CHAPTER - V

MAJOR SĀKTA CENTERS
IN THE DISTRICT OF NALBARI
CONNECTED WITH VARIOUS MYTHS, LEGENDS,
WORSHIPS, FESTIVALS AND PUBLIC CEREMONIES

Before going to discuss about the tradition of Śākti worship in the district of Nalbari we are to discuss what Śākti is. The Tantras emphatically proclaim the motherhood of God. The supreme Being or the Brahma of the Upanisadas has no particular form and sex. That is why his form which one loves and reveres most, that is Brahma's sex which appals to one most. The Tantras, as opposed to some religious scriptures have preferred to represent Eternal Brahma or the Supreme Being as the Eternal mother of the universe. Hence it may be said that the concept of the Motherhood of God is rightly being stressed in the Tantras.

Generally names like Kāli, Kālikā, Candī, Chandikā, Devī, Durgā etc. are found used as synonyms of Eternal Mother - Śākti. Besides the Tantras other Śākta Sāstras and Śākta-Purāṇas have given these synonyms of Śākti.

Generally female deities are regarded as the image of Śākti. Śākti is the source of all the creations. Says Govinda Gopal Mukherji, "Śākti means energy and it is energy which is the productive principle. Energy moves, changes, transforms, products and also sustains; ultimately, all the created things lapse again into the original energy. The evolution of the world is thus an unfoldment of the creative energy, variously termed as prakriti, Sakti or Maya in Indian philosophy. No creation is possible without Sakti."¹ We find a material basis of the ideological

emphasis on prakriti (prakriti pradhanya) of the Lokayata trend in Indian philosophy. "In tantra, as in Sankhya, the female principle or prakriti is viewed as the fundamental reality, the cause of the universe."²

The tradition of Sakti worship has gained equal popularity with the other cults since the fairly ancient past in Pragjyotish-Kamarūpa. The Goddess Kāmākhyā has her temple on the Nilachala hill, and it is one of the All Indian Pilgrimage Centres. With the passage of time the yonī Goddess got associated with Śiva's wife Parvati. According to the Yogini-tantra, there are a number of manifestations of the mother Durgā-Umā, Kāli, Karala, Cāmundi and others are the same virgin mother looked at from different angles. From her epithets Ugratara, Ekajata, she seems to have been of Buddhist origin.³ The Kamarupa kings from Indrapala to Dharamapala were followers of the Tantrik tenet and about that period Kamakhya had become an important seat of Tantrik Buddhism.⁴

According to the Kālikā-Purāṇa and the Yogini-tantra the mother Goddess is worshipped in every household in Kāmarūpa, but she is rare in other places of India.⁵ Hence it may rightly be assumed that Kāmarūpa was regarded as the main centre of Sakti for the long past.

The Sakti cult has assumed a special importance in the folk-life of the district of Nalbari. Though this Sakti worship is primarily observed in the temples, it is also celebrated in various thāns and homes of the village folk.

The mother Goddess is worshipped in this area in the forms of Kumāri, Śitalā, Annapurnā, Subacini, Manasā, Dākini, Yogini and Burhigosāni etc. There are a few temples of the Mother Goddess

5. deviksetrani Kamarupani bidyatehanyunna tatsamani
   anyatratra biralā devi Kamarupē grhe grhe. Kālikā-Purāṇa, 58/41.
   Kāmarūpani deviksetrani kutrapī tatsamānī no ca
   anyatratra biralā devi Kāmarūpe grhe grhe. Yogini-Tantra, 2/6/152.
found in the district of Nalbari. The names of such temples are given below as specimens.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adābārī</td>
<td>Bāghesvārī or Deobāharguri devālaya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bālilechā</td>
<td>Bālilechā mandira</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hāribhangā</td>
<td>Kāmākhyā mandira</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adāttārī</td>
<td>Adāttārī mandira</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barkurihā</td>
<td>Kāli mandira</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Govrādal</td>
<td>Govrādal Kāli mandira</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A brief discussion of the major Śākta centres of the district is given below :-

5.1 BĀGHEŚVĀRĪ TEMPLE:

Deobāharguri temple or Bāghesvārī temple is an old temple situated in the village Adābārī in the East Barkhetri mauza of Barkhetri revenue circle of the district of Nalbari. The village Adabari is 16 Kms. away from Nalbari town in its North. It is behind the P.W.D. road between Guwahati and Barpeta. Bāghesvārī temple is located in the south of the market square of Adabari and on the western bank of the river Pagladiah.

According to the legend the site of Bāghesvārī temple was filled with small bushy shrubs such as birinā, kahuā etc. The cowherds used to grore their cows there. There was a small heath and a cow used to pour milk in the afternoon on that heath. When the owner of the cow came to know this, he fastened the cow with a long piece of rope, but he was commanded by the Goddess in his dream in the night not to fasten the cow with a rope. Hence the cow continued
to give milk on the heath. Once the cowherds were catching the crickets (small insects) and were sacrificing them with the help of the leaves of birinā at that place. The boy who could not catch a cricket was punished. Accordingly that boy was being sacrificed.

One day a boy could not catch the cricket when his term came. The cowherds brought him before the leader. According to the command of the leader he was taken to the alter and his head was kept above a cross made of bamboo sticks and then a sacrifice was made with birinā leave. But surprising his head was severed off his body and it became a real sacrifice.

The Goddess appeared to the father of the boy sacrificed in his dream in the night and asked him not to grieve over the death of his son. The Goddess also asked him to dig out an idol of Goddess Durga from under the heath and make arrangements for its worship in a temple. The next day the villagers dug out an idol of Goddess Durga of stone from under the alter. This was an idol of the eight handed Goddess Durga who was seating on a lion. It can be presumed that the people thought the lion to be a tiger and hence called the Goddess Bāghesvarī. Hence the temple became known as Bāghesvarī temple.

Tradition has it that two bunches of bamboo grew on the spot where the two sticks of bamboo were dug to make a cross on which the boy was sacrificed. As the bamboo sticks were dug upside down, the bamboos grew like that with their branches upside down. Hence these bamboos became known as deolagā bamboo and the temple situated there is known as Deobāharguri temple.6

The old Bāghesvarī temple was swept away by the flood of Pagladiah river in 1920 and the new temple was built on this site. When the old temple was swept away the priest was ordered by the

6. Informant: Sri Nilkanta Kalita (male, 55), Loharkatha, data collected on 22.2.98.
Goddess in his dream to transfer the site of the temple. Hence the people of the villages like Adabari, Sutarkuchi, Loharkatha, Goldighla, Kuriha and Dagapara etc. built the new temple in one day under the supervision of the priest. The idol of Devī Bāghēśvari was taken into a big boat by twelve priests and other devotees with the accompaniment of musical instruments in the rainy season and it was set up in the new temple with all pomp and ceremony. Since then the regular worship is being conducted in the temple. Realising the power of Devī, the Ahom kings donated land to the temple and employed priest, doloi, thākurī, āthparīā, bharāli and sārā etc. for the management of the temple and empowered them to enjoy the produce of the land of the temple. During his reign king Kamalesvar Simha donated much land to the temple, donated a copper plate with inscriptions and appointed priests in the temple. But all these things were lost when the temple was transferred to the new site.

The temple Bāghēśvari had 178 bighās 3 kathās and 4 lechās of land and 3 pikes prior to the reign of Kamalesvar Simha. Further more the temple received donation of land during the reign of king Shiva Simha.

The Assam Government took back the land of the temple in 1970 by the Assam Act No. IX of 1960. The Government paid Rs. 2400.00 as compensation and Rs. 3000.00 as financial grant to the temple. These amounts were used to run the regular worship in the temple and to pay the priest and the āthparīā.

It is known that the temple received Rs. 7000.00 in 1971 from the Government as compensation because its land was used by the Government for building a dam in Pagladiah river.

The power and influence of Bāghēśvari Devī is vast. The

---

8. Informant: Mahim Ali (male, 69), Adabari, data collected on 23.2.98.
boatmen passing in front of the temple through the Pagladia river make offerings to the Devi irrespective of religion and caste. If somebody disrespects the Devi or refuses to accept the prasād of Devi, he is cursed by the Goddess. If Goddess is offered sacrifices the desire of the devotees may be fulfilled.

Besides the Hindus, the Muslims also had great devotion to the Goddess. At that time the Muslims also followed the rituals of the Hindus. Even the Muslims used to sweep the temple and enjoyed the produce of its land. The devotees tell various stories associated with the powers of the Goddess.

In the Baghesvarī temple Durgāpūjā have been observed since a long time. There are regular worship and sacrifice. Pilgrims from far off places come to the temple to pay their homage to Goddess Durgā for the fulfilment of their desires. Hence the festive atmosphere remains in the temple during the day time. The pilgrims also worship in the Śiva temple near the main temple. They believe that Śiva and Durgā are inseparable and hence they worship Lord Śiva.

The Durgāpūjā has been celebrated in this temple since 1857. Due to economic hardships the villagers cannot afford to celebrate the worship with much pomp and splendour, hence the worship is celebrated in a very simple manner. Actually the villagers celebrated the worship with much pomp and ceremony with the idol of Goddess in clay from 1964 upto 1976. Later on the worship is celebrated in a very humble manner. In 1987 a new pūjā committee was formed named ‘Pub-Barkhetri Durgotsav Committee’ and the worship was again celebrated on a grand scale. The worship is still being celebrated by the same committee.

9. A Muslim named Birahu Ojā of Loharkatha village used to sing Ojāpad in Durgāpūjā and Bhatheli in the temple. His sons Anat Ali Saikia and Sandmal Ali Saikia also paid huge donations to the temple every year.
10. Informant: Mahim Ali, (male, 69), Adabari, data collected on 23.2.98.
The Śivaratri worship is also celebrated in the Śiva temple of Bāgheśvarī temple. This worship is observed on the day of Śivachaturdasi every year. The Lakshmi worship is also observed in this temple. Besides these the Bhateli utsav is also celebrated in the temple on the fifth day of the month of Babag.11

5.2 KĀLIMANDIR OF BĀLILECHĀ:

The Kālimandir of Bālilechā is situated three miles away from Nalbari town in its south-east direction. There are legends about the establishment of the temple. According to the legends one official of the Ahom king named Kalicharan Choudhury got an idol of Goddess Kāli from a fishing net while catching fish in the Brahmaputra. This idol of Goddess Kāli was established in Balilecha temple under the direction of the Sākta Pandit Krishnakanta Bhattacharya, the religious teacher of the Ahom kings. According to another legend Kalicharan choudhury was a childless and he performed yajña and worship etc., wishing for a child. At that time a Brahmin of Sadiya threw an idol of the mother Goddess Kāli into the Brahmaputra river out of fear because it said that the Goddess swallowed the daughter-in-law of the Brahmin. The idol was recovered in the fishing net at Pandughat by a fisherman. Krishnakanta Bhattacharya a Sākta saint was directed by the Goddess in a dream to install the icon in a temple. At the behest of Krishnakanta Bhattacharya, an Ahom officer who was known as Parbatia Gohain directed Kalicharan Choudhury to establish a temple at Bālilechā, Nalbari and made necessary arrangements for installation of the idol there. Sri Choudhury did accordingly.12 In this context Harinath Sarma Doloi mentions: “It is known that Ahom king Rajesvar Simha (1751-1769) donated 160 bighās of land by an inscription to Śaktisādhak Kamatatva Vidyanibas and gave him responsibility of the management.

11. Informant: Sri Nilkanta Kalita (male, 55), Loharkatha, data collected on 22.2.98.

[ 68 ]
of Kālimandir of Bālīlechā. Dinanath Bhattacharya of village Alākdi situated three miles away from Nalbari town in its south-east is the seventh successor of Kamtatta Vidyanibas.\textsuperscript{13}

There is no historical record about the construction of the Kāli temple of Bālīlechā. Hence it is very difficult to ascertain its date of establishment of the temple. Legend has it that Śiva Simha, a renowned Ahom king directed Parbatia Gohain to bear the responsibilities of the temple. It is known that the king had donated 12 purās of land for the pond and temple and had donated 200 purās of land in the name of the temple. But Parbatia Gohain did not stay in Assam permanently. He went away to Bengal. It is said that he sold away all the landed properties of the temple donated by the Ahom king before his departure to Bengal. Hence there is no any evidence regarding the donation made by the Ahom kings to the temple.

According to Harinath Sarma Doloi during the reign of the Ahom king Rajesvar Simha, Kamatatva Vidyanibas had granted land and responsibility issuing an inscription for the management of the temple. Accordingly it can be conjectured that the temple was built in the middle of the 18th century A.D. But the renowned archeologist Benudhar Sarma has written a note viewing the sculpture and architecture of the temple and has ascertained that the temple was built during the reign of king Śiva Simha. The temples and ponds during the Ahom rule were built under the supervision of Changrung Phukan.

Rudra Simha (1695-1714) had brought a Brahmin named Krishnaram Nyaybagis from Nabadweep of Bengal and had donated him land on the hill of Kamakhya for his residence in order to embrace Sakta religion.\textsuperscript{14} But instead of becoming the disciple of Krishnaram

\textbf{References:}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} Sarma Doloi, H.: \textit{Asamat Saktisadhana Aru Sakta Sahitya}. P. 175.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Gait, E. A.: \textit{A History of Assam}. P. 182.
\end{itemize}
Bhattacharya he became the disciple of the Vaiṣṇava saint Harideva of Auniali. His son Śiva Simha embraced the Sākta religion under the guidance of Krishnaram Bhattacharya under the direction of his father.\textsuperscript{15} Observes Sarbesvar Rajguru: "we have mentioned that in the last part of Ahom rule, the Ahom kings had leant towards the Sākta faith and it was the Ahom king Śiva Singha who was the first initiated to the Sākta faith by one Krishnaram Bhattacharya of Bengal. The Ahom king rehabilited Krishnaram Bhattacharya at Nilachal Hill and therefore came to be known as Parbatia Gohain, many of the Ahom kings after Shiva-Singha accepted the Sākta faith as their cult."\textsuperscript{16} This Parbatia Gohain Krishnaram Bhattacharya was the first doloī of the Kālimandir of Bālilechā. Hence it can be said without any doubt that the temple of the Goddess Kāli of Bālilechā was built during the reign of king Śiva Simha.

There were two elephants made of stone infront of the Devidoul. There was a Bhog-ghar and a sabhāghar along with the Devidoul. This temple was completely destroyed by the earthquake of 1857. The present management committee of the Kālimandir of Bālilechā has contributed a new temple. The pond and the boundaries of the temple have been renovated.

This temple is regarded as one of the important Sāktipithas of Assam. Belief has it that the desire of devotee is fulfilled if the Goddess is properly propitiated. Many devotees come here to worship the Goddess. Although the regular worship is held everyday, there is a huge gathering of devotees on Tuesday and Saturday. The devotees dedicate Pigeons, goats and buffaloes to the Goddess and sacrifice them before the deity. Sometimes they simply dedicate the birds and animals to the deity. The materials brought for the worship are washed in the water of the pond.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid
\textsuperscript{16} Rajguru, S.: Medieval Assamese Society. P. 112.
Besides the daily worship the Goddess is worshipped annually in the dark moon of the month of October. People irrespective of caste-creed-colour and religion participate in the worship. A sabbā is held on the first day month of Māgh in the courtyard of the temple which is known as Māghar sabbā. Various performing artforms are performed in the context of the sabbā. In the past Durga-puja was also observed in the temple. Now-a-days besides the Kālipūjā, Sarasvati pūjā and Lakshmi pūjā are also observed.

_ Bhatheli Utsav _ is another important festival of Bālilecha Kālimandir. This festival is observed on the seventh day of the month of _ Bobag_. In the context of this festival a pāra (a decorated bamboo) is erected in front of the temple. On the day of _Bhatheli _ the _ Nagājālbi _ (a kind of sword used by Nagas) kept in the pond of the temple is decorated with banana plant and garlands. 17

5.3 KĀMĀKHYĀ TEMPLE:

The Kāmākhyā temple is situated half a mile east of the rivulet Hokākhoa flowing on the east of the village Haribhāṅgā. There is no definite record about its date of construction. The elderly people of the locality say that the temple was built after a few years of the construction of the Kāmākhyā temple of Nilachala. Bhagadatta, the king of Kāmarūpa had donated plots of land at different places in the name of the mother Goddess Kāmākhyā. These plots of land were free of tax. Only a fraction of the income of the land had to be spent in the worship of Goddess Kāmākhyā. King Bhagadatta had donated 2200 _bigbās_ of land on the western side of Haribhāṅgā village for the worship of Goddess Kāmākhyā. It is called Kāmākhyā _bhogdhani _ material. The cultivators of these land did not have to pay any tax to the king, they had to go to Kāmākhyā temple at the end of the year.

17. Anupam Barma Majumdar (male, 40) Balilecha, data collected on 5.3.98.
and had to manage the worship of the Goddess for 32 days. The items for 32 days worship were 32 goats, 4 mons (160 kg) bhog rice, 4 mons (160 kg) mug, 16 kg. ghee and others. These villagers had to run the worship for 32 days and they used to receive a portion of the bhog. The people of this village continued to do this for sometime and then they consulted with the priests of Kāmākhyā temple to find out the ways for getting relief of their trouble. After the discussion it was resolved that they would not go to run the worship at Kāmākhyā temple but they were supposed to pay a tax of 12 paise per bighā. It was decided that the worship of Kāmākhyā would be managed with that amount. Some local people were employed to collect the land tax who are known as Thākuriā. This process continued for sometime. Then these villagers built a Kāmākhyā temple in their village. Since then the worship of Goddess Kāmākhyā has been continuing there. A priest is also employed to worship the Goddess. On a fix day in the year goat, pigeon etc. are dedicated to the Goddess after completion of nāma-kīrtan.

The people have earnest devotion to the Kāmākhyā temple. Pilgrims come to this temple from far off places and make offerings of rice, mug etc. They also dedicate goats and pigeons to the Goddess. It is known that many patients have been cured of their disease after praying to the Goddess. Similarly many myths and legends are running about the childless people attaining fatherhood and barren women attaining motherhood after praying to the Goddess.18

5.4 ĀDĀTTĀRI DURGĀ TEMPLE:

The Ādāttāri Durgā temple is situated 23 kms. away from Nalbari town in its south. Though the construction of this temple was started in 1966, it was completed in 1985. One dedicated Brahmin

was associated with the construction of this temple. He was Nityananda Brahmachari, the son of Ganesh Chandra Rajkhowa of the Rajkhowa family of Sivasagar. He studied Sanskrit in Kashi and Tarkesvar from the day of his *upanayana* (sacred thread ceremony) leading the life of a *Brahmachāri*. He lived as a *Brahmachāri* of the *giri* sect of Dwaraka *math* taking the name 108 Srimat Nityananda Swarup. This *Brahmachāri* had come to perform the *Sī Śrī Viṣṇuyajña* at Amayapur of the district of Nalbari. After the completion of the *yajña* he was invited by Rajanikanta Deva Sarma of Ādattīri to his house for *Candipūth* (recitation of Candi). At that time there was no celebration of *Durgāpūjā* except that of the Bāghesvāri temple. Hence the local people expressed the desire to celebrate *Durgāpūjā*. So they discussed the matter with Nityananda Brahmachari and took a decision to celebrate *Navarātri pūjā*. The *Navarātri Durgāpūjā* began to be celebrated from 1967 with the co-operation of the local people. But there was no permanent temple, hence the people felt the necessity of such a temple and the construction work of the temple began. The construction of the temple was completed in 1985. A *sabhāgār* (conference hall) has also come up with the main temple.

There was an idol of Goddess Durgā of seven *tolas* of gold and a pair of *koshā* and *argha* (spoon) of the horn of Rhino. Both of these properties were stolen away in 1992. After this Madan Chandra Chamaria of Nalbari town brought an idol of Goddess Durgā made of brass metal and now this idol is worshipped.

Besides the regular worship, *Durgāpūjā*, *Lakshmi-pūjā*, *Sarasvati-pūjā*, *Śivarāтри, Daul* and *Janmāstami* etc. are observed in this temple. The important feature of this temple is that both the Śāktas and the Vaiṣṇavas offer worships to the Goddess.

The *Navarātri Durgāpūjā* is observed in this temple. The speciality of this festival is that it begins from the 1st. day of *suklapakhyā*
and ends on the Bijayā dasami. The mahasnām of the deity, Candipāth (recitation of Candi) and yajña are performed everyday from the pratipad (1st. day) up to the navami (ninth day).

_Kumārī-pūjā_ is an interesting part of the Navarātri-pūjā. At the end of the Candipāth and yajña on the navami this _pūjā_ is observed. Nine girls up to the age of nine years are decorated as different forms of Goddess Durgā such as Sailaputri, Brahmacharini, Chandraghanta, Kusumāndā, Skandamātā, Kātyāyanī, Kālirātri, Mahāgauri and Siddhidātrī are worshipped here. The girls are presumed to be the replicant of the mother Goddess. The devotees wash their feet and make their offerings to them.

Although various festivals are observed in this temple nevertheless emphasis is not laid on pomp and ceremony except the performance of _ojāpāli_ art form. The Brahmachārī, the founder of the temple, did not approve of the ceremonial aspects of the worship. Now the temple and the worship run with the help of public donations. The Government has donated 25 _bighās_ of reserve land in the name of the temple. A pond has been dug measuring five _bighās_ of land. The income from the pond and the land are the source of income of the temple.¹⁹

---