INTRODUCTION

The province of Assam and its people are very insufficiently known abroad. Yet by its earlier name of Kamarupa, it is better known to Hindu India as a land of magic and witchcraft with its famous Tantric shrine of Kamakhya with which it is frequently associated together (Kamarupa- Kamakhya).  

The province was differently called in different historical period. Its most ancient name was Prag-jyotisa-pura. By this name it is referred to in the two great epics- Ramayana and the Mahabharata and the principal Puranas. ‘In classical Sanskrit literature both Prag-jyotisa and Kamarupa occurs as alternative names of the country. Kalidasa refers to it by both the designation’.  

‘The modern designation Assam was connected with the Shan invaders of the Brahmaputra valley. Since 1228 the easternmost portion of the Brahmaputra valley came under the domination of a section of great Thai (Tai) or Shan race which spread eastwards from the border of Assam over nearly the whole of further India and far into the interior of China. It seems curious that while the Shan invaders called themselves Tai, they came to as Asam, and Acam in contemporary Assamese literature. In modern Assamese they are referred to as Ahom, which is a modern phonetic development of earlier Asam’.  

These are the geographical background of the Kamarupa viz the land of Kamakhya on which the present work has been undertaken. The work will be primarily being a study on the quest of rulers for legitimation through religious institutions. In earlier periods rulers derived religious legitimacy of their authority through the performance
of grand royal sacrifices, the early middle ages witnessed a decisive shift towards royal patronage of local or regional cults. This development was deeply influenced by the various cults (Saiva, Sakti and Vaisnava) as the new genuine folk religion. Politically perhaps even more important, however, were the strong local and regional root of these cults. The spatial connotation of the cults, radiating from their sacred place, vested the newly emerging local and regional states with an additional dimension of territory. Of particular interest in this regard are the changing modes of legitimation at different stages of state formation, ranging from princely patronage of tribal deities by emerging early kings to the construction of imperial temples by rulers of the great early medieval “imperial” regional kingdoms. During the late Middle Ages royal ritual policy shifted its emphasis to royal patronage of places of pilgrimage and their cults and sectarian leaders.

The society is mixed in nature. In the Hindu social hierarchical setup of the kingdom the king’s position was at the top. Next to him were learned Brahmans, big landlords and high officials. Barring them a great majority of common people known as Khatriya, Baishya and Sudra formed a large part of the society. Moreover, the kings onwards learned Brahmans from different places giving them rent free land in order to settle in the kingdom. These upper class people were intellectually more advanced and gradually occupied the dominant position in the Semi-Hinduized agricultural Assamese society. This resulted in lowering the social status of the people of the soil and consequent social tension. Sankardeva with a view to upgrading the status launched a socio-religious movement in the kingdom.

In the kingdom the Mahammedans were in largest number next to Hindus. At about the beginning to the thirteenth century A.D. the preaching of Islam had began in the western Kamarupa. Thereafter many saints came in to the kingdom and subsequently
many Dargas in honour of the saints were established. It is interesting to notice here that the Hindu kings neither oppressed the Mahammedans nor prohibited the preaching of their religion in the kingdom rather they encouraged the Mahammedan settlement in the kingdom by granting them land grants. It seems likely that as a result of the contributions of the Mahammedan in the field of agriculture and in other crafts they were recognized as an important section of the society.

It is believed that religion which acts as a source of balance and stability provides the vital force for making up the foundation of a society. “Religious life types at any particular period of history point to the socio-economic realities of the time as well as its uncertainty, development or prosperity. To see however, of the meaningfulness of religious life one has to study and explore the faith symbols at its core as well as the realities they try to concretize.  

Religion, which can also be defined as a system of beliefs and practices by which people struggle with the ultimate problems of human life manifest itself in the form of cults, deities, shrines or in the form of object. It also get identified with some organized establishment, church or institution with beliefs and essential practices, code of conduct and rituals prescribed for their adherents as well as with deep seated vested worldly interests. At this level religion presents a highly complicated and sensitive problems.

Using the term ‘The land of Kamakhya’ we mean the district before 1983 which was then comprised of three present districts viz Kamrup, Nalbari and Barpeta. The total area of which is 9863 sq. Kms. and a population of 28, 56,691. It was then bounded by Bhutan on the north, districts of Darang and Nagaon on the east, district of Goalpara on the west and the state of Meghalaya on the south. The mighty
Brahmaputra River divides it into two halves viz South Kamrup and North Kamrup. The present district of Kamrup created in 1983, is bounded by Bhutan on the north, district of Nagaon on the east, Goalpara and Nalbari on the west and the state of Meghalaya on the south. It has an area of 4695.7 sq kms. and a population of 20,0007.

The term ‘King’ using by us is a male sovereign, especially the hereditary ruler of an independent state, a person pre-eminent in a specified field or class. Thus the term used in our study means a monarch who fundamentally independent and self-governing on an autonomous economic unite, which indicates in the land of Kamakhya.

According to Oxford Dictionary, Cult means a system of religious worship especially as expressed in ritual, a devotion to a person or thing (the cult of aestheticisms). A popular fashion, a tribute or devoting a person or thing popularized in this way.

The Random House Dictionary of English language has stated that “Cult is a particular system of religious worship especially with reference to it rites and ceremonies, instance of great veneration of a person, ideal or thing especially as manifested by a body of admirers; the object of such devotion. A group or sect bounded together by devotion to or veneration of the same thing, person, ideal etc. a group having a sacred ideology and a set of rites centering or held to be false or unorthodox or its number.”

As stated by Encyclopedia Britannica, “Cult is a collective veneration or worship. In the west, the term has come to be used for groups that are perceived to have deviated from normative religions in belief and practice. They have a charismatic leader and attract followers who are in same way disenfranchised from the mainstream of society. Cults as thus defined are often
viewed as foreign or dangerous.”\textsuperscript{12} This study is mainly concentrates on the Hindu Cults in the land of Kamakhya.

Again it is religious establishment where direct worship of God or Goddess takes place. “The worship in the religious establishment is conceived as an evocation, reception and entertainment of Gods and Goddesses as a royal guest, reflecting the association of royalty with the divine”.\textsuperscript{13} In the temple worship the services of priests who uphold the concepts of Divine Right of kingship was thus essential.

It is thus no wonder that the kings of Kamarupa who particularly believed in the Divine Right of kingship would encourage religion and religious establishments.

The land of Kamakhya was a land inhabited by the Kiratas i.e., by Non-Aryan people. When Naraka founded a kingdom in early Assam, he established himself as the custodian of this Yoni Goddess and in conformity to her name he changed the name of kingdom from Prag-jyotisa to Kamarupa\textsuperscript{14}. Later on, under the kings of the three successive dynasties viz the Varman, the Salastambha and the Pala, all of whom traced their descent from Naraka, Kamarupa became an extensive kingdom covering the entire Brahmaputra Valley and considerable parts of present day West Bengal, Bihar, Bhutan and Bangladesh. In this period, the kingdom seems to have initiated a political development on a local and sub regional level. This development gained new and even stronger impulses through the example of “classical” north Indian Hindu Empire of the Guptas and the Palas. Although influenced from outside, the political development in Kamarupa during the early centuries A.D., it is characterized by a territorial segmentation. The limit of kingdom varied according to the power of the ruling dynasties. But some names as well as a simultaneous development of some “nuclear areas”\textsuperscript{15} belonging to a community surrounding a temple took place.
The political instability helped to bring about a chaotic condition in the religious sphere. The cementing force that binds together the heterogeneous elements in a society is no doubt, the uniformity of religion and language. A strong and unified political power with a clear religious policy can however, help towards achieving that uniformity. Majority of people belonged to non-Aryan tribes having distinct manners, customs and religious beliefs. Those who professed Hinduism loosely adhered to Vaisnavism or Saivism, Saktism or Tantrism.

Among these cults Siva was prevalent in Assam from ancient times. The Saiva temples at Hajo (Kedaresvara and Kamalesvara), Bisvanath, Sinari (Gopesvara), Negheriting and Dubi (Pariharesvara) etc. are famous from ancient times. Moreover, attached to every Devi temple we invariable find a temple dedicated to Siva in the form of Bhairava.

Besides Saivism, Saktism is also a dominant cult of ancient Assam. The Kalika Purana and Yogini Tantra, the two Sanskrit works composed in Assam, have mainly dealt with the Sakti cult. Sakti in her various forms was worshipped in different temples dedicated to her. But the radiating centre of Saktism had been the shrines dedicated to Kamakhya and Dikkaravasini. The former is situated in western Assam and the later in the North-eastern region. Kamakhya Sakti, in her different forms like Ugratara, Mangalcandi, Siddheswari, Bhairavi, Camunda, Bhurhi Gosani, Dirgheswari etc. have been worshipping in different places. But the Kamakhya temple of Nilachal Hill is most popular not only in Assam but also abroad.

Another important cult of Hinduism that prevailed on the eve of Neo-Vaisnavite movement was Pancaratara Vaisnavism. But this form of Vaisnavism is quite different from the one introduced by Sankaradeva and his followers. The worship of
Visnu in the form of Vasudeva seems to have been prevalent from early times. While the cult of Vasudeva mainly flourished in the temples, the Vaisnavism of the epics appeared to have influenced a certain section of the mass.

Hence, in the land of Kamakhya viz Prajyotisa-Kamarupa (modern Assam and the neighboring states, East and North Bengal including Koch Behar) has been regarded as one of the finest examples of synthesis between Tribal and Brahmanical cultures, reflected in the crystallization of the various cults. It is the finest example of temple-state relationship. But in absence of a centralized bureaucracy, and uniformity of religion the royal authority, tried with their traditional patrimonial power to counterbalance these dangerous local forces by legitimating power through ritual means of the cults. This aim was achieved mainly through three measures:

1) Royal patronage of important places of pilgrimage within their respective kingdoms.

2) A systematic and large-scale settlement of Brahmins.

3) The construction of new “imperial temples” within the core region of the kingdoms.

During the Ahom rule, the temples in the land of Kamakhya were treated as Government institutions and the officers of the state took direct part in the management of the temple establishments. The British occupied Assam on February 24, 1826, by the Treaty of Yandaboo. This led to far-reaching changes in relationships of status, rights and access to land and structures of authority in the region. The penetration of local institutions, in the land of Kamakhya, by colonial apparatuses of control led to the creation of a separate discourse of power that re-contextualized the
prevailing ritual and political structures. Prior to the advent of the British, the long-established link between the Cults and kingship of Prajyotisa-Kamarupa, was an important factor underlying political and cultural institutions and relationships? This link played a major role in the reformation of this institution in colonial environment. So, a study of the interaction between Temple and State presumes the compartmentalization of the cultural matrix of the region.

Indeed, the terms temple, state, and society imply the existence of exclusive domains, which may interact but not entangle. Our study, too, is a victim of the limitations of terminology and the enforced selectivity of available sources. It is necessary, therefore, to be vigilant about the complex interrelationships surrounding symbols and institutions. Forms of cultural expression, relationships of status, privileges and obligations, links of reciprocity and dominance, are not superficial reflection of the core of institutions, they are institutions in themselves. It has been said in the Kalika Purana that immediately after Naraka of Mithila became king and was placed in charge of the goddess Kamakhya, the name of the land was changed from Prag-Jyotisa to Kamarupa. The term Kamarupa- Kamakhya symbolized a new cult, and in explanation of it, the land itself was rechristened. It has also been said in the same Purana that the land Prag- jyotisa was formerly reserved by Sambhu for his own domain; thus suggesting that before the introduction of the noble cult of Kamakhya, with association of magic and incantation, the religion of the land was Saivism.

Thus Prag-jyotisa has nothing to do with the worship of any god or goddess or the planets. It is a toponymical term distinct in connotation from Kamarupa which has a religious association.
The temples as a centre of economic redistribution as well as the legitimation and consolidation of the rule of the Hinduized kings of the land of Kamakhya need a thorough investigation.

Though some scholars focused some of the problems of the region, very little work has been done so far on the religions. Among the earlier works mention may be made of Edward Albert Gait, A History of Assam.

We may also take notice of some indigenous literary works like *Kalika Purana, Buranjis* like *Ahom Buranji, Kamrupar Buranji, Purani Asom Buranji* etc.

The account left by the Muslim chronicles and other travelers such as *Tabaqut-I-Nasiri, Ain-I-Akbari, Akbarnama* etc. and accounts left by European travelers, Stephen Casella, Ralph Fitch, Vandan Broucke may also be mentioned.

The reports of A.J.Maffat Mill and many other articles relating to our subjects are also preserved in National and State Archives in India.

In addition to these the literature, land Grants, inscriptions and numismatic evidences supply us very valuable information about religions, Social and Economic condition of the people.

Keeping in mind the trend of researches and studies, the proposed study is a humble attempt of the evolving discourse of power and dominance in the land of Kamakhya in the light of the construction of temples for various Cults, its management and relation with the state in pre-colonial and colonial periods. It intends to examine the manner in which this order was subverted through colonial penetration, and how these subversions took the form of a separate discourse of power based on the source
materials available so far. With these sources the present work is proposed to study the different aspects of the Religion, Power and State in the land of Kamakhya.

To carry out the proposed research work it is preferred to adopt historical research methodology based on the source materials available so far viz. ancient scriptures, earlier inscriptions, literatures, account of foreign travelers and historians, myths, legends, folklore and temple correspondence etc.

The whole study has been organized into six chapters excluding introduction.

**Chapter I-** Temple and royal authority in the land of Kamakhya: Power and legitimacy, through which we are intended to discuss the main royal temple policy like- Royal patronage of important places of pilgrimage within their respective kingdoms, A systematic and large-scale settlement of the Brahmins, The construction of new imperial temples within the kingdom. By which we may have found a clear idea about the legitimation of royal authority in the land of Kamakhya.

**Chapter II-** State and religious establishment of Kamarupa in pre-colonial period- In this chapter we are going to discuss the pre-colonial religious policy of the state authority. During the Ahom rule, the Cults and its temples in the land of Kamakhya were treated as government institutions and officers of the state took direct part in the management of the temple establishment. All this we are intended to discuss systematically.

**Chapter III-** Temple and the state in the land of Kamakhya during colonial period- The British occupation of Assam, a new chapter began in the history of management of the Cults and temples, all forms of supervision, control over the them and their endowments by the executive officers of the state were withdrawn. In this chapter we
are intended to discuss the chief changes of the temple establishment during the British period.

**Chapter IV-** Significance of Kamakhya temple in the Socio-Religious life of Kamrupa through the ages- Through this chapter we are intended to highlight that the antiquity of Kamakhya and the temple establishment at Nilachal Hill at Guwahati. Though it is a religious institution but it is a part and parcel of the Socio-Religious life not only in the land of Kamakhya but beyond, irrespective of cast and religion. The same importance is continued from the mythological period till today. In our discussion though the study is mainly concentrated with Kamakhya but in course of completion of the study some other deities and their temples will automatically come into the picture.

**Chapter V-** Temple management system and administration in the land of Kamakhya- In this chapter we are intended to make a comprehensive study the properties of the temples granted by the kings and their management in a systematic way.

**Chapter VI-** Conclusion- This chapter will be an overview of my research work connected with the previous chapters.

Lastly a few maps, diagrams and illustrations of temples state authority also have been appended for proper understanding of the problems connected with the subject under discussion.
Notes and References:


2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.


8. Ibid.


16. Ibid.

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