasana respectively. Similar to the corner carvings of lion, peacock and others the faces of the simhasana is also decorated with carvings of human beings, birds and animals, floral and vegetal motifs (plate-6.25). These corner figures are functionally provides support to the
instantaneous tier above them and in the end they create a form of pyramid (plate-6.26). Moreover these figures aesthetically enhance the sublime of the throne and symbolically provide an inspirational decorum to it.

The symbolism of lion corresponds to God in his invincible name and in the Vaisnavism of Assam it has been imagined as the form of ‘Narasimha’. In some of the instance figure of lion has been carved out in a mask like form in wood especially to allocate and adorn the corner of lion- throne. It is carved from a single log of wood and the head of lion is featured with pointed nose, striking eyes and the quivering hairs either side of the head. Similarly peacock, elephant and tortoise are carved elegantly for the respective thrones. The throne is normally painted evenly or sometimes with decorative creepers motifs and sporadically inlaid with gold and silver as the throne of Auniati and Dakhinpat Satra of Majuli. Remarkably the largest and the pretentious model of the Simhasana observed in the Kamalabari Satra of Majuli. Structurally it consists seven tiers and base or the lowermost stage is the largest one measuring ten feet square. (N. Kalita: 1985)

As the Namghar and Manikuta are the rich repositories of fine and decorative Wood carving there are many other divine and semi divine sculptures can be observed which may be some times painted for an instance statues of Auniati and other Satras. The Manikuta enshrines the images of Lord Vishnu which is generally depicted with four hands, indeed his celebrated incarnation forms like Krishna, Balarama, Kalki, and Hayagriva including his other semi divine forms of mount Garuda and Hanuman. The idol of Krishna is represented in the Tribhanga mudra (three bend posture) of playing flute and it is the prominent feature of almost all the Satras (plate-6.27, 6.28), the idol of semi divine being Garuda perceived as the attendant of Vishnu and his figure is carved in the round shape with hooked nose, life-size and detailed wings, with the folded hands in Namaskara-mudra (worshiping posture) appearing in the kneeling posture (plate-6.29). This feature represents his abundant devotion to the lord Vishnu noticeably according to the indigenous perception the physical structure of Garuda profoundly depicts the sharp beaked nose (plate-6.30),
conch shaped eyes and *kalka*-shaped (lotus-bud shape) ears and pomp muscular hands and legs in anthropomorphic and stylised manner including wearing usually dentil crown, characteristically seems to be influenced by Ahom art (plate-6.31, 6.32). Another important image of semi divine being is Hanuman considered as the foremost devotee of Rama, the seventh incarnation form of Vishnu (plate-6.33) among the sequence of *Dasavatara* (ten forms of incarnation). The free standing idol of Hanuman perceived as a persona of formidable physical and mental strength and audacity, solely dedicated devotee and vanquisher of substantial sanity. Remarkably the idol of Hanuman in the *kamlabari Satra* of Majuli still receives adoration and prayers of the worshipers whereas this *Satra* also akin to others persuade the belief in which worship of idol is not regarded.

Reliefs are the significant feature of the Namghar and adorably illustrate the epic and *puranic* narrations with profound implementations of the *Satriya* art of wood carving, which has been employed on the different portions like on the doors including their lintels and jambs, windows, brackets, wall surfaces, pillars and poles. The most celebrated theme of the reliefs has remained Krishna and other incarnations of Vishnu which depicts the various instances and tales of their life. Moreover reliefs are also elegantly rendered with life of mundane as the mortal beings humans and demons, birds and animals including vegetal subjects. Thus the subject matter of relief can be mainly assorted in the divine and semi divine beings like Krishna, Rama, and different incarnated forms of Vishnu including Brahma, Ganesha, Siva, Hayagriva, Hanuman, Garuda and others, earthly beings like humans, demons are basically the characters of epics and purana including the botanical and zoomorphic motifs.

The admirable object of art is an image of Surya of *Kamlabari Satra* presently preserved in the State Museum of Guwahati belongs to the second half of the eighteenth century, comes under the theme of divine beings. The relief depicts the image of Sun-god as riding on a seven horesd chariot however here only three horses are observable; with profoundly implementing the iconographic perception of *Aruna* (Sun-god). In spite of that the image unconventionally
features the rayed disc as an aura behind the head and a bird with sharp beak sitting on the upper most horse. According to K.K Dasgupta this relief is art historically significant as it portrays its contemporary representation of sun-god in his symbolic form of rayed disc, theriomorphic form of beaked bird conceived as Vedic Garutman and anthropomorphic form of human face. (K.K Dasgupta, 1990) Similarly the other important specimen from this category is an Image of Ganesha; this also belongs to Kamlabari Satra and the same period. The image depicts the elephant headed God Ganesha (plate-6.34). He is seated under an arch of cinquefoil and his trunk made in right side touching to his right hand. The other hands are depicted carrying different things as in the lower right hand deity is holding a ladduka (edible sweet ball), a pasa (noose) in his upper left hand, and a snake in lower left hand. The other remarkable feature is rat-mount with its lean and slender abdomen, represented significantly on pedestal. Another relief from Sundardariya Satra now preserved in State Museum, depicts the twenty armed and ten headed Ravana with two stylised lion motifs.

In addition to that Krishna and the other incarnations of Vishnu are considered as the most adorable deities to be depicted on the wood carvings of Satriya tradition of art (plate-6.35) and these are abundantly illustrated with their different phases, forms and stories of life in the narrative relief panels based upon the stories of epics and purans. Moreover in different Satras of Majuli like Auniati, Dakhinpat and Kamlabari the relief panels are portrayed the several exploits and deeds of the God which is called Krishna Lila (plate-6.36) elaborated in the Mahabharata, Bhagvata and Brahmavaivarta like the Raslila scene where the Krishna is dancing and playing flute with his several Gopis (female beloved devotees). Krishna is carved adequately in centre surrounded by Gopis, other interesting scene depicts the story of stealing garments of the Gopis called vastra-harana by the young Krishna on the bank of the river Yamuna while they were having bath leaving their clothes on the bank, Krishna is depicted as centre motif seated on the Kadamba tree (Neolamackia cadamba) with suspended garments are rendered elegantly, river is carved by wavy line, with fish, swan and flower, vigorous Gopis are depicted in water requesting for clothes with emotive
expressions are made it venerable artwork (plate-6.37). Another scene based on the daring exploit of Krishna where he punished a giant black snake called *Kaliya Naga*, as many of beings died after drank the venomous water of the lake in which he stays. The story has been depicted in different episodes and in the last panel *Kaliya Naga* submitted himself and bowed down Krishna and then Krishna is depicted dancing over the hood of *Kaliya Naga* this is the admirable work where Naga is depicted in anthropomorphic form, appropriate placement of the figures and forms, fine and impeccable carving attracts the eyes of spectators (plate-6.38).

Similarly the other series depicts story of the incarnation of Narasimha of Vishnu where he exterminate the demon Hiranyakashyapa to favour his prime devotee prahalad this episode is also acquired as a vital theme of the *Bhaona* performances. Deity Narasimha is depicted in anthropomorphic and combine form of lion and human. The panels are generally painted with gaudy colours where Krishna and divine figures are painted in mild blue colour and demons are painted in black or deep colours with red eyes, panels are surrounded with decorative floral or creeper designs and carving of these reliefs are conventional and stylized.

Addition to *Bhagawata*, Ramayana has been the imperative theme for the wood carvings and most often Rama and Sita is depicted as a central figure with his brother Laxmana and his foremost devotee Hanuman. Rama is also an illustrious incarnation of Vishnu akin to Krishna. Thus Rama and the episode of the Ramayana persuade as the theme of various relief panels like in one of the relief Rama is portrayed as seated on *asana* (seat) with his attendant devotees Hanuman and Jambuvana, Hanuman is carrying a stylized umbrella for his noble and Jambuvana is represented in a posture of paying reverence, carving of this relief is not rendered in detail and characteristically features are highlighted with colours as the figures, clothes eyes, nose, and other details. Various animals has also been the appealing feature of these wood carving and depicted largely in the numerous reliefs of the Majuli among these some of images are elephants, lion, buffalo, and monkey including the mostly featured Garuda and Makara.
(crocodile) in spite of that combine motif of Gaja-simha depicting lion standing on elephant is also carved profusely. The mythical animal Makara is represented with opened mouth and sharp crocodile teeth. It has been also positioned as a decorative motif on the terminal ends of the arched and semi-arched lintels of the gateway of the Satra and Namghar.

Flowers and creeper motifs are also rendered for adornment of the relief frames (plate-6.39), on the windows and doors in variable patterns and several repeatable forms like leaf, creepers, bud, and fruits whereas motifs of the lotus flower and scrumptious lotus bud with its creeper patterns is largely used in ornamentation of various components like simhasana, doors, window frames and other places of Namghar and Satra (plate-6.40, 6.41). The major pillars of the Namghar are made in polygonal or in fine circular shape and decorated by carved capital in the form of lotus and fruit of local idiom kordoi tenga (Abhorrea carambola), even the main entrance or welcome gate, sometime comprised a gatehouse, of the Satra called batchora is also generously decorated by wood carvings.

6.6 Stylistic Analysis

The formation of the human figures, divine figures, semi- divine figures and anthropomorphic forms in wood carvings of Satriya style are generally static and frontal and in most of the cases the face is depicted in profile, but it has not been accordingly maintained in body and treated frontally as in the relief of Ganesha from Kamlabari. Therefore the divine figures are seems to be stiff in manifestation and a slight of vitality including the naive or folk elements can be perceived in numerous of panels. Among these divine figures the Matsya (fish) incarnation of Deity Vishnu is depicted in anthropomorphic forms where half of his body seems gulp down by a fish and in other incarnation of Varaha (Boar) a sphere (earth) is represented above the snout of the boar (plate-6.42) and figure of Brahma is shown in relief panels with four faces in a row. (Barpujari: 1990)

Human figures are made in round shape or anatomy has not been practically followed and appears to be more symbolic. Generally shoulders are
carved broadly, eyes are strikingly open, and lips are thick whereas waist is
carved slightly in proportion and feet are broad, sturdy and rigid. In spite of that
there are some of the representations where human forms are comprised with
more appropriate proportion, liveliness and movement and several others are
representing angularity in manifestation, schematic and static appearance. The
deity figures are represented wearing dhoti as a lower garment, *uttariya-vastra*
(shoulder cloth) in Assamese style and with short *mukuta* (crown). Thus the
majority of these wood carvings are mainly seems to follow the indigenous folk
style and appears conventional, forceful and dynamically alive. The trend of
stylisation of figures through conventional or folk patters has been carried out
which appears in the image of *simha* (lion), *gaja-simha* (elephant-lion) and
*makara* (crocodile) a motif similarly in the geometric, floral and vegetal design
patterns. The animal figures are carved more flawlessly though these are stylized
and articulated, generally the animals such as buffaloes, horses, and goats are
depicted in fighting scenes in the reliefs. The panels are generally painted with
gaudy colours where Krishna and divine figures are painted in mild blue colour
and demons are painted in black or deep colours with red eyes, panels are
surrounded with decorative floral or creeper designs and carving of these reliefs
are conventional and stylized.

**Conclusion**

Wood carvings of Majuli akin to the other art forms were specially
cultivated under the influence of Vaisnavite Satras to portray and propagate the
*puranic* and epical themes nevertheless to adorn the large interiors and exteriors
of Namghar, Manikuta and other important portions of *Satra*. Thus the subjects
and themes of these wood carvings are generally imbued with the Vaisnavite
religious iconography and mythology narrated in the religious scriptures as the
*Bhagawata-purana*, Mahabharata, Ramayana and others. These are principally
depicts the Incarnated forms of Vishnu like Narasimha, Rama, and essentially
Krishna as divine forms, Garuda and Hanuman as semi-divine forms and the
other worldly human, anthropomorphic and theriomorphic forms all in realistic
style. Animal figures are carved more flawlessly though these are stylized and articulated, flowers and vegetal motifs are used in adornment of the frames, on the windows and doors, motifs of the lotus flower and scrumptious lotus bud with its creeper patterns is largely used in ornamentation of various components of Namghar and Satra. The remarkable piece of wooden sculpture in Satra is the multi tiered throne decorated with different animal motifs at the corners of each tier accordingly called simhasana, mayurasana, gajasana and hamsasana etc. intentional to pedestal the sacred manuscript of the Bhagawata Purana as the main adorable object in the chamber on the top tier. Almost all the wood carving of the Majuli depicts the contemporary socio cultural lifestyle according to time and space. Moreover represent thoroughly the manners, outlook and customs of the artisans who created them. The wood carvings of Majuli exposes the popularity of epic and puranic lore and Lord Krishna legend of these scriptures was a major source of inspiration to the Satriya artists of sixteenth to early twentieth century who worked under the divine force of phenomenon of Sankardeva’s Vaisnavism. Remarkably the artists have not incorporated Radha as the beloved consort of Krishna in their illustrations of Krishna-lila (exploits of lord Krishna) due to conventionality with neo-Vaisnavite ideology (K.K dasgupta: 1990). Thus majority of the artists of these wood carvings are mainly believed to delineate the schematic depiction of the theme rather a detailed morphological study of the subjects, followed the indigenous idioms and folk style which appears conventional though forceful and dynamically alive indeed seems influentially committed to communicate the ideology of Neo-Vaisnavism and to adorn the Namghar, Manikuta and various components of the Satras.
Plate 6.01 Lattice work of Palanpur

Plate 6.02 Ledge work, Gujarat

Plate 6.03 Lattice work of Barmer
Plate 6.04 Trio of Lord Jagannath

Plate 6.05 Kharahi (Basket), Assam
Plate 6.06 Chalani (Strainer), Assam.

Plate 6.07 Dola (Sieve), Assam.
Plate 6.08 Chamba Temple of Himachal pradesh

Plate 6.09 Mahadev temple, Katinamkulam

Plate 6.10 Namaskara Mandapa of Tiruvampadi shrine, Trivandrum
Plate 6.11 wood carvings, Namghar of Assam.

Plate 6.12 Wood carvings Sualkuchi Satra, Assam.

Plate 6.13 Dakhinpat, Satra, Majuli.
Plate 6.14 Sanctum of Auniati Satra, Majuli.

Plate 6.15 Gate house of Garmur Satra, Majuli

Plate 6.16 Sundardariya Satra, Barpeta

Plate 6.17 Jania Satra of Barpeta.
Plate 6.18 Seasoning of wooden log
Plate 6.19 Carving process
Plate 6.20 Carved motifs of elephant on lion
Plate 6.21 Carved motif
Plate 6.22 Relief carving
Plate 6.23 Carved lion throne of Kamlabari Satra, State museum, Assam.

Plate 6.24 Throne with Amahi Ghar, Sualkuchi Satra, Assam.

Plate 6.25 Throne preserved in State museum, Assam.

Plate 6.26 Artist painting a small throne, Majuli.
Plate 6.27 Image of Krishna in Tribhanga Posture, Majuli.

Plate 6.28 Image of Lord Vishnu, Majuli.

Plate 6.29 Image of Garuda, Majuli.

Plate 6.30 Image of Garuda, Auniati Satra, Majuli.
Plate 6.31 Image of Garuda, Garamur Satra, Majuli.

Plate 6.32 Image of Garuda, State museum, Assam.

Plate 6.33 Image of Hanuman, Majuli.

Plate 6.34 Image of Ganesha, Kamalabari Satra, State museum, Assam.
Plate 6.35  Wood carvings & Mural, Dakhinpat Satra, Majuli.

Plate 6.36, 37  Wood carvings & Murals, Dakhinpat Satra, Majuli.

Plate 6.38  Exploits of Krishna, Kamalabari Satra, Majuli.
Plate 6.39 Floral & Creeper motifs on the window of Namghar, Majuli.

Plate 6.40 Wood carvings on window frames, Majuli.

Plate 6.41 Carved door of Namghar, Majuli.

Plate 6.42 Narrative reliefs on the wall of Namghar, Majuli.
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