

**KINGS AND CULTS IN THE LAND OF  
KAMAKHYA UP TO 1947**

**(A Study on Religion, Power and State)**

**A Thesis submitted to the University of North Bengal**

**For the award of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
History**

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**March, 2014**

## DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled "KINGS AND CULTS IN THE LAND OF KAMAKHYA UP TO 1947 (A Study on Religion, Power and State)" has been prepared by me under the guidance of Dr. Ichhimuddin Sarkar, Professor, Department of History, University of North Bengal. No part of this thesis has formed the basis for the award of any degree or fellowship previously.

  
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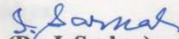
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## ABSTRACT

### CERTIFICATE

I certify that Mr. Gopesh Kumar Sarma has prepared the thesis entitled "KINGS AND CULTS IN THE LAND OF KAMAKHYA UP TO 1947(A Study on the Religion, Power and State), for the award of Ph. D degree of the University of North Bengal, under my guidance.

He has carried out the work at the department of History, University of North Bengal.

  
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## PREFACE

The ‘Kings and Cults in the land of Kamakhya up to 1947 (A Study on Religion, Power and State)’ is epoch making phenomenon in the religious- political and social life of Assam. Its impact on the religious, political and social life of Assam, particularly in the land of Kamakhya, is indeed great and abiding. As religious institutions and places of worship, the temples were the places of popular gatherings as well as means of strengthening of the associated royal authorities. In order to win over the people, the local deities mostly non- Aryan were often identified with their counterparts extolled in Vedic and *puranic* literature.

This study is based primarily on the quest of the rulers of Assam for legitimation through religious institutions. In earlier period the rulers of the land of Kamakhya, derived religious legitimating of their authority through the performance of grand royal patronage of local or regional cults. This development was deeply influenced by the emergence of the *Bhakti* cult as a new genuine folk religion. Politically perhaps even more important, however, were the strong local and regional roots 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 territoriality of particular interest, in this regard are the changing modes of legitimating at different stages of state formation ranging from princely patronage of deities by emerging early rajas to the construction of imperial temples by rulers of the early medieval ‘imperial’ regional kingdoms. During the late middle ages, royal ritual policy shifted its emphasis on the royal patronage of places of pilgrimage and their cults and sectarian leader.

An attempt at presenting a systematic study of the Kings and Cults in the land of Kamakhya up to 1947 has been made here in the following pages. The work is prepared for the Doctorate Degree of the University of North Bengal.

In preparing this work, all available source materials both Primary and Secondary have been carefully examined before use. But in spite of my sincere efforts, error may have crept into it.

It has been tried to arrive at the nearest point of the aim in respect of the proposed study. However we never claim perfection. Uses of diacritical marks in common terms have been avoided.

I take this opportunity of expressing deep gratitude to Dr. I. Sarkar, Professor, Department of History, University of North Bengal who took so much trouble in guiding my research work in the midst of his manifold activities and academic engagements.

University of North Bengal

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Date.

# **KINGS AND CULTS IN THE LAND OF KAMAKHYA UP TO 1947**

**(A Study on Religion, Power and State)**

## **ABSTRACT**

The dissertation under consideration entitled 'Kings and Cults in the land of Kamakhya' is a comprehensive study in which an attempt has been made to focus on the quest of the rulers for legitimation through religious institution, the evolution of religion and power in different phases in the district of Kamrupa before it was divided into three districts (Kamrup, Nalbari, Barpeta) in 1983. By the term 'The land of Kamakhya' we mean this part of ancient Assam. The study shows that since the early period the Cults, its temples and also the system of their management of Kamrupa have been inextricably linked with political development of the region.

Though the 'Cults' and its temples were primarily regarded as the places of worship for the devotees, but they had enjoyed considerable political, social and economic significance. Here it is necessary to clarify that by Cults we mean Hindu Cults only. The term 'King' is used in this work to mean a monarch who is fundamentally independent and self governing on an autonomous economic unit, in the land of Kamakhya.

The indigenous people of earlier Assam belonging to Non-Aryan culture popularly known as Kiratas came in touch in a steady but gradual process of Indian religious systems at least from about the beginning of the Christian era, if not earlier. The state of Assam was possible only at the cost of tribal chiefs resulted the growth of a number of big temples, gradual and systematic settlements of Brahmins, extension of agriculture and propagation and maintenance of *Varnasramadharma*.

The introduction of the dissertation deals with the problem of the study, methodology, objectives, research question investigated as well as chapter distributions of the work. It has also focused on the quest of the rulers for legitimating 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, was 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. In particular interest in this regard are the changing modes of legitimating 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.

Temple and royal authority of Kamarupa: power and legitimacy, in which there is a discussion of Naraka of Mithila who seems to have been a political adventurer but established himself in power in the non-Aryan dominated area of Kamarupa viz the land of Kamakhya. It is said that he introduced the *Sakta* worship of the non-Aryan Goddess Kamakhya, under whose banner the first empire of Kamarupa was built. This paved the way for entry of Hinduism and in this acclaimed territory the three main sects of Hinduism. Thus it is likely that Hinduisation had taken its root in the land of Kamakhya by slow infiltration sometimes between 2<sup>nd</sup> -5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. To win over the allegiance and support and also to facilitate the propagation of Hindu beliefs and

customs, Naraka extended royal patronage to this local cult of Kamakhya, which could easily be aligned with other forms of the mother Goddess. The ground became fertile for the rapid spread of Hindu ideas and Kamarupa became an extensive and prosperous kingdom under the rule of the Varman, the Salastambha and Pala lines of kings from 5<sup>th</sup> century to 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Since the days of Bhutivarman (6<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), lavish endowments of lands, men and other articles were made to the Brahmins, who were entrusted with the task of propagating the *Aryadharma*. Bhaskaravarman is said to have introduced and popularized the *Varnasramadharma* and donated lands to more than two hundred families of Brahmins. All these references prompt us to say that the kings of Varman line followed a systematic policy of creating *Agraharas* for the Brahmins who became the elites of their court. They undoubtedly played an important role in legitimizing and consolidating the power and prestige of the kings through the means of religious rites and rituals introduced in the worship of Hindu as well as many of the Hinduised local gods and goddesses. In this way the three main royal temple policy a) Royal patronage of important places of pilgrimage within their respective kingdom b) A systematic and large- scale settlement of Brahmins c) The construction of new imperial temples within the kingdom were followed by the kings through which the State- Temple relation was automatically highlighted. Detailed information is provided in chapter-I.

It was only after the Ahom occupation of Kamrupa viz the land of Kamakhya in 1682 that the temple building activities had again been taken up on a large scale with the reconstruction of Umananda temple in 1694. The temple building activities started by Gadadharsimha in Kamrupa was continued by Rudrasimha, his son and successor. Rudrasimha understood well the great role of religion in consolidation and legitimation of political authority. It is for this reason he took his initiation of

Padmanabh Bhattacharya, a Tantrik Brahman from Majuli and at the same time stopped all atrocities upon the Vaisnavas. In the chapter 'State and Religious Establishment of the land of Kamakhya', it appears that the Tai- Ahom rulers were never serious in respect of rites, rituals and procedure of worship; but very cautiously and carefully tried to utilize religions and religious sentiments in extending and legitimizing their political authority over the Brahmaputra valley. They often tried to use the different sects of Hinduism against each other. But eventually the very policy led the kingdom to its own destiny. During the Ahom administration the cults and its temples in Assam had grown up as government institution and were running smoothly without much trouble under the fair system of management. The details have been discussed in chapter-II.

The Burmese invasion of Assam eventually led to the downfall of the Ahom kingdom, which was annexed to British India following the Anglo- Burmese war (1824-26). During this period of turmoil most of the temple functionaries including priests fled to Bengal taking with them the valuables. With a view to collecting revenue from the temples, the Burmese Government appointed arbitrarily some new priests. With the establishment of the British rule, the original functionaries returned and claimed their right over the temples which led to dispute between the two groups of priests. As a result, the earlier system of management became outdated; a new chapter in the history of management system of the cults and its temples of Assam began in 1825 when the territory passed under the control of British East India Company. Although the old system of temple management was allowed to continue, the power and function of the Barphukan became irrelevant and the supervision and control of the *Sevacaloo* in respect of management of the temple seems to be greatly relaxed. On the other hand the European magistrates including the Commissioners of the province

evinced a general tendency to delegate their authorities to a Panchayat or Managing Committee. In almost all the cases, these Panchayats stood in favour of establishing the hereditary right of the '*Panchaghar Bardeories*'. Justice was made according to the laws based on age old customs and tradition. The details have been discussed in chapter-III.

Goddess Kamakhya is the most dominating name in the early history of Assam. It was under her banner that the first empire in early Assam was built. It was over her emergence and recognition as presiding deity of the state the *Saivites* and the *Vaisnavites* went into salient conflict and Naraka the first builder of the state lost his life. Later religious history also centers round her and other Goddesses recognized as her varied manifestations. The present location of Kamakhya temple was a part of Kamarupa kingdom and was dominated by the Kiratas (Non-Aryan tribes) who with the advent of the Arayans came under to a systematic process of Aryanisation since 2<sup>nd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. In the same context the cults and its temples were the places of popular gathering as well as a means of strengthening of the associated authorities. All detail information is provided in chapter-IV.

The management of the Cults and its temples mainly depended upon the source of finance, administration and supervising machinery. Though the problems relating to the *Dolai's* power, negligence of duty by the Priests and attendants, land revenue payable to the Government etc. are associated with the temples management but the amount of annuity so fixed is too small to meet the expenditure of the daily as well as regular worship of the temples. With the acquisition of the temple lands by the Government the Priests and attendants lost all interests in the temple and hence, in most cases, the temple became deserted. So, there is now none to look after them and hence the temple buildings too which are undoubtedly historical monuments are

facing ruins. The temple management in the land of Kamakhya during the period under our study is clearly discussed in chapter-V.

The conclusion of the dissertation is a capsule of the study. The dissertation also comprises Abstract, Preface, Acknowledgement paid to the various agencies and persons for providing necessary help and support, list of abbreviations appeared in the present work, contents, list of tables, list of maps and diagram by which an attempt has been made to bring to light the original materials used in the subject of the study. The bibliography of both published and unpublished works used as primary and secondary sources, a glossary and some charts utilized in its preparation appended at the end of the dissertation.

It is quite impossible to draw any inference based on a topic of historical importance. The division of the study into chapters, it may be mentioned that it is simply a matter of convention rather than of convenience; the whole study should be treated as an integrated analysis rather than of loose fragments. The thesis may be a humble attempt to fill up the gap to present an integrated analysis about the Kings and Cults in the land of Kamakhya up to 1947( A Study on Religion, Power and the State) based on the source materials available so far.

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Date.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The study titled 'Kings and Cults in the land of Kamakhya up to 1947 (A Study on Religion, Power and State)' is the outcome of my research work to be submitted for Ph.D. degree of the University of North Bengal, Raja Rammohunpur, Darjeeling, West Bengal. The present work is a study which neither demands full credit for new discoveries nor is a major break-through in the study of the Kings and Cults in the land of Kamakhya up to 1947 (A study on Religion, Power and State). It is a humble attempt to research the subject, which in some points is fully introductory in nature and shows some scope of study in future. Constructive criticism in this respect is always welcome.

A research work is an upended academic voyage. A collective effort is always working as an inspiring factor behind the culmination of a positive result of the voyage. Therefore, one should acknowledge the support and assistance received at the different levels in course of the study.

I have no words to express my deep sense gratitude and acknowledge my ineptness to my revered Guide and Supervisor Dr. Ichhimuddin Sarkar, Professor, Department of History, North Bengal University for his sincere guidance and valuable suggestions that he gave me in every step of my work. I also owe a debt of gratitude to all the faculty members of the department of History of the North Bengal University for providing me necessary help and assistance.

I have received immense help from the staff of National Archives of India, New Delhi, National Library, Kolkata, Library of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Kolkata, Granthagar (Central Library) of University of North Bengal, K. K. Handique Library of Gauhati University, Library of ICHR North- East Regional Centre, Library of Kamrup Anusandhan Samiti, Library of the department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Guwahati, Library of Assam State Museum, District library, Guwahati and Madhya Kamrup College library, I must thank all the staff of the departments, officials and institutions.

I express my gratefulness to my College authority particularly Dr. Suranjan Sarma, Principal of our college and my colleagues for their encouragement to complete my

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ABHA: Archaeology of the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam.

AAR: Anglo-Assamese Relations.

AHA: A History of Assam.

ASP: Asamat Sakti Puja.

AV: Atharva Veda.

BAC: Background of Assamese Culture.

BBP: Brahma Baiivarta Purana.

BDP: Brihaddharma Purana.

BSSS: Bharatar Sakti Sadhana o Sakta Sahitya.

CHA: Cultural History of Assam.

CMT: Chamunda Tantra.

CHA: Comprehensive History of Assam.

CP: Copper Plate.

DB: Devi Bhagavatam.

DRV: Darang Rajvamsavali.

EHK: Early History of Kamarupa.

EI: Epigraphica India.

HCPA: The History and Civilization of the People of Assam.

HV: Harivamsam.

IAA: Inscription of Ancient Assam.

IP: Indian Philosophy.

IHC: Indian History Congress.

JARS: Journal of Assam Research Society.

JASB: Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal

KBT: Kubjika Tantram.

KMT: Kamakhya Tantra.

KP: Kalika Purana.

KT: Kamakhya Tirtha.

KS: Kamarupa Sasanavali.

MB: Mahabharata.

MGK: Mother Goddesses Kamakhya.

MMT: Mundamala Tantra.

MS: Manusamhita.

NEIHA: North East India History Association.

ORC: Obscure Religious Cult.

PHS: Philosophy of Hindu Sadhana.

PKDD: Purani Kamarupar Dharmar Dhara.

PS: Prachya- Sasanavali.

RYM: Ramayana.

RV: Rig Veda.

SK: Skanda Purana.

SS: Sakti and Sakta.

SSC: Sri Sri Chandi.

SST: Sakti Sadhana Tantra.

VP: Visnu Purana.

YT: Yogini Tantra.

YV: Yajur Veda.

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## 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*)<sup>1</sup>.

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'<sup>2</sup>. 'In epigraphic records the name Kamarupa was first mentioned in the Allahabad inscriptions of Samudra Gupta in the fifth century'.<sup>3</sup>

'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*'<sup>4</sup>.

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 Brahmins, 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 Brahmins 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."<sup>5</sup>

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.<sup>6</sup>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.<sup>7</sup>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.<sup>8</sup>

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.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup>

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."<sup>11</sup>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.”<sup>12</sup>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”.<sup>13</sup>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<sup>14</sup>. 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”<sup>15</sup> 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 invariably 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 *Pancaratarā 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 inter relationships 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 re- christened.<sup>16</sup> 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.

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## CHAPTER -I

# TEMPLE AND ROYAL AUTHORITY OF KAMARUPA: POWER AND LEGITIMACY

### Introduction

In earlier periods, rulers of the land of Kamakhya 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 legitimating 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.<sup>1</sup> During the late middle ages royal ritual policy shifted its emphasis to royal patronage of places of pilgrimage and their cults and sectarian leaders. In this chapter it is intended to present a brief discussion about the relationship between the royal power and various Cults.

### Early history

In its earliest history, prior to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD., accounts of the rulers in the land of Kamakhya are legendary in nature. According to the local legends, the earliest ruler is

Mahiranga Danav who ruled from his capital at Mairang Parbat, which has been identified as the area in the neighborhood of Beltola in modern Guwahati. It is said that he was succeeded by Hatakasur, Sambasur, Ratnasur and Ghatakasur. No details of this ruler are found but the appellation *Danava* and *Asura* suggest that they are Non- Aryans. *Kalika Purana* records that Naraka, the son of Visnu in his *Varah* incarnation killed Ghatakasur, occupied his territory and made *Pragjyotishpur* the new capital. His son and successor, Bhagadatta, finds frequent mention in the *Mahabharata* as a powerful ruler of the east. After that under the kings of the three successive dynasties, viz. the Varman, the Salastambha and the Pala, all of whom traced their descent from Naraka; Kamrupa became an extensive and prosperous 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 the 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.<sup>2</sup>With the decline of the Pala's, several independent principalities emerged in the Brahmaputra Valley. The Chutiyas established themselves in the territory east of the Subansiri and Darrang. Further west, the Kacharis who claimed decent from Bhim, the Pandav prince, established themselves on the south bank of the Brahmaputra between the river Dikhow and the river Kalang with the capital at Dimapur. To the West of the Kacharis on the South bank and the Chutiyas on the North bank, were a number of independent chiefs called the Bhuyans. To the extreme West, lay the kingdom of Kamrupa. The centre of political activity had in the meantime shifted to Kamatapur in the Goalpara region and by the latter part of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Kamrupa which included parts of North Bengal and Mymensing, came to be known as *Kamrup-*

*Kamata*. In the meantime, momentous changes had occurred in north India, which had their inevitable fallout in eastern India. In 1192, Delhi had fallen to Muhammad Ghori who swept over northern India. Having overrun Bengal, Muhammad-bin- Bakhtiyar Khiliji, a general of Muhammad Ghori, invaded Kamrupa in 1206, but his army was completely routed. This significant event is recorded in the Kanai barasi bowa rock inscription in North Guwahati . Muhammedans invaded Kamrupa twice in 1226 under Ghiyasuddin Bakhtiyar and in 1257 under Malik Yuzbeg. In 1498 Hussain Shah invaded Kamrupa and a large number of Muslim settled in the area around Hajo, the headquarters, where Ghiyasuddin Aulia, the commander, built a mosque known as Poa- Mecca, implying that pilgrimage to this shrine would earn the pilgrim *poa* (one-fourth) of the merit earned from a visit to Mecca. Ghiyasuddin, who is now worshipped in Assam as a saint, is believed to have been the first Muslim to spread Islam in Assam.<sup>3</sup>

Husain Shah's son who was appointed Governor of the newly conquered territory was killed soon after his father's departure. Thereafter there was no single ruler of prominence in the region till the emergence of the Koches under Biswa Simgha (AD 1515-1540). During the reign of the Koch Naranarayana rebuilt Kamakhya temple at Nilachal Hill. Their reign was also remarkable for the Vaisnava reformation started by Sankardeva. The neo- Vaisnavism of Mahapurush (Saint) Sankardeva had considerable impact on the society of that period.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, an event of tremendous significance which was a band of hardy men of Tai origin from upper Burma crossed the Patkai Hills and entered Assam. They settled in the territory around Sivasagar and enthroned Sukapha as their first King in AD 1228. After a long reign of the Ahoms, Assam passed under the control of the Burmese during the reign of Chandrakanta Simgha, who unleashed a virtual reign of

terror in the region. This insecurity in the North-Eastern frontier threatened the security of Bengal, where the British had solidity entrenched themselves in the meantime. The authorities of the East India Company realized that it was no longer expedient to remain complacent, decided to abandon Shore's policy of non-intervention. In 1824 war was declared by the company Government against the Burmese and a force advancing up to the Brahmaputra occupied Rangpur and forced the Burmese to surrender. By the treaty of Yandaboo (1826), the Burmese king renounced his claims on Assam, Cachar and Jayantia.<sup>5</sup>

The 19<sup>th</sup> century thus proved to be very significant period in the history of Assam. The collapse of the Ahom monarchy and the entry of the British were marked by a swift transition. The changeover from the old order to the new was characterized by a complete overhauling of the administrative machinery, which heralded far-reaching political, social, economic and religious changes in Assam.<sup>6</sup>

### **Nuclear areas in the land of Kamakhya**

Although influenced from outside, the political development in the land of Kamakhya in the early centuries A.D. is characterized by a territorial segmentation. The limit of the kingdom varied according to the power of the ruling dynasties but some names as well as a simultaneous development of some 'nuclear areas' belonging to a community surrounding a Cult or temple probably took place.<sup>7</sup> In this connection we may recall the Tezpur Grant of Vanamala, where it is recorded that the kingdom in the land of Kamakhya was full of "the temples with the sweet sound of the musical instruments and songs, the parks with the chanting of the performers of the sacrifices and the beautiful ponds, charming with the lotuses and scattered in various countries even today proclaim his (Vanamala's) pure fame" .Another centre of such nuclear

area namely the city of Harupesvara, where the temples of Mahagauri and Kamesvara were located, it is recorded that “there the people belonging to all the castes and all the stages of life (*ashram*) are extremely happy. This is the place of innumerable fortunes and honest scholars, where the broad royal roads remain crowded with kings who come to pay homage to the monarch and go back being seated on colorful elephants, horses and *Sivikas* (*palkins*) and where all the quarters always remain blocked with innumerable military potentialities”. The Parvatiya Copper Plate Grant of the same king records that Harupesvara was “the home of innumerable good soldiers, virtuous men and learned men the royal roads of which (city) are crowded by the great kings which has its currents in full with such a (rush of) water, which is purer on account of constantly washing the slopes of the Mount Kamakuta, the top of which is the abode of the glorious (Lord) Kamesvara and the (goddess) *Mahagauribhattarika*”, and “which is characterized by the people living in the whole neighborhoods of its banks delighted by the fragrance of the musk’s of the musk deer”.<sup>8</sup>

However, it is not known whether the nuclear areas in the land of Kamakhya enjoyed defect self-government through corporate institutions like the great district assemblies (*periyandu*) in Tamilnadu, as pointed out by Burton Stein. It appears that in the land of Kamakhya they were under direct rule of the kings who were either independent or only temporarily and nominally subjugated by ‘foreign rules’. The kings organized their political power according to the Hindu law books (*Sastras*). Its centre was the king and his court.<sup>9</sup> In the following pages it is intend to discuss about 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 legitimating of royal authority in the land of Kamakhya.

### **Legitimization through large-scale settlement of Brahmins**

The centre of 'nuclear areas' were encircled by a number of tax free *agrahara*<sup>10</sup>. The Brahmins of these villages formed the elite of the administrative and ritual functionaries, who along with those who had been settled in the outer areas lost no opportunity to make an influence upon the people of the remote places of the 'nuclear area' and the maintenance of Hindu law and royal order. Due to their influence the 'nuclear areas' could not escape from the process of gradual integration in to all Indian sphere of Sanskrit learning. As it appears from the illustration of the inscriptions of the Kamrupa kings, the most significant economic feature of such 'nuclear areas' was a peasant agriculture based mainly on rice cultivation.<sup>11</sup>

The process of the territorial development entered its formative phase in the 5<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> century when donations of land to Brahmins became more and more frequent from the days of Bhutivarman. And it was certainly fully developed in the late seventh century when the Dubi and Nidhanpur Copper plate grant of Bhaskaravarmana bear evidences of a steadily increasing number of such donations.<sup>12</sup>The following chart indicating the land Grants as royal patronage.

TABLE-I: LIST OF LAND GRANTS

Sl. No.	Inscription	Date	Spot where found	Details of Donated Land
1	Nagajari rock inscription	5th century	Sibsagar	Incomplete
2	Dubi Plates	7th century	Kamarupa	Incomplete
3	Nidhanpur Plates	7th century	Syllhet	Land to support 208 Brahmins
4	Hayunthal Plates	9th century	Mikir Hill	Incomplete
5	Tezpur Plates	9th century	Darrang	One Village
6	Parbatiya Plates	9th century	Darrang	One Village
7	Uttarababil Plates	9th century	Mikir Hill	Land with 2,000units paddy yield
8	Ulnbari Plates	9th century	Darrang	-Do-
9	Nowgaon Plates	9th century	Nowgaon	Land with 4,000 units paddy yield
10	Bargaon Plates	A.D 1035	Darrang	Land with 2,000 units paddy yield
11	Suwalkuchi Plates	A.D1036	Kamarupa	Land with 3,000 units paddy yield
12	Coratbari Plates	Early11thcentury	Nowgaon	Land with 4,000 units paddy yield
nag13	Gauhati Plates	A.D1058	Kamarupa	-Do-
14	Guwakuchi Plates	A.D1071	Kamarupa	Land with 2,000 units paddy yield
15	Gachtal Plates	A.D1080	Nowgaon	Land with 8,000 units paddy yield
16	Subhankarapathaka Plates	12th century	Unknown	Land with 6,000 units paddy yield
17	Pushpabhadra Plates	12th century	Kamarupa	Land with 10,000 units paddy yield
18	Khonamukh Plates	12th century	Nowgaon	Land with 6,000 units paddy yield
19	Kamauli Plates	A.D1142	Varanasi	Two villages
20	Assam Plates	A.D1185	Darrang	Seven villages

Source: 13 Lahiri, N, *Pre-Ahom Assam*, Delhi, 1990, p99.

That the process was blossoming is known from the Copper plate grants of Kamrupa kings when they extended royal patronages not only to individual Brahmin but also to the various Cults and monastic institutions.<sup>14</sup>

### **Royal patronage of local deities**

Royal patronage of local deities seems to have been an essential precondition for the consolidation and legitimating of political power in the Hindu-tribal zone in the land of Kamakhya.<sup>15</sup> For obvious reasons, whether Hindu kings or the Hinduized chiefs ascending from the local tribes (like Varmans, Salastambhas and Koches) or whether they had entered in the land of Kamakhya from outside (like Vaidyadeva and the Ahoms), most of them accepted the dominant local deities of this part in the land of Kamakhya as family and tutelary deities of their dominion. An example may suffice for this early type of royal patronage of autochthonous deities in the land of Kamakhya. The *Kalika Purana* states that at the time of his installation in the throne of Kamrupa, Naraka was told by his father Visnu not to worship any other deities except Kamakhya and Naraka accordingly made proper arrangement for the worship of the goddess. During the reign of the Varman and Pala kings (10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> centuries), they recognized her as Mahagauri<sup>16</sup> and the Koch king Naranarayana (16<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) restored her worship as Kamakhya according to Vedic rites. This tradition had been preserved for centuries for which the Ahom king Sivasimha (18<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) made necessary arrangement of maintenance of the deity by appointing Krisnaram Nyayabagis as the *Seva-Caloo* of the temple. It has already been stated that the king had to depend on the support of the tribes and races for the legitimization of their rule in the non-Aryan dominated land in the land of Kamakhya on the one hand and also needed their land for the gradual extension of the peasant agriculture which yielded

Sufficient surplus crop for the maintenance of the court, e.g. the members of the ruling family (*raja, rajni, rajyanyaka, rajaputra*), Brahmin officials (*raj guru*), and soldiers on the other. Tensions were also there with a number of local chieftains due to the efforts of the dominant Hindu or Hinduized kings to extend their economic base at the cost of their tribal neighbours.<sup>17</sup> During this period of gradual development the Brahmins played an important role. Moreover, the following chart indicating the religious streams at royal patronage may help us in this connection.

**TABLE-II: ROYAL PATRONAGE OF THE KAMARUPA KINGS**

SL. NO	RELIGIOUS SECT	PERIOD	EVIDENCE
1	Kirata Siva	Before the advent of Naraka	Kalika Purana, chapter 36-40
2	Sakta at the centre	From the days of Naraka who introduced the worship of Kamakhya	Kalika Purana, chapters.36-40
3	Vaisnava	4 <sup>th</sup> - 5 <sup>th</sup> century A.D.	Umatal rock inscription of Surendravarman
4	Saiva	6 <sup>th</sup> -7 <sup>th</sup> century A.D.	Dubi copper plates of Bhaskar Varian
5	Saiva and Sakta	9 <sup>th</sup> century A.D.	Tezpur and Parvatya CP grants of Vanamala Simultaneously mention the temple of Mahagauri and Kamesvara
6	Saiva and Sakta (Tantric)	10 <sup>th</sup> century A.D.	Khonamukh and Subhankarapataka CP of Dharmapala(mention of Ardhayuvatinarisvara)
7	Vaisnava	12 <sup>th</sup> century A.D.	Kamauli Grant of Vaidyadeva records the rise of Vaisnavism
8	Tantric	Last part of the 12 <sup>th</sup> century A.D. upto the rise of Koch power	A period of disintegration of Kamrupa kingdom
9	Sakta	16 <sup>th</sup> century A.D.	Rock inscription of Nilacala Kamakhya temple
10	Vaisnava	16 <sup>th</sup> century A.D.	Rock inscription of Haygriva Madhava temple regarding the construction of the temple by Rahghudeva and Rock inscription of Pandunath Hari temple of Raghudeva.
11	Saiva	17 <sup>th</sup> century A.D.	Rock inscription of the Umananda temple regarding construction of the temple by Gadadharsimha
12	Saiva, Sakta and Vaisnavite	last part of 17 <sup>th</sup> century A.D. and first part of 18 <sup>th</sup> century A.D.	Land grants inscription of Kamakhya, Padmanatha and Ugratara temple by Rudrasimha
13	Saiva and Sakta	18 <sup>th</sup> century A.D.	Sivasimha took initiation from Krisnaram Nyabagis, appointed him as Seva-caloa of Kamakhya temple and authorized him to compile a vidhi for the worship of the deities in Kamarupa
14	Saiva	Last part of 18 <sup>th</sup> century	Rajesvarasimha's successor laks-hisimha took initiation from pahumaria gossain and built Banesvara and Chandrasekhara temples at Guwahati and made considerable endowments of land and men to the temples of Kamarupa
15	Uprising of Vaisnavites	Last part of 18 <sup>th</sup> century	Moamaria rebellion as evidenced in the relevant CP grants reproduced in the prachya-sasanavali edited by M.Neog.
16	Vaisnava	Last part of 18 <sup>th</sup> century	-----

Source: <sup>18</sup> Adhikary, G, *The History of the Temples of Kamrup and Their Management*, Guwahati, 2001, p.112-113

As has been pointed out in the foregoing pages, they not only created the legendary origin of the kings from dominating deities (e.g. origin of Naraka from *Varaha* incarnation of Visnu through *prithivi*, a local goddess, of the Koches from Siva and of the Ahoms from Indra), but also defined and codified the duties of the different castes and creeds as laid down in the Hindu religious texts. It was also the responsibility of these Brahmins to whom lands in remote areas had been donated, to propagate the ideal of the Hindu Sastras including the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* for their own and their king's sake.<sup>19</sup>

### **In connection with the State Revenue**

Another reason behind this royal patronage was connected with the state revenue. P. Chidambaram Pillai notes that, "Every old temple in India was founded by the rules of the country with a view to get a handsome returns in the shape of offerings from the worshippers. The offerings to the gods must reach the king's treasury and processions and festivals will have to be arranged purely for collecting money for the king. That is to say the ancient Hindu temples were so much sources of public revenue to the king."<sup>20</sup>In all probability it may be also one of the reasons for which the lavish endowments of men, land and utensils were made to the temples of Mahagauri, Kamesvara, Hatakasulin Siva and many other deities by the Kamarupa kings in between seventh to thirteenth centuries A.D. During this period the autochthonous tutelary deities in the land of Kamakhya underwent a process of Hinduization, the intensity and direction of which usually was directly influenced by the parallel rise of the political authority. Generally speaking, the process of Hinduization of these tutelary deities was similar to the *Sakta*, *Saiva* and *Vaisnavite* topography of Hinduization. The worship of Hinduized tribal deities by the king of Kamarupa should not be interpreted as an indicator of a tribal culture at their respective royal

courts. The high and beautiful temple at their capital city, e.g. Mahagauri, Kamesvara and Hatakasulin Siva are eloquent testimonies of their high Hindu culture. The reason why these dynasties over centuries had patronized Hinduized tribal deities as their tutelary deities was the fact that the royal 'nuclear are' were surrounded by tribes on whose loyalty and military support they depended. It appears, therefore, that both the king and the temples maintained a mutual relationship between them, which can be surmised as follows.<sup>21</sup>

- (a) That the temples had a great role to play for the maintenance of kingship and the royal house;
- (b) Dynamic sectarian leaders were the co-coordinators for all sorts of links between the people living in the nuclear areas;
- (c) The king had not interfered the day to day management of a temple and it was left in the hands of the *Sastrakars* (local sectarian leaders). But the ultimate responsibility for temple maintenance was with the king and
- (d) In case of any conflict in a temple, the king had to play his role of administrative character and not of legislator.

In classical Indian treatises it is described as the "Pious act of gift" (*danadharma*) was an important element of the role of the kings.<sup>22</sup> In land of Kamakhya, under the Varmana rule in the late seventh century A.D. a fundamental change occurred in the conception of the sovereignty. The giving of gifts which was previously only one element of the basic definition of kings, sacrifices now became the regular habit of the sovereignty. This shift during the Varmana and Pala rule coincides with the beginning of temple building associated with the *puranic* deities, such as *Visnu*, *Siva* and *Sakti*. This mode of kingly generosity was the basis for generous royal endowment of temples as well as for the establishments and subsidy of *Brahmadeys* (settlement of

learned Brahmins with highly favorable tax assessment). However in the articulation and public display of sovereignty in the Pala period, it appears that temple construction began to play a peculiar and powerful role. Royal endowments to temples become a major means for the redistributive activities of the land of Kamakhya sovereigns which played an important role in agrarian development. But after the disintegration of the land of Kamakhya in early part of the twelfth century A.D. there was a serious decline in the status of *Brahmadeya* as well as the temples became weak which eventually led most of them to be abandoned due to lack of a strong political support.

### **In connection with the construction of temples of various cults**

With the rise of the Koch power under the leadership of Visvasimha in the western part of old Kamrupa during the early part of sixteenth century, the temple activities began to revive. To make the Koch rule legitimate in the eastern part of the land of Kamakhya, which was ruled at that time by a number of Sakta Bhuyans, Naranayaran, the son and successor of VisvaSimha (who was educated in Varanasi, a well known center of Sanskrit learning) not only rebuilt the temple of Kamakhya, but also made all the necessary arrangements for the restoration of her worship. Naranarayana was followed by his nephew Raghudeva, who revolting against the former founded a new kingdom, rebuilt the Hayagrivamadhava temple at Hajo and the Pandunath temple.

The history of the Hindu places of pilgrimage (*tirtha*) was linked undoubtedly with the Bhakti faith which gained its momentum in South India from late sixth century A.D. onwards.<sup>23</sup> Bhakti meaning personal devotion was the innovation of *Bhagavat Gita* which justifies the 'one way of deriving all view from a single divine source'. It bears a close link with a fully developed feudalism in respect of production, land

ownership, military service, tax collection and conversion of local produce to a mercantile commodity with the help of wealthy and influential man. For political and economic reasons, the royal authorities put much importance upon the *tirthas* lying within the territory of a feudal Chief and with the gradual extension and establishment of his authority over different regional powers; the autochthonous cults were included to the pantheon of Bhakti Hinduism. Thus it was through this Bhakti movement that various autochthonous deities in a long and gradual process of Hinduization were included into the sphere of all Indian Hinduism and they were invariably brought into prominence. The Bhakti religion thus earned the characteristics of a folk religion with its emphasis on personal faith and self sacrifice and become “the best religion” to hold a peasant society and “it’s states together”.<sup>24</sup>

In case of Assam in general it seems that Brahmanical Hinduism first entered in to the Ahom court during the days of Sudangpha (1397-1407 A.D.)<sup>25</sup> and under the influence of Brahman priests, the issue of land and men grants as *Dharmottara*, *Brahmottara* and *Devottara* dated from the days of Pratapsimha (1603-1641).<sup>26</sup> The Bhakti movement, of course under the leadership of non-Brahman Samkaradeva (1449-1569) reached its height at the same time. Consequently Barpeta in the land of Kamakhya became the head quarters of this Bhakti movement in last part of sixteenth and first part of seventeenth centuries A.D. particularly in case of the land of Kamakhya the issue of *Devottara*, *Dharmottara* and *Brahmottara* is dated from the days of Gadadharsimha, (1681-1696)<sup>27</sup> who probably to consolidate his authority rebuilt the temple of Umananda. Thus the ground for extension of the Ahom rule in the land of Kamakhya was prepared during the reign of Rudrasimha, the son and successor of Gadadhar. It may explain why Rudrasimha not only made a lavish endowment of land and men to the temples of Umananda and Hayagrivamadhava but also made a survey

of the *tirthas* (sacred places) in the land of Kamakhya with a view to bring them into prominence. It may also explain why Rudrasimha's successors viz. Sivasimha, Pramattasimha, Rajesvarasimha and Laksmisimha constructed a large number of temples on these *tirthastan* made lavish endowments of land, men and other valuables to them.<sup>28</sup> One of the characteristic features of these newly elevated centers of pilgrimage was an increasing process of ritual 'Royalization' of the respective deities.<sup>29</sup> It is of course difficult to say whether they had assumed more and more royal features due to royal patronage, or because the priests had ascribed these features of kingship with an intention to glorify them. However, in the land of Kamakhya, the legitimating of royal power and wealth of the divine king (*Svargadeo/Svargamaharaja*) were inextricably visualized through the performance of daily rituals and great annual festivals with royal paraphernalia and increasing endowments made to them.

### **In connection with the management of the Cults and its temples**

Although royal figures conducted extensive and elaborate relationship with temples (by the building of new temples and the extension and enrichment of old ones), the day to-day management of temples remained in the hands of local sectarian leaders viz. The *Dolai* and his associate, it appears that the Ahom kings and their agents (*Barphukan* and *seva-caloa*) had an active role in the supervision of temples in this regard. In analyzing the settlements of temple disputes, it may be said beyond any doubt that they were not royal legislation, but were rather administrative commands of authoritarian character. The decision taken and declared publicly were commonly understood as *Siddhanta* amongst the members of local corporal groups and the communities, which were to be obeyed by all to whom it might concern. In this

context, the royal command was nothing but “the act through which the king sanctions a collective regulation.”<sup>30</sup>

From the above discussion we may come to the conclusion that the concept of ‘*nuclear area*’ has its own relevance in relation to the process of state formation as well as the growth and development of the temples of various cults in the land of Kamakhya since its earliest times up to the last days of the Ahom rule. Both the king and the cults maintained a mutual relationship between them, which can be surmised as follows-

Royal patronage was extended to popular places of pilgrimage. *Tirthas* has played a significant role in the Bhakti movement and had also become sufficiently well-entrenched in Brahmanical ideology. The land of Kamakhya, an established *tirtha*, constructed temple building of various cults and settling Brahmins with grant of land.

From the earliest times till the Ahom period, Brahmins were patronized by chiefs of principalities in the temple realm. By maintaining a symbolic relationship with the state; their presence was significant in building up a political and administrative hierarchy, and legitimization of the royal authority.

Thus the temples of various Cults become the symbol for the overarching structure of royal authority. It was a centralized nucleus where the diverse process of legislation converged, and through its height and grandeur, represented the hierarchy of political and social relationships at whose apex sat the king. By constructing the temples of various Cults in the land of Kamakhya to depict the integration of diverse ideologies and project their own glory over the land, as protector of the deity.

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## **CHAPTER- II**

### **STATE AND RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENT OF KAMARUPA IN PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD**

In this chapter it is intended to discuss the polity formation during the pre-colonial period, Pre-colonial religions policy of the state authority in the land of Kamakhya and attempts have been made to examine as to how the rulers utilized the local people to achieve their political end. During the reign Tai people later known as the Ahoms, the temples of various Cults in the land of Kamakhya were treated as Government institution and officers of the state took direct part in the management of the temple establishment.

#### **State formation process**

State formation in Southeast Asia took place in three consecutive phases, which correspond with chiefdom (or local principality), the early kingdom, and finally the imperial kingdom .<sup>1</sup>Early State governed by the kings through a central administrative staff which was able to uphold successfully the legitimate claim of the monopoly of physical force within the given area.<sup>2</sup>The state as a specific kind of social origination and its origin and development to its ultra modern sophisticated character is the most interesting subject of study for all social scientists through the ages. In the past, Aristotle, Hobbes, Locks, Montesquieu contributed largely to the study of this most intricate problem. Later, L.H. Morgan and Engels added new dimensions, which became the groundwork for studies in state formation. As a result, endless theories have come up particularly from the scholars of the west. But none of these theories could have universal acceptance. This is obviously because of the fact that the process

of state formation is varied in point of time and space. This is proved by the monumental work, *The Early State* by H. J. M. Cleasen and Peter Skalnik. In this work, the extent theories and generalizations on state formation have been meticulously examined with data collected from all over the world.

The researches have distinctly established two categories of state- *Modern State* and *Early State*; the former one is complex, industrialized and developing while the later is simple, non- industrialized and pre-capitalistic. This division arises out of the stages of progress made by human societies in a time and space continuum. This study relates to the category of early States since these appeared out of the unsophisticated tribal bases.

In India not much work has been done on it. Romila Thapar in her work *From 'Lineage to State'* has spelled out certain pertinent points with regard to the social formations in ancient India. To her, polity formation marked a qualitative change in the history of a society as it arose out of evolving socio-cultural patterns and interrelated change at many levels,<sup>3</sup> This area of study is less explored in the North-East region of India. However, Surajit Sinha in 1962 spoke about the significant prospects of the study in this area.<sup>4</sup>The Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta undertook a project in 1987 on 'Tribal Polities and State Systems in Pre-Colonial Eastern and Northeastern India.'<sup>5</sup>Wherein Amalendu Guha and J. B. Bhattacharjee contributed papers on Ahom Political System and Dimasa State respectively. Such works laid the foundation for further enquiries into the factors and processes of State formation in this region.

'The studies so far done in this regard have brought to light certain common elements which were generally found in the factors and processes in the emerging state systems. These are:

1. Appearance of private property and thereby acquiring political control leading to social stratifications and strengthening the hands of the chief.
2. Direct conquests, subjugation of neighboring tribes or their voluntary submissions for ensuring protection.
3. The Hydraulic culture- Improved means of production, use of the iron plough and transplantation of rice plants in wet rice agriculture leading to Asiatic mode of production and Oriental Despotism.
4. Emergence of a hierarchical structure leading to the growth of centralized authority consequent upon surplus productions.
5. Contributions from immigrants.
6. The Brahmanical influence and the Hinduization/ Sanskritization process contributing to the legitimization of the rule and the use of myths for further consolidation.
7. The trans-cultural variations-language and culture based on interdependency and congruency values.
8. Marriage policy and integrations.
9. Inspiring/Charismatic leadership- the commanding role of the chief.
10. Population growth and pressure- the circumscription issues.
11. Growth of petty commodity production on a limited scale.

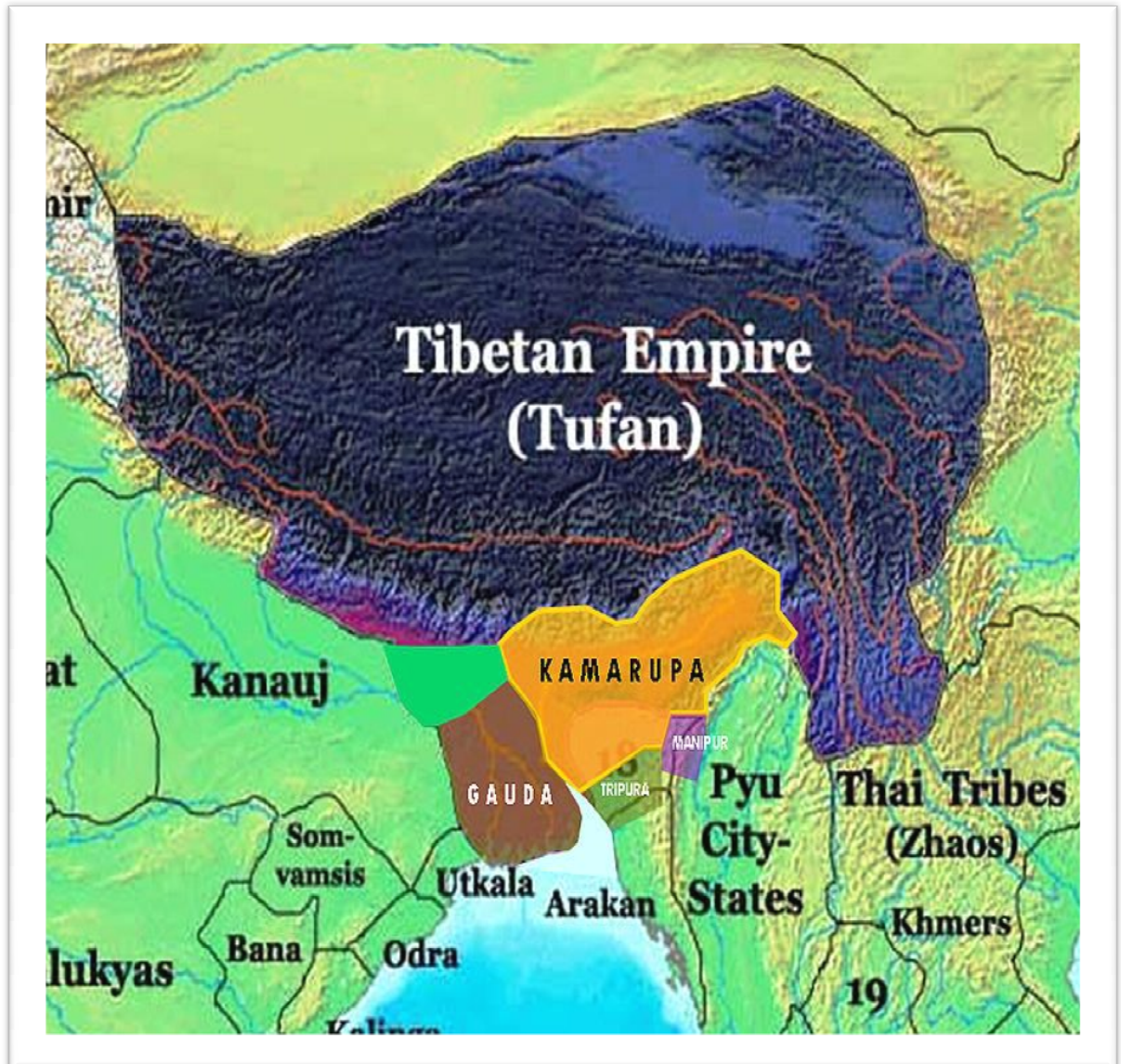
These elements in some measure, in some specific cases, might appear prominently while in some others, it might not. However, Cleasen and Skalnik have formulated some functional and structural models of such state systems termed as the Early State.

Functionally, the Early State was a continuous process. It continued to regulate the relations between 'rulers' and the 'ruled'. Structurally, it was an independent socio-political organization. There existed a centralized government with a bounded territory.'<sup>6</sup>

### **Polity formation in early Assam**

The ancient Indian literary works described the aboriginal inhabitants of Assam as Mlecchas, Asuras, Kiratas, etc. Undoubtedly they were Austric and the Mongoloid people. The *Kalika purana* also confirmed that when *Visnu* (the supreme of the Hindu Trinity) and Naraka made their advent to the land of Kamakhya the shaven headed yellow skinned, drink and meat addicted and ignorant Kiratas pierced over them.<sup>7</sup> With advent of the Aryans there was a gradual and very slow development of the state structure in early Assam and Brahmins who migrated with Naraka<sup>8</sup> played an important role. The intermingling of the Aryans with the Austro- Mongolic people was a significant feature of this period.<sup>9</sup> It is undeniable that prehistoric life continued in Assam for a longer period compared to that of the Indian mainland. Except the Brahmaputra Valley where the Aryans migrated, the whole of North- Eastern India was inhabited by the tribal people. They were less accustomed to the standard production implements which degenerated in the growth of commodity production; therefore no high scale division of labour affected the society. And there was a very slow development in its state- structure and most of the petty rulers of early Assam as referred to in some literary works were mere tribal chiefs. The food gathering and pre-pastoral pre-plough society was matriarchal and remained aloof from the idea of constituting a monarchy and thus a state formation. The following map (map-I) clearly shows the position of Kamarupa in pre-historic period.

## MAP-I: PRE-HISTORIC KAMARUPA



Source: <sup>10</sup>[http/ maps of India .com](http://maps of India .com)

However, in case of Assam and generally in the whole North Eastern India the primitive life continued for long and even today among the tribal people the role of the female is noticeable. Among the Khasi people of present Meghalaya the social structure remained apparently matrilineal. Among the Mishings of Majuli in many

cases the female maintained the whole food producing machinery; sometimes when the men engaged themselves in fishing and grazing the herd of buffalos, the women went to the field or the near-by forest with their child tied to their back with a piece of cloth; searching tuber through digging sticks and some vegetables for making wine from rice. The storing of dried meat and fish in the bamboo tubes by the tribal people is also the custom of food gathering people. Another distinctive feature is noticed among the potters (*Kumar*) of Majuli. The women potters(*Kumarani*), as, it is called in Assamese (*kumar- kumarani*), engaged in carrying baked soil (*Kumar-mati*) and in shaping the vessels while the male engaged in digging the baked soil, heating the vassals in the furnace made of mud, wood and reed, and carrying the prepared vessels to the market. In primitive days division of labour came first between the male and female. In the beginning the women were the potters and the agriculturists. And digging sticks were the main instruments used for food-production.<sup>11</sup> With the rise of the pastoral life the economy of the tribal society of the region transformed gradually from food gathering to food producing; but the pastoral life was continued side by side with the food producing through jhuming. Even today among many tribal people of North Eastern India both jhum cultivation and the taming of wild animals are continued. One may remember of such a pastoral society when taming herds of buffalos and moles in the rural and hilly areas of Assam came to notice. The development of pastoral and agricultural life signified the rise of the patriarchal society and the concentration of the controlling power of the clan to the clan chief. Each of these modes of production is marked by a distinctive division of labour between the sexes. In the pre hunting stage, there was no production, only simple appropriation of seeds, fruits and small animals, and therefore, there could have been no division of labour at all. With the invention of the spear, however, hunting became

men's task, while women continued the work of food gathering. This division is universal among the hunting tribes and it was doubtless dictated in the first instance by the relative immobility of mothers. Hunting led to the domestication of animals; and accordingly, cattle rearing are normally men's work. On the other hand, the work of food gathering, maintained by women, led to the cultivation of seeds in the vicinity of the tribal settlements; and accordingly, garden tillage is almost universally women's work. Finally when garden tillage had given place to field tillage and hoe to cattle drawn plough, the work of agriculture passed on to the men.<sup>12</sup>The practice of plough cultivation gave way to the surplus production which synchronized with the development of private property. The development of private property led to the control of a family by its eldest men which in turn led to the tendency of founding leadership. This process ultimately gave rise to the concept of controlling a clan by a Head man. Administering of a tribe by the clan head is dominant among the tribal people of North Eastern India even today. After the death of the head man the people of the clan elected another Head. The clan heads had such power over the clan that they can even sentence any guilty person to severe punishment even to death, according to their customs. Rajani Kanta Bordoloi's *Miri Jiyari*, an Assamese novel, has given such an account of the role of a tribal clan head. The judicial power of a king during the feudal age was a gradual process of accumulating more power on his hands. Whatsoever, right of the private property, specially the land, was transferred from the family heads to the clan heads? The rise of private property marked the growth of the kingship and the state. In this way, many clans came to be united under one head, in two processes-

(a) When one clan came to be victorious over the others and

(b) When two or more clans came into an agreement that they were to live together in the same place peacefully. Two or more clans came under a single leadership generally after bloody fighting. Thus the patrician groups were under gradual development and extended their authority over the subordinate agricultural people. The Lichchavi confederacy and some ancient Indian republics came into a united action for the defense and administration of their small clans from attack from nearby powerful states.

In early Assam too, which was known as Pragjyotisha and Kamarupa such factors dominated in the formation of the kingship and thereby the state. It was neither Amurtaraja nor Naraka who first established monarchy and kingdom of Pragjyotisha or Kamarupa in the eastern India; but after a gradual, though very slow development of infrastructure for kingship when family leadership changed to a clan leadership in those days. Primitive religious instincts on the other hand dominated its polity and that is why the region was named Kamarupa, before which it was called Pragjyotisha. The people of this region called it Pragjyotisha according to the topographical phenomenon as they saw it. Pragjyotisha means a region of “High and long mountains,” “might be a *sanskritization* of a possible Austric group of word like- *pau* (=hill) + *ger* (=hill) *Jo* (=high) + *tic* (=long)”<sup>13</sup>The Brahmins sanskritised Pragjyotisha as a centre of eastern astronomy- *Prag-jyotish-pur*. Later when religious instincts came steadily to the mind of the people, when the idea of kingship or state did not appear into their mind; the worshipping place became known as something like Kamakhya (a sanskritized word) and incidentally the whole region was called Kamarupa(The land of Kamakhya). During this age the clan-head was the king and at the same time god father, which helped the clan-head or king to accumulate more power and authority in his hands. Whatsoever, the words Kamarupa and Kamakhya

State an Austric origin, derived from Austric words, such as – *ke-mut,-kemuyt=grave* (stiong); *kamai-demon* (old khemer) *komui= grave*(Tareng) ; *Ka-met= crowse* (Khasi); *Kabru or kamru* name a lesser divinity worshiped by the *Sandals*.<sup>14</sup> It is now clear that the words Kamakhya and Kamarupa came from such Austric words connected with the worship of dead. Late Bishnu Prasad Rabha states that the word Kamakya came from the Bodo word *Kham-mai-kha*,<sup>15</sup> who eats flesh. This Bodo name came out of the fertility rite for which the worshippers sacrificed living animals and men to the Goddess Kamakhya signifies the worship of the ‘dead’ at the time when the worship of the dead family- heads and clan-heads were in current and later the Brahmans associated it with Hindu divine origin. The worship of the dead was also a custom of the primitive people; the tradition of the worship of the dead family-head is still alive among the people of India, and the Brahmans made it (Kamakhya) a Hindu legend showing Kamakhya as a divine place associated with the dead body of sati, the consort of Siva (One of the Hindu Trinity).The Brahmanical literature mentioned Kamarupa as a place of rebirth of god Kama-the Cupid-after being burnt by Siva.<sup>16</sup> But the word Kamarupa must have come from *Kamru* which was aryanised as Kamarupa. Alberuni refers to as Kamru, T’ang-Shu as *Ko-me-lu-* (Kamru); and Huen Tsang as *Ka- mo-lu-p’o* (Kamarupa).<sup>17</sup>

The Brahmans did this very well, renamed and sanskritized the non-Aryan place names and included their (Aryan) gods into the Hindu pantheon and thereby absorbed a large section of non-Aryan people within the Hindu fold. It is stated that the word Brahmaputra also came from the Bodo word ‘*Bhullur-buthar*’, means ‘making a gurgling noise’.<sup>18</sup> As a large river the tribal people of the region had their great respect to the *Bhullurbuthur* (the Dimasas originally called themselves greats *Dima-fisa*, means-Sons of the great river)<sup>19</sup> and the Brahmans Aryanized it connecting with

Brahma (One of the Hindu Trinity) who as a result his sexual relation with Amogha, the wife of sage Santanu, has given the birth to the Brahma Putra, the son of Brahma<sup>20</sup> as an illusion. The Luit is also connected with another myth that Parasurama, the son of Yamadagni prepared the way of Holly River cutting the bank of *Luit Sarobora* (lake) when he was relieved of the sin of matricide there.<sup>21</sup> But the Luit is a Bodo word, *Ti-tao-<Lao-ti<Luit*, the meaning of which is lost.<sup>22</sup> The real background of the Parasurama's episode connecting with the murder of his mother<sup>23</sup> signifies the change of the matriarchal society to the patriarchal one, even though this episode was brought from early Indian literature, it is to be noted that primitive life was long continued in the North Eastern India.

The *Kalika purana* cannot be taken as a source of study for the very early period of the social development of Assam, Which was written in the eight century or after; what is more proper is the primitive survivals among the tribal people of the region. An interesting thing that the kings also gone to plough land. A statement goes in the *Kalika Purana*.<sup>24</sup> referring to the use of plough by Janaka and mention may be made to the ancestors of the Koch dynasty of Assam who were mere village agriculturists.<sup>25</sup> Other kingdoms were also formed in the same way. Various rivers and places of Assam signifies Austro-Mongoloid origin and nowhere in the whole of North Eastern India any Aryan rulers ruled over any of its region except the doubtful reference of Amurta Raja in the Ramayana; <sup>26</sup> further evidence is made by the references in the Indian literary works, Where ancient Assam was called as a Mleccha Kingdom and the people as Mlecchas which means non-Aryan or inferior to the Aryans.

Before Naraka we have a very little literary evidence of the ruling tribal chiefs of Assam. The Kirata or Mongoloid people were certainly very well known to the Vedic Aryans, and we find mention of them in *Yajur* and *Atharva Vedas*.<sup>27</sup> During this

period the tribal chiefs of early Assam established their hold over their own clans. Mention may be made to the accumulation of huge quantity of property of Ghatakasura<sup>28</sup> who was killed by Naraka. This is an important factor considering the growth of private property and thus kingship in early Assam. Before Ghataka there are some other tribal chiefs who ruled over ancient Pragjyotisha. They were Mahiranga Danava, Hatakasur, Sambasur, and Ratnasur<sup>29</sup> Mahiranga is the sanskritisation of the Bodo word *Mairang*,<sup>30</sup> even a hill named Mairang still exist at Beltola, Guwahati, where Mairang ruled over this clan. Ghatakasura was another tribal chief who was defeated and killed by the aggressive force of Naraka, most probably a trading tribal chief who came from the eastern part of ancient Magadha. Ghatakasura is described as a ruler of the Kiratas i.e. Bodos<sup>31</sup> It is not unlikely that throughout the whole of North Eastern India many tribal chiefs ruled over various territories; one of them was Bana, a contemporary and friend of Naraka, who ruled over the region of modern Tezpur. Bana must be a historical figure. Even today in their Khatchi ritual the Rabhas of Assam remember the virtues of Bana.<sup>32</sup> Literary sources have given the genealogy of Banasura and his ancestors. The ancestors of Bana were Marichi, Kas'yap, Hiranyakasipu, Prahlad, Virochana and Bali<sup>33</sup> In spite of the unsoundness of such genecology it is true that many ruling tribal chiefs scattered over ancient Assam.

Of all the early kings of Kamarupa, Naraka deserves some credit. Naraka is considered as a mythological hero, but the real development surpassed this mythology and Naraka's adventure is the adventure of tribal chief with many Aryans cultivators and priests with him? It is not unlikely that some tribal groups came into direct contact with the Aryan culture and it is recognized<sup>34</sup> that a greater portion of Northern India was formerly occupied by the Bodo people and Naraka was one of the Chiefs of

a Bodo clan, who were more advanced than the same group of people of North Eastern India who came into the Aryan contact too late. Janaka is also said to have a non- Aryan origin.<sup>35</sup> Undoubtedly, Naraka and his co-followers were well acquainted with plough- agriculture and therefore, with private property and the role of maintaining his clan and the territory.<sup>36</sup>

Having destroyed the might of the local tribal chiefs<sup>37</sup> including Ghatakasura, Naraka occupied the key position in Pragjyoishpura and invited the Brahmins and other high caste Aryans<sup>38</sup> from a region (Magadha) of plough agriculture (where iron was already in use) who played a decisive role in replacing the hoe-cultivation or food-gathering culture to plough agriculture. If not profound, a change of agriculture came to the mountainous tract of early Assam, with the migration of the Aryans, who could not have migrated to Assam, a region of monsoon dominated thick forest, without the use of iron; which was found available in the region of present Bihar, the ancient state of Magadha where these iron played an important part in the supremacy as a political power in India.<sup>39</sup> The *Kalika Purana* tentatively confirmed that there was a large scale intermarriage<sup>40</sup> which led to the fusion of many tribal people into the Aryans. The subdued tribes of Assam as a whole came to be known as a new peasant group of Sudra. Thus the Aryans caste divisions penetrated into the bone of the tribal society of early Assam.<sup>41</sup> This distinction in the turn helped in the disruption of the tribal people and their merger into the general agrarian society. 'The Brahmins here acted as pioneers in underdeveloped localities; they first brought plough agriculture to replace slash-and-burn cultivation, or food gathering. New crops, knowledge of distant markets, organization of village settlements and trade also came with them. As a result kings invited Brahmins generally from distant Gangetic basin to settle in unopened localities.<sup>42</sup> The inclusion of Kamakhya and *Linga-Yoni* worship into the

‘Society’ of Aryan gods is a process on part of the Brahmins to submerge the tribal localities within the Hindu fold. Such primitive emblems like the *linga* and *Yoni* are most common in whole of India as objects of worship in the Hindu religion which survived from the Neolithic period. <sup>43</sup>The Rigveda also refers to the worship of *Linga*<sup>44</sup> and their constitution is ‘increasingly evident with the relentlessly rising tide of Saivite Hinduism.’ <sup>45</sup>When Naraka went against the God (Hindu God) he was killed by the latter. <sup>46</sup> This episode is perhaps the imposition of Aryan belief and customs upon the tribal people of ancient Assam; at the same time on the part of the Brahmins to maintain its role upon the society. ‘Divine marriages’ acquisition of a family or entourage, and successive incarnations are theological manifestations of social fusion. Such parallel changes in society and religion were repeated in different localities. The Brahman literature which is connected with Naraka’s divine origin <sup>47</sup>is nothing but ecology as the general character of the Brahman literature in India. The Brahman literature gives the ruling families of ancient Assam, the status of Kshatriya and connecting them with some hero of Hindu legend or with some great divinity of Brahmanism, thereby opt the assimilating process. Naraka’s birth association with the skull of the dead <sup>48</sup>can be accepted with most probability a tribal customs of hero worship; and the Mother Goddess Durga who was also originally a tribal deity has the custom of hanging the heads of men as wreath. One of the Naga clans of North East has the tradition of cutting the heads of men to show powers. The person who could accumulate more heads was more respected and higher status was attained in the society. It is stated that in course of time human head hunting replaced the formerly recognized animal head hunting. <sup>49</sup>Even there was a custom among the Ahom royal house to kill a man in a single thrust by the king to be with his ancestral sword, before accession. <sup>50</sup>However, the word Naraka is derived from the Bodo word *Narkhu* which

means 'fate'<sup>51</sup> or powerful man and the *Kalika Purana* is also inclined to support it.<sup>52</sup> Bhagadatta and Bajradatta, the names of the sons of Naraka have their Bodo affinities to Bhugdath and Burjjadath which mean courageous and more courageous respectively.<sup>53</sup> The *Kalika Purana* states that Naraka was born of *Bhumi* (earth)<sup>54</sup> which in reality trace out the aboriginal origin of Naraka and the dynasty he founded was known as Bhauma as it came from *Bhumi* and the other ruling dynasties of early Assam which claim them as scions of Naraka and Bhauma prove their aboriginal origin. It is possible to ascribe that Naraka came to this North Eastern tract of India when the pressure of the Aryans was felt heavily in the whole region of Northern India.

The *Kalika Purana* devoted most of its pages regarding religious activities of the people of early Assam bear the clue of primitive fertility rites and situated in the hill tracts, an evidence of settlement before the use of cheap metal when food gathering was common. It is imagined that the shrines were built near the old trade routes to China,<sup>55</sup> which served 'whether directly or through merchants associated' with the shrines 'and the trading tribal chiefs who turned into kings'<sup>56</sup> as a result of accumulating wealth and acquiring the implements of plough cultivation which enabled them to secure the position of leadership and to organize a group of warriors and to overrun other tribes and conquering their territories. This is the probable story of the adventure of Naraka.

The worship of Mother Goddess was predominant in the period of food gathering. At the time Naraka was killed by Lord Vishnu<sup>57</sup> who established Naraka's son Bhagadatta to the throne of Pragjyotisha<sup>58</sup> Vishnu's re-entry into Pragjyotisha was perhaps further Aryan migration, who though were able to kill Naraka, could not establish their hold over this territory and Bhagadatta succeeded to Naraka's position.

Bhagadatta also said to have fought in the Mahabharata war, but the Mahabharata war was originally a local feud and the inclusion of tribes and people of the whole sub-continent are the later versions. <sup>59</sup>In addition to Naraka- Bhagadatta the literary sources supply twenty six kings are said to have ruled in succession, but the records of these are unclear. <sup>60</sup>who ruled over various parts of North Eastern India. <sup>61</sup>They were the tribal chiefs with very little historical importance, until the dynasties of historical significance were established under the Varmanas, Salastambhas and the Palas of early Assam. Further, how Pushyavarman became the founder of the Varman dynasty is also shrouded in darkness. Anyway, polity formation at this time was at an incipient stage. From Pushyavarman we enter into the historical period of Kamarupa. But the extent of the kingdom is conjectural. This might be due to lack of political delimitations of the times. However, literary sources would suggest that the kingdom of Kamarupa lies to the east of Karatoya as far as Dikkaravasini. <sup>62</sup>That the kingdom of Kamarupa would have drawn the attention of the Gupta rulers is enough to indicate the emergence of polity formation in Kamarupa.

The emergence of the Varman rule in ancient Kamarupa state came into existence not long before the rise of Pushyavarman. <sup>63</sup> The term *Pratyanta Nripatis* <sup>64</sup>as mentioned in the Allahabad pillar inscription referring to Kamarupa and Davaka speaks of the existence of rudimentary formations. The term inter alia implies that Kamarupa was a tributary state under the Guptas, but the extent sources are not adequate to substantiate this point.

As regards Davaka except for the name we do not have any other information about its relations with the kingdom of Kamarupa. Davaka might have had some separate existence and was not included in Kamarupa. <sup>65</sup>But later sources prove that Davaka might have been absorbed into or annexed by Kamarupa. But that it may the external

factor might have had a role in the emergence of the Varman polity at that time. To get rid of the emergence of the Gupta domination appears to have been moving factor in this regard.

The extension of the Gupta influence up to Kamarupa might be considered as sporadic, because we do not have adequate sources in finding out the nature of at least some political relations between the two. However, the Gupta influence on Kamarupa polity formation cannot be altogether ruled out. Earlier to Pushyavarman's times, Kamarupa had different principalities ruled by the Danava kings. Perhaps one can say that there was no centralized polity till the rise of the Varmans under Pushyavarman.

It was the Gupta thrust in the northeast, which ultimately brought about a definite course of change. Following the traditional accounts K.L.Barua<sup>66</sup> would say that Pushyavarman, the first king of Varman dynasty dared to arrest the *Asvamedha* (horse) of Samudragupta and consequently he had to battle with the army of Samudragupta and was humbled.<sup>67</sup>

On the other hand, the Allahabad pillar inscription is silent about this. It may be presumed that Kamarupa under Pushyavarman was not fully prepared to face the mighty army of Samudragupta. All this indicates that the Kamarupa state might have been in an embryonic form. The reference to the term *matsyanyana* in the Nidhanpur inscription<sup>68</sup> would have us believe that the Varman polity at this time was not strongly organized. Anyway Samudragupta's policy was not to annex or absorb the distant conquered areas but was to be content with mere submission to sovereignty. Hence, the impact of Gupta domination was forgotten immediately and Kamarupa began to organize her leading to a state like organization, if not a full-fledged state. It appears that Pushyavarman assumed the title of *Maharajadhiraja* as recorded in the

inscriptions. <sup>69</sup>It suggests that Pushyavarman might have annexed or absorbed the other small principalities in to his kingdom immediately after the Gupta onslaught. Herein, we may look into the factor of Brahmanical influence in the polity formation of Kamarupa.

Perhaps, it is not an exception but a rule that the Brahmanical influence was at the root of all polity formations in the ancient Indian context. In the case of polity formation in Kamarupa this factor cannot be overlooked. The Brahmins advocated the importance of strong rulers for the protection of life and property. Therefore, in organizing the polity they created such an image of the ruler that it was at once infallible and inviolable in the eyes of the totality irrespective of caste and creed. This enabled the people to unite under one flag and the legitimacy of the sovereign was never questioned. During the period of the later Varman rulers this aspect of political development manifested itself immensely.

Undoubtedly, it was the ingenuity of the Brahmins, which accelerated the process of polity formation in ancient Kamarupa. For instance, the Dubi copper plate has this to say with reference to Pushyavarman: 'In that very family Sri Pushyavarman, who was like Indra and was the destroyer of the enemy-soldiers, became the king after the retirement to the abode of Indra(i.e., after death) of the kings whose fame was similar to the (luster of the moon).' <sup>70</sup>

And again in the Nidhanpur Copper Plate, 'When the kings of his family having enjoyed the position(of rulers) for three thousand years had (all) attained the state of gods, Pushyavarman became the lord of the world.' <sup>71</sup>So, we may sum up that no further proof is necessary to substantiate the Brahmanical influence in the formation of the Kamarupa polity during Pushyavarman's time. The mediaeval history of North-

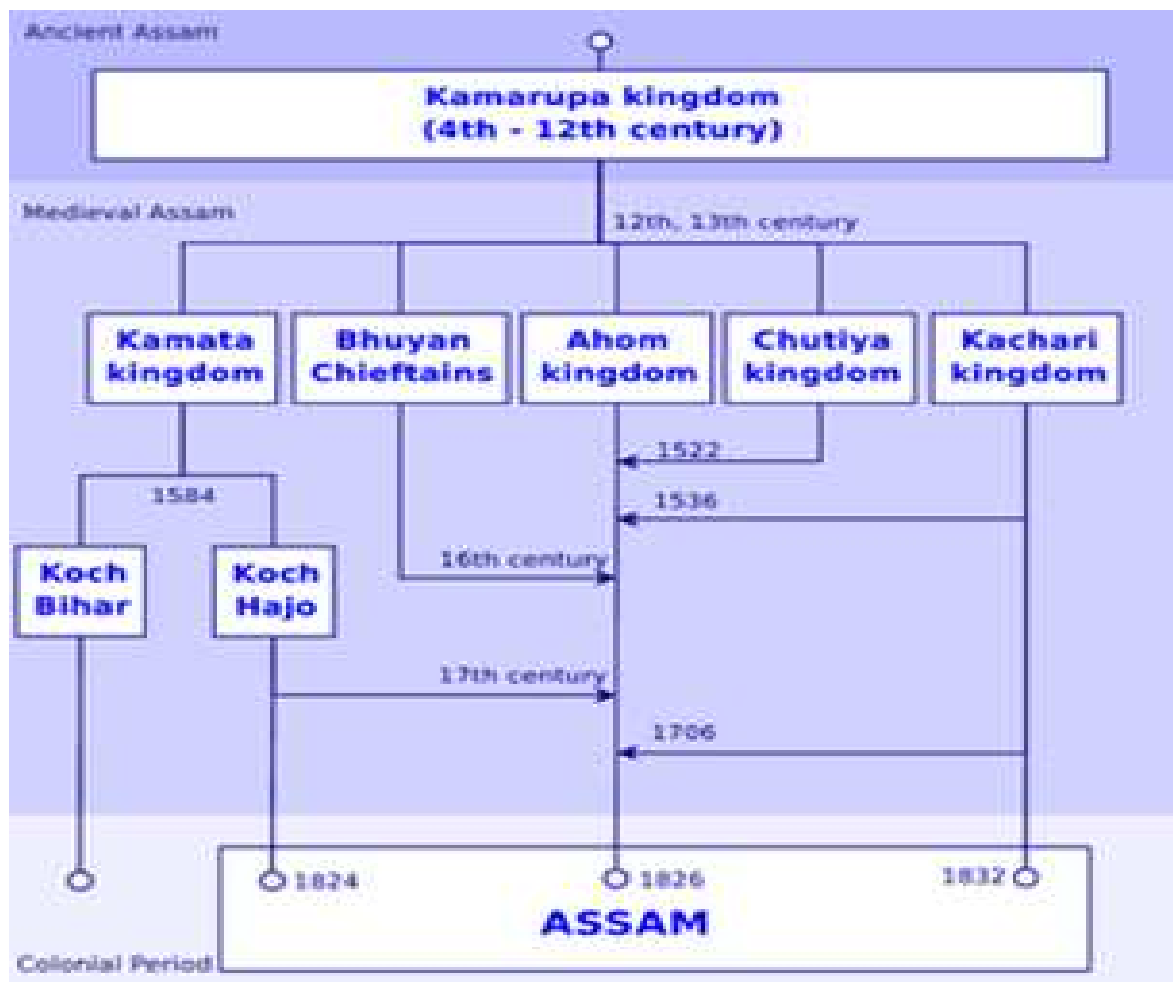
East India also the witness of appearance and develop a large numbers polity formation. These were mainly the Chutiya, Kachari/Dimasa, Koch, Meitei (Manipuri), Khasi (Khyrim), Jayantia (Pnar) and the Ahom States. Except the Ahom, these were mostly sedentary as well as segmentary states. Their social organizations were pristine in form based on their traditional customs and culture. They submitted themselves to a coercive authority in course of time.

It is difficult to form a general theory of state formation in case of Ahom. The Ahom were already socially organized, had their own tribal constitution<sup>72</sup> when they first entered in upper Assam. They were literate and had the capacity for surplus productions. Their leader Chao- Lung Siu-Ka-Pha, the founding father of the Ahom State, was a successful ruler for about eighteen years in his paternal state Mioung-Mao. Further, they landed in a region, which was not politically void the existence of the petty Bhuyan chiefdoms in a fragmented political structure still carried the political heritage of the ancient kingdom of Kamarupa. Moreover, there was the emerging powerful Chutia State in the easternmost corner of Upper Assam, followed by the Kachari state at the centre in a scattered manner, and the Kamata state of Kamarupa in the west, all throughout the Brahmaputra valley. Therefore, the interactions of the variables in the factors and process, in case of the Ahom state formation in mediaeval Assam appear enormously complex and epistemological too.<sup>73</sup>

The Ahom state, in many ways, resembles the formation of the Magadhan state of ancient India. Both had gold bearing rivers, a large number of elephant population in the extensive forests and were naturally fortified by the surrounding hills. Both had a similar ecology conditioned by the river Ganges in Magadha and the river Brahmaputra in Assam. Brahmanical or Indo- Aryan influence was writ large in both cases. Both produced a highly centralized authority by doing away with petty

principalities, wiped out foreign invasions and gave birth to a cohesive unit of the land and the people. Following table (Table-III) indicate the various powers in the land of Kamahi during the 4<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

**TABLE-III: KAMARUPA KINGDOM**



Source: <sup>74</sup><http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/file>

The Thirteenth century India witnessed not only the advent of the Ahom in the North-East but also of the Muslim in the west. Both of them were successful in carving out new kingdoms. The Ahom-Mughal relations mark an important epoch in the history of mediaeval Assam. While the former made Assam their permanent home braving repeated Mughal invasions, the latter failed to make a permanent footing in the region although their contributions were no less in socio- political history of Assam.

The appearance of the Ahom in the political scene of mediaeval Assam produced far-reaching effects in the history and culture of North East India. Early in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the ancient kingdom of Kamarupa centering the Brahmaputra valley, <sup>75</sup>was already disintegrated into a number of Zones each headed by a tribal chief as stated above. This situation was most favorable for the Ahoms, a section of the Tai to found a Tai Kingdom in its South-Eastern extremity between the two tributaries of the Brahmaputra the *Dikhow* and the *Buhri Dihing*. <sup>76</sup>This tract of land was low-lying, marshy and often flooded by river water during the rainy months. The Local tribes, Morans and Borahis who were numerically small, had settled on high lands, lived in clusters of a few villages here and there. <sup>77</sup>But their neighbors, the Chutiyas on the North and the North-East, and the Bodo chiefs on the South and South-East enjoyed their independence extending from the river Dikhow to the kalong. Further west, a number of petty land-holding chiefs called Bhuyans, had their dominions extended to Goalpara and Kamrupa and a part of Northern Bengal and Mymensing (now in Bangladesh). <sup>78</sup>

This disintegrated ancient Kamarupa viz the land of Kamakhya faced simultaneously foreign strains from the East as well as the west while the invasions from the west made by a Muslim General proved futile that from the East made by the Tai proved effective resulting in the ultimate imposition of their rule over the whole of the valley.

This brought to an end of the rule of the Morans, Borahis, Chutiyas, Kacharis and Bhuyans and even of the Koches, who had established their authority over an extensive area in the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

### MAP-II: AHOM KINGDOM



Source: <sup>79</sup> [http:// maps of india.com](http://maps.of.india.com)

The process of expansion of the Tai Kingdom first founded in 1228 A.D. was slow but steady. The process of expansion took several centuries and was attended with bloody warfare and punctured by diplomacy and statesmanship. By 1682, the Tai rules established their sovereign authority over the whole of the valley up to 1826. Map-II above clearly gives us an idea of the Ahom Kingdom in Assam. For their great achievement, the local people called them Tai *Asom* or *Ahom* (meaning invincible or unparalleled) and in due course of time, the whole country came to be Known as *Asom* (Assam).

### **Religious policy of the Ahom**

With the arrival of the Ahoms in the Brahmaputra valley, the Borahis had lost their identity as a separate tribe while the Morans came under the influence of Vaisnavism. The other tribes had been detribalized.<sup>80</sup> It is conjectured that the Ahoms while they were in Yunnan had come under influence of Taoism, Confucianism and even Buddhism. In upper Mynmar, the Ahoms also came into contact with Brahmanical Hinduism. Hinduism, the religion of the ancient Kamarupa was not unfamiliar to the Ahoms. In their early days, the Ahoms did not interfere in the religious rites, rituals and observances of local people. They neither disturbed others nor gave up their own faiths. Liberal and practical outlook also shaped the religious policy of the Ahom Monarchs. Their own gods and goddesses included *Lengdon* (Hindu's Indra), *Langkuri* (Siva), *Ja-Sing-Pha* (Sarasvati) etc. A chronicle records that Khunlung and Khunlai; the progenitors of the Ahom kings on the earth were advised by *Ja-sing-pha* to make annual sacrifice to Lengdon along with all the eight thousand gods.<sup>81</sup> All the eight kings of the line of Sukapha who ruled between 1228 and 1397 A.D. worshiped their gods with pomp and charity.<sup>82</sup> It appears that there were similarities between the

religious practice of the different tribes and these of the Ahoms. For example one may notice that Tai-Ahom religion had the conception of *Pha* (one omnipotent being, the great god), whose counterpart in Hinduism is *Purna Brahma* (the creator of the universe). Likewise the Tai-Ahom god Lang kuri, Pha-pin-Bet, Chang-dam, Jashing-pha, Ban, Den and Phai are identical with Hindu Siva, Vishnu, Brahma, Sarasvati, Surya, Chandra and Agni respectively.<sup>83</sup> The Ahoms also worshiped *Phura-tara* or creator, along and performed *Umpha*, *Saipha*, *Phimai Thao*, and *Me-Dem-Me-Phi* by sacrificing fows, pigs and other objects.<sup>84</sup> Besides they also worshiped gods of forests, rivers, hills and paddy fields. During the first phase the Ahoms maintained their traditional marriage system known as *chaklong* and the dead were buried. There was thus great similarities between the religions of the new comer Ahoms and the autochthonous people of the Brahmaputra valley in respect of worship, sacrifice and also the concept of god and goddesses, ancestor worship and animistic. During this period, all the Ahom rulers followed a policy of Ahomizing the Mongoloid local tribes by means of inter tribe marriage and diving. But they never tried to impose their religious beliefs over the conquered people. Instead, they themselves gradually accepted the local people and thereby tried to become one with the ruled. Sukapha's conciliatory measures towards the conquered Moran and Borahi tribes treating them as equal with the Ahoms may be taken as beginning of such policy of Ahomization followed by all the eight kings during this period (1228-1397 AD). Thus during the period, the Ahom rulers followed a policy of non-interference and tried to maintain their own religion among themselves. By this policy of non-interference in respect of religious activities, the Tai-Ahoms gained the goodwill of the local people which helped a lot in expansion of their kingdom in course of time.

At the murder of the sixth king Sutupha (1364-1376) by the Chutiyas was followed by the enthronement of Sudangpha (1397-1407) better known as Bamuni Konwar as the latter was brought up in a Brahman family.<sup>85</sup> on ascending the throne, the king brought the Lakshminarayan Salagram, a Hindu god, in to the royal palace and appointed his foster father Brahmin as confidential adviser.<sup>86</sup> Thus the Hindu god gained its importance as much as the Ahom titular deity. The same king also performed Hindu practices in the coronation ceremony. It is said that he also assumed the high sounding title of *Rajesvara Chakravarty Narapati*, an early Hindu title of kings. Naturally the orthodox section of the Ahom expressed their displeasure against pro-Hindu activities of Sudangpha. The rebellion was put to an end and The Hindu and Ahom practices continued Simultaneously Susenpha (1439-1488), his successor, patronized Hinduism by rebuilding a Hindu temple at Nagar Samkar in central Assam.<sup>87</sup> It was done probably under the influence of Brahmins, who were well-aware of the theory of 'nuclear area'. Created Centering round a temple by the old Kamarupa kings for extending and legitimizing their rule over a newly acclaimed area. It was probably the Hindu pundits who encouraged Suhungmung (1497-1539) to extend the western boundary of his Kingdom to the Karatoya River flowing through Northern-Bengal and to build a victory tower on the bank of that River.<sup>88</sup> A vast Hindu population was thus included in his territory, and these Hindu and Hinduized people had with them both orthodox and semi-orthodox Hindu social systems. It was the Brahmins who bestowed the Hindu title *Svarganarayan* on him.<sup>89</sup> At the same time, a religious ambassador was deputed to the temple of Lord Jaganath in Orissa. Thence forth the Ahom Kings began to adopt Saka era in addition to the Ahom system Lak-ni.<sup>90</sup> However, the Ahom rulers were not blind Supporters and patrons of Hinduism to grow as a danger affecting their kingdom. The period of Suhungmung

and his immediate successor witnessed the growth of Visnava reform movement headed by Srimanta Sankardeva (1449-1569), a non-Brahmin Siromani Bhuyan from present day Nagaon District. Soon his teachings become popular among the masses for which the kings were alarmed. The Ahom kings therefore took stern measures against this sect of Vaisnavism due to which Srimanta Sankardeva and his chief disciple Madhavadeva had to leave the Ahom kingdom.<sup>91</sup> Thus as impending danger from the Bhuyans was overcome by stern measure and the political powers of the Bhuyans were completely crushed. This was how the new kings legitimized their authority towards west up to Nagaon. Suhungmung's successor Suklenmung (1539-1552) even used the Brahmanical Hinduism to ward off an attack by the Koches. A contingent army of local tribes were sent to battle field that wore sacred threads and marched riding on cows. The Koch army who were also under great influence of Hinduism did not agree to kill their opponents, they thought to be Brahmins and their *Vahanas*-the cows and hence retreated. It is said; here lies the origin of Assamese proverb '*tale go bodh-upare bramabadh*' which is commonly used to mean a crisis situation (*Dharma Samkat*). Avoiding killing of cows and Brahmins the Koch army retreated.<sup>92</sup> Following the similar policy, his Predecessors Susengpha also known as Pratapsimha (1603-1641 AD) rebuilt several Siva temples at Dergaon and Bisvanath and introduced the annual Durga Puja. He also appointed non-Ahom persons from Brahmin caste to some responsible posts.<sup>93</sup> He performed his mother's Sraddha Ceremony according to brahmanical form of rites and rituals. Thus the probable Danger from the Bhuyans was checked by patronizing brahmanical rites and recognized also the brahmanical sects of Hinduism against the Neo-Vaisnavites headed by the Bhuyans. Pratapsingha even wanted to be a *Gajapati* having at least ten thousand elephants following the *Gajapati Kings* of Orissa. But the concept of

equality and fraternity in religious plane, the neo-Vaisnavite movement attracted the masses, who were the peasant *Paiks* of the state. The successors of Susengpha therefore changed their approach. They began to show favour to the branch of this sect which had been under brahmanical influence. Sutamala alias Jayaddhajsimha (1648-1663) was the first Ahom King who formally embraced Hinduism by taking initiation from Brahmin called Niranjan Bapu of Aunihati Satra, a Monastery of the neo-vaisnavites. He also caused to establish Satras at Jakhalabandha and Dakshinpat. Since then the Ahom rulers used to assume Hindu title in addition to his Tai-Ahom title at the time of coronation.<sup>94</sup> This policy was continued up to 1681 for which all the successive kings became disciples of Satras led by Brahmins.

The religious policy of the Tai rulers reached a culminating point as soon as Supatpha alias Gadadharsimha (1681-1698), the 30<sup>th</sup> king of the line ascended the throne in 1681. The experience he gathered during the period of his exile before ascending the throne, Gadadharsimha could see the impending danger to the Ahom kingdom from the Neo-Vaisnava Satras mostly headed by Brahmin preceptors. It was under the royal patronage as well as of growing popularity of the new faith that some *satradhikars* used to live like kings with all sorts of paraphernalia.<sup>95</sup> The state economy was at stake when the followers of this sect called *Bhakats* claimed exemption from the liability to serve the state as paik. Gadadharsimha, therefore, after assuming the power followed a policy of enforcement upon the Vaisnavism on one pretext or other. On the contrary Gadadharsimha followed a policy to renovate the age old Hindu temples which had been neglected for centuries. He therefore, re-constructed the Umananda temple at Guwahati with an intention to legitimize the Ahom authority in the land of Kamakhya.

To arrive at these goals his son and successor Sukhrungpha alias Rudrasimha (1696-1714) made a survey of the Satras and the ancient sacred sites of the Hindus. He appears to be extremely shrewd in healing the wounded sentiment of the Hindu religious heads for he suspended the atrocities upon the Vaisnavism on the one hand and continued to make extensive patronage to Hindu temples where Brahmins were assigned lands and men. He also patronized Islam and sent regular offerings to Muslim sacred site at *Poa-mecea* at Hajo <sup>96</sup>perhaps with the objects of raising a third front.

His son and successor Sivasimha (1764-1744) was a staunch Sakta Hindu, who appointed Krishnaram Bhattacharya, a Brahman from Bengal as head of the management of the Kamakhya temple at Guwahati who was also codified the rites and rituals of the Hindus and traced out a procedure of worship acceptable to all Hindus of Assam. Sivasimha let loose a policy of assault on the Vaisnavism to the extent that the Vaisnavism were openly insulted by his queen. A section of Vaisnavism called Moamaria could not tolerate this type of insult and atrocity for which they rose in an armed revolt against the Ahom authority. In the meantime a number of high dignitaries become disciples of the Moamaria sect who also opposed the policy of atrocities to the Vaisnavism. This opportunity presented itself during the reign of Lakshmisimha (1769-1780), when Nahar Khora and Ragha, the two local chief of the Moran tribe received severe physical torture in the pretext of nonpayment of regular tribute to the king. Incidentally the two Morans were the disciples of the Moamaria Gossain who flagged off the green signal for an armed revolt against the Ahom king. Lakshmisimha was dethroned and mad captive. Soon Ramakanta Moran becomes the king while Ragha Moran assumed the office of the Barbarua in 1769.

<sup>97</sup>Under the new governments headed by Ramakanta, the Brahmin Satradhikar were

put into confinement and made to pay fines in cash and kind.<sup>98</sup> In extreme jealousy the nose, ears and eyes of the Aunihati Satradhikar were cut off.<sup>99</sup> But dissensions regarding the Kingship among the Moamarias soon broke out which had enabled the royalists to restore their king by April 1770.<sup>100</sup> The royalists now in their turn took drastic action which led the country to a civil war. In the reigns of Gaurinathsimha alias Suhitpungpha (1780-1795), the rebels rose into revolt and attempted to burn the then capital city. The king managed to escape followed by a whole sale massacre of the Moamarias which continued for six months. Thus policy of blood and iron instigated the Moamarias who made up their mind to bring an end of the Ahom rule from Brahmaputra valley, when they shouted, “ *Mari Jaon, Mari Jaon, Gurur rin suji Jaon*” (let we be killed, let us kill, but we must serve our Guru). The Moamarias attacked the capital at Rangpur and Gaurinath was compelled to flee to Guwahati and made a request for military assistance from the British power in Calcutta. Lord Cornwallis sent captain Thomas welshe in 1792, Armed with sophisticated weapons the small number of British army suppressed the Moamarias but could not crush it.

It was after 1805 when Moamarias were given separate state on tributary basis,<sup>101</sup> that the rebellion was withdrawn. But the jealousy between Purnanada Buhragohain and Badan Chandra Barphukan paved the way for a Burmese invasion of the kingdom. Ultimately the scramble for power between the Burmese and the British, the Anglo-Burmese war took place which ended with the conclusion of the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 and the Tai Kingdom in Assam came to an end.

From the above discussion, it appears that the Tai-Ahom rulers were never serious in respect of rites, rituals and procedure of worship, but very cautiously and carefully tried to utilize religions and religious sentiments in extending and legitimizing their political authority over the Brahmaputra valley. They often tried to use the different

sects of Hinduism against each other. But eventually the vary policy led the kingdom to its own destiny.

### **Cults and the State under the Ahoms**

The Tai people later known as the Ahom entered Assam in A.D. 1228 and established a small kingdom in the eastern region of the Brahmaputra valley. For a long period till A.D. 1682, the Ahoms had frequent struggle for power with the Koches and the Mughals.<sup>102</sup> Finally in A.D. 1682 during the reign of king Gadadharsimha, they emerged victorious at the last Mughal war at Itakhuli and the entire area of present day Assam (Except the district of Goalpara) had come under their political sway.<sup>103</sup> It was from that time that the temple building activities by the Ahom rulers in Assam had been restored to<sup>104</sup> beginning with the temple of Umananda at Guwahati.<sup>105</sup> His son and successor Rudrasimha (1698-1714) continued the practice of granting extensive area of land and a number of men for regular worship and maintenance of the temple.<sup>106</sup> The same king invited Krisnaram Nyayabagis from Shantipur (Nadiya in west Bengal) who was given the charge of the Kamakhya, the most famous cult in Assam. Rudrasimha caused a survey of sacred places and shrines of Kamarupa in A.D. 1712<sup>107</sup> which revealed the existence of 84 sacred sites or *tirthas* which included Kamakhya, Ugratara, Citracala, Hajo, As'vakranta, Siddhesvara and Manikarnesvara. Following this the king made endowments in forms of land and men and utensils to a number of Cults. Temple building tradition for various cults was continued by his son and successor Sivasimha (1714-1744). He built several temple and made huge endowments of land and men for their upkeep. Sivasimha's successor (also brothers) Pramattasimha (1744-1751), Rajesvarasimha (1751-1769) and Lakshmisimha (1769-1780) and later on Kamalesvarasimha (1799-1810) also built a

large number of temples. Thus the temple building tradition and creation of endowments in the form of land, men, utensils and in some cases in cash money was continued to the last days of the Ahom rule and we now find more than one hundred temples together with their endowments, Some of this temple is still in standing order and hundreds of people visit these temples regularly on certain occasions. Moreover, the daily and regular worships are also performed for the respective deities of the temple.

### **Relation regarding construction and repairing**

The grant of lavish endowments by the Ahom kings to the temples since the reign of Gadadharsimha (1681-1698), made it necessary on their part to place a royal officer for the supervision of the temples and their establishments. The relation with the temples in lower Assam was maintained through a highly dignified and powerful officer of the Ahom administration called the *Barphukan*. It was he who issued royal charters on behalf of the king assigning grants of land and men. A study of these charters,<sup>108</sup> which record power, prestige and functions of these temple servitors help us to reconstruct the form of machinery responsible for the construction and repairing of the temples.

**a) The King:** The king built or rebuilt temples on sacred sites and made endowments of land, men and utensils. It was the king who declared a temple as a public place; occasionally the king visited the temples, when he was received by the officials connected with the temples like the *Barphukan*, the *Seva-Caloo*, the *Dolai* and others.<sup>109</sup>

**b) The Barphukan:** The Barphukan was instrumental in putting into practice the royal wish of the king. The temples were built or rebuilt by the Barphukan in lower

Assam, and by the Barbarua in upper Assam at the order of the king. Subsequently they issued all the grants to the temples. It appears that they recommended also the name of a Brahmin to the post of the *Seva-Caloo*,<sup>110</sup> an intermediary person in lower Assam. The copperplate grants record the assignment of a number of attendants (*likcau*) for the use of the Barphukan, which suggests that he kept the temples and their establishments under constant supervision and received secret information. A large number of stone inscriptions declare that the full responsibility to build or repairing of a temple or any other components of a temple complex was vested upon Barphukan.

**c) Seva-Caloo :** Next to the Barphukan was the *Seva-Caloo* responsible for the management of the temples. He was appointed by the king and was responsible directly to the Barphukan. The *Seva-Caloo* was required to be well conversant with the character and intricacy of the religious performances and thus he was one of well-versed persons amongst the Brahmans. He had a general control over the temple affairs and functionaries. The copper-plate grants of the Ahom kings record that a number of attendants and a number of other people called *Paiks* were provided to him in each and every temple, so that he may do needful for the upkeep and maintenance of the temple buildings, to dig well and ponds, to cultivate the agricultural lands, to build roads to and from the temple campus subject to the approval of the Barphukan.

**d) Dolai:** The *Dolai* or the chief officer managed the affairs of the *Bardeories*. In some places, they were known as *Barthakur*. The *Dolai* or the *Barthakur* was the man at the spot responsible for all types of constructions and reconstructions besides the continuity of the regular and daily worships of the deities of their respective temples.

e) **The paiks:** A large number of people from all castes and creeds were appointed in a temple that were required to render all types of labourer's work for constructions and maintenance of the temple.

### **Relation regarding worship and offerings**

At the time of creation of an endowment the Ahom kings affixed a detail list of the articles with prescribe weight and measure, which were to be offered to a deity at the time of worship. They also took initiative in providing rules and procedures (*Puja-Vidhi*) for all the temples in Assam during the Ahom rule. Following this *puja -Vidhi* detailed by Krisnaram in addition to the customary daily worship and offerings of *bhog* (cooked food offered to the deities), certain *tithis* were observed in all the temples irrespective of sect, the form of some rituals however different from temple to temple. The most popular *tithis* are *Ambubachi*, *Bihu*, *Devadhanior Mare*, *Sardiya Utsav*, *Sivaratri*, *Janmastami* and *Dolyatra* or *Phakua*. Following the procedure laid down in royal character, the deities in the temples were regularly worshipped three times a day viz morning noon and evening. Every day in the morning the deity had to be bathed and then clothed in a new dress, then at noon cooked food was to be offered to it and finally there had to the evening worship accompanied by musical performances. It is also recorded in some literary documents that the regular *nirmali* (offering of flowers etc) from some of the temples was required to be sent to the king<sup>111</sup> through the Barphukan on the Barbarua in every morning while it was sent by some of them occasionally. It was on the desire of the king that certain colorful festivals were performed in the temples on some occasions when the deities were brought out in huge procession and all the holders of royal insignias like *Dandadhara*, *Catradhara*, *Camardhara* and *Pikdandhara* had to render their specific services.

These types of ceremonies were performed to show the strength and wealth of the Tai rulers on the one hand and the people in the vicinity of a temple irrespective of their caste, creed and sects showed their acknowledgement of the suzerainty of the king on the other.

### **Relation regarding socio-cultural and economic activities**

The relationships of the temples with the state in socio-cultural and economic spheres was varied and numerous. The temple acted as the centers of popular education through the constant recitation and exposition of the *Ramayana* the *Mahabharata* and the *Purnas* or other religious scriptures. Occasionally the priests or religious teachers expounded the principals and philosophy of their own sects in the communal rejoicings. The festivals always included music, dancing, recitations, performances etc. The temples thus played a dominant role in the socio-cultural life of the state. For all these a temple was assigned a large number of people including the priests, accountants, treasurers musicians, drummers, singers, dancers, lamplighters, cooks, sweeper and gardeners, who earned their livelihood directly or indirectly from the temple.

The temples were also the major consumers of local products. Certain articles were regularly purchased for the performance of the rituals in the temples such as pots, small earthen lamps, areca nut, ginger, oil and ghee. Besides the pilgrims who visited the temples encouraged the growth of a good market for the local traders.

The temples also played an important role in the regional development in the Tai kingdom in Assam. Agriculture was carried on in the lands received by the temples and often extended cultivation to lands lying fallow. The temples mobilized resources of land, labour and money and financed rural artisans and merchants. Around the

temples like Kamakhya and Hajo, urban centers grew up. Roads were constructed and ponds were dug by the state for the temples and for the use of pilgrims who came from different places. They brought wealth to spend in religious purposes resulting in the rising of the standard of living of the people of the vicinity of a temple.

The Ahom kings and their agents (*Barphukan*, *Barbarua*, and *Seva-caloa*) had an active role in judicial matters from an examination of the settlements of temple dispute,<sup>112</sup> it is seen that these were administrative commands of an arbitrary sorts. The publicly and communally arrived at decisions were understood as *Siddhanta* amongst the members of local corporal groups which were rendered authoritative by the participation of the king or his agents. In this context, the royal command was the 'act' which sanctioned a collective regulation.

Thus during the Ahom administration the temples in Assam had been grown up as government institution and were running smoothly without much trouble under fair system of management.

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## CHAPTER- III

### TEMPLES AND THE STATE IN ASSAM DURING COLONIAL PERIOD

MAP III: ASSAM UNDER THE BRITISH



Source: [http/ maps of India.com](http://maps of India.com)

On February 24<sup>th</sup> 1826, the British East India Company entered in the land of Kamakhya and took over the administration of the province of Assam. 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, particularly the temples 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 temples in the land of Kamakhya, was an important factor underlying political and cultural institutions and relationships? This link played a major role in the reformation of the institutions in the colonial environment. In this chapter it is intended to discuss the manner in which the temple-state relationship formed a backdrop for the shifts and changes in the balance of power in the region during the colonial rule.

The penetration of the temple-state network in the land of Kamakhya by the company administration involved the redefinition and negotiation of prevailing structure of power. Although the British had claimed territorial authority over the larger province of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, they were yet 'outsider' to the world of the temple and the ritual kingship. The company administration was an important force in a larger conflict over power which also involved the Ahoms and the Burmese. The Bhakti Cult in Assam flourished under the leadership of the Neo-Vaisnavite reformer Sankaradeva appeared to be a challenge to the temple based creed like *Saivism* and *Saktism*.<sup>2</sup> The Bhakti movement of its kind aimed at embracing all including the *Garo*, *Bhota* and *Yavana* in the fold of fraternity with the right to chanting *Ramanama* was intolerant of creeds that close the door on the impure caste.<sup>3</sup> On account of such principles, the Bhakti movement of Sankaradeva earned a great popularity among all sections of the society. Due to the mass popularity 800 Satras were established within the area of our study, most of which received little or no patronage from the rulers as compared to 28 temples, all of which thrived under the royal patronage.<sup>4</sup> The

popularity earned by the Vaisnava Satras created a feeling of insecurity to the very existence of Brahmanical rituals. The propriety of numerous blood sacrifices especially to Devi in her different forms in different temples received a challenge from *Bhakatas*. It was under this situation, between the later Part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the temples were deserted by many of their original *Sevitors* and all the rites and rituals in the temple during the period of Assam (1821-1826) suffered greatly, which were greatly responsible for the diffusion of 'nuclear areas' and for the changes that took place in performing the rites and rituals of the temples.

After the Anglo- Burmese war, the treaty of Yandaboo was signed in 24<sup>th</sup> February 1826. The British had emerged as the deliverer of the people of Assam. But the state of the country when the British took possession was one of the most unpromising. The population harassed and oppressed by the long civil and internal wars almost gives up cultivation. Men of rank including the priestly families retired to Goalpara, taking with them whatever they could. A large number of people belonging to lower classes followed the nobility and gentry. Even after the British occupation, most of the lower classes never returned to Assam while the nobility including the Priests had came back.<sup>5</sup>

At this juncture there arose rival claims on the temples between the two groups of people i.e. the descendents of original grantees and the incumbents appointed by the Burmese. Besides, the land revenue policies adopted by David Scott and Jankins which will be dealt with in the following pages were responsible for a series of disputes among the different functionaries of the temples resulting in some cases a complete cessation of even the daily *Sevapuja*.<sup>6</sup> The ruins of the temples were completed when a series of earthquakes occurred in 1832, 1838, 1841 and 1897. The

last one was greatly responsible for submerge into water of a considerable area of cultivable lands which were confirmed to the temples by the British government. This affected temple income and the rites and rituals suffered.<sup>7</sup> With the withdrawal of the supervision of temples by the British in 1842.<sup>8</sup>and with the enactment of the Hindu Religious Endowment Act ( Act XX) in 1863 to deal with the religious establishment on the one hand and due to gradual enhancement of pilgrimage visiting the temples on the other, the daily *sevapuja* and other rituals were restored mainly at the initiative of the priests who were naturally benefitted with the offerings of pilgrims.<sup>9</sup>In a series of articles entitled '*Tirthar Vivaran*' and '*Tirthayatra*' in the first Assamese monthly *Oroonoday* some of the customs, rites and rituals that prevailed in the temples, especially those in Kamakhya and Hajo are described. It is stated in this description that goats were sacrificed in the Kamakhya temple and the pilgrims were caused to be harassed by the pandas. The *Ambuvasi* was observed with pomp and ceremony, the *Kumaripuja* also prevailed and a number of *natis*(dancing girls/prostitute)were also there. It is believed that one can attain the same *punya* (religious merit) by visiting Hajo, where in Hayagrivmadhava and Kedarnathsiva reside.<sup>10</sup>

So, it is clear that the temples though faced ruin due to natural as well as political and economic changes were soon restored to pilgrimage indicating the restoration of rites and rituals as performed under the Ahom administration. But it will be seen that led a series of disputes among the different functionaries regarding the management of the temple affairs. Due to this throughout the British administrations the worship were very much neglected. As a result, there had been a gross mismanagement in the performances of the rites and rituals.

## Confirmation of Temple Properties

During the period of Burmese occupation which lasted for about four years, the Cults as well as the temples of the land of Kamakhya were subjected to arbitrary taxation and forcible seizure of their accumulated wealth which included gold and silver ornaments and jewelers, coins and other valuables. How far this allegation was true to all Cults cannot be ascertained by any positive proof, but it appears that many priests fled away to Bengal taking with them temple wealth. The priests appointed by the Barphukan under the Burmese administration, as it was alleged, also misappropriated for their own use, a considerable amount of wealth. It is known from an official report that soon after the restoration of peace and order under the British, the Commissioner of Assam, provided funds for certain furniture and utensils in the Kamakhya temple in addition to an annual grant of Rs. 1100/- for the celebration of some rites and rituals<sup>11</sup>, which may indicate that at the time when the British occupied Assam, Some temples did not possess even, their minimum utensil.

In regards to men and land originally assigned to the temples, the new administration faced a great number of difficulties for which David Scott, the Commissioner of Assam had to study carefully the revenue system in the land of Kamakhya,<sup>12</sup> and found that the land followed the *Paragana* system introduced by the Mughals. The Paik system was also partially introduced by Ahoms and thus the two systems in a mixed form were in vogue. Kamarupa then comprised of 36 *Paraganas*, (Details list in Appendix-C) each under a Chaudhury, while each temple had its own *Devottara*, *Brahmottara* and *Nankar* lands under the management of its Dolai. According to a calculation 11,0260 *puras* of land which was about half of total cultivable lands in Kamrupa was alienated for religious and other purposes and a number of not less than

12,114 *Paiks*, were in the direct services of the temples or state protégés.<sup>13</sup> It was also found that the temple estates were not situated in one locality or a compact area. The lands and men were dispersed in different *Paraganas* and *Taluks* in the land of Kamakhya. The Paiks attached to a temple were not found together in one body, but were frequently mixed with other Paiks in the same village each paying his taxes to different collecting officers, who had to travel throughout the division in per suit of stray Paiks.<sup>14</sup> Scott also found that prior to the Burmese occupation all revenue free lands granted to the temples by Ahom kings, had occasionally, in time of troubles, been assessed at rate of 5 *annas a pura*. He did not want to disturb much of the old system and simply remodeled the *Paraganas* by making into compact area each being given well- defined boundaries and the temple land were settled with the existing Dolais with the imposition of tax known as police *Barangani* at 8 *annas a pura* and the temple Paiks were declared free from their liabilities to render personal services. At the same time the company government also thought to impose a pilgrim tax ‘varying from *annas* four to rupees twenty according to the nature of offering made by the votaries’, but ultimately the idea was given up.<sup>15</sup> The settlement of the lands were made on the basis of records available in the *perakakagaz*(register) of survey which was undertaken by the Ahom Government.<sup>16</sup> As a result another complicacy arose that the Dolais, Bardeoris, and other supervising officials appointed by the Burmese during their short rule began to lodge a number of complaints raising their claim on the temple lands and men. Scott now faced two fold problems that the data of *perakagaz* was so old ‘affording little insight into the existing state of things’ and the rival claims for the ownership of temple properties from different claimants. At this crucial moment Scott breathed his last in 1831 and T.C.Robertson came to Assam in place of Scott, who made no change in assessment in temple lands (*Devottara*)

including those of *Brahmottara* and *Nankar*. So far these landed estates were concerned, in 1834 when Capt. Jenkins had become Commissioner; the Government of East India Company declared that all rights to hold lands free of assessment founded on grants made by any former government must be considered to have been cancelled by British conquest. All claims therefore for restoration to such tenures can rest, only on the indulgence of Government, without any right.’<sup>17</sup> No doubt this order declared the right of the Company Government to assess all lands held by the temples and their functionaries’ revenue free, at the same time they also expressed their willingness to grant indulgence of restoring to and confirming in their possession. Thus to overcome the problems that arose out of the claims raised by the holders of *Devottara*, *Brahmottara* and *Nankar* including the *Dharmottara* lands, it necessitated on the part of the Government to undertake an inquiry regarding the authenticity of the claims for *lakheraj* land.<sup>18</sup> James Mathie and Capt. Bogle were appointed special Commissioners for the said job under Regulation III of 1818, subject to control and order of General Jenkins. But the Government laid down some principles to guide the special Commissioners in the proposed enquiry.<sup>19</sup> However, General Jenkins instead of treating all rent free lands as being on the same footing and liable to assessment, drew a broad distinction between *Devottara*, *Brahmottara*, *Nankar*, and *Dharmottara* lands, although no grounds for this course of his action had ever been explained. Thus in all cases of land granted to the temples under *Devottara* category he confirmed the grants revenue free, if he found them to have been bonafide and valid. The only question left for after consideration was whether special ‘indulgence’ should be shown in those cases where it was found that the grants made by the Ahom kings were made bonafide for services, still being performed in the temples. In such cases of genuine *Brahmottara* and *Nankar* lands, he simply, confirmed the grants in possession,

subject to payment of David Scott's favourable rate 8 *annas* a *pura* until the completion of the proposed inquiry. In this connection the Commissioner asked the claimants to substantiate their claims on *lakheraj* lands by producing the original phalli (copperplate inscription) or *perakagaz*(register). Taking the advantage of the situation it is alleged that a number of forged documents were produced by some claimants for whom the cases were referred to panchayats, a judicial board constituted by some local nobles.<sup>20</sup> About more than 700 such cases settled by such panchayats and were confirmed by the Commissioner.<sup>21</sup> Thus on all the grants found mollified, the full revenue rate of rupee one per *pura* was levied. The 'bonafide and valid' claimants of *Brahmottara* and *Nankar* grants( also the *Dharmottara*) now objected to pay the tax at the rate of 8 *anna* per *pura*( half revenue) and pleaded that Scotts arrangement was purely temporary and he had promised to remit it, when the Government of India replied that there was no reason to believe that Mr. Scott intended to give up any of lands claimed to be held rent free which he brought under his moderate assessment, and if he did he could not have done so without sanction of Government previously obtained.<sup>22</sup> Thus the holder of *Brahmottara*, *Nankar* and *Dharmottara* lands were brought in obligation to pay half revenue. The *lakharaj* inquiry was continued up to 1860 and for the gap of long 26 years the right to continue to hold at the half rate had been recognized. Such estates were declared by the Government of India in 1887 to be heritable and transferable.<sup>23</sup> In the same year though the help of the Assam Local Land Regulation<sup>24</sup> all the lands of *Devottara*, *Brahamottara* and *Dharmottara* were assessed at a rate not exceeding one Anna, four pies for every rupees of the annual value of such land. On the *Devottara* estates held for ordinary cultivation the assessment of local rates was to be revised annually on the basis of figures in the *dag- citha* of the year and under the provision of Assam land

and Revenue Regulation (1886), the grantees of such lands gained the status of 'landholders' on the same footing as of the decennial settlement holders at full rate, with a permanent, heritable and transferable right in their lands, subject to the payment of legally assessed local rates only. The *Devottara* land holders were therefore had the advantage of permanently settled estates with the additional one that they did not pay any revenue to the Government except the local rates. Thus the estate became heritable and transferable and the *lakerajdars* were recognized as the legal owners and not only a trustee, i.e. a temple servitor. They had moreover power to enhance the rents of their tenants at their will. Their power in this regard however, was limited by law. For all practical purposes, so long as they paid the Government revenue and such cases as may be legally assessed on their lands and confirmed to the provisions of the rent law, they were the absolute owners of their lands and could dispose of it as they pleased.

Thus the landed properties originally granted to deity (*Devottara*) either known as *Bhogdhani* or *paikan* were confirmed revenue free (*lakheraj*) to the respective Cults and the *Bardeoris* as a class became the owner of the lands (*lakherajdar*) while being the representative of the *Bardeoris*, the *Dolai* became the manager. The lands originally granted to a Brahmin or non Brahmin paiks for rendering some specific services (*Brahmottara* and *Nankar*) were confirmed at half revenue with the grantees under the management of *Dalai*. Because of this arrangement, the *Dolai* could create encumbrances even though the estate is brought to sale on account of any demand realizable by law as an arrear of land revenue. At the close of the year 1895-96, there were altogether 1,985 *nisfkeraj* estates (half. revenue paying estates) in the district of Kamrupa with a revenue demand of Rs. 1.52.262 covering an area of 151, 844 acres.

<sup>25</sup> The following table (Table-IV) shows the area of land confirmed by the British

Government to the temples under the aforesaid provisions.<sup>26</sup>

**TABLE-IV: ORIGINAL GRANT AS CONFIRMED BY THE  
BRITISH GOVERNMENT**

Sl. No.	Temple	Lakheraj			Nisfkheraj		
		Bigha	Katha	Lacha	Bigha	Katha	Lacha
1	Asvakranta	1141	0	13	4429	03	08
2	Agnibanesvara	99	2	14	1283	02	08
3	Banesvara	252	1	05	1303	02	03
4	Billesvara	1420	0	05	2986	03	02
5	Bhrngesvara	500	1	19	2677	04	10
6	Chatrakara	2288	4	11	5096	03	16
7	Candika	221	0	08	201	03	16
8	Cadra Sekhar	0000	0	00	244	00	13
9	Dirghesvari	6821	4	04	634	04	04
10	Dharesvara	1732	0	04	2897	03	19
11	Diptesvari	1286	3	11	1029	04	05
12	Gopesvara	65	0	10	532	01	15
13	Hayagrivamadhava	38103	3	18	15469	04	16
14	Janardan	1735	3	09	834	03	17
15	Jay durga	9567	2	02	495	00	12
16	Kamakhya	23707	1	18	812	04	06
17	Manikarnesvara	192	4	16	1020	01	15
18	Madankamdev	118	3	03	507	04	14
19	Navagraha	210	0	12	344	02	10
20	Pandunath	727	2	09	855	00	09
21	Pariharesvara	1280	3	03	1336	01	09
22	Pingalesvara	376	4	06	965	04	11
23	Rudresvara	381	3	04	2186	01	07
24	Sukresvara	1276	1	02	4626	01	00
25	Siddhesvara	474	4	05	870	00	16
26	Ugratara	454	2	03	334	02	03
27	Umananda	9429	4	16	6505	02	09
28	Vasistha	193	0	09	664	03	10

Source:<sup>27</sup> Adhikary, G, *A History of The Temples of Kamrup and Their Management*, Guwahati, 2001, pp.136-138.

The paiks became free riots and their liabilities for rendering service were commuted to revenue payable in respect of their lands they possessed. They were even gradually evolved into *Kheraj pattiidars* under the Government.<sup>28</sup> However as regards the *Devottra paiks* their relation in respect of the old *paikan* or service lands became somewhat different. These *Devottara paiks* were considered to have acquired right of occupancy and so long they continued to render the allotted services, they were not to pay any rent to the Government, whereas the paiks who refused to render his prescribed services to the temple as before, were assessed at full rent calculated on the basis of Government revenue for similar lands.

### **Change in the Management Machinery**

With the British occupation of Assam, a new chapter began in the history of management of the temples of various Cults and all forms of supervision and control over temples and their endowments by the executive officers of the state were withdrawn. In this connection, it may be recalled that at the beginning of their administration, the British Government did not want to disturb the existing system of management for which the *Sevacaloo* exercised his power as before in respect of supervision of the temples.<sup>29</sup> The Commissioner of Assam, by virtue of his office was the apex supervisor of the religious endowments under the provision of Regulation XV of 1810, who was also empowered to make inquiries if and when necessary into the revenue matters of such foundation.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand a public opinion had grown up in England against such type of activities, for which in early 1833 the Court of Directors of the East India Company had to decide to follow a policy with an intention to relax the state control and supervision over the religious establishment of India.<sup>31</sup>

But in case of Assam after consideration of the prevailing chaotic situation due to the

rival claims raised by different claimants as has been pointed out earlier Jenkins, the Commissioner of Assam doubted much of misappropriation of the temple properties by the *Dolais* in collaboration with the *sevacaloo*, for which he referred the matter to the Governor-General through the Sadar Board of Revenue for their reconsideration of the said policy to be applied. In this connection he advanced his argument that the temples of Assam did not belong to any private individual but were state endowments and as such under Regulation of XIV of 1810, they should be strictly preserved and controlled as public institutions under direct supervision of the Government. In this regards, Jenkins suggested that under certain sections of the said Regulation, the Commissioner should be empowered to constitute a commission of local agents under his supervision and the Collector (of Revenue) for the proper maintenance of the temples.<sup>32</sup> However the Court of Directors did not agree with Jenkins and consequently it laid down the principle that "no servant of the Company should thereafter be engaged in the collection or management or custody of money in the nature of fines and offerings under what so ever they might be known that in matter relating to these temples (i.e. the temples of India in general), their worship, their festivals, their religious practices should be left entirely to themselves."<sup>33</sup> Following these principles it was directed that 'ail interference on the part of Government with selection of Officers or their establishments and management of any office or concern of the temples be at once prohibited.<sup>34</sup> Jenkins, therefore, under compulsion took necessary steps to abolish the office of the *Sevacaloo* in 1842<sup>35</sup> and thus the executive officers of the Government were prohibited from interfering in the management of the temples. Directions were also issued till the Collectors to determine the right of succession of several Offices by the ordinary court of law in case of disputes.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, the Act of XX of 1863 was enacted under the

provisions of which the Government divested itself of the charges and control of the temples and placed them under the management of their own respective 'creeds' and 'trustees'. Accordingly Privy Council took a resolution to form a committee to which the powers vested to Government for the appointment of manager, trustees and superintendents were to be transferred.<sup>37</sup> However, a problem arose as because the Act XX of 1863 did not define the word 'trustee', it's led to the raising of claim from different supervising functionaries including the *Bardeoris* and the *Brahman* and non-Brahman establishments. Under this situation, the *Bardeories*, being the most elite among all temple functionaries, who had always maintained a close connection with the Government through the offices of the *Dolai* and *Sevacaloo* seized the power of the management of the temples. Thus the *Bardeoris* gradually earned the importance and ultimately became accepted governors of the *Bhogdhani (Devottara)* properties. It was repeatedly told in a series of judgments which will be dealt with in detail in the following pages, that only the *Bardeoris* as a class had the right to watch over the administration of a temple and to protect the temple endowment.<sup>38</sup> Thus the *Bardeoris* as a class fell within the description of 'Zamindars and other recipients of the rent of lands' according to the spirit of law.<sup>39</sup> The *Dolai* being appointed by the *Bardeoris* acknowledged their supremacy In the management of all affairs relating to a temple.<sup>40</sup> The functionaries who were bulked in the *Devottara* land as has been discussed' earlier came to be known as *paiks* who had no voice in the management. The other Brahmin and non-Brahmin functionaries originally assigned to different services as *Pathak, Mudiar Mazumdar, Thakuria, Athparia, Balikata* got settlement of land under *Nankar* and *Dharmottara* category directly from the Government and the authority of the *Dolais* to watch over their liabilities to the temples was greatly reduced and hence they began to claim their status superior to that of the *paiks*, who

tilled the *Devottara* lands. These self-styled superior servitors were originally "Supposed to be devoted entirely to a religious life." However due to the changed political and socio-economic position they became "men of generally of better education and standing than the *bardeoris*' who were also "more closely attached to the temple and more directly interested in its management". This was why they were recognized as *Sevants* and allowed them 'to have some voice in its management'.<sup>41</sup> Thus the new class of *Sevants* appeared in the scene which led to a series of disputes in regard to the management of the temples. Consequently upon the situation, the *Bardeoris* and the *Sevants* made several attempts to gain the support of the paiks to strengthen their right over the temples. Even then neither party was in favour of giving the paiks a share in the management. The judges of Assam valley Districts also gave their judgments that the paiks 'have no right to a voice of its management'.<sup>42</sup> Thus it appears that with the abolition of the post of *Sevacaloo* in 1842, the Government withdrew all forms of interference in the affairs of the temples. Since the~ the office of the *Dolai* assumed great importance. Claim had now been made by of the classes of functionaries' viz. the *Sevants* and the *paiks* to have a right in the election or selection of the *Dolai*, which was rejected in a number of judgments in different courts of law. The findings of the learned judges in this connection are noteworthy to mention in summary as follows<sup>43</sup>

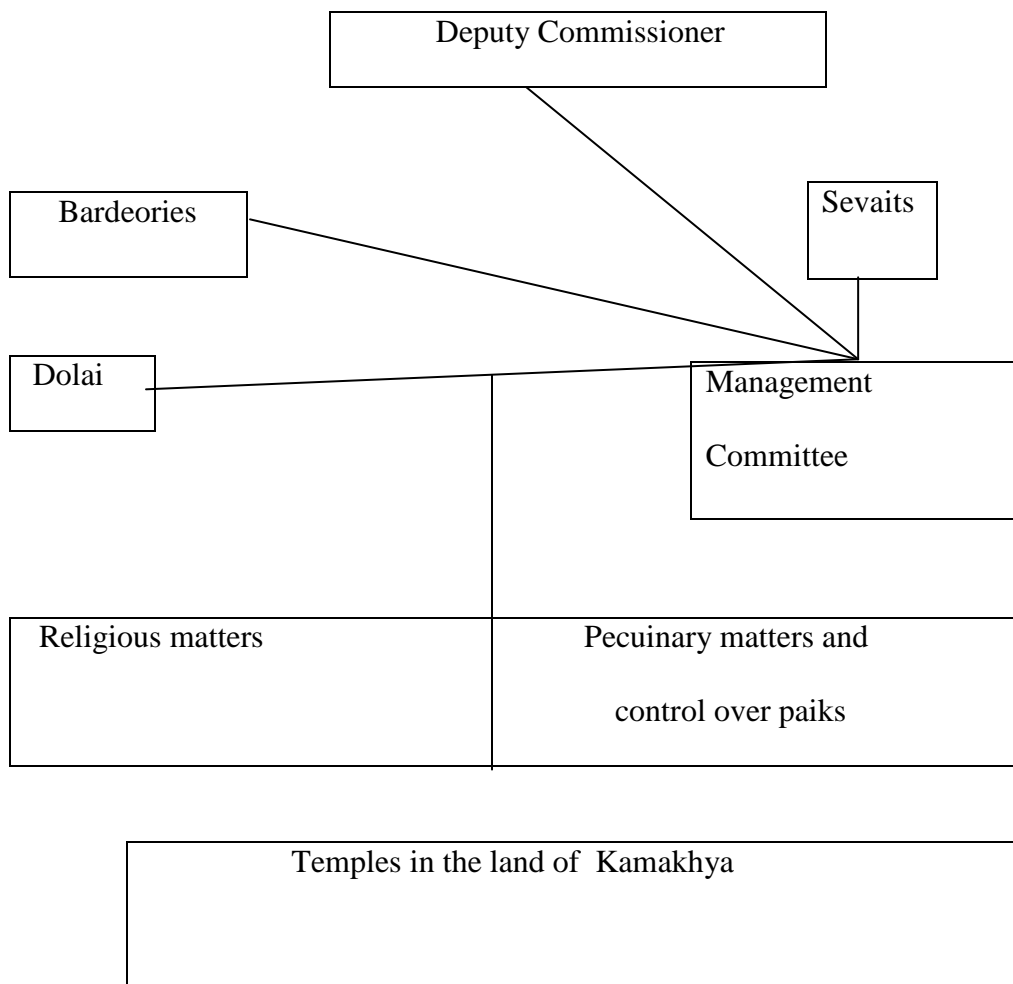
(a) The office of the *Daloi* was elective and the *Bardeoris* as a class only have the right to elect a *Daloi*. As the Government ceased to take steps, as of old, to guard the temple funds from misappropriation by the *Dolais*, the power to guard them must be held to have developed on the elective body of the *Bardeoris*.

(b) The *Bardeoris*, as a class had a right to watch over the administration of the temples and to protect such funds from waste and that the *Dalois* were, so to speak

their agents in that matter. This was how the *Bardeoris*, since the British occupation of Assam, evolved into a defect oligarchy and became in fact, the Supreme Board of control of all affairs in the temples. With the relinquishment of interference of management or supervision by the Government special and exclusive rights were acquired by the *Bardeoris* collectively as a class, which they did not and could not exercise during the time of the Ahom kings. Thus three types of people called *Bardeori*, *Sevaitis* and *paiks* appeared to be interested in the management of the temples as well as Cults and their endowments.

The *Bardeoris* served as priests and the owner of *Devattara* properties, the *Sevaitis* as officers and the *paiks* as manual labourers<sup>44</sup>. In 1874, the Government of India issued a resolution which provided the new administration with a separate staff of the Deputy Commissioner to carry on the ordinary revenue and judicial business of the country, under the provision of this resolution the Deputy Commissioner became the figure head of the temples in the district. It also appears in this connection that as a result of constant litigations instituted by the different interested parties (viz. *Bardeoris*, *Sevaitis* and *Paiks*) at different times which will be dealt in detail in the following pages, the Government in 1908 decided to follow a policy of formation of scheme of management of the temples under the provision of the aforesaid Act XX of 1863. According to this arrangement the management was divided into two factions, viz. pecuniary and religious, As far as the pecuniary management was concerned the *Daloi* became accountable by the District Judge while in the religious matter the entire management was left to the *Daloi*,<sup>45</sup> this scheme of management may be drawn as follows:

**DIAGRAM I: TEMPLE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM IN THE LAND  
OF KAMAKHYA**



**Changes effected in the State's Relation**

As has been discussed earlier, the East India Company intended to follow a policy of non-interference in respect of exercise of the religious rites and ceremonies and to preserve the places of worship in violated since 1842.<sup>46</sup> The Company Government therefore rejected the suggestion made by Jenkins, the Commissioner of Assam, for which he initially had to follow the administrative system of our temples of various Cults as it existed at the time of their occupation of Assam. Thus some arbitrary taxes

such as the police *barangani* and *Kharikatana* were collected from the temples. But most of the British officers made attempts to reorganize the lands and men at the temples; they realized that due to lack of proper knowledge on the native custom and tradition on the one hand and due to lack of sufficient efficient (European) officers on the other, they could not arbitrate fully in the management of the temples. The British Government therefore had to look for the *Bardeories* upon whom the management of the temples' were entrusted. It may be recalled here that the British Government administered the district of Kamrupa with its 36 *paraganas* without disturbing, as far as practical, the old fiscal units. Former Chaudhuris were allotted the new *paraganas* in their immediate neighborhood and had the assistance of Patowaris (accountants) and were entitled to a commission of 7% of the gross collection. Each *Paragana* was subdivided into a number of *taluks* and the later again into *mauzas*. Each *taluk* was placed under a Thakuria each receiving a certain commission. The Chaudhuris had no control over the temples. The responsibility of collecting the revenue so levied in arbitration on the temple lands was entrusted to the *Daloi*, who was the agent of the *Bardeoris*.<sup>47</sup> He was also entitled to a commission of 7% of the gross collection under his jurisdiction. According to this arrangement although the *Devottara* land were to be freed from taxation, the *Brahmottara* and *Nankar* lands were confirmed in the name of the grantees in possession and assessed generally at the half of the usual rate, which caused a great dissatisfaction among the holders of such grants. To allay the grievance, Robertson, the then commissioner proposed to spend a part of the revenue collected under this provision" for the support of institution for the spread of education".<sup>48</sup> Which was also straightway rejected by the Governor General-in-Council on the ground that they were prohibited from "devoting the produce of any particular tax to a specific object". In fact for their declared policy of religious

neutrality the Company Government had doubts whether it would be right to impose a tax on the aforesaid grants.<sup>49</sup> As a result of long correspondence with the Court of Directors, the Governor General-in Council finally decided that 'Whatever revenue may now be derived by the Government from the religious endowments in Assam at once be relinquished, that all interference of this establishment and the management of any office or concern of the temples be once prohibited,'<sup>50</sup> Consequently the office of the *Sevacaloo* was abolished In 1842 and the Government withdrew all responsibilities to the temples which were left absolutely and finally to a committee like co-operative trusts consisting of person professing the same religious creed<sup>51</sup> As a result the affairs since then began to evolve independently of Government control, the Government merely confining their relations with the temple affairs by accepting the *Daloi* appointed by the *Bardeoris* as the person with whom to make settlement of the temple estate and for other incidental purposes. The public works department of the Government also withdrew and so, unlike in the past, the duties in the connection fall on the persons actually in charge of management on the spot<sup>52</sup>. This was undoubtedly an added and onerous duty to be discharged by the *Daloi*.

As a matter of fact, land endowed by the former Government and now confirmed by the British came to be known as *Bhogdhani* properties of the temple on which the Government had nothing to do. For this policy of absolute non-interference followed during this period, it appears that, the temples were falling into decay while in some other there was neither a single person in attendance nor a service.<sup>53</sup> All the revenue which was derived from the *Bhogdhani* properties was enjoyed by some Brahmins who claimed to be the *Bardeoris*. Thus they grew fat out of these endowments and lived at ease at the expense of the public for which a series of dispute took places among the persons belonging to the *Barderoies* and *Sevairs*. The paiks also came

forward to have a share in the management under the provision of the scheme of management framed by the District judge to each temple from time to time. It will be seen that the Chaudhury of a *paragana*, who also became fat out of the public revenue became the chief opponent of the *Bardeoris* and a constant rivalry was going on between the *Bardeoris* headed by the *Dalai* and the *Sevairs* under the stewardship of Chaudhuris or by some otherwise influential persons for the establishment of their authority in the committee of management so formed under the provision of the Act. XX of 1863.

Thus the importance of the temples of various Cults as a centre of socio religious and cultural activities had greatly diminished. The *Sevairs* and *paiks* originally assigned to different services of a temple became immediately free from their responsibilities and their relation was confined only in respect of revenue to be paid to the *Daloi*. Likewise the relation of the Government with the temple remained only in the matter of revenue. The only objective of the Government was to collect revenue and so long the *Daloi* paid Government dues on behalf of the *Bardeoris* to their collective estates, his office remained undisturbed. As a result the *Daloi* tried to be more independent and he refused to be accountable to anybody. It led to another series of dispute between the *Daloi* and the *Bardeoris* throughout the period of the British rule.

### **Disputes and their Settlements**

As soon as the East India Company adopted the policy of religious neutrality, as has been discussed above, the settlement of *Bhogdhani* properties were made in the name of the *Dalai* on behalf of the *Bardeoris* and all the temple affairs were left independently to them. It has also been noticed above that the Government had made

the provision that in future any disputes regarding the temple management would have to be decided by ordinary court of law.<sup>54</sup> This led to the institution of a series of litigation in different courts of law in which almost all type of temple functionaries became involved. It is noteworthy that even some years before the abolition of the post of *Seva-caloa* in 1842, all types of Brahmin functionaries began to claim the status of *Bardeori*. The first case of such type of dispute took place as early as 1838 in the Kamakhya group of temples, when the election of Gangaprasad and Prannath to the office of the *Daloi* was challenged by Bisnudatta. After a careful consideration of the decisions of three subsequent *panchayats*, the Sadar Dewani Adalat tries the case and defined that only the 5 families of Brahmin viz. *Buhra, Deka, Brahma, Bidhipathak* and *Hota*, originally assigned to perform *rajaki puja* of Goddess Kamakhya were to be recognized as *Bardeoris*. This case was pursued in one way or another up to 1927,<sup>55</sup> when it was finally decided by the special sub judge of the Assam Valley district that "The name *Bardeori* is not a new invention or coinage. we find the word *Bardeori* used in a copper plate which is (was) produced in original at trial... it was dated 1686 Saka when the five families of *Bardeoris* were also loosely called *pandas* in the mean time of Assam Rajas on the other hand the certified copy of *Brahmottara* grant by Gaurismiha Raja in 1709 *saka* to a *Candipathak* Brahman in Kamakhya showed that such Brahmins were never styled as *Bardeoirs* or *Pandas*."<sup>56</sup> Since then this definition of the *Bardeoris* seems to have been applied only to the priests of the temples of various Cults whose duties and status were specified that they are (were) the real trustees of the temples and accordingly they have always had the right to elect a *Daloi* or general manager both of the worship and the endowments "<sup>57</sup> Thus it appears that only the Brahmin assigned to the daily and the regular *Sevapuja* of the deities were recognized as the *Bardeoris* by the British authority

upon whom the responsibility to manage all the temple affairs was vested. "At this the other Brahmins who rendered certain duties other than priestly work, became offended. They now in alliance with the other Brahmin *Sevants* such as the *Mazumdar, Chaudhury, Mudiur, Bhandar Kayastha, Melcaloa* were looking always at the default of the *Dalai* and the *Bardeoris*. These offended *Sevants* tried to include paiks in their group and all of them collectively claimed themselves to be the *samuha* or *raij* who made a number of objections before different colitis against the absolute power and privilege of the *Bardeoris*. Being the agent of the *Bardeoris*, the *Daloi* had to tackle all the difficulties arose out of the complaints lodged by the *Sevants*. The *Bardeoris* remained contended only with their respective shares of the earnings from the *Bhogdhani* properties which were distributed among them by the *Dolai*. Taking advantage of the situation the *Daloi* tried to be more independent and refused to be accountable to anybody, which led to another series of disputes between the *Bardeoris* and the *Daloi*.

Thus two types of disputes took place throughout the 'British rule: (a) disputes between the *Bardeoris* and the *Sevants* and

(b) Disputes between the *Bardeoris* and the *Daloi*. Of these, the leading cases are as follows:

As a consequence to a quarrel between Umadatta, the Daloi and Lakshidas, the Mazumdar of the *Hayagrivamadhava* temple, the latter was dismissed from his office by the former. Lakshidas then went to the court of the *Sadar-Amin*. After considering a number of issues the court of *Sadar-Amin* stood in favour of Lakshidas and was decreed that 'the ancestors of Lakshidas were appointed the Mazumdar of the temple and he (Lakshidah) was rendering his duty regularly and the Dalai had no authority to dismiss him from his office'.<sup>58</sup> Umadatta then appealed against this judgment in the

court of Mr. E.A. Rowlat, the Assistant Commissioner of Kamrup, who also gave his judgment in favour of Lakshidas. Mr. Rowlat declared that " the only point to be decided is whether the *Daloi* has such power (to dismiss an officer of the temple) and if so whether the circumstances authorized him to exercise it in the instance now brought forward ... nothing has been produced before the court to show that the *Daloi* has the power he claims" <sup>59</sup>

Since the occupation of Assam by the British, the judgment for the first time recognized some rights of the *sevaits* regarding the management of a temple. Even then the *Sevaits* were not given little share in the management. It is known, that the above ligation of 1854-1855 was followed shortly in 1858 by another suit between Krishnakanta Sarma and Durgaprasad Sarma of the Kamakhya temple. The dispute arose when Krishnakanta claimed to have succeeded to the joint Daluiship after the death of Sarbananda with the nomination of the majority of the *Bardeoris*, while Durgaprasad claimed the right to be the sole *Daloi* by Survivorship and contended that no second or joint *Daloi* was necessary as this was a recent innovation against the practice prevalent during the time of the Ahom kings. To strengthen his claims, Krishnakanta then executed an *Ekranama* (agreement) with the *Sevaits*. through which he admitted that they should have a share in the management or the temple properies. <sup>60</sup> Finding himself in a sea of troubles Durgaprasad came to a compromise with Krishnakanta and to give effect to this compromise, both of them accepted the *Ekranama* executed by Krishnakanta with the *Sevaits* headed by Tirthanath Balikata. <sup>61</sup> Thus Durgaprasad and Krishnakanta tried to remain aloof from the suit. But the other *Bardeoris* became angry with the *Sevaits* and they pursued the suit. The *Sevaits* also became enthusiastic with their apparent victory over the *Bardeoris* and both the parties continued to contest the question over right of appointment of a

*Daloi*. After a long procedure followed by the court of *Sadar Amin*, Gangaram Barua, the Officiating Judge gave his judgment that the *Bardeoris* alone were the supreme authority for appointment and dismissal of *Dalois* and generally for all matters connected with the temple affairs.<sup>62</sup> Thus the attempt by the *Sevairs* to get a share in the management of the temple was a failure. Since then the *Sevairs* were looking for an opportunity to enter into the management, which was provided by dispute that arose between the joint *Dalois* (Durgaprasad and Krisnakanta) and the *Bardeoris*

In 1872, a suit was instituted by the *Bardeoris* headed by Durgakanta Sarma in the court of Deputy Commissioner of Kamrupa in their capacity as *Bardeoris* of the Kamakhya temple for delivery of accounts of the temple property from the *Dalois* from A.D. 1865 to 1870. In that suit, some *non-Bardeori* and *Sudra Sevairs* put an application with a prayer to be added as parties, taking up the attitude that he alone was competent to take accounts from the *Dolais* and not the *Bardeoris*. At this time it is also seen that an attempt was made by the *Dalois* to shake off the yoke of the *Bardeoris*, for which the *Dalois* instigated the *Sevairs* to apply to the Deputy Commissioner to be recognized as a party. After a regular trial, the Deputy Commissioner rejected the petition of the *Sevairs* and made his judgments in favour of the *Bardeoris*.<sup>63</sup> Thus this time also, the attempt of the *Sevairs* to enter into the management failed and the power and the privileges of the *Bardeoris* as sole steward were confirmed and consolidated in respect of the temple properties.

Being aggrieved at this the *Sevairs* once more tried to enter into the management by instituting another suit in 1880. This was caused by the death of Durgaprasad Daloi, when his son Guruprasad was appointed by majority of the *Bardeoris*. With the capacity of the *Dolai*, Gururprasad now moved to the Deputy Commissioner's Court (Revenue Jurisdiction) for registration of the temple estates in his name. On this

occasion, the *Sevants* as a body consisted of some *Gayan, Athpariii. Balikata* and other hereditary paiks headed by Dehram Gayan made their complaints against the exclusive rights of the *Bardeoris* to elect a *Dolai* and claimed that they should also be given the equal right.<sup>64</sup> The Deputy Commissioner, however rejected the claim of the *Sevants* and Guruprasad was allowed to act as the *Dolai* and the temple properties were confirmed in his name.<sup>65</sup> Since then we have not come across any documents relating to a dispute between the *Sevants* and the *Bardeoris* up to 1904.

On the 13th of September 1905, the *Sevants* of the Hayagrivamadhava temple headed by Sraddha Charan Choudhury lodged a number of complaints against the existing system of management and also alleged that the system provided scopes for misappropriation of temple property by the *Dolai* on behalf of *Bardeoris*. In support of their allegation the *Sevants* produced a number of documents before the District Judge of Kamrupa which showed that the *Dolai* was in a habit of misappropriating the temple properties in various ways, such as utilizing land revenue for his own use, keeping away the valuables of the temple in his home etc. for which they wanted the removal of Suryadatta Sarma from the office of the *Dolai*. In this context the Lower Court admitted that "the temples were not in good repair and required improvement, and the management was not as good as it should be."<sup>66</sup> The Court, however, observed that there being a non-cooperation from the *Sevants*, the *Dolai* alone should not be blamed for the dilapidated condition of the temples, when the two Judge of the High Court remarked that the servants who held the service lands for the performance of different duties were not performing their duties properly and the evidence produced before the Court of "not sufficient in themselves for an order for the removal of the *Dolai*." So The Court, therefore, directed the *Dolai* to submit an account of income and expenditure of the temple for the year 1903 and 1904 before the Court and also

suggested that for the preservation of the temple properties and for due performance of the daily and periodical worships in future, a scheme of management might be framed.<sup>67</sup>

Thus apparently the *Sevants* gained a victory over the *Bardeoris* after a long struggle of seventy two years (1826-1908), when it was decreed that "the *Sevants* were the temple officers and they are more closely attached to the temple and more directly in its welfare ... they should be allowed to have some voice in its management."<sup>68</sup> The Court however wanted an upper hand of the *Bardeoris* in the management when it said "The *Bardeoris* are the descendants of the original grantees, they are the real trustees of the temple and accordingly they have always had the right to elect *Dolai* or general both of the worship and the endowments .... The predominant right of the *Bardeoris* must be recognized in any, scheme which is formed."<sup>69</sup>

Thus the *Sevants* gained an initial victory over the *Bardearis* when in 1908; the scheme of management of the Hayagrivamadhava temple was framed. The scheme to materialize the principles of the Lower Court provided that the *Dolai* was to be elected amongst the *Bardearis* who also would elect three members from amongst themselves to form a management committee of five. The remaining two members would be from amongst the *Sevants* while the *Dolai* would have a casting vote. The scheme also provided that in all the pecuniary matters, the *Dolai* had to consult the committee while in regard of worship the *Dalai* was given a free hand. The *Sevants* now began to look after the default of the *Dolai* and the *Bardearis* and whenever got a minimum clue, they instituted suit alleging that the *Dalai* was working against the provision of the scheme.<sup>70</sup> under this situation even the daily *snan. puja, hom, bhog,* and *arati* were ceased to be performed and the temple building were fell into ruins.

After an investigation of the commission appointed by the High Court of Calcutta, the allegation were found true for which the scheme of management was amended twice in 1926 and in 1936 in addition to the institution of a number of inquiries on the accounts submitted by the *Dolai*.<sup>71</sup> Following this, the *Sevants* of the Kamakhya group headed by Jiban Chandra Balikata also made an appeal before the Court of the Special Sub-Judge of Kamrupa in 1927 for framing a scheme of management of the temple.<sup>72</sup> In this suit No. 45 of 1927 between Jiban Chandra Balikata and other Vs Binsuprasad Dolai and others, the Judge observed that "no Court scheme could improve the present state of affairs in the Kamakhya temple unless a special legislation is enacted to provide certain statutory authority in the charge of management". It was further observed that mere scheme of management framed by the courts would contribute a lot in creation of a chaotic situation with Kamakhya temple<sup>73</sup>.

The learned Judge therefore recorded "after giving my most careful and anxious consideration to this case and taking comprehensive view, I hold that the court will not be justified to interference in the present management of the *Bardeori* trustees and that the suit must be dismissed with costs. If at any future time a suit is fought against the *Bardeoris* as defect and demure trusts to suppress or super cede them, or if a group of *Bardeoris* comes forward to demand a scheme pleading their own incapacity to deal with the temple affairs then the matter may be dealt with and tried from another stand point."<sup>74</sup>

Thus though the *Sevants* of the Hayagrivamiidhava temple gained an initial victory in 1908, their counterparts in Kamakhya faced a failure and the supremacy of the *Bardeoris* was once again established. It appears from the judicial proceedings relating to the Umananda temple, that the *Sevants* then changed their strategy against the *Bardeoris* by trying to make the paiks interested in the management and instead of

entering into a dispute directly with the *Bardeoris* they made an attempt to create chaos in the management by launching a non-cooperation and no - tax campaign against the *Dolai*. To translate their thinking into a reality they declared that if the *Bardeoris* in their capacity as supreme trustees could remove the officiating *Dolai* Loknath and elect a new, one they would extend all possible cooperation for the proper management of the temple affairs. The *Sevants* of the temple also alleged that they had paid their dues up to date for the lands they possessed, but the *Dolai* (Loknath) did not deposit the dues to the Government treasury for which the tenants (both the *Sevants* and the *Paiks*) had to suffer.<sup>75</sup> They therefore, made an appeal to the Deputy Commissioner of Kamrupa to remove Loknath from the office of the *Dolai*.

To fish in the troubled water Ratnadhara Sarma a *Bardeori* of the temple came forward and claimed to have the support of the majority of *Bardeoris* as well as of the *Sevants*. Ratnadhara at the same time came to an understanding with the *Sevants* that they would be allowed to have a share of the *pranamis* (daily cash offering). Now the *Sevants* in collaboration with a group of *Bardeoris* headed by Ratnadhara alleged that,<sup>76</sup>

- (a) The *Sevants* had been regularly paying rents to the *Dolai* up to 1352 B.S. (A.D.1945) and it was a surprise to them how a huge amount of Rs.19, 171.00, remained as arrear and the temple estate indebted to the Government;
- (b) The temple houses were out of repairs for last few years (i.e. since 1930) and the temple servants like *Mudiar*, *Thakuria* and *Bharailis* were being deprived of their status and remuneration since last twelve years; and
- (c) The income of the temple was being used for some purpose other than its own interests.

The *Sevants* as well as the *Bardeoris* therefore pleaded the Deputy Commissioner that as soon as the Government takes adequate steps against Loknath to realize the arrear amount of rent, they would pay up the rent for the remaining years at an early date. The Deputy Commissioner then appointed an inquiry Commission with G.C. Barua, an Extra Assistant Commissioner as its Chairman in 1946. The Commission during its inquiry found the entire allegation true and commented that the *Sevants* had a voice and the *Dolais* had to listen them. They (*Sevants*) wanted a real and effective participation in the management of the temple.<sup>77</sup> But the Commission did not blame much too either party, rather it praised both of them with the comments "the *Dolais* are conscious of their responsibilities and the *Sevants* are also sincere as they may have a substantial share in the management of the affairs". Even then the Commission found that if the *Dolai* who was entitled to 15% (earlier it was 7%) commission on gross collection had an honest attempt he might have liquidated a major part of the arrear of Government dues, for which he was convinced that 'making the utmost allowance in favour of the *Dolais*, one will be compelled to say that the *sevants* are not wrong when they were (of the view) that the economy of the temple have not been properly managed."<sup>78</sup> It is noteworthy that finding no other way to remain in the office and to restrain the *Sevants*, the *Dalai* himself proposed for introduction of a scheme of management, while the *Sevait* continued their argument that the solution of the problem regarding the Government dues by the *Dolai* should be settled before introduction of any scheme of management. The Commission had therefore suggested for a comprehensive study on the management of different temples by a select committee which should also to submit a scheme for the efficient management of the temple affairs, The commissioner also suggested that by following the age old

practice the *Dolai* should invite the *Sevants* for taking decision in all matter involving the administration of the temple.<sup>79</sup>

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9. *Paper book in Appeal from original Decree No.128 of 1935 p.25, no. 80 of 1909 pp.30-32, proceeding in Appeal from original Decree No. 180 of 1936.*
10. *Oroonoday, July- August and September, 1852 AD.*
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12. Bhuyan, S.K: *Anglo- Assamese Relations*, Guwahai, 1974, pp.529-30.

13. Ward, W.E: *The Assam land Revenue Manual Eastern Bengal and Assam*, Secretariat press, Shillong, 1897, introduction, p.1-esis.

14. *Letter from Capt. Bogle to Jenkins, No. 16, dated 28<sup>th</sup> July 1835.*

15. Barpujari, H.K: '*The Management and Control of Religious Endowments in Assam*' in the journal of the University of Gauhati, Vol.xv.No.1 Arts, 1964, pp.37-38.

16. *Bengal secret and political consultation, 1826, 7th July, No.31.*

17. *Letter from Government of Bengal to Commissioner of Assam, No. 790 dated 25<sup>th</sup> August, as quoted by Ward, W.E: The Assam land Revenue Manual Eastern Bengal and Assam*, Secretariat press, Shillong, 1897, introduction, p.lxix.

18. *Lakheraj = rent free*

19. *Principles of Lakheraj-*

*i. All the right to hold land free of assessment founded on grants by any former Government were considered as cancelled and it was pointed out that all claims for restoration to any such tenures could rest only on the indulgence of Government.*

*ii. All land found to be held by Lakherajdars in excess of what was held and possessed on bonafide grants before the Burmese conquest or services still performed, as well as land held for service no longer performed were to be assessed at full rate.*

*iii. All lands held on bonafide grants before the Burmese conquest or for services still performed were to be Government on receipt of such report, the Government would take into consideration how far it might be proper in each case to extent or without the indulgence of favourable rates on such tenure.*

iv. *General Jenkins might suspend the order of bringing any particular lands on full rates, if he thought proper but he was to submit his reasons for the consideration of Government.*

v. *Pending the Lakheraj inquiry, Mr. Scott's moderate rates were to be levied as before from all lands claimed as Lakheraj( Devottara, Brahmottara, Dharmottara or on whatever plea) until brought under assessment at full rates or until order to the contrary were received from Government vide The Assam Land Revenue Manual, introduction, p.lxx.*

20. Bardoloi, K.C. (ed.): *Sadar Aminor Atmajibani, (Assamese)*, Guwahati, 1960, p.70.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Letter no. 790 dated 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1834 as quoted by Ward, W.E. The Introduction to the Assam Land Revenue Manual, 1886, pp. 1 xix-lxx.*

23. *Revenue Department letter no. 73 dated 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1879.*

24. *Details of Assam Local land Regulation are given in The Assam Land Revenue Manual, Guwahati, 1886, pp.133-42.*

25. Ward, W.E: *Op, Cit., p.l .xxii.*

26. Adhikary, G: *A History of The Temples of Kamrup and Their Management*, Guwahati, 2001, pp136-138

27. Chakravarty, S.K: *A Report o the Administration of the Temples and their lands submitted to the Government of Assam*, Guwahati, 1955, Appendix-B.

28. *These lands were settled with the Choudhury with whom the Dolais had nothing to do.*

29. Rowlat, E.A: *Principal Assistant Commissioner of Kamrupa in the Judgment between Durgaprassad Daloi and Gayanath Sarma on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1855*; Paper Book Appeal from original Decree No. 128 of 1935, part II, p.73.

30. *General Jenkins's was therefore empowered to constitute Lakheraj inquiry as has been discussed earlier..*

31. *Revenue proceedings (Misc.) Bengal, No. 78 dated 26<sup>th</sup> April, 1842 as quoted by Barpujari, H.K: It may be inferred that as in the case of Orissa, the Christian Missionaries were probably presenting a public pressure for the withdrawal of all forms of supervision, so that they might enter into the field of religion in India. For details of this type of public pressure of the missionaries may be seen in Kulke ,H: Judgment under British supremacy and the resurgence of the Khundra Raja as 'Raja of Puri' in The Cult of Jaganath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa, New Delhi, 1986, pp.345ff.*

32. Barpujari, H.K: *'The Management and Control of the Religious Endowments in Assam (1825- 58)'* in the journal of University of Gauhati, vol. xv, no.1, 1964, p.40.

33. *Parliamentary paper, no.261 of 1839 quoted by Banerji, P.N: 'Indian Finance in the Days of Company', p.248.*

34. *Revenue proceeding, Bengal No. 5 dated 26<sup>th</sup> January, 1841.*

35. *Letter no.100 of 1842, Paper Book Appeal from original decree no. 128 of 1935, p. 216, quoted in M. Sarma: Kamakhya, A Town of Assam, Census of India, 1972, vol.i, part iv-b, New Delhi, p.68.*

36. *Paper Book Appeal from original decree no. 28 of 1953, p. 105.*

37. *Resolution of the Privy Council as quoted by Pillai , P. C: Right of Temple Entry, University of California, 1933, p.42.*

38. Agnew, Col, *Judgment of the Judicial Commissioner of Assam in Regular Appeal no. 1 of 1873, in appeal from original Decree no. 128 of 1935, part II, pp. 73-76,*

39. Sarma, M. M: *op. cit* p.66.

40. *Daloi's various duties-*

*i. Daloi would make proper arrangement for daily and annual puja or bhog and would look after that puja was duly performed.*

*ii. He would collect and pay regularly the Government dues and would make a survey of the lands, waters and bills confirmed to the temple each year and if he fails to realize money amicably, would sue in the court and if he fails to constitute a suit he would personally be responsible for the same.*

*iii. He would repair the temple's walls or houses that needed to repair. If any damage occurred due to his negligence he would be in obligation to pay from his own pocket the cost of reconstruction of the same.*

*iv. He would carry on all the temple affairs in consultation with the Bardeoris(vide the agreement executed by Guruprasad Sarma, the Daloi of Kamakhya group of temples with the Bardeoris, dated 17<sup>th</sup> November 1880.).*

41. Brown, W.W: *Judgment of the Lower Court, dated 9<sup>th</sup> November 1908.Paper book Appeal from Original Decree No. 80 of 1909, p68.*

42. *Ibid.*

43. Agnew, Col: *Judgment of the Judicial Commissioner of Assam in Regular Appeal no. 1 of 1873.*
44. Brown, W.W.; *op cit.*
45. Brown, W.W: *Judgment of the Lower Court of Assam valley district, dated 9<sup>th</sup> November 1908, in the paper book Appeal from Original Decree No. 80 of 1909, p68-70. While this system of management under a scheme was followed by a number of temples but the Kamahi temple did not follow the same.*
46. Bengal Revenue consultation, dated 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1814, as quoted by Kulke, H: in *The Cult of Jaganath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*, New Delhi, 1986, p.345.
47. Agnew, Col: *op. cit.*
48. Barpujari, H.K: *Assam In The Days of Company*, Gauhati, 1963 p.71.
49. *Ibid.*
50. Barpujari, H.K: 'The management and Control of Religious Endowments in Assam' in the journal of the University of Gauhati, Vol.xv.No.1 Arts, 1964,p.40. In this context the Government was with the view that all matter relating to the management and control of the temple be vested at the hands of a committee consisting of persons professing same religious creed. Jenkins, the officer on the spot however was afraid of the sentiments that might develop among the Bardeoris and hence he was not favour of the proposed management committee. He therefore wrote to the Board of Revenue that the former rulers of Assam were the patrons and protectors of the temples of Assam and general principle applicable to the rest of India could not be implemented in case of Assam. Instead he proposed that the satras be left independent of Government control as they contained within themselves a complete self govern

*and the means of appointing successive officers, while the temples be placed under a temporary panchayat consisting of the Choudhuries and few Seva-caloo of the district particularly to settle the question of succession to the office of a Seva-caloo of temple, if and when necessary. The Board on the other hand did not want the association of the Chaudhuris in the committee decided to withdraw all sorts of control in respect of management of a temple and left all the parties concerned who had any claim to establish or wrong to redress to resort for justice to the regular courts of law.*

51. *Paper Book Appeal from original decree no. 128 of 1935, p. 74.*

52. *Order of the Board of revenue, Eastern-Bengal and Assam in revenue appeal no. 12 of 1906 against letter no.2540 R and F from the Commissioner of Assam dated 26<sup>th</sup> July 1906.*

53. Barpujari, H.K: *op.cit*, p.44.

54. Barua, I.P: *Judgment of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Additional Judge of Assam valley district, Title suit no.28 of 1932, Paper Book Appeal from Original Decree No. 28 of 1935, p105.*

55. Barpujari, H.K: *op., cit.*

56. *Before 1842, all the civil and revenue business left to a local panchayat or Mel formed by the local influential people who had to decide the disputes according to the local customs and traditions subject to the remote supervision of a superior authority of the commissioner. This experience ultimately became a dismal failure (vide, Assam in the days of company by Barpujari, H.K, p.46ff). The other Brahmins however continued to contest the definition of the Bardeoris and an attempt had been made by to enter into that circle of the Bardeoris by the backdoor for which a suit was instituted on behalf of one Kamdeb Sarma claiming the right and privileges of the*

*Bardeoris of Kamahi group of temples by tracing his descent in the direct female line in absence of male and in preference to other male agnates. There the Bardeori customs and their traditional exclusive rights were also discussed, and it was finally held that descendants in the female line of the Bardeoris were not entitled to perform the professional duties of those functionaries and were not entitle to share and never had shared in the divisions of the offering made at the temple or profits of the Bhogdhani or Brahmottara land vide the Judgment of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Additional Judge of Assam valley district, Title suit no.40 of 1932, dated 2<sup>nd</sup> January, 1935.*

57. Barua, I.P: *Judgment of the special Sub- Judge of Assam valley districts, Title suit no.45 of 1927(judgment no. 30 of 1924), in Paper Book Appeal from Original Decree No. 128 of 1935.part ii, p.212.It may be noticed that in a parwana which the Commissioner of Assam addressed to the managing Bardeoris in 1827, they were addressed by named out only as 'kamakhya barir pach panda' (5 pandas of Kamahi temple)*

58. Brown, W.W: *Judgment of the Lower Court in suit no 3 of 1904, dated 9<sup>th</sup> November 1904.Paper Book Appeal from Original Decree No. 88 of 1909, pp.66-70.*

59. Rowalat, E.A: *Judgment of Principal Assistant Commissioner Kamrupa, no.14 of 1855 dated 31st December 1855.*

60. *Ibid.*

61. *Judgement of the Sadar Amin in original suit no 155 of 1858, District Kamrupa, Assam, dated 29<sup>th</sup> July 1859.*

62. *Ibid.*

63. *Ibid.*

64. Agnew, Col: *Judgment of the Judicial Commissioner Kamrupa, dated 30<sup>th</sup> January 1873.*

65. *Petition of Dehiram Gayan and other Sevaitis making certain statement and praying for rejection of application of a few of the Bardeoris for appointment of certain Bardeori as Daloi in place of his deceased father dated 18<sup>th</sup> January, 1880 to the Revenue collector of Kamrupa in Misc. Temple case.82 of 1896-97.*

66. *Ibid.*

67. Mitra S. C. and Caspersz C. P: *order of demand by the High Court of Calcutta dated 14<sup>th</sup> May, 1907, in Appeal from original Decree no. 518 of 1905.*

68. *Ibid.*

69. *Ibid.*

70. Brown, W.W: *Judgment of the Lower court dated 9<sup>th</sup> November 1908.*

71. *Ibid.*

72. *Petition of Jeuram Pandit and others; Sraddha Charan Choudhury and others; Mahidhar Sarma – Bhagavati; Rudraram Bhagavati and others before the district Judge of Kamarupa in Misc. case no. 69 of 1939.*

73. *Report of the commissioner to examine Accounts of Hayagrivamadhava temple at Hajo, appointed in Misc. case no. 69 of 1939.*

74. Barua, I.P: *Judgment of the special Sub- Judge of Assam valley district at Guwahati in Title suit no.45 of 1927.*

75. *Ibid.*

76. Report of Barua, G.C: *in suit no. 925 of 1944.*

77. *Ibid.*

78. *Ibid.*

79. *Copper plate inscription of Dehar paragana of land revenue grant for Harikirtanta at the Hayagrivamadhava temple granted by Chandrakantasimha in saka 1743 in which it is clearly mentioned that the Daloi had to consult Mena, Meteri, Melceloa, Rajkhoa and other in respect of management of certain property and in respect of performance of certain rites and rituals, vide PS, plate no.103.*

## CHAPTER- IV

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CULTS IN THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS LIFE OF KAMARUPA THROUGH THE AGES

#### **Origin and antiquity of Kamarupa and Kamakhya**

‘The non-Aryan origin of the name Pragjyotisha and its association with astronomy is well known to us. The words Kamarupa and Kamakhya also suggest an Austric or Alpine origin. The term Kamakhya is probably derived from an Austric formation, such as *Kamoi* (*demon*) in old Khamer; *Kamoit* (*devil*) in Cham; *Kamet* (*corpse*) in Khasi; *Komui* (*grave*) or *Komuoch* (*corpse*) in Santali. It may be a substitution of the word like *Komuoch*, meaning grave or the dead.<sup>1</sup> Kamrupa is derived from the formations like *Kamru*, or *Kamrut*, the name of a lesser divinity in Santali, and the land is thus associated with magic or necromancy.<sup>2</sup> Both Kamrupa and Kamakhya are closely associated in literature. B.K.Kakati thinks that the word Kamarupa symbolizes a new cult, and in exhalation of it the land was re-christened. The very name Kamrupa-Kamakhya suggests, in his opinion, that the cult is to be derived from some Austric divinity.<sup>3</sup> The traditional origin of the name of the name of Kamarupa, as given in the *Gopatha Brahmana*, Which relates the story of Kamadeva’s revival after being burnt up by Siva, may be explained in the light of prevalence of the cult of magic and sorcery, associated with the Austric-Alpine culture of Assam.<sup>4</sup> The traditional name Kamakhya also, associated with the genital organ of Sati, according to the *Kalika Purana* and other works, can be explained on the basis of a pre-Aryan cult of the phallus, receiving new orientation with the introduction of Aryan culture. The legends in the *puranas* and the *Tantras* may as well recall internment of the relics

of the Buddha. The story is applicable to both Kamarupa and Kamakhya.<sup>5</sup> Symbolically Kamakhya stands for the geographical unit of Assam, which is *trikonakara* and Kamarupa for spiritual entity. The latter name was so reputed that a comparatively late work, *Hara-Gaurisambada* describes the long period of the Ahom rulers under what is styled *Kamarupadhikara*. Historically and traditionally both the names are indistinguishable, Kamarupa standing for *Purusa-Siva* and Kamakhya for *Prakriti-Devi*'.

While Kamakhya finds mention only in literature, Kamarupa is also mentioned in epigraphs. That the latter is a sanskritization of some earlier formation is proved by other sources. The usual name is found as *Kamru* or *Kamrud* in the Buddhist *caryas*, the *Hara-Gauri-Sambada*, and the Muslim sources like the *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* and *Riyaz-us-Samvada*, *Yuan- Chwang* mentions it as *Kamolup'o* <sup>6</sup>and in *T'ang-Shu*, the name is given as *Kamopo* and *Komelu*.<sup>7</sup> Levi connects it with a formation like *Tamalipi*.<sup>8</sup> The references shows the Austric origin of the name Kamarupa.

### **The Sakti Cult Kamakhya**

We have come across the references to four places where Goddess Kamakhya is worshipped. The Kamakhya temple at Kshetri in Kamrupa is said to have been built by an unknown ruler of the Dimarua principality, and the date of its construction cannot be ascertained. The second is situated in Silghat in Pubtharia mauza in Nagaon district and one Kendukalai Barthakur is credited for the foundation of the temple in 1745 A.D. under the patronage of the Ahom king Pramattasimha. One more place for Kamakhya is known to be located in Lakhimpur village in Kalaigaon Mauza near Mangaldoi. The ruins lying there indicate the existence of an ancient temple.

According to some investigators Goddess Kamakhya was not totally absent in other parts of India also for they have referred to the temples of Kamakhya in a place called Ahicchatra, said to be the capital city of a king named Sumada and another temple for the Goddess in Kanchipura. It is however not known if there is any relation in between the temple of Kamakhya on Nilachala and that of Kamakshi of South India. The Cult as well as the temple of Kamakhya of our concern stands on the Nilachala hill in Guwahati. The area surrounding the temple has now been included in the area of the Guwahati municipal authority with 200 families who are closely connected with some form of activity of the temple. An all weather good motor able road leads to the temple. Buses of the Assam State Transport Corporation ply between the Deputy Commissioner's office and the temple at every half-an-hour during day time. Taxis and auto-rickshaws are also readily available at the foot of the hill. The main temple of Kamakhya is surrounded by 13 other minor and subsidiary temples and is collectively known as *Nanan Devalya* (other different temples). The priests of these temples however, do not enjoy the right of worshipping Kamakhya. Besides the daily and regular worship, special *pujas* are organized on the occasions of the *Ambubachi* in the month of *Asadha* (July-August), when the mother earth (goddess Kamakhya) becomes impure. It last for three days and during the period the temple doors are closed and no pilgrim is allowed inside the temple. Pilgrim from all over India, Nepal and Bhutan come to visit the shrine on the forth-day when the temple is opened again.

Goddess Kamakhya has been the most dominating deity of the region since early times. Kamakhya has long been the most important shrine of the *Sakta*. Hindus and the land of Kamakhya attain fame in Hindu traditions as a land of magic and witchcraft. The name of Kamakhya finds mention for the first time in the *Kalika Purana* which also gives the story of its origin. Other work viz.the *Yogini Tantra*, the

*Rudra Yamala*, the *Tantra- Chudamani*, the *Devi-Bhagavanta*, the *Manhandle Tantra*, and the *Kamakhya Tantra* etc. simply recount the same story in one form or other. According to the *Kalika Purana*, being unable to bear the insult heaped upon her husband Siva by her father Dakhya, the familiar king in Indian mythology, Sati breathed her last. Overcome with the grief at the death of his consort, Siva wandered about the world carrying the dead body of Sati on his shoulder. Frightened at this all the Gods and Goddesses requested Visnu to put stop the penance of Siva. Visnu then followed Siva and the body of Sati was lapped off into pieces with his discus. As a result different parts of her body fell on fifty one different places on earth which became sacred. The genital part of Sati fell on Kamagiri and site was henceforth known as Kamakhya, or the goddess of sexual desire.

In another place, the same work says that the mountain represent the body of Siva himself and when Sati's organ of generation fell on it, the hill turned blue for which it is called Nilachala (Hill of blue colour). The goddess who resides in Nilachala is called Kamakhya because she came here secretly to satisfy her *Kama* (amour) with Siva.

The *Yogini Tantra* on the other hand puts stress on the creative symbolism of Kamakhya in his conversation with wife Parvati, Siva tells that Kamakhya is the same as Kali and is regarded as the eternal form of Barhma, the god of creation. About the origin of the temple building, we have two legends. One says that Kama, the Indian cupid was sent by gods to put an end to Siva's mourning after the death of Sati and to awake in him again the passion of creation. Siva became furious at this and Kama was burnt to ashes by the angry glance of Siva. Rati, the wife of Kama having no other way began to cry other gods suggested her preserve the ashes and to pray Siva. On being pacified, Siva brought back Kama to life without his original grace and charm.

Siva, however, agreed to restore Kama to his former self on condition that a temple on the genital part of Sati was to be erected by Kama. This was done and Kama got back his own *rupa* (original form). It is therefore, said that the temple of Kamakhya was built by gods with the help of Visvakarma, the carpenter and architect of Indian mythology. The other legend relates the construction of the temple with Naraka, the legendary king of ancient Assam. According to this legend, Naraka was made the king of Pragjyotisa and placed in charge of goddess Kamakhya. He was further advised by Visnu, his father, not to worship any other god except Kamakhya. Naraka made his capital at Pragjyotispura and settled a number of Brahmins at Kamakhya for the worship of the Devi. One day when goddess Kamakhya appeared before him, Naraka was captivated by her charm and made overtures of love to her. To fulfill the condition as laid down by the goddess to marry him, Naraka almost completed the construction of a temple, a pond and a road from the foot of the hill to the top within a single night. It is therefore said that the temple of Kamakhya was built by Naraka. However nothing is definitely known about the time of its first building and its builder. On architectural evidences, the original temple is assigned to 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

It is from the rise of the Koch dynasty in the sixteenth century that the history of Kamakhya temple is known. A woman belonging to the Mach community showed the shrine to Venusimha, identified with Koch king Visvasimha, who after sacrificing a pig and a cock resolved to build a temple of gold at the site. Though scholars like R.M. Nath in his article entitled '*Kalapahar and the Kamakhya temple*'<sup>9</sup> demurs at the tradition; a large section of devotees still believe that the iconoclast Kalapahar who led an invasion of Kamrupa was responsible for the destruction of the temple. B.N. Sastri on the other hand opines that the Kamakhya temple faced its ruin on

account of natural calamities like earthquake.<sup>10</sup> whatever might be the truth, the original temple collapsed and Naranarayana alias Malladev, who succeeded Visvasimha built the temple of brick and mortar on the old temple. He placed one Mahatram Basihya, in charge of the construction but was accused of misappropriation of money for which he was punished. Thereafter, Meghamukdumak, one of the generals of Naranarayana, completed the work within six months. Two stone inscriptions now seen at the entrance chamber of the main shrine declare that king Malladeva and his brother Sukladhaja had built the temple in Saka 1487 (A.D. 1565). K.L. Barua suggests that the credit of rebuilding the temple should go Sukladhaja. The two stone figures now seen in the temple are said to be the representations of Naranarayana and Cilarai. (Malladeva and Sukladhaja).

### **Rites, Rituals, Festivals**

The *Kalika Purana* contains information about the rites and rituals of Kamakhya. This is a work written in 10<sup>th</sup> century. But the worship of Goddess Kamakhya was started in the ancient past. Therefore it is very difficult to say how the goddess was worshipped before the *Kalika Purana* was composed. However, the rites and rituals of the deity might have prevailed for a long time. Up till now the method of worship is followed according to the *Kalika Purana*.<sup>11</sup> In the Kamakhya complex a number of rituals- both calendrical and occasional are performed. Among these the most important rituals are as follows:

#### ***Ambuvachi* (popularly known as Amti or Ameti)**

It is observed in the month of *Asadha* (within the first fortnight of the month of June) and is considered to be the menstrual ceremony of the Earth goddess (goddess

Kamakhya). On this occasion doors of the sanctum of the temples are closed to all including the priests for three days at a stretch and then reopened on the 4<sup>th</sup> day. During these days cultivation, digging, ploughing, felling trees, building houses etc. are prohibited. On the day proceeding the actual time of the beginning of the *Ambuvachi* as per the almanac, the yoni Mandalay of Kamakhya pitha is covered with a cloth called *angavastra* for four days. The day next to the completion of the period of *Ambuvachi* is called *suddhi* and on this day Kamakhya or the yoni Mandalay is given a ritualistic bath. A ceremonial puja is also performed. This ceremony has its special importance since the main object of worship is said to be the genital organ (yoni) of the Devi and pilgrims from different parts of India assemble in the temple campus awaiting entry to the temple on reopening day.

It is not clearly known since when *Ambuvachi* has been observed at Kamakhya. As per oral history, this festival was known to the *sadus* and *sanyasis* from Nepal and the Himalayan foothills from very ancient times that used to frequent *Devikuta* alias Kamakhya in their pursuit of pilgrimage. Probably, the festival came to limelight since the time of renovation of the temple by Koch king Naranarayan in AD1565, which inspired the *sakti* worshippers from far and wide and particularly the *tantriks* from Nepal and Eastern India, to assemble in the temple. This has been inferred from the *Darrang Rajvamsavali*,<sup>12</sup> it is possible that the concept of the mother's period of menstruation had come down from some tradition, which was in existence among the autochthons (indigenous people) of this region; particularly the different communities and it became a major festival when the *tantrists* and *sakta* worshippers recognized it. In fact this tradition is seen even in Orissa which is celebrated as *Rajotsava*. Though *Amuvachi* is observed with varied names with similar concept in many parts of India, apparently it is to Kamakhya temple that thousands of devotees congregate from

every nook and corner of inside & outside our country .<sup>13</sup> One of the traditional beliefs from ancient time associated with *Ambuvachi* is the custom of spreading of the *Angavastra* or *raktavastra*, which is used to cover the symbol of Devi during the *Ambuvachi* period. *Angavastra* is regarded as greatly beneficial and auspicious and the devotees crave for acquiring a piece of this cloth. The garments that adorn her during these days are made into small strips and distributed among the *Bhakatas* succeeding the purifying rituals on the fourth day. These pieces of cloth are tied on the arms or wrists or necks as talisman to achieve success. According to a legend, Koch king Naranarayana and his brother Chilarai laid a piece of white cloth on the main *pitha* of Devi to locate and verify this age old spot before undertaking rebuilding work. It is said that this piece of white cloth became red automatically indicating the presence of Mother Goddess.

The worship of Durga is held in autumn season. Durga is not different from Kamakhya. Durga puja is worshipped in *Devipitha* and people from different parts of the country come here to attend the festivals. The worship is done according to the instructions of the *Kalika Purana*, *Devi Purana* and *Vrhanandikesvara Purana*. In the Kamakhya temple Durga puja is celebrated as one of the major festivals. It is believed that the tradition of observing Durga puja in Kamakhya area is as old as the *pitha* itself. In this temple, the puja begins on the *Krisna Navami* (9<sup>th</sup> day of waxing of the moon) of the month of *Asvina* (mid of September-October) indicating that it covers a period of 15 days from *krisna Navami* to *Sukla Navami* of *Asvina*. The duration of this *puja* being one *paksa* (derived from Sanskrit *paksa* that is fortnight), it is locally called *pakhuvapuja*. Late Paran Chandra Sarma, one of the Chief Priests and who is also a panda of the Kamakhya temple, informs that the *puja* which start from *krisna Navami* of the *Asvina* and is called *pakhuva puja* does not quite signify Durga

puja but a part of *pakhuva puja*. However, the masses take it as Durga puja itself. The first day of *Durga puja* is called *sasthi* or *Adhivasa*, which indicates the 6<sup>th</sup> day of the new moon of the month of *Asvina*, and the *puja* ends in *sukla Navami*. The immersion ceremony, which is locally called as *Visarjana* or *Bhasana*, is performed in the next day of *Sukla Navami* called *Dashama Navami*. The most remarkable aspect of *Durga puja* in the Kamakhya temple is its process of performance, which is unique in character when compared to the *Durga puja* performed elsewhere. There is no image or shrine in the *Durga puja* of Kamakhya temple and instead of this the *puja* is performed in the main *pitha*, which consists of a natural fissure, conical in shape and about nine inches (225mm) in length and fifteen inches (375mm) in width. Under the *Ahom* rule as recorded in British report, only the royal house observed the *puja* or in the temple the *puja* was performed only on the permission obtained from the king.

### ***Kumaripuja (The Devi in her human form)***

It is not known since when this *puja* came to existence. It is believed that it grew into an indispensable ceremony when Kochs renovated the Kamakhya temple in AD 1565 and started *pujas* of all the *Devis* related to the *Sakta* worship.

Virgin worship (*Kumari puja*) is as old as that of Kamakhya worship. Worship of goddess Kamakhya as virgin is similar to that of mother concept. Perhaps, it was assumed that the goddess, although omnipresent, surely exists in the virgins. Reverence to male or female children as god or goddess is an age old customs of India. The worship of infant *krisna (Bala- Gopala)* is a very popular custom.

It is believed that at Kamakhya, the goddess appears in the form of virgin.<sup>14</sup> So, some of the pilgrims worship the living virgins as goddess in this temple. Worship of living man or woman as god or goddess with the offerings, generally offered to them, is

purely of Tantric origin. Like Virgin worship, *tantra* recommends preceptor (Guru) worship. It is stated that Virgin worship is nothing but *Sakti* worship.<sup>15</sup> The *Yogini Tantra* has introduced the following story about the origin of virgin worship. We relate the myth below.

‘Once a ferocious demon was gave birth by Visnu’s bosom. He tortured the gods. The gods being helpless prayed ‘*Mahakali*’. *Mahakali* approached the demon in disguise of a virgin and begged food from him. The demon gave her sweets but her hunger remained unsatisfied. She devoured horses, elephants, and chariots and at last devoured the demon. At the death of the demon the gods being overjoyed began to worship her. Since then the virgin worship began.<sup>16</sup> According to another story from the same *Tantra*, that a king of *Caitra* dynasty attained salvation by propitiating a virgin named *Kanci* and the place where *Kanci* was worshipped was named as *Kancipuram*.

The prevalent custom of Virgin worship is that it is performed along with *Durga*, *Kali* and other *Mahavidyas*. The salutation mantra of a virgin worship is same as that ‘*Vidya*’s salutation mantra. Sometimes it is also seen that virgin is fed and clad, saluted without any mantra. The tantric believe that the virgin is the goddess incarnate.

The *Pranatosini Tantra* says that virgins are of sixteen types, depending upon their ages.<sup>17</sup> Again in ancient time, a man named *Kampilla*, worshipped a virgin. The place where he worshipped the virgin is known as *Kampilla Nagar*. Since then the virgin is there is in the form of a stone.<sup>18</sup>

There is a '*Dhyana*' for *Kumari Puja* in Kamakhya<sup>19</sup> there is also '*avahana*' and salutation mantra.<sup>20</sup> In *Kumari Puja* there is no caste bar. Virgins from the low castes are preferable. Their only caste is virginity.

As regards virgin worship, N.N. Basu comments: 'Thus the maiden was an unavoidable item of *Sakti* worship at Kamakhya, and quite a large number of these unmarried girls were required to devote themselves to the service of the goddess.'<sup>21</sup>

To quote S.C. Banerjee: 'Krishnananda says that '*homa*' does not produce the full fruit without *Kumari Puja*'.<sup>22</sup> It may be that the procedure of worshipping virgins in the *Durga* and *Kali Puja* is just after the performance of '*Homa*'. *Kumari* is an integral part of *Purasccarana*.

### ***Deodhani* also called *Devadhani* or *Mare* or *Manasa puja***

The *Manasa puja*, a *puja*, dedicated to *Manasa*, the goddess presiding over Serpents, is celebrated in any one of the following months-*Jaistha*, *Asadhara*, *Sravana* and *Bhadra* in some of the temples of Kamrupa according to convenience. It has assumed the form of popular festival in Kamrupa, and also in Darrang. In all the Devi temples including that of Kamakhya, it is observed on the confluent day of *Sravana* and *Bhadra* and continues for the next two days. On the first day of the *puja*, a *ghat* (an earthen pot of particular shape) full of water is placed in the name of *Manasa*. The last day coinciding with the second day of *Bhadra* the *ghat* is thrown away into water, and the *puja* comes to an end. The particular class of servitors called *ojhapali* exhibit their dance in all these days by reciting passages from the *Padmapurana* (also called *Manasa purana*). In some temples, another class of people consisting of both male and female called *Deodha* (*Deodhoni*) offer dance on this occasion separately. In the non- Vaisnavite temples, animal and birds are sacrificed on these days.

*Deodhani* is one of the most important occasions of significance associated with the Kamakhya temple. Because of congregation of a large number of devotees, this occasion takes the form of a *mela* or fair. Incidentally, it coincides with the *Manasa puja* at Kamakhya. The *deodhani* is a shamanistic type of dance. There are different opinions regarding the spiritual aspect of the *deodhani*. According to some people *deodhani* means spiritual power of god and goddess, which is manifested through the performers of the *deodhani nrtya*. According to another belief, it means voice or expression of a goddess through a man who serves as a medium of divinity to manifest their will before a human being.

The dancers of *deodhani* are called as *deodha*, which means the man who possesses the power of a *deo* or god or goddess. *Deodhas* are also locally called *ghora* and *joki*. *Ghora* means the vehicle of god or goddess, and *joki* means the parson who is possessed by a particular god or goddess with the result that he demonstrates paranormal feats, which enable him to predict the fate of a man.

History is silent regarding the date from when *deodhani* in Kamakhya was started or how it came to be performed during *Manasa puja*. According to Dr. Nabin Chandra Sarma, Retd. Prof. Dept of Folklore, Gauhati University; both *Manasa puja* and *deodhani* started in Kamakhya temple from the time of Koch king Biswa Singha. He opines that in ancient times the traditional dance *devadasi* was popular with the temples in this area. There is a village named *Natipara* (*nati* means dancer and *para*, a locality) in Kamakhya area and according to him it might have been a colony of *devadasis* from which *deodhani* dance originated in a local form. But there apparently has no distinct influence or impact of *devadashi* dance on the present form of *deodhani*. Now *deodhani* is performed only by non-Brahmin male dancer in Kamakhya temple while the *devadashi* was traditionally performed by females.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Phakua and Dolyatra of Krishna***

Durga Deul is remarkable festival uncommon in other parts of the country. It is performed during spring season particularly on second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth tithi of the full moon day in the month of *Caitra* (March and April). Like Radha-Krisna in the Daulyatra, Kamesvara and Kamesvari are kept in the swing in their respective temples. On the evening of the sixth day Devi Kamesvari is taken out in a procession people observed the ceremony by throwing colour at each other. For all these days special worships are held.

### ***Sivaratri***

The *Sivaratri* is performed on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the waning forth night also known as *Sivacaturdasi* in the month of *Phalguna* or *Caitra* according to astronomical calculation. On this day, all the deities in the temples are worshipped with special offerings, but in Siva and Devi temples animals are also sacrificed. On this day, a special worship in addition to the normal worship of Siva is also performed according to the procedures laid down in the *Sivapurana*.

### ***Dasamahavidyas***

The concept of *Dasamahavidyas* is of tantric origin. But before going to discuss the ritual of *Mahavidyas*, let us know what *Mahavidya* is. According to the *Yogini Tantra* and science of mantra is divided into two categories i) *Mantra* ii) *Vidya*. Those are mantras which are applied to the worship of gods and those applied to goddess are known as *Vidyas* <sup>24</sup>When we apply the adjective 'Maha' to it we mean great goddess or chief goddess.

The popular myth behind the origin of *Dsamshavidyas* is that when Sati came to know that her father Daksa is going to perform a sacrifice to which Daksa has invited all but Siva and Sati she wanted to go there without having any invitation. She begged permission from Siva to go to the sacrifice. Siva forbade her and explained the consequences of attending the sacrifice, without being invited. At this Sati became ferocious and angry. At the sight of her anger, Siva became perplexed and wanted to flee hither and thither. Sati obstructed him by shouting 'do not be afraid.' Siva was not pacified. In the mean time Sati expressed herself in ten images in ten directions. Siva was perplexed and accorded permission to go to Daksa's place.<sup>25</sup> The modern interpretation is different. Some scholars wanted to say that these ten images of the mother goddess are different forms of Devi Kalika.<sup>26</sup> The followers of Kalikula, worship the ten *Mahavidyas*. They are Kali, Tara, Tsodasi, Bhuvaneshvari, Bhairavi, Vagala, Cinnamasta, Dhumavati, Matangi, and Kamala.<sup>27</sup> These *Mahavidyas* are worshipped along with their Bhairavas i.e. Siva with different names.

The *Siva-Sakti* Union is the best explained by *Dasmahavidyas* concept, because Siva without Sakti is passive or dead. To quote Dr. Radhakrishnan, 'Siva is this system is of the nature of omnipresent (akhilanugata), pure consciousness (prakash), impersonal and inactive. It is being devoid of any relativity. The active personal being Sakti includes all individual souls.' The worship of *Dasmahavidyas* is prevalent among the *Tantrics* and specially the *Saktas*.

The worship of *Dasamahavidyas* and their respective piths are perhaps the creation of a later age. Considering the different tastes of different persons, the Hindu religion has recognized the worship of various gods and goddesses. Similarly, the worship of various *Mahavidyas* is propagated to suit the need of different devotees. The existence of the *Dsamahavidyas pithas* on the Nilachala hillock proves that it was out and out a

centre of Tantric worship for a long time. The following table shows the form of *Dasamahavidys-*

**TABLE-V: DASAMAHAVIDYA AT THE NILACHAL HILL**

Sl. No.	Name	Additional Name, if any	Hands with Ayudhas
1	Kali	No	Two hands, <i>Khanda</i> in one hand only
2	Tara	No	Two hands, both hand carry <i>Khanda</i>
3	Sodasi	Tripura Sundari	Four handed holding <i>pasa, ankusa, arrow</i> and <i>bow</i>
4	Bhairabi	Tripura Bhairavi	Four handed in <i>padmasana, trisula</i> in left hand
5	Bhubanesvari	Rajarajesvari, Annapurna & Navadurga	Four handed, two carries <i>pasa</i> and <i>ankusa</i> her vehicle is tiger
6	Chinnamasta	No	No
7	Dhumavati	No	No
8	Bagala	No	Two handed in general, four handed on special occasions; mace in right hand & pulling the tongue of a demon with left hand
9	Matangi	Sarasvati	Four handed figure on <i>padma</i>
10	Laksmi	Laksmi	Four handed, on <i>padma, pasa</i> in hands <i>ankusa, Dhanusbana(bow &amp; arrow)</i>

Source: <sup>28</sup> Bhuyan, G.N. & Nayak, S(ed.): *Heritage of Kamakhya on Nilachala Hill*, Guwahati, 2010, P.136.

### ***Kali puja***

The Kali puja of Kamakhya starts with her worship in the Kamakhya pitha. It is always a fact with Kamakhya that, in spite of the existence of different temples of the Devi with their respective methods of worship, Kamakhya Devi is considered as the supreme as such, in any event in any of the temples here, the same is started with a ritual in the Kamakhya pitha. On the day of kali puja mentioned while the difference in the mode of worship inside the Kamakhya pitha as Kali is not known. Buffalo and Goats are sacrificed during this worship. This sacrifice was found to be exclusive for Kamakhya Devi who, in fact, is assumed as Kali in Tantra, who constitutes one of the ten aspects of *Mahavidya* (great incarnations of the divine female power). However, this daytime ritual in the Kamakhya pitha had appeared to be confined to the priests only and did not attract any devotee other than the normal visitors to the temple.

### ***Sevants of Kamakhya temple***

The Kamakhya temple is regarded as one of the most vibrant *Saktipithas* of India. An important aspect of this shrine is the tradition of the *Sevants* (a *sevaitor* and a tenant of the *devottar* land) (The kings and the landlords of ancient Assam donated lands to temples as an act of patronage. Thus, lands of three categories were donated, such as, the *brahmottara* which was given to the Brahmins for keeping religious rites vibrant, the *dharmottara* to the religious leaders to keep the flag of religion high and the *devottara* in the name of a deity of a temple to manage all affairs of a temple, such as, daily rituals, for general maintenance etc.) Who are indispensable in the management of the temple? From history, the origin of the sevants of Kamakhya is little known, but *sevants* groups like *pujari* (priest), *balikata* (people engaged in sacrifice) etc claim their origin from Kanyakubja or Kanauj in North- India. Several groups of *sevants* are

known to be traditionally in existence. From *pujari* to *paneri* (water supplier to the *pith*), all of them offer their services concertedly to the upkeep and the daily management of the temple. From investigation it was known that initially there were only five officials appointed by the raja (king) for management of the *pith*. But in course of time the designations of these officials either changed or they changed their professions to mingle with the general population.

In Assam it is noticed that, except Hayagriva Madhava temple of Hajo, it is the Kamakhya temple where varied groups of *sevaitis* are traditionally employed in the management of the temple. (During the rule of the late- medieval Ahom kings, the system of offering paiks or temple-servitors was introduced. They mainly raised crops on the temple land and offered their service as required by the temple management). Though these *sevaitis* groups originally had specific services to be offered traditionally to the temple, many changes have taken place by now in their mode of service. Incidentally, these *sevaitis* are still seen to have important role in the management of the different daily and seasonal works of the temple. It is a matter of satisfaction that even today they maintain these age old traditions which have made Kamakhya temple one of the best –managed temples of our country. Some details of the servitors are given below:

### ***Pujari***

Pujaris from the priest class of the Kamakhya temple. Originally five pujaris were entrusted by the raja (king) to share the daily rituals of the *pith* in shift basis throughout the year. Besides *nitya* (daily) puja in the morning, they also offer their services during the *arti* (chanting hymns accompanied by music and dance) in the evening and on the other special occasions of the *pitha*.

There is a system of *Pali* among the priest. According to this system, a *Pali* or a particular priest offers his service for a particular duration and then vacates in favour of another from the group. In this system there is also provision that in the absence of a *Pali*, another of the same priest group can offer the service. For some special occasion like *Durga puja*, *Manasa puja* etc. there is another *Pali* system. According to this system, every *Pali* is given the chance to offer his service in rotation. For his service to the temple, the *pujari* gets a portion of the amount of money and the *naivedya* offered to the temple by devotee as the *daksina*. It was known that *daksina* and *naivedya* are shared among the *pujari*, *duwari*, and *athporia* in 60-40 percent ratio. On the other hand, the offerings received in cash or kind collected as *pranami* goes to the accounts of the temple trust.

In Kamakhya pitha a person has to pass a long process to become a priest. One should have to select his Guru who will teach him the methods and the curriculum of the *puja* or the religious performances of the *pitha*. After this, the oldest member of the *Sevants* group has to recognize him as proficient enough to take the responsibility. In Kamakhya temple there is a tradition of reciting the hymns for the Devi without reading the main *bidhi* during religious performance.

***Athparia*** (originally round-the-clock watcher but now cleaner of Devi *pitha*):

The word *Athporia* derived from the word *asta prahara*, (*asta* means eight and *prahara* covers three hours) meaning the eight divisions of a day covering 24 hours. In the *pitha* the *Athporia sevants* are engaged in full day service to keep the premises tidy by cleaning and washing of the *pitha* etc. He also offers his service as the helper of the *pujari* during religious rites in the *pitha*. According to the daily routine, an *Athporia* has to come to the temple early in the morning and should bring flowers for

*puja*. After this he performs *japa* (meditation) and recites mantra, which is followed by other works like cleaning and washing of the *pitha* and the *chalanta*. Then the *athporia* replaces the sari that was spread over the *pitha* on the previous day with a new one. This type of work is also done in the same way on the *Matangi* and the *Kamala pitha*. After this the *pujari* performs religious rites and the *athporia's* service is limited basically to the temple. He is the guard of the temple.

To become an *athporia*, a person has to follow and practise some strict rule and regulation. At first he has to take *sarana/diksa* (initiation) under a priest of the *pitha*, who trains him in *japa*, *tapa* and *bijamantra* of the *pitha*, after acquiring which the person is recognized as an *athporia*. In return for his service to the *pitha* he gets *bhog* and *thali* from the temple. The kinds and coins offered by the devotees to the temple as *dakshina* are shared between the priest and the other *sevaitis* groups. According to this tradition, the priest receives half of the share and the remaining half is again divided among other *sevaitis* groups equally that are engaged inside the temple. It is also a rule that the beheaded body part of the daily sacrifice is also shared between the *sevaitis* groups.

### ***Balidhara***

The service of the *balidhara sevait* group is to control the animal before sacrifice including holding the *Bali* (the animal offered for sacrifice) in position during sacrifice. The members of this *sevaitis* group are arranged mainly from other *sevait* group like *duwari*, *athporia* etc. of the temple. Most probably the *balidhara* group was not introduced in the earlier times but was organized later on when situation demanded it.

In the distant past these *sevait* groups were created mainly to offer the specified service in relation to the activities of the *pitha* and even today most of these entrusted services are carried out by maintaining the age old tradition.

These *sevait* groups get some portion of daily income of the temple. It was specially known that the daily donation (*Dana*) to the main temple is shared among the priest and *Duwari* and *Athporia* in 60/40 percent. On the other hand, the cash offered by the devotees against their sacrifice (*Bali*) is also shared between *Balikata* and *Balidhara*. The remaining *sevait* groups get *bhog* against their services. Among these *sevait* group the *Pali* system has prevailed, according to which the *sevait* shift their services on rotational basis. The number of people assigned to the temples during the Ahom administration was quite large. According to an estimate it was more than 15,000 in 1769.<sup>26</sup>

Thus it now appears, that besides the temple building, each temple within the limit of our study enjoyed a huge property both movable and immovable appropriated to various deities and to Brahmins or other religious men.<sup>27</sup>

### ***Balikata***

*Balikata* service to the *pitha* is to execute the *Bali* (sacrifice) offered to the *pitha*. In the *pitha* a *nitya* or daily sacrifice is a must from the temple management in which a he-goat is offered to the Devi. By offering the service to the *pitha*, the *balikata* gets a *thali* (share) of *naivedya* and *bhoga*. There are two kinds of *thali*, namely, *barthali* and *chalanta thali*. The *thali* offered to main *pitha* is known as *barthali* and another two *thalis* for *chalanta* (the metallic image of the Devi which is taken out on special occasions) as *chalanta thali*. The *balikata* gets the *barthali* and also one *thali* of

*chalanta*. Moreover, he also earns money by executing sacrifices offered by the devotees.

In Kamakhya, the original *balikata* families are titled as *sikdar*. It is known that this *sevait* group is also engaged in revenue collection and payment of Kamakhya *pitha* in past years, for which the title *Sikdar* was given to them from the *pitha*. To be a *balikata* of the *pitha*, a *sevait* of the *sikdar* family has to take *diksha* from Guru at first and then by offering a *puja* to the *pitha* he can gain the qualification of *balikata* (executor). In Kamakhya temple buffalo, pigeon, duck, goat, catfish, sugarcane, gourd, banana etc are sacrificed. The weapon used in buffalo sacrifice is 5kg in weight. In the midnight of *Astami* of *Durga puja* a human motif made of wheat is sacrificed traditionally in the *pitha*. A member of the *Sikdar* family can offer his *balikata* service to any *pitha* of *dasamahavidya* of the area. The *Pali* or shift-duty system is also in existence among this group.

### ***Dadharua***

Originally, this group of people was engaged in sharpening the knives of the *pitha*. But today they have lost this distinction.

### ***Duwari***

*Duwari* is the gatekeeper of the Kamakhya temple. Their main duty to the Kamakhya temple is to open the doors of the temple in the morning and then to close the same in the evening. Moreover, the *duwaris* are also seen to have played the role of helper during *puja*. In the morning a *duwari* has to provide various types of help to the priest. During the time of offering of *bhoga* (cooked item) and in the *arti* (prayer in the evening) also the *duwari* offers his help to the *pujari*. This *sevait* group also serves as

the night watchman of the temple and resides in the temple at night. During enquiry it was known that now only eight families from *duwari* groups are engaged in their service and among them Pali system is prevalent. In return for their service to the *pitha*, this *sevait* group gets *bhoga* and *naivedya*. Moreover, the group also enjoys a share of the *Dana* and *daksina*, which are offered to the temple.

### ***Hetania***

*Hetania*s help the *khowar* (a *sevait* group) in the preparation of *bhoga* in the temple. They help by cleaning and preparing the items needed for *bhoga* and are also responsible for cleaning the kitchen of the temple. Moreover they carry the *dolas* (palanquin) in the procession organized during the festivals like *phakua* or *holi*, *Durga puja* etc. Now four families are engaged in this service and among them *Pali* system is maintained. In exchange for the service, the *hetania* gets a plate of *bhog* every day. Different types of item like fish, meat, vegetable, duck, eggs, pulses, and arum etc. are offered as *bhoga*.

### ***Gayan***

*Gayans* are the players of the musical instruments associated with the temples of Kamakhya. The literary meaning of this word is a singer but at Kamakhya it means a musician. They play instruments like *khol* (a type of traditional drum), *doba* (kettle drum), cymbal etc. in the Kamakhya temple. Originally this *sevait* group used Barman as their family surname, but now they have adopted the '*Gayan*' title to indicate their relation with the service to the *pitha*. This *sevait* group offers their particular service during the evening prayer (*arti*) daily. Moreover, except in *Manasa puja*, the *gayans* have to offer their service in other festivals such as *Durga puja*, *Basanti puja* etc.

Now four families of these *sevait* groups have been offering their service to the *pitha* under the *Pali* system. For which for their service to the *pitha*, the *thali* (the dish of *naivedya*) and the *bhoga* offered to the *Saraswati pitha* in the temple is granted to the particular *gayan*.

### ***Panery***

*Panerys* are the water suppliers to the Kamakhya temple. There are two types of *panery* in Kamakhya temple-*Snan Panery* (water supplier to clean the main *pitha*) and *Bhog Panery* (Water supplier to prepare the *bhog*). For the above mentioned purpose the *panerys* usually bring the water from the *Saubhagya Kunda*.

### ***Chandipathak***

This *sevait* group is Brahman by caste. The *Chandipathak* recites the *Chandi* (scripture) during special *pujas* like *Durga puja*, *Manasa puja* etc.

### ***Khowar***

*Khowar* is the temple cook who prepares the *bhog* or cooked *prasada*. This *sevait* is always Brahmin by caste.

### ***Tamuli***

The *Tamuli* group claimed themselves as of *ksatriya* origin. Originally the members of this *sevait* group supplied *tamul-pan* (areca nut and betel leaf) used in *naivedyas* for the *puja* of the *pitha*. But today the *tamuli* group shoulders some extra responsibility by supplying all the raw fruits needed for the *naivedya*. In return for their service, this group also gets a share of the *bhog* from the temple authority.

### ***Sil***

*Sil* is a barber associated with the temple. Though the service of this group is not directly related to the interest of the temple during the *Deodhani mela*, they have cut and clean the hair etc. of the *deodhas* for which they are paid by the temple authority. It was known that the *sils* are liable to offer their services to every *pujari* family of the *pitha*.

### ***Sonari***

*Sonari* or *honari* are the goldsmiths of the temple. The making, repairing and polishing of all the ornaments of the temple are their responsibility. Now the services of these services of this *sevait* group have almost come to an end.

### ***Bharali***

*Bharali* serves both as accountant and treasurer of the temple. He keeps and maintains details of the expenditure and income of the temple and also serves as the auditor. But today this *sevait* group is not in their traditional engagement and their services are only sporadic.

### ***Bhandarkayastha***

*Bhandarkayastha* is the in charge of *bhandar* (warehouse) of the temple. The *bhandarkayastha* has to keep strict vigil on the articles of the *bhandar*, which consists of gold, silver, ornaments, metallic objects, valuable materials etc. of the temple. They are non-Brahmins and enjoy a high status in the temple management.

### ***Kaurkhenia***

The word *kaurkhenia* comes from Assamese words, *kauri* (crow) and *khedua* (to drive away). This group of *sevait*s was created to drive away crows that disturbed peace during religious performances of the temple. But today the services of this *sevait* group have become redundant and instead of this the group offers miscellaneous services to the *pitha* during special occasions.

Nowadays the individuals from some other *sevait* groups like *duwari*; *athporia* etc. also offers the above mentioned miscellaneous services during special festivals as required.

### ***Chaulkadhas***

*Chaulkadhas* are the persons carrying out the duty of measuring and supplying rice etc. for *bhog*. The group now faces extinction.

### ***Jagamukti***

This group is engaged in cleaning the sacrificial pits and the place around the sacrificial frames. They are still in existence as a distinctive *sevait* group.

### ***Kharikatia***

*Kharikatias* are the wood suppliers to the temple, but now the service is not in practice.

### ***Dhubi***

This *sevait* group was exclusively engaged in washing and cleaning the cloth used on the yoni of the Kamakhya temple.

Now this group has almost disappeared as a separate group.

### ***Maji***

*Maji* is in-charge of distribution of Prasad and *bhog*. It was known that their work is limited to special festivals of *pitha*.

### **Significance of Kamakhya**

Goddess Kamakhya is the most dominating name in the early history of Assam. It was under her banner that the first empire in early Assam was built. It was over her emergence and recognition as presiding deity of the state the *saivites* and the *vaisnavites* went into salient conflict and Naraka the first builder of the state lost his later religious history also centre round her and other Goddess recognized as her varied manifestation. The picture of Goddess Kamakhya as presented in the *Kalika purana* is a composite figure made up conceptions imported from outside in different epochs in the history of the evolution of the original mother Goddess herself. Naraka's Kamakhya has been patterned on the earlier conception of the mother Goddess as a primordial deity associated with and patronized by Vishnu. The other figures of Kamakhya as a virgin and as a spouse of Siva belong to later periods. All these conceptions have been rolled into one in the portrait of the Goddess as pictured in the *Kalika purana*.<sup>29</sup> The evolution of the concept of a supreme female power in Indian religion is not new and can be traced to the *Rig-Vedic* times. As such, there is nothing adverse in the worship of a female deity. Even Visnu while installing Naraka on the throne of *Pragjyotish-pura* was said to have exhorted him to worship Kamakhya, a manifestation of supreme power. The cult of *Sakti* is common to both *Vaisnavism* and *Saivism* and *Siva-Sakti* worship came to be the dominant religion

under state patronage. When such a religion later on relegated Siva to the background and gave a very dominating position to the female deity, the royal power it seems began to stand aloof from it.<sup>30</sup> Thus the assimilation of different modes of worship is another significance of Kamakhya temple.

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## **CHAPTER -V**

### **TEMPLE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM AND ADMINISTRATION IN THE LAND OF KAMAKHYA**

The management of the temples of various Cults mainly depends upon the source of finance, administration and supervising machinery. Though the problems relating to the *Dolai's* power, negligence of duty by the Priests and attendants, land revenue payable to the Government etc. are associated with the temples management but, the amount of annuity so fixed is too small to meet the expenditure of the daily as well as regular worship of the temples. With the acquisition of the temple lands by the Government the Priests and attendants lost all interests in the temple and hence, in most cases, the temple became deserted. So, there is now none to look after them and hence the temple buildings too which are undoubtedly historical monuments are facing ruins.

#### **Management of the Temples and their Rites, Rituals, Fairs, Festivals, etc.**

Rites, Rituals, Fairs and Festivals of the deity have prevailed for a long time in the land of Kamakhya. A lots of Rites, Rituals, Fairs and Festivals both calendar cal and occasional are performed. It has a great importance in the temples management system of the land of Kamakhya in different periods. The references to Bhagavata (reverence, holy etc.), *Swamina* (lord) and Balabhadra in the Umacala Rock Inscription<sup>1</sup> indicates that the shrine was dedicated to Balabhadra, a name of Balaram, the elder brother of Krisna and one of the '*Panca-Viras*' of the *Vayu* and some other *Puranas*. The shrine is therefore taken to be a place of Vaisnavite worship. Balabhadra Swami might have been also an anchorite, a religious teacher of the

donor. The inscription belongs to the royal period of Maharajadhiraja Surendra Varman whose identification is yet to be ascertained, though some scholars have tried to identify him with Mahendravarman, the king of Varman family for the reason that both the names stand for Indra. The Barganga Rock Inscription of Bhutivarman records that *Avaguna*, a minister who worshipped *Paramesvara* made the 'religious asylum' (*asrama*) with a view to securing longevity of Sri Bhutivarman, a performer of *Asvamedha* sacrifice.<sup>2</sup> Of the two religious architectural remains to which references have been made above, we have, however, no further details regarding their scope, material and extent nor regarding their management. However from the clear references made to the worship of Siva and in some cases of Sakti by the kings of Kamrupa, at least since A.D. 7<sup>th</sup> century, as found in their inscriptions, it appears that in the majority of the temple in ancient Kamrupa Saivite rites and rituals were performed however, in some, *Sakta* and in some other, both *Saiva* and *Sakta* and in a few Vaisnavite rites and rituals were performed with great pomp and ceremony. BhaskaraVarman pays his homage to *Sasisekhharapinakimahadeva* at the beginning of a grant to some Brahmins.<sup>3</sup> Most of the ancestors of Bhaskara are described as regular performers of sacrifices.<sup>4</sup> The Nidhanpur Grant of Bhaskaravarman records that he was born for the proper distribution of the duties of various castes and stages of life (*Varnasramadharm*) which had been lying in a confused state.<sup>5</sup> It indicates that various Brahmanical rites were observed conforming in all probability to the textual prescriptions at the time of BhaskaraVarman. His predecessor, Balavarman, as recorded in the same epigraph, was the very domain of sacrificial rituals. It is also recorded that an endowment of land was created specially towards *Bali*, *Caru* and *Satra*, the three important rituals of Brahmanical Hinduism.<sup>6</sup> The Copper plate Inscription of Srikumara, on the other hand, mentions the worship of Indra.<sup>7</sup> From the

Tezpur grant of Vanamaladeva of the Salastambha dynasty we learn that Mahagauri and Kamesvara Siva were worshipped in a temple on the *Kamakuta* hillock.<sup>8</sup> The same epigraph mentions that king Vanamaladeva not only rebuilt the big temple of *Hatakasulin Siva* (i.e. *Mahadeva* called *Hataka* or a *linga* image of Siva having a *sula* meaning trident/ *fance* of *hataka* meaning gold) which had fallen down in ruins but also made large endowments of villages, men, elephants and dancing girls to it,<sup>9</sup> which implies that besides the various sacrifices as well as the regular and daily worships of Siva and his consort Sakti, there had been regular musical performances at the temples, and also that the temples were gradually becoming owners of large landed estates, men and wealth. The Nagaon grant of Balavarman of the same ruling dynasty records that Devadhara, a pious Brahmins performed the Vaitanika rites in an unbewildered manner.<sup>10</sup> The Bargaon Copper Plate grants of Ratnapala of Brahmapala's dynasty indicates that there was a Siva temple of great height in the capital city called Durjaya while the Guwahati and the Guwakuchi Copper Plate grant of his son Indrapala state that Ratnapala "caused the whole world to be crowded with white washed temples of Siva, the dwellings of Brahmins to be stuffed with various types of wealth, the places of sacrifice to be littered with sacrificial posts, the sky to be filled up with the sacrificial smoke". On the other hand, the Gachtal Inscription of Indrapala's son king Gopala informs us that Indrapala "by constructing a clearly white washed temple of Sambhu turned the earth into as if a Kailasa Mountain".

These epigraphically evidences gives us a clear impression that the rites and rituals of Brahmanical Hinduism found a fertile ground in the area of our study at least from the fifth century A.D., if not earlier to the eleventh – twelfth century A.D. And that the various important sacrifices were performed in a grand manner as that " the smoke of the hum enveloped the sky of the temple campus".<sup>11</sup> Among other rites and rituals,

taps or ascetic practices formed an important part of the religious life of the Brahmins assigned to the temple.<sup>12</sup> There are references also to Brahmins making pilgrimage to various *tirthas* (sacred places).<sup>13</sup> Besides the religious establishments recorded in these epigraphs, the *Kalika Purana* gives a long list of *tirthas* and also mentions some of the high and beautiful *prasada* and *saudha* including that of *Candravati* situated in the city of *Candravati* which were bedecked with gold, silver and jewels.<sup>14</sup> It is also recorded in the work that *Naraka*, after his installation on the throne of *Kamarupa*, made proper arrangement for the worship of *Kamakhya*.<sup>15</sup> Fortunately the *Kalika Purana* records the rites and rituals observed at the different *tirthas* in the land of *Kamahi* in ancient period, while the *Yogini Tantra* refers to the ones followed in its contemporary medieval period. As the *Kalika Purana* records it, the *naivedya* (offerings) for *Kamakhya* consisted of various ingredients.<sup>16</sup> The work clearly mentions that *modaka* (sweet meat) should be offered to *Ganapati*, ghee to *Hari*, regular musical performances to *Samkara* and various sacrifices to *Candika*.<sup>17</sup> Such sacrifices included birds, tortoise and animals such as *varaha* (boar), *chagala* (goat), *mahisa* (buffalo), *godha* (donkey), *sasaka* (deer), *camara* (gourd), *krsnasara* (ox), *sarabha* (monkey), *simha* (lion), *matsya* (fish), *sukara* (dog), *manusya* (Human being), *svagotrarudhir* (blood from own race) horse and elephant.<sup>18</sup> Among these, *chagala* was regarded as *Bali*, *sarabha* as *Mahabali* and *manusya* as *Atibali*.<sup>19</sup> Such references indicate that besides the sacrifices of various birds and animals including cow and ox, human beings were also offered at the temple, specially at that of *Kamakhya*.<sup>20</sup> The offering of human sacrifice, however, was the royal prerogative enjoyed by king and no one else could do it without his sanction.<sup>21</sup> In all probability it also might be an old practice on the part of some women in *Kamrupa* to sacrifice their virginity at the shrine of *Kamakhya*.<sup>22</sup>

A number of other rites observed in places of worship include *avahan* (invitation), *Sodasopacara* (offering of *sodasopcar*), *japa* (uttering of mantra), *balidan* (offering of sacrifice) *ango* (invocation) and *angadirpuja* (worship and invocation) and exhibition of *mudra* (ring and script).<sup>23</sup> But at the same time pilgrims from outside Kamrupa were allowed to worship in the temples according to the customs, rites and rituals of their own.<sup>24</sup> Among the rituals, the detailed description of *Sakroththana* and that of the *Visnuyajna* in the *Kalika Purana* leads us to conclude that these ceremonies were performed long before tenth century A.D.<sup>25</sup> The *Sakroththana* ceremony is also described in the *Devipurana* and is supported by a reference to its performance in a Copper Plate grant of Balavarman.<sup>26</sup> The *Kalika Purana* mentions several times about the celebration of *Madan Troyadasi* and *Sivacaturdasi*. Besides, some particular days were observed as days for special worship. Thus on the *astami* and *navami tithi* (the eighth and ninth days of the moon), a special *puja* (worship) in the temples was arranged with offerings of cooked food with *Sali* rice (autumn rice) and curry at noon and with an earthen lamp to be lightened with ghee.<sup>27</sup> Moreover the *ekadasi* (the eleventh day of each moon) day was observed in the temples, and was also selected for making religious grants. The Kamauli Grant of Vaidyadeva was made on the *ekadasi* of *Visnuvati* in *vaisakha*.<sup>28</sup> The Nagaon Grant of Balavarman, on the other hand, was issued on the *Visuvat* tithi.<sup>29</sup> Both these days are still observed in the temples as festival days and are commonly known as Bihu.<sup>30</sup> The above rites and rituals both daily and occasional were practiced in the temples up to eighteenth century A.D. and it is well known that king Naranarayana (Malladeva) and his brother Cilarai (Sukladhvaja) after having inaugurated the Kamakhya temple which was then newly built by them offered a number of 3 lakhs of different sacrifices including those of *mahisa* (buffalo), *chagala* (goat), *hamsa* (duck), *matsya* (fish), *paravat* (pigeon),

*harina* (deer) and *kacchapa* (tortoise), opened it for the use of public and donated lavishly for meeting the expenses of the priesthood, daily worship and occasional festivals.<sup>31</sup> Thereafter the Ahom king Gaurinathsimha following the old custom also on another occasion offered sacrifices numbering three lakhs in the temple in A.D. 1782.<sup>32</sup> According to the detailed account of the daily *puja* of the Hayagrivamadhava presented in the text entitled *Manikuta*, the deity was regularly offered worship three times a day. Every day in morning the deity had to be bathed and then clothed in a new dress; then at noon cooked food was to be offered to it and finally there had to be the evening worship (*sandhyarati puja*) accompanied by musical performances. This prescription is supported also by a large number of Copper Plate Grants of the Ahom kings containing information about the rites and rituals of the temples. Some other literary works, to name the more important ones the *Yogini Tantra*, the *Darrang Rajavamsavali* and a number of *Caritputhi* (biographies) of Neo-Vaisnavite preachers including that of Sankardeva and Madhavadeva also help us in this regard. It is noteworthy in this connection that at the invitation of the Ahom king Rudrasimha, Krisnaram Nyayavagisa came to Assam and subsequently was appointed Parvatiya Gossain i.e. the sole in charge of the Kamakhya temple on the Nilacala hill. King *Sivasimha* requested him to prepare the details of the *puja-vidhi* for the use of all temples in the land of Kamrupa. This is an important piece of information for it clearly indicates that discrepancies were suspected between what was prescribed in the ancient texts and what actually were followed in these temples, Krisnaram did accordingly.<sup>33</sup> And following this *puja-vidhi* detailed by Krisnaram, in addition to the customary daily worship and offerings of *bhog* (cooked food offered to the deities at noon and in evening), certain tithes were observed in common through the performance of some rites in all the temples. These *tithi* based ceremonies have been

observed in all the temples, irrespective of sect, the form of some rituals is, however, different from temple to temple.

Besides the regular rituals, some other ceremonies such as the Buddha *puṇnima* (birth, attainment of enlighten and death of Lord Buddha), *Ratanti Kalipuḷa* and also the *pañcāparvas* (five festive days in a month), are observed in all the temples.

### **Control over Temple Property**

From the descriptions in the land grant charters of the kings of Kamarupa and consequently of the Ahom kings, the properties of the temples may be divided broadly into two groups viz, movable and immovable. Each temple has its own temple building and huge quantity of land, which comprised the immovable properties. The movable properties include utensils; different images made of metals including gold and silver, boats and traders free from all taxes and punitive measures, cow, buffaloes, elephants and in some cases included cash money. Besides it also included men assigned to various services of the temple.

Servitors to a temple were assigned from all the professional castes of the society to make the daily and regular worship. Some of them were priests, some were to assist the priests and some were to maintain the temple establishments.

In ancient times, a class of people called *Sastrakars* usually lived in the temple complex were assigned to frame laws or code of conduct regarding the management of the temples.<sup>34</sup> The Kamauli Grant of Vaidyadeva made reference to the Brahmin Rajguru Murari, who was probably the priest of a temple.<sup>35</sup> Besides, we come across of references to appointing women as dancers and courtesans connected with temple services. Vanamala made gifts of *Vesya* to the temple of Hatakasulin Siva.<sup>36</sup> Those

women, dedicated to temple services were usually known as *Nati* or the *Daluhangana* or *Devadasi*.<sup>37</sup> Their duty included dancing and singing before the deity and to fan the idol with camera (Tibetan ox tails) and also to prepare garlands. The grant also records that the king made a large endowment of men, elephant, horse, gold, silver and many other valuables.

Srikumara donated a copper bell to a temple of Indra,<sup>38</sup> while Vanamala donated an image of Surya to Bhattaravi, which indicates that the done was in charge of a temple and he received the image on behalf of the temple.<sup>39</sup> Likewise the same inscription from Deopani<sup>40</sup> records that Hari donated a Visnu image indicating that the donor also made other donations to the temple. These images in some cases were made of gold and we find mention that the temple where Mahamad-I-bukhtiyar took refuge contained huge image of solid gold weighing one thousand pound.<sup>41</sup> The Guwahati Grant of Indrapala record that the white-washed temples which were built by the kings decorated with wealth of all kinds.<sup>42</sup>

In regard to the immovable properties, it appears from the descriptions in the land grant charters of the kings of Kamarupa that some lands connected with the temples, usually known as *Bahamadeya* or *Agrahara* are found to have been granted by Bhutivarman as early as 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D.<sup>43</sup> The Guwahati Grant of Indrapala also refers to the land in Pandari area dedicated to the temples of Mahagauri and Kamesvara.<sup>44</sup> Another reference to land of the Kurmanatha temple is made in the copper plate Inscription of Dharmapala.<sup>45</sup> Likewise king Madhavadeva “by virtue of the grant of property (*nirbandhana*), obtained from Sri Ananta Dasa, the *Bhumikaranakayastha* (writer of the Land Settlement Department) one hundred partakes of land near (the shrine or god) Sri Kamesvara were released by the king to *virocan*, the Superintendent of the Temple”.<sup>46</sup> Thus, it appears that a huge amount of

movable and immovable properties were enjoyed by the temples of Kamarupa since long past.

During the medieval period, the Koch king Naranarayana made a large grant with 140 men to the temple of Kamakhya, while his nephew Raghudeva granted land and 700 Paiks to the Hayagrivamadhava temple at Hajo,<sup>47</sup> during the short period of the Mughal occupation of Kamrupa. Land men and money were received by the priests of the temples of Hayagrivmadhava, Kamakhya, Sukresvara and Umananda from the Mughal Emperors Jahangir and Aurangzeb also.<sup>48</sup>

In the connection it is also noteworthy that a *Brahmottara* grant earlier issued by the Badshah to one Pranapati was confirmed by Rajesvarasimha, a later Ahom king in Saka 1687.<sup>49</sup> A huge amount of movable and immovable properties were enjoyed by the temples during the Ahom Administration (1682-1825).<sup>50</sup> But it was not Dihingia Raja, as claimed by some scholars to be the first Ahom king to make grant of land and men to the Pingalesvara temple.<sup>51</sup> Which was due to wrong reading of inscriptions. The credit goes to Gadadharsimha, as the first Ahom king to make grants of land men to any temple in the land of Kamakhya, when he granted 26 men and a certain area of land to Umananda temple in Saka 1617 (1695).<sup>52</sup> As the Ahom kings came more and more under the influence of Hindu priests, large number of Paiks were removed from their respective *khels* and assigned them to support the temples.<sup>53</sup> In fact, movable and immovable properties in the form of men, land and utensils gifted to the temples by Gadadharsimha's successor were huge in both quality and quantity.

An examination of the copper plate Inscriptions shows that three categories of land were enjoyed by temples viz. *Devottara*, *Brahmottara* and *Nankars*. The *Nankar* grants were similar to the *Dharmottara* grants. Usually the grant issued to the deity of

a temple was called *Devottara*. The *Devottara* land and men were of two types, vize. *Bhogdhani* and *Paikan*. The riots of *Bhogdhani* land must supply daily rations (*bhog*) to the temple for each unit of land. The riots of *Paikan* land were required to render certain specific personal services to the temple. Personal grants made to a Brahmin was called *Brahmottara* and receiver of a *Brahmottara* grant was to render some specific services viz. of *Seva-caloa*, *Dolai*, *Bardeori*, *Supkar* and *Pathak* to the temple in which, the Brahmins were assigned. Likewise the rent free lands received by temple servitors belonged to Non-Brahman caste were known as *Nankar*. In return, the receiver of the *Nankar* land was required to render prescribed personal services to the temple. These *Nankar* grants were made for the maintenance of the non Brahman servitors including *Bhandar kayastha*, *Mudiar*, *Baricoa*, *Mali*, *Dhoba*, *Teli* and other Sudra Paiks attached to the temple. Some Bhogdhani Paiks, who also received *Nankar* lands and did not like to do personal service could of course be commuted it in lieu of money.<sup>54</sup>

Further, the *Brahmottara*, *Devottara* and *Nankar* lands were of several classes. The Subhankarapataka grant of Dharmapala mentions of *Go-Pracara-Bhu* (grazing field).<sup>55</sup> The Nilacalal grant of Madhavadeva issued to the Kamesvara temple mentions<sup>56</sup> vatic or *Vastubhu* (homestead land), *pokhari-badi* (homestead land with tank), *mundavati* (barren homestead land), *casabhumi* (arable land), and sac *bhumi* (Sali rice growing field). In the epigraphs of the Ahom kings we have different classes of land, vize.<sup>57</sup> *ropit or rupit* (rice land), *pharingati* (dry rice land), *kathiatali* (land for raising *Sali* seedlings), *baotali* (land for variety of paddy), *bengenatali* (land for raising brinjals), *badi or bari* (elevated land with low land on sides), *bari or bhithi* (homestead land) *habi* (forest land), *dalani* (marshy land with dal grass), *bakari* (open waste land), and bill (fishing waters). Some terms like *aja-jangala* , *hacila-jangala* ,

*mirnik* , *svaminnik ropit* , *tal* , *nil* and *changana* of the inscriptions are difficult to know.

The epigraphs mention people belonging to different professional castes and records details about their distribution of duties to be rendered to the temple. This will help us to trace out the supervising machinery of the temple managements.

Besides the practice of granting dancing girls known as *nati* continued and it is claimed that a number of *natis* were brought from the Siva temple of Negheriting at Dergaon during the reign of Sivasimha and were assigned to the temple of Hayagrivamadhava and Pariharesvara.<sup>64</sup> The land allotted to the *natis* of Pariharesvara are still known as the *Vesyar pathar* (area of prostitutes or temple girls).<sup>65</sup> Thus the number of people assigned to the temples during the Ahom administration was quite large. According to an estimate it was more than 15,000 in 1769.<sup>66</sup> The Ahom kings and their officers also made gifts in form of different images and utensils. Rudrasimha donated a large number of utensils including water jar, vessel, cups etc. to Hayagrivamadhava temple. His son Sivasimha gifted an image of a bull made of silver to the Umananda temple.<sup>67</sup> Rajesvarasimha donated a *japi* (a broad trimmers local hat) made of 216 *tolas* of silver to the temple of Dirghesvari.<sup>68</sup> Gaurinathsimha made endowments of an umbrella and a flower both made of gold and weighing eleven *tolas* and two *tolas* respectively to the Umananda temple.<sup>69</sup> He also donated a *gacha* (1 lamp stand), a *tekeli* (water jar), a *vedi* (an altar) and a *kalah* (a water jug) all made of brass and weighing five *seers*, two *seers*, three *seers* and four *seers* respectively along with a flower made of silver weighing two *seers*.<sup>70</sup> Gaurinathsimha donated a silver spittoon weighing 80 *tolas* and a *camara* (Yak's tail) with a handle made of six *tolas* of silver to the Hayagrivamadhava temple. He also donated a yak

tail to the Kedar,<sup>71</sup> all these show that the temples of Kamrupa came to possess huge amount of valuable properties.

Even earlier the Koch king Raghudev made a large endowment of land, men, utensils and cash for the burning of an *akhandapradipa* in the Hayagrivamadhava.<sup>72</sup> The Ahom king Laksmisimha granted 159 *gots* of paiks including Brahmin for the maintenance of two *akhnandapradip* in the Umananda temple.<sup>73</sup> Likewise Gaurinathsimha allotted 727 *puras* of land to keep burning an *akhandapradip* in the Hayagrivamadhava temple.<sup>74</sup> In the reign of Kamalesvarasimha, Sayani, the wife of Pratapballabha Barphukan donated seven person who were charged with the duty of maintaining *akhandapradip* in the Hayagrivamadhava temple.<sup>75</sup>

According to the *Darrang Rajvamsawali*, the Kamakhya temple received cash amounting to rupees 25,000.<sup>76</sup> During the Ahom administration, king Pramattasimha gave an amount of rupees 85 which yielded an interest of 10 *gandas* in a month and the money would be spent for a daily *naivedya* in the Hayagrivamadhava temple.<sup>77</sup> Gaurinathasimha deposited a sum of rupees 90 in the hands of a *paik* which would yield an interest of rupees 22 and *annas* 8 per year. This amount be spent for the *naivedyas* of an *akhandapradip* in the temple of Umananda.<sup>78</sup>

The mentioned of a functionary called *Darmara* in some Copper plate grants to the temples indicate that boats were also an important movable property. The fact is crystallized in a copper plate grant of king Gaurinathsimha,<sup>79</sup> which records an order of the king, addressed to the *Barduaria* (chief custom officer) and the *Duvarias* (Junior Custom officer) of *Betkuchia, Sonal and Sonapuri Duvara (out-post), the Bhuyans, Kakatis* etc. who dealt with customs, that the said two boats (*nao*) be declared rent free, 2 merchants and two paiks attached to the boats were given some

amount of money as investment of merchandise. The men should pay the profits of their trade and render the accounts to the Hayagrivamadhava temple.

The mention of the servitors '*hathimahut*', '*gorakhia*', '*gowal*' and '*ghanhi*' in some copper plate grants indicate that temples possessed a number of animals like elephant and cows.

Thus it now appears, that besides the temple building, each temple within the limit of our study enjoyed huge property both movable and immovable appropriated to various deities and to Brahmins or other religious men.<sup>80</sup>

### **The Supervising Machinery: Structure and Constituent Parts**

At the present state of our knowledge it is difficult to say if there was any temple in the true sense of the term asking for its management in ancient Kamarupa of the pre-Christian period. The worship of the 'Mother Goddess' and the phallus might have been practiced there even several centuries earlier. If the *Kalika Purana* has any bearing on the history of the land here and there were two popular cults vize. The phallic worshipped and that of the 'Mother Goddess'. The former enjoyed greater patronage and both belong to the fold what is called 'Fertility Cult'. Considering their popularity it may be surmised that the place of worship, i.e. the place where people met in groups with a view to perform the rituals relevant to either of the cults might have been provided with a hut or at least an additional small structure with a shed against heavy rain and scorching sun. As for the role of the priest, the leader of the tribe or at least a person considered as master of sorcery and magical art, from amongst the people was preferred, though there was probably no bar against an ordinary member of the tribe provisionally officiating or performing the worship. Such leaders or sorcerer apparently enjoyed some extra privileges in the society and

exploited the people's fear against divine wrath, and tried to maintain hold over such places of worship evidently for personal gain; and as well as a result, it was these leader priests or magician-priests who for their own interest professed shouldering the responsibility of management of the place of worship. A critical study of the religious life of any present day tribe of a remote area will perhaps show that the premises drawn above about the past are not altogether improbable. With the passage of time and particularly with aryanization of the land, things changed to a great extent.

The *Kalika purana*, incorporating stories about our mythological past, simply puts it that Naraka, a king regularly paid his daily respectful homage to the mother goddess Kamakhya on the top of the Nilachala (the hill called Nila) personally till he fell a prey to the ill-advice of Bana, the *Saiva* ruler of Sonitpura. In referring to the place of Kamakhya, the text used the words "*Devivasa*" which cannot be accepted as a doubtless reference to a constructed temple. Rather, elsewhere in the text the word *guha* has been used many times as substitutes for '*Devivasa*'. The text, however, categorically states that Brahmin and people would observe Vedas and *vedic* rites. In a word Brahmanical rites and rituals and worship of Brahmanical deities were brought in the land of Kamakhya and settled here by Naraka. Nothing is told in the text also about the management of the temple. In Chapters 52-56 detailing the procedures of the regular and occasional worship of the Devi and some other deities, the texts sometimes seem to observe that one of the sacred duties of king was to see that the worship of deities does not stop.

The epigraphs of early Assam constitute the other source of information for our present study particularly regarding the period up to twelfth century A.D. Discussion on epigraphs referring to temples has already been made on a previous occasion. It has also been noticed that ancient kings in the land of Kamakhya donated lavishly to

the temples and Brahmins. The donations to the temples included land and men and wealth in some other forms, while the donation to Brahmins consisted of landed property only, of course rent-free. The accumulated donations to temples by different kings at different times evidently finally made a temple an owner of large estate, But whether an administrator of some sort other than the king and the priest, was there to look after this 'estate', is not mentioned in the epigraphs. The Tezpur Copper Plate Grant of Vanamala informs us that the old temple of *Hatakasulin* collapsed and lay in ruins with the passage of time, and then king Balavarman built it anew and donated land, men, dancing girls, elephants etc. to be used in one or other services required by the temple. The epigraphs thus indicate what as if it was the king who shouldered the responsibility of keeping the temple alive.

The *Kalika Purana* is supposed to be a work composed between 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. and completed somewhere in the western part of ancient Kamrupa, for it is popularly followed since long in both Eastern Bengal and Assam. The *Kalika Purana* as it is noticed, details the procedures and paraphernalia relating to worship of different deities particularly the Devi; these procedures and paraphernalia must have been those which were age-honoured. In other words daily and occasional worships were being performed regularly in great details in many temples in ancient land of Kamakhya since at least from 6<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. But it is equally true that nothing is explicitly told in any indigenous source about the management of these establishments except that kings donated lavishly to these temples to facilitate the services and that the Brahmins who were encouraged to settle here might have in some way rendered service to these temples, though their exact role besides that of a priest cannot be ascertained at the present state of our knowledge. On the basis of the available evidence only a hypothetical picture may be drawn.

But we have reason to believe that the king shouldered the responsibility of keeping the temple alive in full strength and showing not merely for religious gains but also for gains materials. The reason behind the lavish endowments made to the temples and Brahmins was that even a fairly Hinduized court in a tribal or partly Hinduized surrounding, was depend to a great extent on the support and loyalty of the tribes. Royal patronage of autochthonous deities seems to have been an essential presupposition for the consolidation and legitimating of political power in the Hindu-tribal zones.<sup>81</sup> As the ancient treatises put it, a share of income that the temples daily incurred in the form and shape of daily offerings including even gold and precious jewels from the devotees to the deity, had to go to the royal treasury. And the bigger the number of festivals the bigger the amount of revenue,<sup>82</sup> from these points discussed above, it appears that the king was the first person to look after both the temples and their establishments. Other temples, as of other parts of India were under the management of the community and those who lived in their vicinity.<sup>83</sup> Thus perhaps the community as a whole was responsible for the management of the temple. This custom seems to have come down even to the days of king Visvasimha who founded the royal house of Koch Bihar although it is simultaneously seen that in the later days the Brahmins came to usurp the power and prestige of the priesthood at the patronization of the kings.<sup>84</sup>

The temples and their endowments were, apparently under the priests and supervised by the state. However it is not known whether in the ancient period there was existed a department to look after the religious institutions. In the Kamauli Grant of Vaidyadeva, a reference has been made to a Brahmin Rajaguru Murari.<sup>85</sup> But whether he was the chief religious officer of the state cannot be said with any certainty, though his close association with the king and his importance in the ceremonies must have

naturally given him a prominent place. From this it appears that the concept of the society completely changed and on the basis of both epigraph and literature, it appears that since the beginning of at least the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. it was systematic policy of the rulers to create *Agraharas* for the Brahmins. From the Nidhanpur plates of Bhaskaravarman it appears that the grant of land to the Brahmins and endowments to temples was very rigidly acted upon after the Sastra,<sup>86</sup> the *Sastrakaras* usually lived in the temple complex or closely connected with the temples. No doubt, the king's orders were supreme in the management of the temples as he was the *danda* incarnate, still power to frame laws or code of conduct regarding the management of the temples was left to the *Sastrakaras*. In other words kings had to follow the *Sastras* in their daily administration for the good of the people for which he was responsible for making endowments to the temples, and in return the priests and all connected with management of the temples had to perform regular worship for the well being of the king and the kingdom.<sup>87</sup> Brahmins attained a position of adviser (*Rajaguru*) of the king and the temples were used as the local agency of the sovereign's administrations. The mention of an officer of the Brahmin Adhikary in the grant of Harjaravarman may suggest that religious institutions were in some way controlled by state officials.<sup>88</sup>

Evidences of the direct involvement of the state in the management of the temples are, however, found since the days of the Koch king Naranarayana. The *Darrang Rajvamsavali* states that Koch kings Naranarayana and Raghudeva built new temple at Kamakhya on the Nilachal near Guwahati and Hayagrivamadhava temple on *Manikuta* at Hajo respectively and that they also made large endowments of land, men and articles to the respective temples for their smooth functioning. It is further stated

that *bhog* and *nirmali* should be sent to the king. No more details are available about the management of temples in the land of Kamakhya under the Koch rule.

During their temporary occupation of Kamrupa, the Muslim rulers maintained the old order regarding the management of the temples for which the Emperor Aurangzib simply allowed the continuous occupation on certain area of land by Kamdev and Sudaman, the two priests of the Umananda temple on condition as laid down by 'previous ruler'<sup>89</sup> of the land, that a certain amount of revenue yielded from the land of the '*sanad*' were to be spent for the maintenance of the '*holy low and high hills*' (i.e. the maintenance of the shrine of Umananda).

The grant of lavish endowment of lands, men and utensils by the Ahom kings to the temples in the land of Kamakhya since the reign of Gadadharsimha made it necessary on their part to keep a royal officer for the supervision of the temples and their establishments. As has been discussed earlier, the Ahom king Sivasimha placed Krisnaram Nyayabagis in charge of Kamakhya, who was also authorized to compile a *vidhi* for worship of the deities in the land of Kamakhya. The Barphukan was entrusted on the entire administration in the land of Kamakhya for which it appears that the temples were under direct control of the Barphukan. It was he who issued royal ordinances to the temples on behalf of the king including the grants of land and men. A large number of grants were issued by the Barphukan which record a number of functionaries assigned to the temples. A study of these inscriptions regarding power, prestige and functions of these temple servitors may help to trace out a tentative form of the machinery responsible for the management of the temple establishments.

**The King:** The king built or rebuilt temples on sacred sites and made endowments of land, men and utensils. It was the king who declared a temple as a public place. The Copper Plate inscriptions record the ordinances of the king regarding fairs and festivals to be observed at the temples, the endowments made by the king, the budget of income and record that the priests of the temple should offer the daily *bhog* to the deities for the well being of the king and his kingdom. The practice of offering *bhog* in the name of the donor king was continued up to 1961 in most of the temples. In Umananda, Sukresvara and pariharesvara, all offerings in three Bihus are being made in the name of king Sivasimha even today. Occasionally the king visited the temples, when he was received by the officials connected with the temples like the Barphukan, the *Seva-caloa*, the *Dolai* and others. King Rajesvarasimha visited almost all the temples in the land of Kamakhya in *Saka* 1678 (A.D. 1756). During his visit he donated to the Hayagrivamadhava temple a dish, a pot and three umbrellas all made of gold.<sup>90</sup> A huge crowd of people from nearby villages assembled to receive the king, who on his part made lavish gift to them including some temple servitors like priests and dancing girls, four hundred *tolas* of gold and twenty boxes (*peras*) of garments.<sup>91</sup> Then he came to the temple of Kamakhya on the Nilachala on 6<sup>th</sup> *Phalguna* in *Saka* 1678, where he was received at the door of the temple by the then Barphukan Dasaratha Duvara and a huge amount of present to the king and his family members and even to the officers accompanied him were also given.<sup>92</sup> King Rajesvarasimha visited also the temples of Asvakranta, where he made special worship by offering gold flower (*kanakanjali*). Then he visited the temple of Janardan, Ugratara, Navagraha, Vasistha and Gopesvara. At the time of his visit to Dirghesvari temple, the king donated a *japi* (a kind of hat) made of silver weighing two hundred and

sixteen *tolas*, the king thus made a large endowments of land and men to all the temples he visited.<sup>94</sup>

**The Barphukan:** The *Barphukan* was instrumental in implementing the wishes of the crown in all respects. Thus, the temples were built or rebuilt by the *Barphukan* at the order of the king; subsequently he issued all the grants to the temples. It appears that the *Barphukan* recommended the name of a Brahmin to the post of the *Sevacaloo*.<sup>95</sup> probably all necessary investigations before issuing a grant to the temples were made by him. It will be seen in the following pages how the *Barphukan* acted as the chief justice in settling the disputes relating to the temple land and the subjects. All the Copper Plate grants mention the assignment of a number of *likcau* for the use of the *Barphukan*, which may suggest that he had constantly supervised the temples and their establishments and received secret information through his *likcaus*. From a British record, it is known that the *Barphukan* received *bhog* and *nirmali* from the temples on behalf of the king and then sent these to the king.<sup>96</sup> Towards the later part of the Ahom rule it seems that the *Barphukan* also issued grant of land and men to the temples in his personal capacity and in one or two cases even by his wife. Thus Pratapballabha Barphukan's wife Sayani made a separate endowment of land and men to the temple of Hayagrivamadhava.<sup>97</sup>

**Sevacaloo:** Next to the *Barphukan* was the *Seva-caloo* for the management of temple. It is not known with any certainty as to when the post was first created. But we have reason to believe that Krisnaram Nyayabagis who took over the charge of the management of the Kamakhya temple during the reign of Sivasimha was, in all probability, the first incumbent of the office of the *Seva-caloo*. He was appointed by the king and was responsible directly to the *Barphukan*. This necessitated that the *Seva-caloo* to be well conversant with the character and intricacies of the religious

performances, and thus he was one of the well versed person amongst the *Brahmans*. In some cases, it was the religious preceptor of the king who was appointed as *Seva-caloa*. The *Seva-caloa* confirmed the selection of the *Dolai* from amongst the *Bardeoris* of a temple. He had a general control over the temple affairs and functionaries. The Copper Plate grants of the Ahom kings record that a number of *likcsau* were provided to him in every temple. As his remuneration, the *Seva-caloa* received grant of *Brahmottara* land. Krisnaram Nyayabagis was assigned a considerable area of land in the land of Kamakhya as *Brahmottara* grant from king Sivasimha and Pramattasimha.<sup>98</sup> Likewise Nati gossain was appointed the *Seva-caloa* in the Pandunath temple, and the two sons among the three of the Na-gossain were appointed as *Seva-caola* of the Banesvara temple in Guwahati and of the Candrasekhar temple at Umananda. The office of the *Seva-caloa* was continued till the early part of the British occupation of Assam when it was abolished in 1842 A.D.<sup>99</sup>

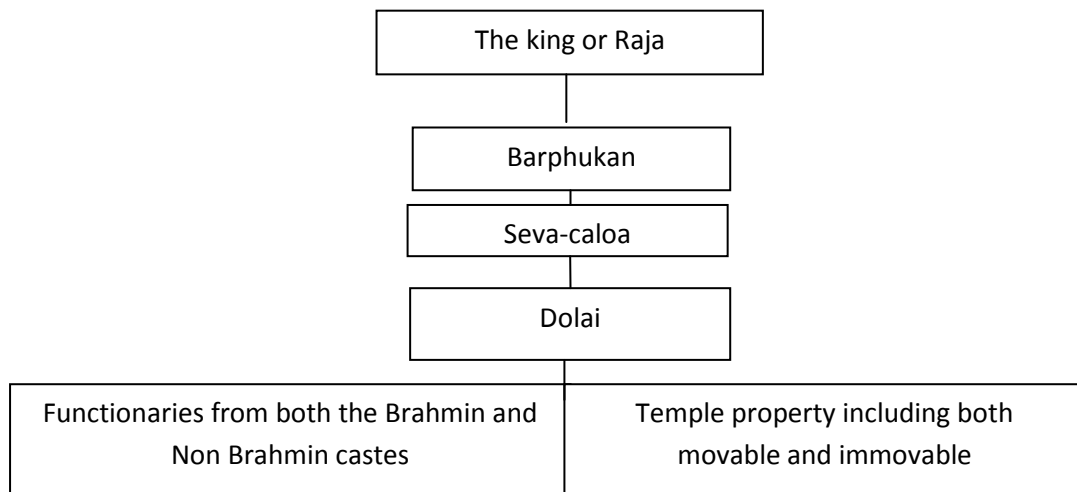
**Dolai** : The *Dolai* managed the affairs of the Bardeoris.<sup>100</sup> The word *Dolai* seems to have been derived from the Sanskrit word *Dol* meaning the temple or a holy shrine and the word *Dolai* means the chief officer of the Hindu temple in the land of Kamakhya .<sup>101</sup> It is not known why this honorific chief officer of a Hindu temple in the land of Kamakhya was called *Dolai*, whereas in other parts of Assam, they are known as Barthakur.<sup>102</sup> The Copper Plate grants of the Ahom kings made to different temples record the function and duty of a *Dolai*. He was to collect the rent of land donated to the temple and to utilize it for the maintenance of temples. The *Dolai* also received land, men and other property out of grants made to temple. The Copper Plate grant issued in *Saka* 1750 by Gaurinathasimha to the Hayagrivmadhava temple mentions that the *Dolai* of the temple would receive certain articles from three *paiks*

attached to the temple.<sup>103</sup> Another inscription of Pramattasimha (A.D. 1744-51) records that one Madhavdah athparia was placed in charge of keeping the light burning (*akhandapradip*) in the said temple for which he was granted 50 *puras* of land. The *Dolai* of the temple was entrusted with the duty to watch the *Athparia* and his duty.<sup>104</sup> In another copper plate issued by king Candrakantasimha in *Saka* 1743 for the performance of *Hari-Kirtana* in the Hayagrivamadhava temple, it is recorded that the *Dolai* was charged with the duty of managing the festivals in consultation with the *Mel-Caloa, Rajkhoa, Meteri and Mena*.<sup>105</sup> It appears that in the land of Kamakhya all the civil and revenue matters of temples were managed by the *Dolai*.<sup>106</sup> Being the custodian of all the properties-movable and immovable and the receiver of all the donations either from the royal house or from the devotees, the *Dolai* had to work under the instruction of the *Seva-caloa*. From the discussion as has been made in another connection regarding the duties of different functionaries of a temple, it appears that the *Dolai* was assisted by the *Bardeoris* and other functionaries like *Bhandarkayastha, Mazumdar, Mudiar, Mena, Meteri, Melcaloa and Thakuria etc.*

It thus appears that during the Ahom rule, the 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 establishments.

A tentative diagram of the machinery responsible for the management of temple may be drawn as follows.

## DIAGRAM II: SUPERVISING MACHINERY OF THE TEMPLES IN THE LAND OF KAMAKHYA



Temples in the land of Kamakhya

### Conflict over issues of access and control

Regarding disputes that had occurred in the temples and settlements of such disputes in the ancient and early medieval period are extremely limited. Simply it appears that all cases of disputes relating to the temples and their establishments were settled according to Hindu *Sastras*. In all probability the priests of the temple officiated as judges, but the king interfered in cases when one of contending parties approached him with a second appeal. Although the intervention of the king in judicial matters may be decisive, it brought no new element to interpretation. In settling disputes relating to a temple, the king merely discharged his duty to secure order and peace in his kingdom following the prescription of the classical Indian treatises that the distinctive function of the king is to provide protection to his subject' (*prajanam paripalanam*). No more details regarding the disputes and settlements in this period could be said at the present state of our knowledge.

Fortunately we have some evidences about disputes involving temple functionaries and land and men during the Ahom administration. These disputes were of two types (a) internal and (b) external. By internal dispute we mean the disputes which arose among the functionaries of the temple and other establishments. In all such cases the *Dolai* acted as the chief justice. And examination of the Copper Plate inscriptions of the late medieval period shows that the *Dolai* being the representative and leader of the *Bardeori* enjoyed the control over all men and properties of the temple. It appears that in the land of Kamakhya all the civil and revenue matter as relating to a temple were managed by the *Dolai*,<sup>128</sup> and being the custodian of all the properties, movable and immovable, as well as the receiver of all the donations either from the royal house or from the devotees, he was charged with the duty of managing the temple affairs in all respects in co-operation with other officials viz. *Melcaloa*, *Rajkhoa*, *Mena*, *Meteri* and others.<sup>129</sup>

Sometimes there had been disputes between two or more temples or the priests and other functionaries of one temple with those of another. Such type of disputes, we call external disputes. In such cases the *Dolais* of the temples involved in the disputes brought the matter before the *Barphukan* through the *Seva-caloa*, the *Barphukan* then decided the disputes in his court. He was assisted by a number of assessors such as *Kakatis*, *Ganak* and *pundits* by whose opinion, he was usually guided.<sup>130</sup> A dispute between *Sukresvara* and *Barkshetri* temple on one side and *Billvesvara* temple on the other relating to *paiks* and land was settled by Pratapballabh Barphukan and the proceeding of the judgment was recorded in a document called *jitaripatra*.<sup>131</sup> According to this document, the case was presented before the *Barphukan* in his *Tamulicora* (council Hall) in the evening session by *Katha Jogo Bara* on 13<sup>th</sup> *Asadha* in *Saka* 1730. The *Brahmottara* land as well as 6 *paiks* named Tamradhaj,

Rampani, Haliram, and Durgaram. Sivanath and Sahadev who were *Tithikar* (astrologer) attached to Billesvara temple was claimed by the *Dollais* of Sukresvara and Barkhetri also. The court examined the records of the *paiks* in *perakakaz* (Record Book) of the previous year and found the claim of Billvesvara valid and therefore the *paiks* were assigned to Billvesvara. It also mentioned that the *Dolai* of Sukresvara and Barkshetri were punished,<sup>132</sup> the boundary of the land in question was demarcated by putting stone pillar. Later on, on assuming the office of the *Choudhury*, *Dhani Bhandari* in league with the *Dolai* of Barkshetri temple removed the pillars of the said land. The *Doali* of Billesvara temple brought the case before the *Barphukan* through the *Katha-Jogoa-Bora*. The claim of the *Dolai* of Barkshetri was supported by the *Khataniar* and one *Phaguna Thakuria*. On examination of the records (*Para-kakaz*), the *Barphukan* found the 6 *paiks* and their lands belonging to Billesvara and statement of *Khataniar* and the *Thakuria* false. The *paiks* were allowed to Billesvara temple and the lands in question were again demarcated. The *Khataniar* and the *Thakuria* were punished by whipping cabuk 40 times each.<sup>133</sup> Another dispute took place between one Bisnu Adhikary and one Kalia Mahajan (*Khatanair*) on one side and one Purnadev Medhi on the other regarding a village named *Bhitarkhana*. The *Medhi* claimed that the village was granted to him, and accordingly *nirmali* was regularly sent to the king on three *Bihus*. The *Barphukan* then asked the *Medhi* to substantiate his claim. As the *Medhi* could not do so, he first fled away, but afterwards arrested. The case was settled on 14 *Agrahayana* in *Saka* 1636 in favour of the *Adhikary* and the *Thakuria*.<sup>134</sup> Another Copper Plate inscription records that one Bhagavat Candra Dolai was the respondent and Dhaneswar Choudhury of *Paragana Pachimpar* was the appellant in a litigation heard on 7<sup>th</sup> *Asadha* in *Saka* 1737 (1815 A.D.). According to the records, the *Katha-Jogoa Bora* presented the report of the dispute before the

*Barphukan* in his *Cangcora* (council house) in the evening. The case was that two villages named Barigog and Baghmara measuring an area of 249 *puras* of land together with 60 *gots* of *paiks* were given to Bhagavat Chandra Dolai as *Dharmottara* by Tamulijana Barphukan, after having purchased in the local *Choudhury* now complained that the *Dolai* had no right over the place. The *Choudhury* further complained that the *phalli* (copper plate) which recorded the land and men as produced by the *Dolai* were a false one. According to his complaint the *Doali* was occupying this land by force. The *Barphukan* then asked for an explanation from the *Dolai*, who then replied that the motive of the *phalli* was not known to him as it was granted by the Tamulijana Barphukan and the *phalli* was inscribed by Haricaran Mazumdar. In support of this claim another plate inscribed by Ratnamala Bujarbarua, Kama kayastha and Namchandra Barkayastha was also produced. The *Barphukan* therefore brought all the concerning *parakakaz* to his court and after examination of all these, he found the statement of *Dolai* true. The *Choudhury* was accused of committing atrocities on Brahmin, but he tried to defend himself stating that 60 *paiks* shifted their place of residence, and during the tenure of Sandikai Barphukan he purchased these 60 *puras* of land (allotted to the 60 *paiks*) and the Bora and *kakati* duly handed over occupation to him. One Gauri Bora supported this statement stating that the Copper Plate which the *Dolai* produced was a false one. This was also found to be false and the *Choudhury* was punished. The land was reissued to the *Dolai*.

The above instances clearly establish the point that the *Barphukan* was the chief justice to settle disputes between the functionaries of a temple with outsiders. The disputes were presented at the court by *Kathajogoa* Bora. The *Barphukan* then heard the statements of the defendant and witnesses of both the parties. The old records were examined, if and when necessary, and the judgment was made which was issued

in a *jataripatra*.<sup>135</sup> In some cases, he sent his *takela* (peon) to the *Barkayastha* to take deposition of the *raij* (people in general) for which the *Barkayastha* called the *paraganiyas* and took deposition. Very often they had to swear touching copper, “The Hindu law, as expounded by the Brahmins seems to have been generally followed in later times, at an earlier period the judge decided according to the custom of the country and his own standard of right and wrong.”<sup>136</sup> A second appeal could be made to the sovereign. Such appeals were dealt with, on his behalf, by the *Nyayasodhaphukan*. It also appears that the authoritative settlements of temple dispute, the *siddhanta* (decision) was not royal legislation, but were administrative commands. It may suggest that “collective regulations” as has been explained earlier, sanctioned by the Ahom kings were administrative in the sense that they were addressed to specific group and individuals.<sup>137</sup> In respect of settlement of temple disputes in the land of Kamakhya, the central feature of the royal function was the responsibility of the king to maintain peace and order in this part of his kingdom. The maintenance of the *siddhants* as recorded in the *jitaripatras* was the responsibility of authoritative local groups like *Barua*, *Barkayastha*, *Choudhury*, *Patowary*, *Thakuria* and others. Moreover we find in the bulk of the inscriptions from temples in between seventeenth to these inscription, whereby the protection of the *siddhanata* was probably entrusted to local sectarian group for which the inscriptions begins with the name of the respective presiding deity of a temple.<sup>138</sup>

### Notes and Reference:

1. Sarma, M. M. (ed.): *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam*, Gauhati University, 1978, plate No. 1 & Sarma, D. (ed.): *Kamrup Sasanavali*, Guwahati, 1981, plate No.1.

2. Bhattacharya, N.K. (ed.): *Vol. XXVII. 1947-48, pp. 18-23; JARS, Vol. VII, No. 4 pp. 138-39, Sircar, D.C(ed.) : Vol. XXX, Part II, 1953, pp. 62 ff., Sarma ,M. M: op. cit., p. 4 & Sarma ,D:op.cit, p. 231.*
3. *Dubi Copper Plate, VI, Sarma,M.M:op.cit.*
4. *Op.cit, VV. 4, 5, 16 and 23.*
5. *Nidhanpur Copper Plate, V. 26, Sarma ,M.M:op.cit.*
6. *Op.cit, V. 133, Bali is the offering of scent, flowers and uncooked food before an idol; Caru is the oblation of rice, milk and sugar boiled together; Satra is the distribution of food to the guests and the poor; vide A Tri-Lingual Dictionary, Calcutta Sanskrit College Research Series, 1996, pp. 141, 273 and 401.*
7. Sarma, M. M: *op. cit,* p. 4.
8. Sarma, D: *op. cit.,* p. 231.
9. Bhattacharya, N.K: *Select Inscriptions, Vol. 1, pp. 384 f, Sarma ,M.M: Op.cit.*
10. *Tezpur Copper Plate of Vanamala lines 13-14, Sarma ,M.M: Op.cit.*
11. *Tezpur Copper Plate of Balavarman, V. 24, Sarma ,M.M: Op.cit.*
12. *Nagaon Copper Plate of Balavarman, V. 2, Sarma, M.M: Op.cit.*
13. *Guwahati Copper Plate of Indrapala, V. 10, Sarma, M.M: Op.cit.*
14. *Nagaon Copper Plate of Balavarman, V. 2, Sarma, M.M: Op.cit.*

15. *Kamauli Copper Plate of Vaidyadeva, V. 26, Sarma, M.M :op.cit.*
16. Acharya,T. P: *Kalika Puranam, Calcutta, 1384, B.S. 63. 136-138.*
17. *Op.cit, Ch. 38, Vs. 97, 98, 124, 125 and 126.*
18. *The ingredients are gandha, puspa, dipa, payasa, modaka sarkara, gur, dodhi, khirir, ghrta, various fruits including nagrang, kusmanda, haritaki and coconut, red flower, suvarne and rahata, vide Kalika Purana, 54, 18-21 and 67, 3-5.*
19. Acharya ,T.P :*op.cit, 55. 1-2.*
20. *Op. cit, 55. 3-5.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. *The Yogini Tantra however prohibits the sacrifice of a cow and human being in the kaliage.*
23. Acharya ,T.P: *op.cit, 67. 123-24. In this context we may also refer to Gait when he writes “there was in Kamrupa a class of persons called Bhogis, who were voluntary victims of a goddess named Ai, who dwelt in a cave. From the time when they announced that the Goddess had called them they were treated as privileged persons, they were allowed to do whatever they liked and every woman was at their command, but when the annual festival came round they were killed.” Vide Gait,E.A: A History of Assam, P. 58.*

24. Basu ,N. N: *Social History of Kamrupa*, (3 vols), New Delhi,1986,Vol. I, p.70.
25. Acharya ,T.P: *op.cit*, 64. 65-66. *Details in this regard may be found in the Kalika Puranam chs. 52-58.*
26. *Op.cit*: 64. 33-36.
27. *A full Chapter No. 87 and No. 88 entitled 'Sakroththana' and 'Visnuyajna' respectively have been dedicated in the Kalika Puranam.*
28. *Howraghat Inscription of Balavarman V. 30*, Sarma,M.M: *op.cit*.
29. Acharya ,T.P: *op.cit*, 55. 61 and 55. 73.
30. Sarma ,D. (ed.) : *op,cit*, p. 87.
31. *Ibid.*
32. Barua, B. K.: '*Bohag Bihu and its probable relation with fire festivals*', *JARS, IX 1939, pp. 73 ff.*
33. Sarma, N. (ed.): *Darrangrajvamsavali*, Guwahati, 1975, VV. 547-51. *They however did not sacrifice any human being.*
34. Neog ,M. (ed.) : *Prachya Sasanavali*,Guwahati,1975, plate No. 142.
35. Bhuyan, S. K: *Svargadeo Rajesvarasimha*, p. 21 *Sarma, D*, gives a vivid description of almost all the religious fairs and festivals of Assam in *JARS, o. XVIII, 1988, vide pp. 22-45. Here, he tries to trace the Aryan and non-Aryan elements in these rites and rituals.*

36. Sarma, D. (ed.): *op.cit*, p. 102.
37. *Kamauli Copper Plate of Vaidyadeva*, VV. 33-34, Sarma,M.M: *op.cit*.
38. Barua ,B.K: *Cultural History of Assam*,Guwahati,1969, p. 65.
39. *Tezpur Grant of Vanamala*, V. 24, Sarma,M.M: *Op.cit*.
40. Chaudhury, P.C: *The History of Civilization of the People of Assam*, Guwahati, 1987 p. 326; Kakati B.K and Barua, B. K: *A Cultural History of Assam*, Guwahai, 1969, p. 226. *A critical discussion has been made on Natis in JARS, Vol. XXXI (new series), No. 1-2, 1989-90, pp. 55-59. Here J.P. Singh demurs with Kakati, B.K. and Barua,B.K: when he says that the word Daluhangana used in the Tezpur Grant does not refer to the temple women. He, however, admits that 'the reference to the donation of Vesyas to the temple of Hatukasulin actually refers to the gift of Vesyas for their quality of dancing and singing. Pillai, P. C, in his right of Temple Entry (pp. 21-23) makes his convincing agreements that the Brahmins who were assigned for performing puja in a temple in ancient India became degraded and out casted and hence they were not allowed to marry a Brahmin girl. The kings of the territory wherein the temple stood therefore provided the temples with some women to satisfy the biological urges of these out casted Brahmins as well as to attract more and more people to the temples, in disguise of devadasis or dancing girls some women were donated. On the other hand*

*the religious treatises state another theory of the origin and development of the practice of dancing girls, or devadasis. According to this theory the temple building is the earthly representation of the Supreme being, at the same time it is the dwelling house of God, for which the Supreme being is to be surrounded with beautiful natural elements through the rhythms of their dancing and singing at the time of worship of the president deities.*

41. Sarma, D: *'The Copper Bell Inscription of Srikumaara'*, *op. cit.*, p. 167.
42. Sarma, D: *'Inscription on the Surya image from Kaki'*, *Ibid.* p. 179.
43. *Op.cit: p. 180.*
44. Samad ,A (trans.) : *Riyas-us-Salatin*, p. 67 *cited in Adhikary, G: History of Temples of Kamarupa and Their Management, Guwahati, 2001, p.136.*
45. Sarma, D. (ed.): *op. cit.*, p. 200. *The details of the valuables are of course not given in the inscription.*
46. *The Nidhanpur Grant of Bhaskaravarman records that the grant was reissued by Bhaskaravarmana to make confirm the land grant of Bhutivarman.*
47. *Guwahati Grant of Indrapala, line 47. Although no ruins of an ancient temple is found in the vicinity, the pandari area is even now traceable with the Pandari Mauza in Rangia area, please see Kamarupa Sasanavali edited by D. Sarma: p. 61.*

48. *Subhankarapataka copper plate Grant of Dharmapala, V. 22, Sarma, M.M: Op.cit.*
49. *The Nilacala Copper plate Inscription of Madhavadeva, a king of Kamrupa in Prachya Sasanavali. Edited by Neog, M: plate No. 198 and notes.*
50. Sarma, N.C. (ed.): *op.cit*, VV 546-52 and 682-83. In this context Gait, E.A. was not correct when he said that 140 people were sacrificed by Naranarayana on the opening ceremony of Kamakhya temple (vide HA, p. 58). These people were infecting attached to the temple for different services.
51. Goswami, S. C: 'Land Grant to the temple of Umananda at Guwahati by badshah Ghazi Aurangazeb Salar Khan, JARS, 1942, Vol. IX, Nos. 1-2, new series, 1942, pp. 1-12; S. K. Bhuyan, *Annals of Delhi Badshate*, pp. 16-29; Neog, M: *Religion of the North-east*, p. 34.
52. Neog, M. (ed.): *op,cit*, plate No. 75.
53. *It was a principle that both the land and the subjects were the property of the state under the Ahoms, vide Mali, D.D: Revenue Administration in Assam, p.5.*
54. Chaudhury, P.C: 'Anchaeological Remains of Pingalesvara Devalaya', JARS, Vol. XXIII, 1974, pp. 49-52; Goswami, S.K: *A History of Revenue*

*Administration in Assam, p. 211. This has now been proved to belong to a later king.*

55. Gait, E.A: *A History of Assam*, Guwahati, 1962, p. 170; Neog, M. (ed.): *op,cit, plate No. 13.*
56. Gait, E.A: *op. cit., p. 239.*
57. *Annual Revenue Report, 1874-75, pp. 4-5. The paiks of the grant of Pramattasimha to Hayagrivamadhava temple (vide plate No. 64 in the PS), were asked to pay half a rupee as tax for per pura of land, thus yielding an annual revenue of rupees 26 and annas 8. This amount was to provide oil for 6 lamps and for offerings to the deity. In this connection references may also be made to plate No. 80 and 81 reproduced in the PS. References to the Bhogdhani paiks are made in other CP grants also.*
58. Bhattacharya, P.N. (ed.):*op,cit, part I, p. 35.*
59. Neog ,M. ( ed.) :*op,cit, plate No. 108.*
60. *The numbers in brackets indicate the select numbers as reproduced in the Prachya Sasanavali.*
61. *The numbers in the bracket indicate the inscriptions reproduced in the Prachya Sasanavali and the number prefixed with M stands for the inscription number.*
62. Hunter, W.W: *A Statistical Account of Assam*, London, 1879, Vol. I, p. 37.

63. Barua, H. C: *Hemakosa*, Guwahati, 4th edition 1965, p. 393; Phukan, H.D: *Assam Buranji*, p. 60.
64. Neog, M: *op, cit*, p. 157.
65. *Op.cit*: p. 158.
66. Sarma, H. C, Sarma, M.N& Choudhury, S. C (ed.): *Dubi Pariharesvara devalayar Itivritta*, Pathsala, 1995, p. 37.
67. *Op.cit*: p. 27.
68. Hamilton, B: *An Account of Assam*, Guwahati, 1981, p. 38.
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85. Basu, N.N:, *op,cit, Vol. I* pp 66-68.
86. *Kamauli Copper Plate of Vaidyadeva, V. 33. We have come across a reference of a minister called purodha or pandita under the Gupta administration, "who had to discharge functions similar to those of the Dharmamahamatras of Asoka, viz., regulation of public morals, supervision*

*of charity and temples and promotion of education.”, (vide A.S. Altekar: p. 344). In our case, it cannot be said with any certainty if the Brahamana Rajaguru murari belonged to that status and was responsible for such functions.*

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88. *Ibid.*
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107. *In this connection we may recall that the Allahabad pillar Inscription of Samudragupta, where Kamrupa is mentioned as a frontier kingdom (pratyanta desa) and itinerary of the Chinese pilgrim Yuan Chwang where detail account of Bhaskaravarman and Harshavardhan is recorded indicating the impulsion gained through the classical North Indian Hindu Empire. vide Altekar, A.S. op, cit, p. 345.*
108. *This theory of 'nuclear area' has been widely accepted by the scholars. Details of these 'nuclear areas' are discussed in 'Royal Temple policy and the Structure of Medieval Hindu kingdom' by Kulke, H. K. in CJRTO, pp. 125 ff, also in the South Indian Temples, edited by Burton stein. The theory is explained by Burton Stein as follows. "nuclear areas, most abstractly conceived are ecological systems, that is consisting of relatively intensively organized and inter related human activities and biological and physical*

*processes, more correctly the nuclear areas were localities comprising a set of natural and social elements which represented the most advance level of early south Indian life". This theory is seemed to be relevant to a great extent in respect of the growth and development of the temples of Kamarupa also. For details one may consult, Adhikary , G: "The concept of Nuclear area and the temples of Kamarupa" proceeding of the NEIHA Dibrugarh. Session, 1999, pp. 69-79.*

109. Sarma, M. M. (ed.): *op,cit*, pp. 122-23.
110. *The inscriptions mention different classes of land and quantity of their production of Sali rice. Details in this respect have already been dealt in 'Temple Property'. For details of the economy of ancient Assam mainly based on rice cultivation, one may consult, Lahiri ,N: The Pre-Ahom Asam, Delhi,1990,pp. 104-05.*
111. *The Dubi Copper Plate Grant of Bhaskaravarman alone records Agrahara to 205 families of Brahmana from different gotras, Sarma M.M: op, cit.*
112. *Tezpur and Paratiya Copper Plate Grants of Vanamala; Samkara-Narayana stone- image inscription in Inscription of Ancient Assam, pp. 95-144, and 310-11 ,Sarma, M.M: op, cit.*
113. Chaudhury, P.C: *op.cit*, pp. 223-224.
114. Nath, R.M: *The Background of Assamese Culture, Guwahati, 1948, p. 36.*
115. *The Nidhanpur Copper Plate Grant of Bhaskaravarman records that Bhaskaravarman, "caused the light of the aryadharm to appear again, after having dispelled the darkness of the kaliage with an equal distribution of revenue", and "has surpassed the whole ring of his feudatories by the strength of his arm who is adorned with a wonderful ornament of splendid*

*fame made by the flower in the form of various words of praise composed by hundreds of kings vanquished by him in battle” (IAA, p. 52). The Tezpur Copper Plate Grant grant of Vanamala, records that “out of fear for his (vanamala’s) prowess sme of even those king who have themselves defeated many enemies ran away to various quarters and others took the path to the sky (V. 21). And those among the other kings who used to shoot sharp arrows in the battle field left their own land at long distance out of fear for him (V. 22). Those kings, who for a display of their velour used to arrange excited elephant against their enemies, had to salute him with folded palms.” (V. 23, Vide IAA)*

116. *This is conspicuous when the king ascribed them as second Visnu, Cakrapani, Indra, Rama, Krsna, Purusottama and Janardana in their inscription. Thus we have the reason to believe that Brahmanas proapagated the ideal for the tribes reside in Aryan kingdom that they should serve their king, dig wells, give waters to thirsty travelers and should make donation as much as they could to the Brahmins (Mahabharata, santi parvam. Lxv).*
117. Pillai ,P. C: *op,cit, pp. 12-18.*
118. Stein ,B. (ed.) :*The South Indian Temple,Delhi,1978, p. 48; Kulke, H: “Royal Temple Policy and the structure of Medieval Hindu Kingdom”, CJRTO, p. 132. These propositions bear a great relevance in the growth and development of the temples of Kamrupa also.*
119. Muss, M: *The gift, London, 1954, p. 53-59; Dikshit, V.V.R. Hindu Administrative Institutions, pp. 102-04.*
120. Kulke, H: *op. cit., p. 132.*

121. Kosambi, D.D: '*Social and Economic Aspects of the Bhagavad-Gita*', in the *Myth and Reality*, Bombay, 1983, pp. 12-41.
122. Gait. E. A: *op.cit*, p. 82.
123. *Op.cit*: p. 121.
124. *Op.cit*: p. 170.
125. *In this regard we may recall that in the temples of Umananda, Pariharesvara and Sukresvara, some offerings in the three Bihus are offered in the name of king Sivasimha even to-day.*
126. *It is for this reason that when the deity of a temple was brought out in procession on some festive occasions such as Bihu and Phakua, the deity was adorned with the royal insignias like danda, catra, camara etc. from the days of Sivasimha.*
127. Lingat ,R: *The Classical Law of India*, Oxford University ,1998, p. 229, fn. 54 as quoted by Appadurai ,A: '*Kings, Sects and Temples in South India*' in *South Indian temple*, p. 50.
128. Hunter, W.W: *op,cit*, p. 35.
129. Neog M. (ed.): *op.cit* Plate No. 103.
130. Gait, E.A: *op.cit*: pp. 240-41.
131. Neog, M. (ed.): *op.cit*, *Introduction*, p. 121-23, *we could not identify the Barkhsetri temple.*
132. *Nothing is recorded about the nature and details of punishment in the document.*
133. Neog, M. (ed.): *op.cit*, *Introduction*. P. 123.
134. Neog, M: *op.cit*.
135. Neog, M:*op.cit*. p. 122.

136. Gait, E.A: *op.cit*, pp. 240-41.
137. *In all the Copper Plate inscriptions, the Ahom kings addressed like “Kamrup desar barua, barkayastha, choudhury, patowari, thakuria, anosakale sabadhane janiba” (let it be known by all the barua, barkayastha, chaudhury, patowari, thakuria and others of Desa Kamrup)*
138. *For example in the inscriptions of Kamakhya and the Umananda, the stylized formula is “Sri Sri Kamakhya” and “Sri Sri Umananda Dosain” respectively.*

## **CHAPTER -VI**

### **CONCLUSION**

In the foregoing pages an attempt has been made to present a comprehensive study on the Kings and Cults in the land of Kamakhya up to 1947(A study on the Religion, Power and State). Through this study we have discussed the history of various Cults, their management, the evolution of religion and power in different phases in the district of Kamrupa before it was divided into three districts in 1983. The study shows that since the early period the Cults of Kamrupa and also the system of their management have been inextricably linked with political development of the region.

It is very difficult to make a comprehensive study on the Kings and Cults in the land of Kamakhya up to 1947(A study on the Religion, Power and State). It is a brief study on the subject. In this work attempts have been made to the Cults and temples as far as possible from the various sources of information both traditional and textual data. From the sources it may appear that though the temples were primarily regarded as places of worship of various Cults for the devotees, but they had enjoyed considerable political, social and economic significance. The Kamakhya, Ugratara, Asvak, Hayagrivamadhava and Vasistha are related to Naraka, an Aryanised prince who introduced the worship of Kamakhya. As a result, the Cult of Kamakhya secured an Aryan recognition and pilgrims from outside Kamarupa began to visit the shrine. Consequently a conflict developed between the Sakta and the Saivas.

The present location of Kamakhya temple was a part of Kamarupa kingdom and was dominated by the Kiratas, Non-Aryan tribes, who with the advent of the Arayans came under a systematic process of Aryanization. Since 2<sup>nd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> Centuries A.D., if

it is not earlier, and also explain why this part of old Kamarupa kingdom had always been a part of India in regard to religious activities centering round the Cults and its temples. In the same context the Cults and its temples were the places of popular gathering as well as a means of strengthening of the associated royal authorities. In order to win over the people, the local deities mostly Non-Aryans were often identified with their counterparts explored in the *Vedic* and *Puranic* literature.

The kingdom was renamed as Kamarupa, just after Naraka captured the throne of *Pragjyotisha*. If the term Kamarupa can be fix with some amount of certainty that would be the time when Naraka of Mithila (*Videha*) could be said to have reigned. From epigraphic as well as literary references, 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 land and people, religious-political trends, Social and Geographical background and also the state formation in Assam is clearly stated with Temple-State nexus in the Introduction.

Temple and Royal Authority of Kamarupa : Power and Legitimacy through which it have discussed that Naraka of Mithila was a political adventure who established himself in power in the non-Aryan dominated area of Kamarupa viz the land of Kamakhya, introduced the Sakta worship of the non-Aryan Goddess Kamakhya, under whose banner the first empire of Kamarupa was founded. This paved the way for entry of Hinduism and in this acclaimed territory the three main sects of Hinduism. Thus it may be said that Hinduization had taken its root in the land of Kamakhya by slow infiltration since sometimes between 2<sup>nd</sup> -5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. To win over the allegiance and support of and also to facilitate the propagation of Hindu

beliefs and customs, Naraka extended royal patronage to this local cult of Kamakhya, which could easily be aligned with other forms of the mother Goddess. The ground became fertile for the rapid spread of Hindu ideas and Kamarupa became an extensive and prosperous kingdom under the rule of the Varman, the Salastambha and Pala lines of kings from 5<sup>th</sup> century to 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Since the days of Bhutivarman (6<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), lavish endowments of lands, men and other articles had been made to the Brahmins, who were entrusted with the task of propagating the *Aryadharma*. Bhaskaravarman is said to have born for proper arrangement of the *Varnasramadharm* and donated lands to more than two hundred families of Brahmins. All these references lead us to say that the kings of Varman line followed a systematic policy of creating *Agraharas* for the Brahmins who became the elites of their court. They undoubtedly played an important role in legitimizing and consolidating the power and prestige of the kings through the means of religious rites and rituals introduced in the worship of Hindu as well as many of the Hinduized local Gods and Goddesses. In this way the three main royal temple policy a) Royal patronage of important places of pilgrimage within their respective kingdom b) A systematic and large- scale settlement of Brahmins c) The construction of new imperial temples within the kingdom were followed by the kings. Through which the State- Temple relation was automatically highlighted. Detail information is provided in chapter-I.

It was only after the Ahom occupation of Kamrupa viz the land of Kamakhya in 1682 that the temple building activities had again been taken up on a large scale with the reconstruction of Umananda temple in 1694. The temple building activities started by Gadadharsimha in Kamrupa was continued by Rudrasimha, his son and successor. Rudrasimha understood well the great role of religious zeal in consolidation and

legitimizing of political authority. It is for this reason he took his initiation of Padmanabh Bhattacharya, a Tantrik Brahmin from Majuli and at the same time stopped all atrocities upon the Vaisnavas. In the chapter 'Pre- colonial religious policy of the state authority in the land of Kamakhya' , it appears that the Tai- Ahom rulers were never serious in respect of rites, rituals and procedure of worship; but very cautiously and carefully tried to utilize religions and religious sentiments in extending and legitimizing their political authority over the Brahmaputra valley. They often tried to use the different sects of Hinduism against each other. But eventually the vary policy led the kingdom to its own destiny. During the Ahom administration the temples in Assam had been grown up as government institution and were running smoothly without much trouble under the fair system of management. The details have been discussed in chapter-II.

The Burmese invasion of Assam eventually led to the downfall of the Ahom kingdom, which was annexed to the British India following the Anglo- Burmese war (1824-26). During this period of turmoil most of the temple functionaries including priests fled to Bengal taking with them the valuables. With a view to collecting revenue from the temples, the Burmese Government appointed arbitrarily some new priests. With the establishment of the British rule, the original functionaries returned and claimed their right over the temples which led to disputes between the two groups of priests. As results, the earlier system of management became outdated and a new chapter in the history of management system of the Cults and its temples in Assam began in 1825 when the territory passed under the control of East India Company. Although the old system of temple management was allowed to continue, the power and function of the Barphukan became irrelevant and the supervision and control of the *Sevacaloo* in respect of management of the temple seems to be greatly relaxed. On the other hand

the European magistrates including the Commissioners of the province evinced a general tendency to delegate their authorities to a *Panchayat* or Managing Committee. In almost all the cases, these *Panchayats* stood in favour of establishing the hereditary right of the '*Panchaghar Bardeories*'. Justice was made according to the laws based on age old customs and tradition. The details have been discussed in chapter-III.

Goddess Kamakhya is the most dominating deity in the early history of Assam. It was under her banner that the first empire in early Assam was built. It was over her emergence and recognition as presiding deity of the state the Saivites and the Vaisnavites went into salient conflict and Naraka the first builder of the state lost his life. Later religious history also centre round her and other Goddess recognized as her varied manifestations. The present location of Kamakhya temple was a part of Kamarupa kingdom and was dominated by the Kiratas, Non-Aryan tribes, who with the advent of the Aryans came under a systematic process of Aryanization since 2<sup>nd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. In the same context the temples were the places of popular gathering as well as a means of strengthening of the associated authorities. All detail information is provided in chapter-IV.

The management of the Cults and its temples mainly depended on the source of finance, administration and supervising machinery. Though the problems relating to the Dolai's power, negligence of duty by the Priests and attendants, land revenue payable to the Government etc. are associated with the temples management but the amount of annuity so fixed is too small to meet the expenditure of the daily as well as regular worship of the Cults. With the acquisition of the temple lands by the Government the Priests and attendants lost all interests in the temple and hence, in most cases, the temple became deserted. So, there is now none to look after them and hence the temple buildings too which are undoubtedly historical monuments are

facing ruins. The Cults and its temple management in the land of Kamakhya during the period under our study are clearly discussed in chapter-V.

It is quite impossible to draw any inference based on a topic of historical importance. The division of the study into chapters, it may be mentioned that it is simply a matter of convention rather than of convenience; the whole study may be treated as an integrated analysis rather than of loose fragments. The dissertation is thus a humble attempt to fill up the gap to present an integrated analysis about the 'Kings and Cults in the land of Kamakhya up to 1947( A Study on Religion, Power and the State)' based on the source materials available so far.

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## APPENDIX: A

**TEMPLE AND OTHER BRAHMANICAL ESTABLISHMENTS AS GLEANED  
FROM THE INSCRIPTIONS OF EARLY ASSAM**

Sl. No	Temple/Brahmanical establishment	Location	Sect	Suggested Time	Evidence/ Reference
1	Umacala cave	Guwahati	Vaisnava	5 <sup>th</sup> century A.D.	Umacala Rock inscription
2	Badaganga Asrama(Almshouse)	Nagaon near Davaka	----		Badaganga Rock inscription
3	Nagajari Khanikargaon estate Almshouse	Golaghat	-----		Nagajari Khanikargaon stone inscription
4	Nagajari KhanikargaonSurya temple		Surya		Clay-Seal obtained from Daiyang- Dhansiri Valley
5	Alichiga Tengani Temple				
6	Deva Temples(probably of Siva)	Guwahati	Saiva	7 <sup>th</sup> century	Si-Yu-Ki
7	A number of Temples dedicated to Visnu with four hands and attended by Lakshmi and Saraswati, Surya with his seven horses and chariot, Yama,Agni,Siva,Ganesah,Durga,Jagadhatri and Manasa centering round a big Temple of Indra		-----	8 <sup>th</sup> century	Inscription found in the hoard of Narakasur hills findings and copper plate inscription of Kumara
8	Temple of Hari Deopani, Hara and Devi	Deopani Golaghat	Saiva, Vaisnava , Sakta	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> century A.D	Visnu image inscription
9	Temple for worship of Hari and Hara				Sankaranarayana stone image inscription
10	Temple of Hari and Hara				Harihara stone image inscription
11	Hatakesvara Mahadeva	Tezpur	Saiva, Sakta and other	9 <sup>th</sup> century A.D	Tezpur copper plate grant of Vanamala
12	Mahagauri and Kamesvara				
13	Temple of other Gods and Goddesses				
14	Kamesvara, Mahagauri,Bhattairika				Parvatiya copper plate of Vanamala
15	Place of Surya worship	Kaki Nagaon	Surya	9 <sup>th</sup> century A.D	KS, partII,p57
16	Temple of Paramevara	Bargaon Tezpur	Saiva	1035 A.D.	Bargaon copper plate grant of Ratnapala
17	Temple of Mahagauri Kamesvara and the temple of Vasumadhava	Rangia near Guwahati	Saiva, Vaisnava , Sakta	1071A.D.	Guwakuchi copper plate grant of Indrapala
18	A series of Siva Temple	Probably in Durjaya or	Saiva	1080 A.D.	Gachtal copper plate grant of Gopalavarman
18	Temple of Srimadhusudana	Guwahati	Vaisnava	Early part of 12 <sup>th</sup> century A.D.	Puspabhadra grant of Dharmapala
20	Kurmanath			12 <sup>th</sup> century A.D.	Subhankarpathaka copper plate grant of Dharmapala
21	Temple of Mahadeva	Tezpur	Saiva	1185 A.D.	Assam plate of Vallavadeva
22	Bhaktasala		-----		
23	Sabasika Sattrra	Guwahati	-----	1232 A.D.	Stone inscription of Samudrapala found at Ambari
24	Mahagauri Kamesvara		Saiva and Sakta	15 <sup>th</sup> -16 <sup>th</sup> century	Nilachala copper plate inscription of Madhavadeva

Source: Adhikay, G., *A History of the Temples of Kamrup and Their Management*, Guwahati, 2001, p.136

## APPENDIX: B

### RULERS IN THE LAND OF KAMAKHYA FROM ANCIENT PERIOD TO THE COMING OF THE BRITISH

NAME OF DYNASTIES	NAME OF KINGS	CAPITAL	APPROXIMATE DATE(A.D.)
Varman dynasty	Pushyavarman	Pragjyotishpur	430A.D
	Samudravarman	Pragjyotishpur	446
	Balavarman	Pragjyotishpur	462
	Kalyanavarman	Pragjyotishpur	478
	Ganapativarman	Pragjyotishpur	494
	Mahendravarman	Pragjyotishpur	510
	Narayanvarman	Pragjyotishpur	520
	Mahabhutavarman	Pragjyotishpur	542
	Chandramukhvarman	Pragjyotishpur	558
	Sthitavarman	Pragjyotishpur	574
	Susthitavarman	Pragjyotishpur	590
	Suprathisthitavarman	Pragjyotishpur	****
	Bhaskaravarman	Pragjyotishpur	606
Salastambha dynasty	Salastambha	Pragjyotishpur	664
	Vigrahastambha	Pragjyotishpur	680
	Palakastambha	Pragjyotishpur	696
	Vijayastambha	Pragjyotishpur	712
Pala dynasty	Sriharsa	Pragjyotishpur	740
	Pralambha	Harupesvar	800
	Harjiara	Harupesvar	820
	Vanamala	Harupesvar	836
	Jayamala	Harupesvar	852
	Virabahu	Harupesvar	868
	Balavarman	Harupesvar	884
Successors of Pala dynasty	Tyagasimha	*****	990
	Brhamapala	Sri Durjaya	1000
	Ratnapala	Sri Durjaya	1016
	Purandarapala	Sri Durjaya	****
	Indrapala	Sri Durjaya	1048
	Timgadeva	*****	1120
Vaidyadeva	Hamsa-konchi	1133	
Scramble for power among the Bhuyans upto 1514			
Koch dynasty	Visvasimha	Kochbehar	1515
	Naranarayana	Kochbehar	1540
	Raghudeva	Barnagar	1581
	Parikhit	Barnagar	1603
Scramble for power among the Ahoms, Mughals & Koches upto 1681			
Ahom dynasty	Gadadharsimha		1681
	Rudrasimha		1696
	Sivasimha		1714
	Pramattasimha		1744
	Rajesvarsimha		1751
	Lakshmisimha		1769
	Gaurinathsimha		1780
	Kamalesvarasimha		1795
	Chandrakantasimha		1810
	Purandarasimha		1818
Jogesvarasimha		1819	
Burmese Rule			1819-1824
British Conquest			1826

Source: Adhikay, G., *A History of the Temples of Kamrup and Their Management*, Guwahati, 2001, p.212

## APPENDIX: C

**PARAGANA SYSTEM IN THE LAND OF KAMAKHYA AS ORGANISED BY  
THE MUGHALS**

Name of the Sarkar	Name of the Paragana
<b>Kamrup</b>	Knowarbhadg
	Patidarrang
	Banbhadg
	Bardarrang
	Banbbari
	Satbajai
	Caurahikhata
	Kachimiur
	Barbhadg
	Dehor
	Khsetribhadg
	Bajali
	Bausi
	Barnagar
	Barpeta
	Bejini
	Baska
	Digjal
	Hajo
	Guwahati
	Cikarmohal
	Pechkoch
	Pandarihari
	Baraggmohal
	Pussvamohal
	Gudara
	Umananda
	Hemamohal
	Makimohal
	Chetalbaji
Faroiat	
Agadhubi	
Nikahimohal	
Kacharimohal	
Chuytimohal	
Karkhana	

<b>Dhekeri</b>	Khutaghat
	Guma
	Parvatjowar
	Dhberi
	Jamira
	Taria
	Ghurala
	Jalkarmohal
	Katowali
	Dimyalimohal
	Dhamadimohal
	Dastakmohal
	Chulhat
	Sabhor
<b>Dakhinkul</b>	Pandu
	Dumuria
	Bahranti
	Mechpara
	Kalumlua-para
	Karaibari
	Pusyatale
	Garomohal
	Gorkati
	<b>Bangalbhum</b>
Bhitarbadha	
Gaybari	
Chakibaretala	
Chandiani	

Source: Adhikay, G. *A History of the Temples of Kamrup and Their Management*, Guwahati, 2001, p.236

**APPENDIX: D**

**LIST OF DOLAIS IN THE LAND OF KAMAKHYA WITH WHOM  
SETTLEMENT OF TEMPLE PROPERTIES WAS MADE IN 1835**

<b>Name of the temple</b>	<b>Name of Dolai</b>
Asvakranta	Somdatta Bardolai
Agnibanesvara	Jagadatta Barkataki
Banesvara	Sudhadhar Gossai
Billesvara	Lakhidatta Barkataki
Bhrngesvara	Prionath Phukan
Chatrakara	Dibar Bardoli
Candika	Digambar Deka Barua
Cadra Sekhar	Joggesvar Gossain
Dirghesvari	Jagguram Majumdar
Dharesvara	Bistu Khataniar
Diptesvari	Kishenram Kakati
Gopesvara	Narayan Bhandari Barua
Hayagrivamadhava	Lakhivallavh Gossain
Janardan	Madori Barkakati
Jay durga	Lakhivallavh Gossain
Kamakhya	Kalicharan Bhattacharya
Manikarnesvara	Runukanath Deka Barua
Madankamdev	Gangaram Majumdar
Navagraha	Gangatape Dolai
Pandunath	Kalicharan Bhattacharya
Pariharesvara	Govindaram Barua
Pingalesvara	Srikanta Gijipura Barua
Rudresvara	Gauripati Sarma
Sukresvara	Priyanath Parvatiyaphukan
Siddhesvara	Joggoram Sarma
Ugratara	Ranuram Barua
Umananda	*****
Vasistha	Mihiram Barua

Source: *Report of the Judicial and Revenue Administration of Assam, 1835*, Assam Secretariat proceeding, file no. 298 Bengal and also cited Adhikary, G. *A History of the Temples of Kamrup and Their Management*, Guwahati, 2001

## APPENDIX: E

**AMOUNT OF ANNUITY AS GRANTED TO THE TEMPLES BY THE STATE  
GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM UNDER THE PROVISION OF THE ASSAM ACT IX OF  
1961**

<b>Name of the temple</b>	<b>Amount of Annuity (in Rs.)</b>
Asvakranta	3,494.38
Agnibanesvara	1,427.47
Banesvara	2,300.80
Billesvara	6,604.35
Bhrngesvara	3,558.15
Chatrakara	6,748.81
Candika	1,972.32
Cadra Sekhar	328.11
Dirghesvari	4,356.52
Dharesvara	7,584.99
Diptesvari	14,328.41
Gopesvara	573.71
Hayagrivamadhava	28,106.92
Janardan	8,496.62
Jay durga	1,232.78
Kamakhya	35,000.00
Manikarnesvara	609.41
Madankamdev	776.07
Navagraha	1,419.62
Pandunath	1,116.66
Pariharesvara	5,825.45
Pingalesvara	1,108.50
Rudresvara	2,197.48
Sukresvara	3,990.50
Siddhesvara	662.00
Ugratara	935.33
Umananda Vasistha	5,907.00

Source: *Devalaya Register*, 1987, office of the Deputy Commissioner, Kamrup, Guwahati also cited Adhikary, G. *A History of the Temples of Kamrup and Their Management*, Guwahati, 2001

## GLOSSARY

<i>Adani</i>	: rent free.
<i>Agrahara</i>	: land granted to Brahmana.
<i>Agrahayana</i>	: 8 <sup>th</sup> month of Hindu calendar.
<i>Akhandapradipa</i>	: a lamp burnt for 24 hours.
<i>Ambuvasi</i>	: menstrual ceremony of Mother Goddess.
<i>Angasikhara</i>	: a decorative side dome attached to the main sikhara of a temple.
<i>Antarala</i>	: a covered passage adjoining a vimana and its next mandapa.
<i>Asada</i>	: 3 month of Hindu calendar.
<i>Asvina</i>	: 6 month of Hindu calendar.
<i>Asokastami</i>	: a vaisnava festive day.
<i>Astami</i>	: 8 day of a fortnight.
<i>Atibali</i>	: sacrifice of human being.
<i>Bahata</i>	: man granted to royal officers for personal use during Ahom administration.
<i>Bali</i>	: sacrifice and offering to a deity.
<i>Balikata</i>	: one who sacrifices animals before a deity, at present it is specially animal sacrifice.

<i>Bada Deori</i>	: chief priest of a temple.
<i>Barduvaria</i>	: chief custom officer.
<i>Bari</i>	: high land.
<i>Baisakha</i>	: 1 <sup>st</sup> month of Hindu calendar.
<i>Barphukan</i>	: viceroy of the Ahom king at Guwahati.
<i>Basanti Puja</i>	: special worship of Devi in spring.
<i>Basti</i>	: high land.
<i>Bhakat</i>	: a class of religious people (Neo-Vaisnava).
<i>Bhog</i>	: offering of food to a deity.
<i>Bhukti</i>	: an administrative unit in ancient India.
<i>Bramottara</i>	: grant issued to a Brahmana.
<i>Bhuyan</i>	: a revenue officer.
<i>Cakla</i>	: administrative unit having several villages.
<i>Catusasti-upacara</i>	: worship with 6 ingredients.
<i>Chatra</i>	: grant issued in the name of a deity.
<i>Chaudhury</i>	: revenue officer of a paragana.
<i>Chowkidar</i>	: guard.
<i>Danda</i>	: royal scepter.
<i>Dasami</i>	: 10 <sup>th</sup> day of a fortnight.

<i>Deori</i>	: servitor of a deity of a temple.
<i>Deul</i>	: a conical mound rose of brick or earth.
<i>Devadasi</i>	: dancing girl of a temple.
<i>Devalay</i>	: temple.
<i>Dhanu</i>	: a unit of distance.
<i>Dharmottara</i>	: grants issued to a <i>satra</i> or religious men.
<i>Dhupa</i>	: scented sticks.
<i>Dipa</i>	: lamp burnt in a temple.
<i>Dol</i>	: temple.
<i>Dol-utsav</i>	: a festival, when the presiding deity of a temple brings out and installed on a monde near the main temple.
<i>Don</i>	: a unit of measurement.
<i>Duvar</i>	: check gate.
<i>Duvaria</i>	: custom officer.
<i>Ekadasi</i>	: 11 <sup>th</sup> day of a fortnight.
<i>Ekranama</i>	: an agreement.
<i>Gacha</i>	: a stand to hold a lamp.
<i>Ganak</i>	: Astrologer.
<i>Gandha</i>	: scant.

<i>Ganda</i>	: 4 cowries.
<i>Garbhagriha</i>	: sanctum.
<i>Ghat</i>	: an earthen pot used in religious purpose.
<i>Ghrta</i>	: ghee.
<i>Guchi</i>	: a bunch.
<i>Gur</i>	: molasses.
<i>Guru</i>	: religious preceptor.
<i>Gurucarita</i>	: a biography of a vaisnava saint.
<i>Harikirtana</i>	: chanting the name of Hari i.e. Visnu.
<i>Haritaki</i>	: silikha, a kind of fruit.
<i>Homa</i>	: sacrificial fire.
<i>Janmastami</i>	: birthday ceremony of lord Krishna.
<i>Japa</i>	: repetition on utterance of incantation.
<i>Jata</i>	: matted lock.
<i>Jirnodharapatra</i>	: restored document of a grant.
<i>Jitaripatra</i>	: document where in the judgment of a dispute had been recorded.
<i>Kar</i>	: tax.
<i>Kakati</i>	: writer/ scriber.

<i>Kalia</i>	: blower of a local trumpet.
<i>Kirata</i>	: non-Aryan aboriginals of Kamarupa.
<i>Kirtana</i>	: chanting the name of a deity.
<i>Kirtanghar</i>	: prayer house, where kirtan is recited.
<i>Lakheraj</i>	: revenue free land.
<i>Likcau</i>	: peon.
<i>Maghasamkranti</i>	: the confluence day between pausa and Magha.
<i>Maharajadhiraja</i>	: great king.
<i>Maharaja</i>	: great king.
<i>Mala</i>	: garland of flower.
<i>Melcaloa</i>	: speaker of a mel, i.e. traditional tribunal for justice.
<i>Mleccha</i>	: non-Aryan.
<i>Malia</i>	: supplier of mala.
<i>Mena</i>	: a revenue officer.
<i>Mandala</i>	: an administrative unit in ancient days.
<i>Manmati</i>	: land granted to officers in lieu of salary.
<i>Mantra</i>	: incantation.
<i>Mauza</i>	: a revenue unit under the Mughals.
<i>Mayamaria</i>	: militant Vaisnavas of Assam.

<i>Naivedya</i>	: offerings of food and flower etc. to a deity.
<i>Namghar</i>	: prayer house.
<i>Nankar</i>	: rent free land granted to a sudra servitor of a temple.
<i>Nati</i>	: dancing girl of a temple.
<i>Navami</i>	: 9 <sup>th</sup> day of a fortnight.
<i>Nirmali</i>	: Flowers offerings.
<i>Nisfkheraj</i>	: half revenue paying estate.
<i>Padshah</i>	: emperor.
<i>Paik</i>	: a person who served the state.
<i>Pala</i>	: turn of service.
<i>Paladara</i>	: service man in rotation.
<i>Pandit</i>	: learned men.
<i>Paragana</i>	: a revenue circle under the Mughals.
<i>Paramanna</i>	: food that offered to a deity.
<i>Perakagaz</i>	: register.
<i>Pranami</i>	: cash offerings to a deity.
<i>Prasada</i>	: sacred offerings.
<i>Puspa</i>	: flower.
<i>Safar</i>	: a month of Islamic calendar year.

<i>Samkranti</i>	: confluential day of two months.
<i>Sandhya</i>	: evening prayer.
<i>Sastra</i>	: religious scriptures.
<i>Saptami</i>	: 7 <sup>th</sup> day of a fortnight.
<i>Sarkar</i>	: government.
<i>Sasti</i>	: 6 <sup>th</sup> day of a fortnight.
<i>Satra</i>	: a vaisnava monastery.
<i>Sevait</i>	: brahmana and non- Brahman servitor of a temple.
<i>Sevaka</i>	: brahmana and non- Brahman servitor of a temple.
<i>Sidhanta</i>	: judgment.
<i>Sivalinga</i>	: phallic emblem of Lord Siva.
<i>Sraddha</i>	: death ceremony.
<i>Subada</i>	: governor.
<i>Suryagrahan</i>	: sun eclipse.
<i>Sorasa-upacara</i>	: worship with 16 ingredients.
<i>Taluk</i>	: an administrative unit under the Mughal administration.
<i>Tekela</i>	: peon.
<i>Tirtha</i>	: a sacred place.

<i>Tithi</i>	: sacred day.
<i>Tola</i>	: a measurement of weight equivalent to 175 grain.
<i>Uru</i>	: thigh.
<i>Vidhi</i>	: rules and regulations.
<i>Vamsa</i>	: race, family.
<i>Vedi</i>	: alter.
<i>Visaya</i>	: an administrative unit.
<i>Yajna</i>	: a ceremony in which oblations are offered.

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