CHAPTER -IV

HINDU PLACES OF WORSHIP

General Introduction : Hinduism

In Vedic literature Sanātan-dharma or 'eternal Dharma' is known as Ārya-dharma and at a later age it came to be accepted as Hindu Dharma. An Eminent Scholar, K. M. Sen in his book Hinduism says: “Hinduism is like a tree that has been erected by some great architect at some definite point in time.”¹

Again, according to Dr. S. N. Sarma, “Although Hinduism is as old as the Aryan migration to Assam, i.e. at the beginning of Christian era, all the historical dynasties and kings professed Hindu religion and strived utmost for the maintenance and spread of Hinduism, yet the bulk of the population being ethnically non Aryan remained outside the pale of Hinduism till the beginning of the 13th century.”²

Infact, the Hindu concept of dharma is derived from the idea of established rites and practices. It works in the whole field of human activities, as well as the established social order.

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¹ Sen, K. M., Hinduism
² Sarmah, S. N., A Socio-Economic and Cultural History of Assam, p. 188.
with its attributes of law, conduct and worship. Society, according to the Hindus, exists for the maintenance of dharma, that is, the doing of that which is good and conducive to the attainment of the ultimate object of existence. The state is embodied in society to enable those constituting society to pursue this dharma unhampered by those with whom their lot of life may be cast. According to P. C. Choudhury, "Brāhmānical religion consisted of the worship of the elements of nature. But later on, it was developed into the worship of personified deities, something like the doctrine of Monotheism."

Again, ideologically Hinduism believes in one supreme God, "Iśwara or Parameśwara". But it allows the Hindus to worship Him in any form belonging to the Brāhmanical pantheon by the devotees. Some relics on stone or terracotta decorated with geometrical or floral designs are noticed in and around Dhubri district as fragmentary portions of temples and other religious institutions. After a close observation, it may be assumed that these designs were attributed to different gods and goddess belonging to the Brāhmanical pantheon.

The Brāhmanical religion has further been divided into the

following sections (cult) like Saivaism, Šaktism, Vaiśṇavism, Saura, Gānapatya, Kartikeya and other minor cults.

Dhubri district witnessed the prevalence of the above mentioned religious cults in different periods of her history which played a vital role in the socio-religious life of the people of the society.

Generally, the Hindus worship gods and goddesses in various iconographic form in their homes as grha-devatā or kula-devatā. But in temples or mandira, they are regarded as public deity (Baroāri). The Kālikāpurāṇa and the Yoginītantra are two notable literary works consisting of various rites and procedures of worship. The process of Sanskritisation is a remarkable feature in case of worship of many Hindu deities. Sanskritisation in the field of religious history also remained at work in the medieval period in Assam. Reference can be cited from the legendary episodes mentioned in the Skaṇḍa- purāṇa (Avantya-Khaṇḍa) giving details as to how Jalpeśwara became a devotee of Śiva.\(^5\) Jalpiśā, a Śivaliṅga (now in Jalpaiguri district in North Bengal) is the beginning point. Its significance lies in the fact that the Śivaliṅga was worshipped by the mlechhas (who do not even speak the refined dialect or language). The

\(^5\) Skanda Purāṇa, Avantya Khaṇḍa, Chapter 66
Kalikāpurāṇa, explains that the devotees of Jalpiśa, in fact, were kṣatryias, who fled their country anticipating annihilation by Jāmadagnya Paraśurāma and kept themselves hiding around Jalpiśa. It seems that they were originally Ārya language speaking people, but in order to conceal their identity, they started to speak the Mlechha language. Perhaps this is a clear explanation of Aryanisation of an aboriginal deity in phallic form by the ever advancing Aryan people.

Again, the process of Sanskritisation also achieved new height during the time of Neo-Vaiśṇavite Guru and religious reformer Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavdeva who were free from all divisive caste considerations. The integration of various tribal communities into Hindu religion was greatly facilitated by the Kāla Saṁhati Satras. The Sanskritisation of tribal people by a Hindu Gosāi is a remarkable phenomena in Hindu religious system.

It is evident that the Neo-Vaiśṇavite movement in Assam brought the tribal people still nearer. Śaṅkaradeva himself took the leading part by admitting a person belonging to Garo tribe into the intimate circle of His diciples by recheistening him as Govinda.
A. ŚÄKTISM

Introduction:

"Śakti, the mother Goddess, is conceived as power, both creative and destructive, has been an object of worship in India from early times."⁶

"Śaktism is the cult of worshipping a female Goddess as the supreme deity. The Goddess has been conceived as the Śakti or energy of Śiva, the supreme Godhead. The Śāktas or the worshippers of this deity would claim that the Goddess is superior to even the supreme Godhead in so far as he has to remain inert without the inspiration drawn from the Goddess Śakti."⁷

Specific reference to the worship of Śakti in Kāmarūpa occur in the Devīpurāṇa, the Kālikāpurāṇa and the Yoginītantra. The Kālikāpurāṇa written in the 10th or 11th cent. A.D. mentions that Kāmākhyā was a popular deity throughout India. The Kālikāpurāṇa though predominantly a Śāktapurāṇa glorifying the worship of the Mother Goddess Kāmākhyā, draws instances of religious tolerance in respect of Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivaism,

⁶ Banerjea, J. N., Hindu Concept of God
This spirit of tolerance continued till the advent of the Neo-Vaiṣṇava religious order in the early decades of the 16th century A.D.

In fact, Śaktism was not probably originated in Assam. Both Śaktism and Tāntricism appear to have been popular from the early medieval period in Bengal and orissa. Śaktism became leading religion of Assam only in the later times. According to P. C. Choudhury, “Kāmarūpa was an important centre of Devī worship both in Her symbolic and iconographic representation under various names along with Her companion Lord Śiva.”

The Śaktism or Śakti cult was mainly patronised by the kings and well-to-do classes. Śaktaism naturally had a greater appeal to the royal families, who required strength for remaining in power. For the satisfaction of Devī, sacrifice of different animals like buffellow, goat, pigeon was compulsory. In the earlier days, offerings of human sacrifice was also practised in this locality. According to some local scholars, “Banabāsi-thān of Hātogāon was well known for human sacrifice. Banabāsi-thān is situated at Thākurānjīhār, 7 km. away from Laksmipur in Dhubri district. The people of neighbourhood of this shrine

8. Choudhury, P. C. 418
are mostly Rabhas who perform the worship of the deity. According to local information, human sacrifice was also offered to the deity in earlier days. Banabasi is also another local name of Kali.⁹

After the fall of Pala dynasty and the disintegration of the kingdom of early Kamarupa into several small principalities under the leadership of the local land-lords, the Sakti cult found favour with most of the Bhuyans. For example, Chandivar Bhuyan (Siromoni), the great-grand-father of Sankaradeva, was a great devotee of Devi or Sakti, for which he was also known as Devi- Dasa.”¹⁰ Chandi is also another name of Goddess Kali.

According to the Yoginitantra, (16th century A.D.) Saktism had a firm hold in this jurisdiction. This may be supported by the fact that the Koch general Sukladvaja (Chilirai) made an arrangement for the worship of Devi Durga for three days in his early life. It is also narrated in the Darrang Rajbansavali¹¹ that Visva Singha, the founder of Kocha dynasty, used to worship the Goddess Durgā while he was a cowheard by sacrificing a grasshopper to the Goddess Durgā.

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⁹. Patgiri, J., Abibbhatka Goaipara Zilar Math, Mandir Aru Satrar Itivritya, p.222. (A)
¹¹. Darrang Rajbansavali p. 208
According to the *Kalikāpurāṇa*, immediately before the advent of Naraka, Prājīvyotisa-Kāmarūpa was dominated by the Kirātas, who seems to have Śīva as their worshipful deity. It was Naraka who brought the cult of Mother Goddess to Kāmarūpa and it was he who said to have driven away the aboriginal Kirāta inhabitants from Kāmarūpa and settled the Āryan immigrants in their place. After driving out the kiratas king, Naraka himself became a devotee of Kāmākhyā.

**Kāmākhyā Group of Temples and Thānas in Dhubri District:**

Kāmākhyā is also considered to be one of the most sacred *pīṭhas* in Brāhmanical as well as Buddhist literature. "The name of Goddess, Kāmākhyā does not appear in the early literature, and the word, according to Dr. Banikanta Kakati, is of non-Sanskrit origin. According to him, Kāmākhyā is an Austric word meaning ghost or dead body. Kāmākhyā, formerly, a Goddess of ghost or spirit, was worshipped in a śmaśāna (cremation ground). According to the *Kalikāpurāṇa*, the genital organ of Satī fell on the Nilāchal hill when the Satī (Mother Goddess) gave up her life in the sacrificial ground, where Dakṣa, her father held a great sacrifice, being unable to bear the

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insult suffered by her. The story goes that Dakṣa-Prajāpati, father of Satī, once held a great sacrifice where he invited all the gods and ṛṣis with their respective consorts except, however, Śiva and Satī. Though uninvited Satī went there. But Dakṣa-Prajāpati not only did not pay heed to his daughter, but also insulted her as the wife of a Kāpālīka, meaning Śiva. Thus, being greatly distressed at this ill-treatment by her father, Satī ended her life by resorting to yoga practice. Hearing the sad news, Śiva was greatly enraged and he immediately proceeded with his numerous attendants and destroyed Dakṣa's sacrifice. On the other hand, being unable to bear separation, Śiva carried her corpse and started loitering hither and thither. Fearing that Śivas anger and restless attitude might led to the destructive consequences, Viṣṇu cut the body of Satī into pieces with his discuss from behind in order to save the universe. These pieces of Satī's body fell on the earth. Wherever Satī's limbs fell, it became an auspicious pīṭha.

The original number of Śākta-pīṭha is said to be four, but later on, the number of pīṭhas came to be counted as 51. Kāmākhya, one of the four original pīṭhas, is situated on the Nilchal mountain in Kāmarūpa. The Goddess herself was called Kāmākhya, because She came there secretly to satisfy her amorous passion (kāma) with Śiva. The term pīṭha is associated with the Devī worship.
Pitha means, *āsana* or seat. The different *pīthas* in India are supposed to be the dwelling places of Devī (the Mother Goddess) and so they are called *Devī-thāna*. To a Śākta devotee, the word *pitha* further bears a special significance which includes the places where, it is believed, the different parts of Śatī fell. Regarding the establishment of the *pīthas* as Chattopadhaya believes, “the story has possibly at its background the influence of the Buddhist legend of the creation of the *stūpas* on parts of the Buddhas body in different places.”

13. According to the *Yoginītantra*, Goddess Kāmākhyā is identical with Kālī, who is ever existent as the Supreme being and Supreme knowledge.

The prevalence of the worship of Goddess Kāmākhyā can be traced out in Dhubri district with the existence of three shrines dedicated to the name of the Mother Goddess, Kāmākhyā.

1. **Kāmākhyā Thān at Bārsīgaon**: 

   It is situated at Udmari, 3(three) miles away from Bilasipara, town of Dhubri district. There is a local belief that a part of Satī’s body fell here and, as a result, the temple was built on it.

2. **Jaibhūi Kāmākhyā**:

   It is situated near Chunari Bazar of Lakhmipur in Dhubri district. According to legends, this area was once a dense forest.

The tributaries of the Brahmaputra flowing by the area which was inhabited by the local Mech community. The holy shrine of Satī was located on the mount of a hillock near a pond. The original structure was destroyed by earthquake in 17th cent. A.D. But the worship was performed under the patronage of the Mechpara Zemindars. At present it is maintained by the local people.

3. Kāmākhyā Thān of Mankachar:

In the South Salmara sub-Division of Dhubri district on the bank of the river Kolā, another Kāmākhyā-thān is located. The background history of the origin of the establishment of the thān is based on the popular legends. It is believed that when Lord Śiva was wandering with the body of Satī on his shoulder, a particle of her body dropped at this site. King Viśva Sundara and Mahendra Nārāyanā both patronised this sacred thān. During ambuvācī and Durgā-pūjā, devotees makes a visit to this holy thān to worship the deity.

Śakti in the form of Mahāmāyā, a form of the Devī Durgā, also gained much popularity in and around Dhubri district. Goddess Mahāmāyā is considered as kula-devatā of the local Zemindars of Gauripur, Bilasipara, Chapar, Bagribari, Rupsi and others.
The epithet *Mahārāṇī* is also applied in some areas to denote Mahāmāyā with the patronization of local Zeminders. She is also known as Burī-Thākurāṇī, who is a very popular deity and also worshipped as *kula-devatā* of the Zeminder family of Salkocha.

Mahāmāyā group of Temples and Shrines of Dhubri District:

1. Mahāmāyā temple of Bagribāri:

   This temple is situated roughly half a kilometer north of Bagribari town on the national highway.

   According to local beliefs, in the last part of 16th cent. A.D., a certain merchant came to “Parvatjowār” estate of the erstwhile Ratnapitha region and incidentally became fortunate to see the physical appearance of the Goddess Mahāmāyā. The Goddess instructed him to inform the local Zeminder to construct a temple immediately at the site of the specified huge stone which was done, accordingly.

   Initially, the temple was a thatched house; after that for a number of times the temple was renovated and reconstructed during period from 1873 to 1991 cent. A.D. It was a C.I. Sheet-roofed building for a long time. Only after 1990 a *deul*-type construction has been made. The present temple is *pañcaratha*-type. The height of the temple is 70 ft. and its breadth is 50 ft.
The whole complex consists of a Śiva temple, a Kāli temple and one temple each for Pañca-devatā, Manasā, Narasimha and Baṭuksesvar. This is also a Gopal-thān and with a nāṭamaṇḍapa. The first sevāyet of the Mahāmāyā temple was the Zeminder of Parvatjowār estate headed by Hatibar Sigha Choudhury.¹⁴

The presiding deity of the temple is an amorphous figure regarded as the Mother Goddess Mahāmāyā, a popular form of Devī Durgā. As a centre of pilgrimage, Mahamaya temple is very popular and regarded by the believers as the greatest Śakti-pīṭha in and around Dhubri district. Regular worship is performed in the temple. But on saturdays, the number of devotees increases and sacrifices of goat, pegion, etc. are offered specially. Occasionally, bufellow sacrifice is offered during the Aṣṭamī tithi of Dūrgā-Pūjā. One sacrificial ground is attached to the courtyard and the deuri performs the sacrificial ritual with the instruction of the senior priest. The neighbouring tribal people also offer pūjā to the Devī Mahāmāyā with great devotion. People of the locality have great regards to this temple. There is a belief that the temple has some supernatural power. If devotees worship the deity sincerely, his or her desires will undoubtedly

¹⁴. Devi Bharati, a soveniour published by Mahamaya Temple maintenance Committee, 1992
be fulfilled. As a result of it, Mahāmāyā temple has become the most favourite religious centre of Dhubri district where numerous visitors come regularly to derive favour from the vigraha. People believe that the vigraha of the temple has a living and flourishing power.

Besides the regular worship, Upanayana, Cūrākaraṇa, marriage ceremony etc are also performed here. One big fair (melā) “Sāt Biśuār-melā” is held during the annual worship in the month of April. One Śiva-mandira is situated in the same campus.

2. Aṣṭabhūjā Mahāmāyā :

Durga in the Aṣṭabhūjā form is worshipped in the Rājbāri of Bilāśpāra, Known as Aṣṭabhūjā Mahāmāyā, the deity is considered as Kula-devatā of Bilasipara estate. It is made of aṣṭadhātu.

3. Ālākajhārī Mahāmāyā :

It is situated on a hillock, 8 miles north of Matherjhar railway station. The land of the temple was donated by the Gauripur-rāj and the arrangement for priest and sevāyet were also appointed by them. A local belief is connected with the name of the shrine. According to the local belief one of the family member of Gauripur Rāj went out for hunting in that area. But when he
entered the dense forest, he became puzzled and could not find out the way to get out. After a long time when he became tired and fell asleep Devi Mahāmāyā appeared in his dream and the particular site in the forest was lighted up, whence it came to be known as Ālākjhārī-thān of Mahāmāyā. This shrine is situated in the neighbourhood of Pāglāhāt in the Golakganj sub-Division of Dhubri district. People believe that the site is also associated with the footsteps of Devī Mahāmāyā which is locally known as padikābārī. Worship is performed annually with sacrifice and other offerings. One fair is held during the annual festival.

4. Āiśakhati Thān:

It is situated in a place about two miles to the east of Sāpatgrām railway station in Dhubri district. Goddess Šakhāti is nothing but a form of Kālī. According to the local people, the Šākhā (auspicious bangle) of Satī dropped here when Mahādev was wandering with the body of Satī. Šākhāti Devi is very flourishing deity in this locality. There are number of popular stories connected with the supernatural power of the deity. Originally it was a cave-temple, but recently a modern temple was constructed with the initiative of local people and the Managing Committee of Šākhāti temple. Annual worship is
held on the 6th day of Vaisākha (April) along with a fair arranged by the local people.

5. Mahāmāyā Snān Ghat:

"Snān-ghāṭ" means the “bathing spot of Devī Mahāmāyā. According to the mythological belief Devī Mahāmāyā first appeared physically at that site in front of a merchant. The recently discovered site of Mahāmāyā-Snān-Ghāṭ is presumed to have contained a few relics (both terracotta & stone) which are now preserved in the gallery of the District Museum, Dhubri. The sculpture of the relics shows that it belonged to the contemporary period of the Koch-Kamta rulers. It may be assumed that earlier there was some sort of structures at Snān-Ghāṭ area of Dhubri district.

5. Mahāmāyā temple of Gaurīpur Rāj:

Mahāmāyā is the Kula-devatā of Gaurīpur Rāj. There is an interesting story regarding the erection of the temple as well as the installation of the deity, Mahāmāyā, at Gaurīpur Rāj. One of the Zeminders belonging to Gaurīpur Rāj family collected the icon of Mahāmāyā from one saint. The icon was made of aṣṭadāhātu and in Daśabhujā form. The temple of Mahāmāyā is attached to the Rājbārī campus of Gaurīpur. The temple is a Chālā-type one with some intricate designs. Nārāyana in the
Madan-Mohan form, who is locally known as Pagla-bābā, is also worshipped along with the Mahāmāyā in the same campus. During the time of Durgā-pūjā, Devī Mahāmāyā is worshipped by the present descendants of Gaurīpur Rāj with traditional custom along with other religious rituals.

It is obtained that a good number of sacrifices are also offered to the Devī Durgā or Mahāmāyā on the auspicious day of Mahā-Aṣṭomī-tithi during Durgā Pūjā. A Local proverb is popular in this connection

_Cooch-behārer rās_ (fair)
_Balarāmpurer bās_ (Bamboo)
_Barpetār holi_ (Deul)
_Gaurīpurēr bāli_ (Sacrifice).

6. Mahāmāyā of Lālkurā:

It is situated on a hill-side. Usually, the goddess Mahāmāyā is worshipped in an aniconic symbol of a stone. But an image of Mahāmāyā made of clay is also worshipped at the time of annual ceremony in the month of April every year. A fair (_melā_) is also held on this occasion. The local people believe that the aniconic symbol possesses some supernatural power.

7. Mahāmāyā of Rupsi Rājbarī:

Durgā in the form of Mahāmāyā is also the _Kula-devatā_ of
Rupsi Rājbarī which belongs to Parbatjowār estate of the undivided Goalpārā district. It is made of *āstādhātu*. Madan Mohan was also worshipped along with Mahāmāyā. But the Madan Mohan temple of Rājbarī is no longer *in situ* at present. Now it is in a dilapidated condition. Only a fragmentary wooden portion of the *dolamaṇḍapa* representing the contemporary art has been preserved in the gallery of the District Museum, Dhubri.

The Goddess Jagaddhāṭrī is regarded another form of Durgā who is worshipped in the locality both in urban and rural areas of Dhubri district. Jagaddhāṭrī Pūjā is worshipped with great pomp and grandour at Bausmārī near Balajān and Harirhat in Golokganj area. A three-day fair is also organised to mark this occasion. Though Jagaddhāṭrī Devī belongs to Śaktī faith, the worship is performed with Vaiṣṇava rituals. Animal sacrifice is not allowed to offer to the deity. Even the surrounding people also abstain from eating meat and fish during the Pūjā.

Besides the temples of Mahāmāyā, a number of shrines locally known as *pāṭ* or *dhām* in the name of Mahāmāyā are also preserved by the devotees in the rural areas of the locality. As Martin observed, “Kālī is a Grām Devatā which is regarded as the greatest object of worship. Other than temples, a large

number of shrines known as Pāt, Dhām, Thān etc. are dedicated to Goddess Kālī and her various manifestations." Apart from the independent worship, goddess Kālī is also associated with some folk deities like Charak, Manasā, Madarer Bas etc. Kālī is called Chaṇḍī by the local devotees. Chaṇḍī, as a consort of Śiva, is a popular figure in folk literature also. Kālī-Chaṇḍī dance is the most popular dance of this locality. It forms an element of the so called Goālpariyā culture.

B. ŚAIVAISM

General introduction:

The worship of Śiva prevailed in Assam since very remote times, and it was the popular form of religion both amongst the aboriginal and Aryanized people. Śiva is the great Lord (Maheśwara), the greatest of the gods (Mahādeva) and is said to have been known by a thousand other names (e.g. Śiva-sahasra-nāma in the Mahābhārata, XII, 17).

Śiva is one of the most influential gods of the orthodox Brāhmanical pantheon. In the early and medieval Brāhmanical texts Śiva is described as the originator and the best exponent of

17. The Mahabharata Chapter XII, p. 17.
various acts and accomplishments. According to Hindu mythology, Śiva is the great master in the art of dancing. The dance personifies this universe in action and destruction.\textsuperscript{18}

According to Rai Bahadur Gunabhiram Barua, Śiva worship was first introduced in Assam by king Jalpeśvara of Jalpaiguri, in modern North Bengal. The region formed part of the ancient kingdom of Kāmarūpa. This king is said to have erected the temple of Jalpeśvara there. The legendary story is found in the \textit{Skanda- Purāṇa}. The Purāṇa shows how Jalpeśvara became a devotee of Śiva. The \textit{Kālikā-Purāṇa} states that on the eve of Naraka’s installation in the kingdom of Kāmarūpa, Śiva-worship was prevalent in the region. According to the \textit{Kālikāpurāṇa}, king Naraka brought with him the cult of the Mother Goddess to Kāmarūpa.\textsuperscript{19} But Śaivaism did not disappear altogether; Śiva was still worshipped there by the aboriginal Kirātas. The traditional Asura king, Bāna, who is said to have been a contemporary of Naraka, was a staunch devotee of Śiva. The influence of the Śaiva Bāna had an effect on the mind of Naraka, who later became a Śaiva. Originally a tribal god, Śiva continued to receive homage from both the ruling families and tribal

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\textsuperscript{19.} Barua, Gunabharam, \textit{Assam Baranji}. 39,45-46. (A)
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communities. The earliest Hindu religious culture that prevailed in ancient Kāmarūpa, in addition to the tribal beliefs and practices, was Śaivism.

Śiva is generally worshipped both in his iconographic as well as phallic symbol in temples and elsewhere. The linga form of Śiva is very common. According to the Yoginītantra, the number of Śiva lingas in Kāmarūpa exceed a million. According to Dr. P. C. Choudhury “Linga worship is associated with the pre Aryan elements.” The liṅga is a strait pillar of stone erected on a pedestal, a symbolic form of female genetic organ, called yoni.20

After going through various historical records of Assam, it appears that all principal ruling dynasties of early Assam were Śaivites, more or less. The historical account of the royal family of the Koch kings have asserted the birth of the first Koch king from Mahādeva. Koch kings also performed Śiva worship with sāstric rites before expeditions. The tribal mode of worship was recognised by the kings of the north bank of the Brahmaputra as the aboriginal forms of worship. The popularity of Śaivaism during Koch period is confirmed by their Nārāyanī-mudrā (coin) where they described themselves as the devotees of Śiva.

The coin of Naranārāyana shows:

**Obv:** Śrī Śrīman Naranārāyaṇa Śāk. 1477,

**Rev:** Śrī Śrī Śiva Čarana Kamala Madhukarasya. Even the founder of the Neo-Vaiśnavaism was named after Lord Śiva (Śaṅkara) as Śaṅkaradeva was born after his parents propiciated Lord Śiva. Rāmcharan Thākur narrates in his biography of Śaṅkaradeva that Satya Sandhā saw Mahādeva in a dream requesting her to bear a child in her womb.21 According to this version, it seems that Śaṅkaradeva was an incarnation of Śiva. So it is a fact that Śaivaism was a living religion in Assam when Śaṅkaradeva was born.

**Śiva temples and Shrines of Dhubri District:**

In Dhubri district, Śiva temples in the name of Mahādeva are the highest in number. Majority of these temple are located in the foot-hills of the Bhairava, the Mahādeva, the Dudhnāth, the Chāṅdardingā etc. The existence of innumerable Śiva temples (Now most of them are in ruin) proves that Śiva cult was popular in the Dhubri district and its neibourhood. As the Zemindari system prevailed in the erstwhile Goalpara district, some Brahmottara and Devottara lands were donated to the Sevāyet of the devālaya or temple. In the medieval period, a number of

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21 Thakur, Ram Charana: Gurucharita VV 320. (A)
temples were erected by the contemporary rulers which are still in existence and maintained by their descendants. Śiva is locally known as Pāgla-Bābā, Burā-Thākur, Trināth, Dhel-Khāwā, Dudhnāth, Dvāsilā and many others, like Dhumsiyā, Kuwārā, Bholānāth and so on and so forth. Śiva is also accompanied by His consort Pārvatī, who together are locally called Burā-Burī. The concept of Burā Burī-thān is probably associated with a Bodo term. Brai and Brei, i.e. Lord Śiva who is represented as liṅga. As in Hinduism, liṅga is represented by a cactus shoot in the Bodo traditional religious belief. Another term Burā-Thākur, who is also known as Burā-Gohāi (i.e. Bura-Gosāin), a very common term in other districts of Assam. The word Thākur (Gosāin) is used to denote God in the undivided Goalpara district. Besides the liṅga or image, Śiva is also worshipped in this locality in His emblem the Trident (trīśula) or His vāhana (the Bull Nandī).

Over and above the existing temples, there are several holy places which are known as pāt, dhām, thān etc. where multiferous festivals are performed. Generally, the devotees of Śiva are visiting these holy places during the specific occasions like Śiva caturdaśī. A visitor in the rural areas of the district would certainly find that the worship of Śiva is performed centering a
big *aśvattha* (Peepal) or *vaṭ* tree (*Ficus indica*). Freshly made clay or *pith*-craft figurines with vermillion mark (sindoor/auspicious red powder) and maolithread meet the eye as the latest additions of the offering to the deities. Thus the gods or goddesses are propiciated or appeased and good luck is assured in return. In this locality, pith-craft offering is more common than terracotta. Besides regular visits, on the occasion of Śiva *caturdaśī* (Śiva-rātri) a large number of devotees used to visit almost all the Śiva temples and *thanas* in their neighbouring areas for worshipping the deity with various offerings.

The *tithi* of Śiva-rātri is considered as the greatest festival in Śaivaism, and the most auspicious night for worshipping Śiva. On that night Śiva is worshipped not only in the temples but also in the private houses of the devotees. According to the *Matsya-Purāṇa* (Ch.95, page -32-37), one who observes the Śiva-rātri vow gets the fruit of a thousand *aśvamedha* sacrifices, and that all his sins are wiped out in a moment. He gets long life health, domestic prosperity and promotion in his husbandry, and ultimately he merges in the soul of Śiva. The *yogini-tantra* asserts that any one who worships Śiva with the offering of Bilva leaf, a flower, a fruit and a wood apple paste. (Bilva-
chandana) would become an affectionate devotee of Śiva.

Important Śiva temples and shrines of Dhubri District:

1. Dudhnāth Temple:
   
   Dudhnāth is a legendary temple situated on hill side in between Sālkochā and Bilāsīpārā in the Dhubri district. It is situated at a distance of $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles, to the east of Bilasipara on the bank of the river Brahmaputra. Devottara land to Dudhnāth temple was made by the Bijnī estate. The original temple was destroyed long ago, and the worship is performed presently by a local priest. Devotees from neighbouring areas usually paid a visit only on the occasions of Śiva-caturdaśī and Aṣokāśṭamī. The temple was reconstructed on the original structure centering round the huge stone which is represented as Lord Śiva. Because of bad communication, its importance as a religious centre is confined only to the neighbouring villages.

2. The Burā-Burī-thān (Jaleśwara):

   On the south bank of the Brahmaputra, the famous Burā-Burī-thān is situated at Jaleśwara. Under a big tree two huge stone blocks are lying. The two stone blocks are considered as Burā-Burī (Śiva-Pārvatī) by the local people belonging to both the Hindu and the Muslim Communities. It, indeed, is very unique, that the followers of Islam pay due reverence to a known
Hindu deity. Here we have an exemplary instance of religious harmony, tolerance and peaceful co-existence which prevailed there since long time. According to the local people, the gradual growth of the stones are remarkable. Milk and fruits are offered to the deities as naivedya (prasāda), and candles are also lighted by the devotees. In the month of April, a melā (Fair) is held at Burā-Burī-thān. "Hastāyurveda, a treatise on elephant, was composed by the sage, Pālakāpya, in the hilly slopes of the Himalayas on the bank of the Lauhitya. According to a section of the local scholars, the Burā-Buri-thān area maybe identified with the hermitage of Pālakāpya. Pālakāpya was born in Kāpyagotra and, as he used to rear the elephants, he became known as Pālakāpya. The name of his father was Sāmagayana.”

Again, according to M. Sastri, “the Hastāyurveda of Pālakāpya may be assigned to a period prior to c 3rd century B.C.; he was the first to have introduced Aryan culture and thereafter Sanskrit language and culture were spread in Assam.”

The Bhairava-thān :

Bhairava is supposed to be the highest mountain in this region. It stands on the eastern direction of Baitāmari Dighi.

22. Shastri, M., Prabandha Sauratbha, Purani Asomat Bhāratīa Daśan Śastrar Čarccā (A) p. 17
The main than is situated on the top of the hillock which was constructed by Koch king Naranārāyaṇa and his brother Chilārāi. There are some sculptural relics scattered around the premises of the temple which seem to be of antique variety. The Sebāyat of the temple belongs to the Rājbaṅshī community. According to the local people, Kālāpāhār, the iconoclast destroyed the original than, but later on, it was renovated by the descendants of the Koch ruler.

Būrā-Buri-thān of Sālkochā:

The shrine is situated on hill-side of Sālkochā. A huge-shaped perforated stone is worshipped as Śiva. According to local belief during the draught devotees offer milk with a combination of one hundred eight number of cows for rain. On the month of April (6th Vaiśākha) a good number of devotees from Sālkochā and its neighbourhood visit this flourishing than for worshipping Śiva by offering milk and other items. It has become a regular practice now-a-days.

The Maṭha of Mahādeva:

On the southern part of North Śālmāra village in Dhubri district, the Mahādeva-maṭha is situated at the foot of the hillock popularly called Mahādeva, about 89 meter high. This Maṭha is also known as a Śiva temple. It was originally a cave-temple.
The images of different deities were curved mainly on stones. But in course of time, the stone images became partly damaged thereby making them indistinguishable. Rānī Abhayēśwari of the Bijnī Rāj donated the land for building a Nāṭamāṇḍapa. The worship is performed by a deuri belonging to the Rajbangshi community. On the occasion of the Śiva-rātri, a fair is also held by the local people.

The Pāglābābā than:

The Pāglābābā shrine is situated on the foot of the Chāndardingā hill, on the bank of a river. It is 4 Km from the National highway towards the sub-way to Salkocha. Śiva is worshipped here as Pāglābābā. On the occasion of Śiva caturdaśī a good number of devotees step in to worship the god with traditional rituals. The thān enshrines a huge stone representing Śiva or Pāglābābā.

The Śiva Temple of Dhubri:

It is locally known as “Śiva-Bārī which was established on 1907 A.D. But in the year 1928 the temple was destroyed by the earthquake. However, it was reconstructed temporarily with the stone pieces collected from the bank of the Brahmaputra near Dhubri town. The Śiva-liṅga is worshipped regularly here by a
Brāhmin priest. Recently, the temple has been rebuilt by the Managing Committee of Śiva-Bāri.

C. VAISHNAVISM

General Introduction:

Vaiśnavism is one of the oldest religious faiths of India. It is a cult based on bhakti or devotion, according to which God can be approached only through love and devotion. Vaiśnavism claim that it is the best way to attain the highest salvation.

On the other hand, the Rg-Vedic Viṣṇu is a solar God. It is believed that Viṣṇu-worship is nothing but solar worship transformed over the ages. Vaiśnavism, as its name implies, is the religion in which the Vedic-deity Viṣṇu is the chief object of worship. Generally, Viṣṇu is depicted as a four-armed deity with a crown holding conch, discuss, mace and lotus as the four emblems in His hand. The most important characteristic feature of Vaiśnavism is that it has adopted “Bhakti” as the path of śādhanā. The worship of Avatāras is another notable feature of Vaiśnavism.23 Viṣṇu in His various forms is not only worshipped in temples individually but He finds an important place even among the Śākta and Śaiva shrines. It is clear from both literary and archaeological sources that the cult was very popular during

10\textsuperscript{th} - 12\textsuperscript{th} cent. A.D. It may be assumed that the extreme popularity of the cult in 12\textsuperscript{th} cent. was probably caused by Jayadeva, the contemporary Vaiśnava propagator of Bengal who composed the *Gīṭa Govīndam*.

In Assam Vaiśnavism became prominent in the beginning of 13\textsuperscript{th} century A.D. In the Puṣhpahadrā grant of Dharmapāla the Boar incarnation (Varāha-avatāra) of Viśṇu is mentioned. It signifies that Dharmapāla embraced Vaiśnavism in the later days of his life. Viśṇu assumes incarnation from age to age. The most important avatāra of Vaiśṇu in the later stage is Rāma who is the 7\textsuperscript{th} avatāra of Viśṇu. Reference can be cited from the miniature figure of the deity attached to dvārāsākhā from Choudhury-para of Mornoi in Goālpārā district, which is at present exhibited in the Assam State Museum gallery. This four-armed Viśṇu figure is considered as a hybrid form, where āyūḍhas are not clear. It may be datable to c 10\textsuperscript{th} cen. A. D.\textsuperscript{24} Another Viśṇu in the āyūḍhapuruṣa form is collected from Khāramedhi-para, Dudhnoi, in Goalpara district. This is the only image discovered so far in Assam valley dated in the 6\textsuperscript{th}-7\textsuperscript{th} cent. A.D. Here āyūḍhas of lower hands are not clear. The Vaijayanti worn by the deity is clearly shown, but other details

\textsuperscript{24} Choudhury, R. D., *Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley*, p. 32
of the icon are missing. The vāhana of the deity is not shown. The reference to Kurma-avatāra (Tortoise incarnation) of Viṣṇu is also seen at Mornoi finds in Goalpara district (undivided). Avatāra forms of Viṣṇu, are mostly found either in panel-form or independently. Images of Kṛṣṇa found in Assam are quite a few. One icon of Kṛṣṇa in Veṇugopāla form was unearthed in the campus of the Ratnapitha College of Chapar in Dhubri district. It is also preserved in a temple in the same campus. From the stylistic point of this view this icon is datable to c 10th century A.D. The head ornamentation of the figure is remarkable. This figure is no doubt a rare specimen of Viṣṇu with full anatomical perfection.

The influence of Vaiṣṇavism also marked by the worship of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa form in some temples. Nārāyaṇa, both in iconographical and Śālagramśilā-form are found to be worshipped in some temples. Gopāla is another popular form of Kṛṣṇa both in Veṇugopāla and Nādugopāla aspects. Again, Viṣṇu is also worshipped in this locality as Gopīnātha, Puruṣottama, Madana-Mohana and in many other names.

Madana Mohana is a popular form of Kṛṣṇa same as Veṇugopāl, form who is also considered as kula-devatā of the royal families, like those of the Coochbehār Rāj, and the
Zemindars of Rupsi, Gauripur, Bilasipara, Salkocha (Neogi estate) in the Dhubri district.

It is very strange, indeed, that the Viṣṇu images found in the Brahmaputra valley are plenty in number, whereas the female deities affiliated to Vaiṣṇavism seems to be very few in number.

Being a border district of parts of North and West Bengal, Dhubri district has always been influenced by Bengal Vaiṣṇavism since the early period. Bengali-Kirttans and Aṣṭa-Prahara are used to be performed in most religious functions in Dhubri district which are based on Vaiṣṇavism propagated by the great apostle, Chaitanyadeva. The main theme of Chaitanyavada is the chanting of the holy name of Kṛṣṇa. He also recommended the joint worship of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Chaitanyadeva preached the doctrine of prema-bhakti, and his mantra, known as Tāraka-Brahma-mantra, is as follows:

\[
\text{Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare}
\]
\[
\text{Hare Rāma Hare Rāma Rāma Rāma Hare Hare}
\]

The Chaitanya Vaiṣṇavism greatly influenced the people of western region of Kāmarūpa to a great extent. The existence of numerous Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa temples in the locality obviously prove the popularity of this cult.

The Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa temple of Gauripur:
It is a living and flourishing temple which was established with the initiative of an ordinary employee of Gaurīpur Rāj. This religious minded person started to build the temple with his personal savings, but could not complete construction. The benevolent Zeminder of Gaurīpur, Rājā Prabhat Chandra Barua, came forward to help him in the completion of the temple. This temple is popularly known as Pañca-cūḍā Mandir. The icon of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa is made of marble stone; besides, a good number of *vigrahas* like Gopinatha and others belonging to some of the well-known families of Gauripur are also kept along with the Rādhā- Kṛṣṇa image for regular worship and proper maintenance. A big fair (melā) is held annually on the occasion of *Jhulan-Yātrā* surrounding the temple premises.

On the other hand, the history of Assam Vaiśṇavism is marked by the Neo-Vaiśṇavite movement initiated by Parama Guru Śaṅkaradeva and his disciples Mādhavadeva and Dāmodaradeva. This is marked the advent of a new age of renaissance in the socio-religious history of Assam. Satras and Nāmgharas are not only the two remarkable institutions of Assamese socio-religious life, but also considered as active guardian of religion and morality which keep watch over the disciples. The Nāmghara as a place of congregational worship
has spread even to the urban areas and it serves the purpose of a Church or a temple.

Neo-Vaiṣṇava Religion:

By the end of the 15th century, there started a great and vigorous renaissance movement in Assam in the form of Neo-Vaiṣṇava movement under the leadership of the Great apostle Śaṅkaradeva. During this period Kāmarūpa was undergoing a huge change as a result of which a cultural resurgence took place in the entire region. The main theme of Neo-Vaiṣṇavism is the belief in the repetition mentally through the speech and various names of Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa or Nārāyaṇa to attain Lord Kṛṣṇa. It is known as Eksarana Nāma Dharma (the religion of complete surrender to the Supreme One). Śaṅkaradeva was a great follower of the proverb mentioned in the Rg-Veda “ekāṁ sad vipṛāḥ bahudhā vadanti.” According to Him, Unity and integration are the main objective of Neo-Vaiṣṇava theory.

The Neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement in Assam also brought the tribal community still nearer. The Vaiṣṇava apostle took the leading part in this matter by admitting a person of Garo community, renamed Govinda, into the intimate circle of his disciples. Through the reforming zeal of several Vaiṣṇava
Satradhikāras a good number of tribal people accepted Hinduism and gradually became great followers of that faith.

The Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa cult is not included in this Neo-Vaiṣṇava concept.

As the Neo-Vaiṣṇava movement developed, two institutions, namely Satras and Nāmgharas started contributing the morality and proper way of life to the people of the local society. To quote Dr. S. N. Sarma, "As a result of Neo-Vaiṣṇavism movement which generated the religious and cultural regeneration in the valley produced a sense of literature, dance and music and painting which served as a media of a religious communication." Satra is considered as a religious centre consisting of school and library. Devotional lyrics, dramas and religious Kāvyas were composed and dramatic performances were held for the entertainment of the people. Biographies of Saints (Charita Puthis) and Satra chronicles (Satra Vaṁśāvalīs) were considered as the important historical documents to the Satra library.

In fact, the Satras developed a school of Classical dance and music in Assam which was religious in outline and motif. Another most notable social contribution of Satra institution

was the upliftment of the backward classes belonging to Assamese society. According to Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, the illiterate literacy system was first introduced in the Satra and Nāmgharās where the old and aged persons of the society could express their ideas with others. This system is still prevalent in the Satra and Nāmgharās of Assam.26

The *Bhāonā* a dramatic performance held in Nāmgharās belonging to Satriyā culture, was initially used as a medium of religious propagation, but later it became the vehicle of education in the Assamese society. It is a fact that satras and Nāmgharās are the twin monuments of Neo Vaiṣṇavite culture, which serve as flaming torches of religious thoughts and social usages.

It is observed that the idea of Neo-Vaiṣṇava faith not only influenced the people of the erstwhile undivided Goalpara district, but also a section of the people belonging to the neighbouring North Bengal. Neo-Vaiṣṇavism had flourished and became popular in this region under the great patronage of the Koch king Nara- Nārāyaṇa, his illustrious brother general Chilārāi and their descendants. In fact, Coochbehar was the chief centre of socio-cultural activities of the Vaiṣṇava apostles of Assam, namely Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva, Dāmodaradeva

and other prominent Gurus.

It is a fact that as a result of Neo-Vaiṣṇava movement the awareness which was generated among the people of Assam in the field of literature and fine arts, serves as a vehicle of socio-religious upliftment in the society.

The cultural history of Assam in respect of fine arts and craft, education and learning since the 16th century onwards largely developed centering round the Vaiṣṇava movement through the Satra institution. The Nāmghar another religious institution also played an important role in the socio-cultural life of the Assamese people for the last 400 years. Along with the spread of Neo-Vaiṣṇavism in the 16th century a large number of Nāmghars sprang up throughout the country.

The influence of Neo-Vaiṣṇavite religion is also marked by the existence of several Satras and Nāmgharas established in Goalpara region under the guidance of different Vaiṣṇavite Gurus.

Of these only a few establishments are in existence at present. The only institution (Satra), known as Rāmraikuṭhī, situated at Chhatraśāl on the junction of the Indo-Bangladesh border, is still maintaining the glorious religious history of this region.

The structural pattern of the Satra is marked by the existence
of a Nāmghar, a Maṇikūṭa, Karāpāt and two or four rows of residential quarters for sevaits (hāṭis). The centre of all religious activities of a Satra is the Nāmghar which serves simply as a prayer hall. The actual shrine where the sacred scripture, the Bhāgavata is kept is called Maṇikūṭa. In fact, the prayer hall and the shrines are modelled on the structural pattern of a Hindu temple which consists of Garbhagṛha containing the idol and maṇḍapa hall. On the four sides of the Satra campus stands four rows of huts, called hāṭi, where the bhakat of various categories resides. The entrance leading to the interior of a Satra is usually marked by a small open house, called as Karāpāt. Generally distinguished guests are first received at the karāpāt and then escorted to the main Nāmghar. There are some typical features of the Satras belonging to undivided Goalpara region. Satras under eastern part of Goalpara district are almost similar to the Barpeta Satra. But in case of western part, specially in case of Chhatrasāl and Jinkātā Satra, the location of the Garbhagṛha is remarkable. In fact, the Coochbehār Sara was taken as the model in forming the Satras of western part of the district. According to the Satra chronicles, a good number of Satras once flourished in the erstwhile Goalpara district. But at present only a few
among them are in existence.

The Important Satras of Dhubri District are as follows:

1. Rāmrāikuṭhī Satra:

The Rāmrāikuṭhī Satra is situated at Chhatrasāl under Golakganj sub-Division of Dhubri district just on the Indo-Bangladesh border. This holy place is recognised as a witness of historical marriage of Chilarāi the brother and General of Koch king Naranārāyaṇa, with Bhuvaneswari, the daughter of Rāmarāi, a cousin-brother of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva. It is learnt that the original Satra was housed in a thatched hut, which was improved subsequently with C.I. Sheet roofing, and remained so far a long time. Hari Ātoi was the first Satrādhikāra of the Rāmrāikuṭhī Satra.

The present Satra consists of a Bātcō'ra, the entrance (karaṇāb), a Nāṭamaṇḍapa, where the cultural programmes are performed, the Do'ī-maṇḍapa and the Kīrttanghar, Rathaghar, where the historical brass-made chariot with intricate designs is kept. The area of the Kīrttanghar is 180' x 90' sq.ft. The Bhakti-Ratnāvali-puthi composed by Mādhavadeva is placed on the thāpanā. One čaturbhuj-vigraha, 4 ft. high, made of wooden material is also worshipped there. It is known as a Bāmuṇiyā Satra. On the wall of the Satra, wooden sculptural panels are depicted with
some mythological stories. These are really an unique variety of sculptural motif of the contemporary period.

The present *Do’l-maṇḍapa* of the Rāmarāikuṭhi Satra is said to have been used as the pandel (*rābhā*) where the marriage of Koch general Chilarai and Bhubaneswarī was held at Chhatrasāl.

Being located at the remote Indo Bangladesh border, the Satra attracts devotees from all religious sects. This Satra is a unique institution of social harmony and national integration. On the day of the *rathayāṭra*, all sections of people, irrespective of caste and creed, draw the historical chariot which had been preserved at the Satra Campus in the *rathaghara*.

The *tithi* of Hari Ātoi is the most distinguished function celebrated in the Satra campus. Every year in the month of Čaitra (*suklā-dyiti*) the death anniversary function is observed with great gathering of the devotees. The death anniversary of Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva, Burhā Ātā, Viṣṇu Ātā etc. are also observed by the Satra authority accordingly with pomp and grandeur.

2. Shyāmrāī Satra :

This Satra was established by Raghūdev Nārāyaṇ and his son Pariskshit Nārāyaṇa. It was located at Čarāikholā, 12 k.m.
away from Golakganj in Dhubri district. But this Satra is not in existence now.

3. Veduā Satra:

The name of Vedua Satra is mentioned in the Gurulilā of Rāmrāi. It is supposed to have been established by Dāmodardeva. There is a controversy regarding the location of this Satra. According to Pandit Rāmanath Vidyālāṅkār, the Satra was located near Barundāṅgā (the erstwhile capital of Chapar Zemindari.) But another local Sanskrit scholar Late Rajani Śāstrī opines that it was located at Matherjhār “which was once famous for temples (matha), of the saint and religious preachers. A number of silver coins issued by Raghudev Nārāyaṇa son of Chilarāi were unearthed from the same campus at the time of clearing jungles by the local authority during 1950.

4. Vijaypur Satra:

There is a local belief that Harikṛṣṇa Ātoi, the deciple of Mādhavadev, has established the Vijaypur Satra at Rūpsī near Gāruipur in Dhubri district. According to the Kathā-Gurucarita,28


27. Vidyālāṅkāra, R. N., A great Sanskrit Scholar and teacher of Tarini-priyā Catuspāṭhī (Tol) of Gauripur. He has left behind a manuscript on Koch-Hajo kingdom.
one of the favourite disciples of Madhabdeva, Harihar Ätā lived at Vijaypur Satra. At present the Satra is not in existence.

5. Phulaguri Satra:

On the bank of a river, 10 miles away from Hákámá near Bilásípára sub-division in Dhubri district, the Satra was established by Manohar Kāyastha, a disciple of Guru Dāmodardeva.

D. Minor Hindu Temples and Shrines of Dhubri District:

Besides the temples and shrines belonging to major Brāhmanical faiths, some temples belonging to minor gods and goddess also play important role in the socio-religious life of the people of the society.

Ganēśa Temples and Shrines:

Ganēśa the Lord of the gaṇas is one of the important member of paṇcha-devatā, who is also regarded as the guardian deity. Gaṇeśa is the remover of obstacles. Probably for this reason his figure stands over the house door or niches and entrance of the temple. Those who worship Gaṇeśa as their principal deity are known as Gaṇapatyā.

In Dhubri district the individual temple of Gaṇeśa is not found anywhere in the locality; but one very flourishing temple dedicated to Gaṇeśa is situated at Lalmati, five kilometers west
of Abhayapur, the erstwhile capital of the Bijnī estate, in the present Bongaigaon district. This is the only temple belonging to the medieval period. Originally, the temple was made of C.I. sheet roofing. But later on a new brick-R.C.C. structure was constructed. The temple contain stone images of Gañēśa, Śiva and Viṣṇu.

A number of stray icons of Gañēśa are found by chance. One icon of Gañēśa (Brass) in mahārājalīlā-poser is preserved in the gallery of District Museum at Dhubri. It was found at a site in Rupsi area of Dhubri district, which was once the capital of the eastern Koch kingdom. A sketch of the figure of Gañēśa is also found in situ along with the two Jain Tīrthāṅkara figures traceable in the Śrī-Sūryapāhār in Goalpara district.

Another deity, Manasā, locally worshipped as Māre or Mārāi, occupies a place of prominence in the socio-religious life of the rural people of the locality. She is not only installed in a shrine, but she has always an important place in the community shrine. Even she is a household deity, who is kept in the altar of the family shrine with the other deities. It is not only the snake-goddess, but the deity of the remover of poison (viṣahari). The worship of Manasā appears to have prevailed in Assam from time immeorial. Nārāyaṇadeva, Mankar and Durgāvar, noted
poets of the 16th-17th cen. composed quite a good number of songs in praise of the Goddess Mansā.

It is generally held that Mansā pūjā was introduced in Assam from North Bengal, via Goalpara region. It is a fact that Mansā pūjā is popular only in Goalpara, Kamrup and Darrang region. In Goalpara region Mansā Pūjā is an integral part of a Rājbaṅgšī family. But besides the Rājbaṅgšī community the Goddess Mansā is worshipped in the temples by other communities of the locality as well. The popularity of the Mansā Goddess is a remarkable phenomenon in the socio-religious life of the people of Dhubri district. Mansā Pūjā is performed with great grandour in the temple where a good number of devotees offer their pūjā with traditional rituals.

At Śrī-Sūryapāhār, one deity was noticed with seven hooded snake above the head. P. D. Choudhury in an, article “Ancient Sites in Assam,” identified the deity as Mansā.29 Another terracotta figure of Mansā unearthed at Bhāitābārī site of Goalpara region is now preserved in A.S.M. The lower part of the deity is broken. But the snake-hood of the deity is found to be clear.

The worship of God Kārtikeya is performed almost exclusively by the womenfolk of this locality. Kārtikeya is popularly known by the local people mainly belonging to Rājbaṅśi community as Kāti or Kātkāi.

According to popular Hindu mythology, he is the son of Śiva and Chaṇḍi; he is shown as mounted on a peacock, but sometimes on an elephant also. The deity is seemed to hold a bow and arrows in both his hands like a warrior. Kārtikeya is worshipped by couples desiring offspring. Kāti Pūjā is absolutely confined to the women section of fisherman community. The last date of the month of Kārtika is regarded as the most auspicious day for Kāti Pūjā. Generally, the image of Kārtikeya is made of pith-craft, locally known as Šolā which is available in the murshy land of the locality. Though Kārtikeya is regarded as a minor God in Hindu pantheon, it plays a vital role in the socio-religious life of the people of the locality.

A very fine terracotta image of Kārtikeya is found at Bhāitbarī near Phulbārī in Garo hill area is now preserved at A.S.M. which is badly mutilated. Here the deity is seen in arddhaparyāṅkaṣaṇa posture. Below the deity is shown clearly as seated on a peacock.

Sūrya was popular in Assam since a long time back. It is
evident from the temples of Navagraha at Guwahati and Śrī-
Śūryapāhār at Goalpara region. Like other cults, the worship of
Śūrya (sun-god) is prevalent in undivided Goalpara region.
One image in Samapāda-sthānaka pose seated on a ratha is now
preserved in the Nāmghar at Mornoi in the neighbourhood of
Śrī-Śūryapāhār. The deity wears the usual alamkāras and vastras.
Piṅgala and Daṇḍa are seen along with the deity. From the
stylistic point of view the image is datable to 11th-12th cent.
A.D.

Another Śūrya figure was unearthed in the roadside of
Hākāmā, in Bilāsīparā sub-division of Dhubri district, which is
datable to 8th-9th cent. A.D. and presently preserved in the
A.S.M. Besides this image of Śūrya, a rockcut panel of Adityas
is seen at the foot of Śrī-Śūryapāhār. On a round or circular
stone measuring 138 cm. in circumference, the panel of the
twelve Ādityas is carved. It is known as the Ādityaṇākra or
Dvādaśa-Āditya stone. It is dated in c 10th cen. A.D.\textsuperscript{30}

In Dhubri region many people directly worship Dharma as
the representation of the sun god. Worship of Dharma is noth-
ing but the Sun-worship by which one can be cured from eye disease.

According to some scholars, who hold the view that Chadak
\textsuperscript{30} Choudhury, R. D., Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley, p. 58
Pūjā, which is generally associated with Kāli, originally linked with Dharma cult. The revolving swing of Chaḍak Pūjā represents the Sun's movement in the sky. Chaḍak Pūjā is performed in many places in this region. Chaḍak Pūjā is held at Gauripur with traditional rituals. Thus, it may be a vital point to establish the view that Dharmapūjā is another form of Saura cult in this region.