

The Sculptures of Kamarupa : A Comparative Study with the Rest of India

Deepi Rekha Kouli

Art is the medium of spiritual and aesthetic expression of the human kind. From the time immemorial, the growth of a culture and civilization is based on human behaviour. Like the Gaṅgā valley, the fertile valley of the river Brahmaputra created a distinct culture that is reflected in the art and sculpture of Assam, of which the Kamarupa District is a part. Kamarupa District of the State of Assam in North-Eastern India lies in the western part of the State, covering both North and South bank of the river Brahmaputra. As in other parts of India, religion was the basic force behind the development of art and iconography: same was in the State of Assam also. The different phases of historical periods, witnessed the development of art and iconography in this region. The Kamarupa district of Assam, being a part of the ancient Prāgjyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa kingdom, is scattered with the art and archaeological evidences that reflects the socio-religious, economic and cultural traits of its inhabitants throughout the ages.

Eminent archaeologist H. D. Sankalia referred to Assam as an ethnological museum like Saurashtra on the basis of evidences of pre-historic settlements of the Early Stone Age at Garo hills – the neighbouring areas of Kamarupa District. The findings of the Stone Age tools in the region exhibits sequence of Stone Age in Assam as found in the Indian counterpart.¹ We come across numerous archaeological evidences starting from as early as the first century BCE/CE to the eighteenth century CE in the region, which can be compared with those of the rest of India to evaluate and interpret the history of the region.

Eminent historian V. A. Smith divided the art style of Hindu sculpture in India into four different schools representing four different regions of India. The first one is called Mathura School; the second school is represented by early Chalukyas of Badami and the Pallavas of Kanchi, both these schools are marked by simplicity and elegance with naturalism. The third school is represented by later Chalukya-Hoysala group of sculpture and is marked by heavy floral ornamentation and fine tracery; the fourth school represents the sculpture of Bengal, Orissa and Assam, and is characterised by the human figures with round faces, oblique eyes, and broad forehead, thin lips and small chin.²

As regards the comparative study of the art and iconography of the sculptures of Kamarupa District with those of the rest of India, mention may be made of the raw materials used for making the art objects in the region.

Like the Indian counter-part, medium of the plastic art of Kamarupa kingdom was wood and clay which were the common media for making plastic art in the early period. The *Bṛhatsaṁhitā* and the *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa* mentioned wood as well as clay as the common material for image-making, a traditional practice during ancient and mediaeval period.³ Use of perishable materials like wood and clay or terracotta manifested in absence of large scale findings of any sculptural art or artefacts of early period in the Kamarupa District even though we sometimes come across such remains or evidences in ruins.

In this connection, mention may be made of findings of terracotta art objects at Ambari Archaeological Site in Guwahati. Eminent scholars, like Z. D. Ansari and M. K. Dhavalikar are of the opinion that the cultural sequence of Ambari as a habitation site may go back to early centuries of Christian era. This hypothesis is placed by the scholars on the basis of finding of a characteristic ink-pot shaped lid during the course of excavation at Ambari. This is fossil type, similar to the art form of Kuṣāṇa period found all over Northern, North-Western and Central India. As per the historical evidence, the imperial Kuṣāṇas had flourishing trade with China through two routes – the 'silk route' through Central Asia and another route through Brahmaputra valley and Burma to China. This

was supported by Paul Pelliot who states that there was a trade route between Assam and China as early as second century BCE. A Chinese text, *Chang Kien* of second century BCE referred to trade relation between Assam and China.⁴ A broken piece of terracotta having beaded motif on the border was found at Ambari, which has been referred as having stylistic similarity with the beaded motif of the Śuṅga art form. One of the important



Fig.1 : A large brick-built tank, Ambari

features of Śuṅga art is its flowing linear rhythm that binds all the isolated objects in one continuous stream of life.⁵ Similar type of beaded motif on terracotta plaque is found at Chandraketurgh in Bengal. The figure is of Śrī-Lakṣmī datable to second century BCE represents similar motif.⁶ Further, in addition to this, in 2008-09 during excavation at Ambari a large brick-built tank and a terracotta sealing was exposed,

which according to scholars appears to be stylistically similar to the art form of the Śuṅga-Kuṣāṇa period (Fig.1). Further findings of kaolin ware at Ambari in all the layers with different varieties comprised of three types of imported wares, namely, 'Chinese celadon', 'Green glazed ware' and 'Arrentine and Rouleted ware'. Of these, Arrentine and Rouleted pottery ware are identified as the Roman ware datable to first-second century CE and indicates trade relation with Mediterranean region. The Chinese celadon of Chinese ware type was imported from the principality in the Singkiang province of China. Alberuni (CE 973-1048) referred to the export of Chinese ware to India, Ceylon and Persia. All these excavated findings at Ambari archaeological site indicate international trade relation of Prāggyotiṣa-Kāmarūpa with Chinese and Roman empires.⁷ It may, however, be mentioned that the kind of China clay variety found in the Ambari excavation is also found in the foothills of Meghalaya in the south of Kamarupa District and possibility is there that both imported and local China clay were used in the region. The imported Chinese Celadon ware indicates trade link between the ancient Kamarupa and China.⁸ M. K. Dhavalikar also mentioned that similar potteries were found in and around Guwahati at Navagraha, Nilachal and Sarania hills as well as in neighbouring District of Nagaon and in Tezpur. The excavation at Bhisamak Nāgara in Arunachal Pradesh, the North-Eastern border State of Assam also exposed similar Kaolin Pottery. Such variety of Kaolin potteries are not found anywhere in India. Hence Dhavalikar labelled it as 'Ambari Ware', a distinctive feature of Brahmaputra valley civilization as well as an ancient culture of Assam.⁹ Further the potteries with cut impression and matt finished decoration on bowls and dishes, incised lotus motif on the large dishes represents similarities with the potteries of Gangetic sites of Ahicchatra, Kaushambi, Rajghat, Hastinapur and Charsada, near Peshawar. Again roulette pottery found at Ambari exhibits similarity with the potteries first found at Arikamedu near Pondicherry and at Sishupalgarh in Orissa and other places of India in the later period which indicate similarity with the cultural development of the Gangetic valley of central India. The Green-glazed ware of Turkish-Mughal origin datable to thirteenth-seventeenth century CE represents assimilation of Islamic art form, which developed with the comings of the Mughals to this region.¹⁰

This apart, S. D. Sankalia found numerous beautiful Mauryan terracotta sculptures at Bihar which portrayed invariably Manipuri and Naga dance forms and thereby art form of this region may be dated back to as far as the third century CE. Further the Mauryan court at Patna had taken note of various ethnic tribes both on their eastern and southern borders.¹¹ There is another unique terracotta huge phallus shaped object found at Ambari having hair or rays on it in relief. The object is made of kaolin and provided with a small hole at the tapering top. It has been identified as *Mukhaliṅga*, as initially relates to the Kuṣāṇa period and continued in the succeeding periods. There is another fragment of a terracotta female figurine having headdress with layers lavishly ornamented with pearls. Such headdresses are characteristics features of the Gupta and post-Gupta period. There also two miniature Sivaliṅgas and Gaṇesa figurines; and a conical seal, having depicted with a human face wearing tiara of three crests and perforated top having similarity with sculptures of Kāmākhyā

temple. The headgear is one of the significant features of early medieval sculpture of Assam. Another significant finding at Ambari- a finest terracotta fragment of a female torso made of kaolin exhibits heights of artist's skill of the period. The figure appears to be semi-divine nymph or *apsarā* and appears to be stylistically similar with the *surasundarī* of the Sun temple at Konark in Orissa and may be datable to eighth-twelfth century CE.¹² Thus, the terracotta findings at Ambari represent one of the finest ranges of Indian art form. The excavated findings at Ambari archaeological site of antiquities, terracotta objects and a group of stone sculptures carved as per canonical norms indicates existence of a atelier of artisans working under master craftsman either for trade or other purposes. The Ambari inscription of CE 1232 mentioned the existence of *sattra* institution at Ambari, established by king Samudrapāla at Yogihati, in which rituals were performed and was attached to royal residence. The inscription bears mixed characters of Devanāgarī and old Assamese script having similarity with few characters of inscribed images of Ambari. This exhibits royal patronage for the development of art and crafts in the region.¹³ Trade might be routed through the present Dighalipukhuri adjacent to Ambari site which was earlier a channel of the river Brahmaputra. It was a part of noubahar of the Paniduar (port) during Ahom period.¹⁴ It, thus, indicates continuity of the use of the port area even before the coming of the Ahoms with the rest of India and also perhaps for import of Black-basalt from the Bihar.

Later texts like the *Agnipurāṇa* mentioned stone as the medium of plastic art form in India. In Kamarupa District, earliest stone architectural development as early as fifth-sixth century CE is found at Kāmākhyā temple in Nilachal Hill. There exist some stone panels at the site, which appears to be the remnants of a stone temple of early period. While some of them are lying outside the present temple, some are found to be used on the outer side of the *garbhagrha* of the temple in later period. The panels has carvings of scroll or creeper design having similarity with that of the scroll motifs which is typical of the Gupta Classical age, found at Chandimau pillar scroll motif at Bihar, door-panel of Daśāvatāra temple at Deogarh and Dhamekh Stūpa of Sarnath, Varanasi. Further we find similar Gupta influence in the art form of seventh-eighth century CE at Kāmākhyā, Ambari, Uzan Bazar and Hajo, etc. At Kāmākhyā in Nilachal hill, found some sculptural panel depicting lively narration of homely life, like blowing *śankha*, pouring water, mother and child, etc. These are some of the art reliefs that represent plasticity of Gupta art form, wearing of transparent drapery of Gandhāra art form, scanty ornamentation with simplicity and flowing contours that exhibits lingering of the Gupta art form. The life-size sculptures of various deities in between pilasters on the outer side of the wall of the temple and panels of socio-cultural life projected vertically on the outer side of the wall of the *garbhagrha* of the Kāmākhyā temple are stylistically similar with the scroll motif and life sized sculptures of the Dūlādeo temple of Khajuraho.¹⁵ The squarish face with drooping eye-lids and discipline with slender form of the life-size sculptures on outer side of the walls of *garbhagrha* of the Kāmākhyā temple represent lingering of the Gupta art style with sensuousness of eastern trend. The original plan of the Kāmākhyā temple represents *pañcaratha rekhādeul* temple of the North Indian Nāgara

style though its upper part was reconstructed in later period by the Koches and the Ahoms. The *Darrang Rājavanīsāvalī* referred that the renovators failed in two successive attempts in resetting the temple with stone masonry and reconstructed the *śikhara* of the temple with bricks. The *śikhara* was given a sixteen-sided dome like shape having similarity with Islamic domes. The same text mentions that Koch King Naranārāyaṇa sent troops of soldiers and workers from Koch Bihar of present North Bengal, for the reconstruction job who were accustomed with Islamic art and architecture.¹⁶ The Hayagrīva-Mādhava temple at Hajo of Kamarupa District has a panel of *gajathara* on the plinth of the *garbhagrha*, similar with the *gajathara* of Kailāśa temple of Ellora, though the panels at Hayagrīva-Mādhava was depicted with heavy ornamentation (Fig.2).¹⁷ Similar depiction of elephants is also noticed in the Konark Sun Temple. Further some reused panels having carvings of musical and social scenes, broken parts of *Daśāvātāra* panel fixed on the *batchora* subsequently, are examples of reliefs that represents similarity with the Gupta



Fig.2 : Gajathara panel at Hayagrīva-Mādhava temple, Hajo

art idiom. Worship of the *avatāras* was one of the important features of Bhāgavata religion of the Gupta period.¹⁸ Remains of temple panels of *jaṅghā* parts depicting erotic, geometrical, floral carvings, *gajathara*, *apsarās*, *vidyādharā* and *pārsvadevatās* carvings on it found at Uzan Bazar and few other places of Guwahati (now at Assam State Museum) signifies the prevalence of Nāgara type of temple in this region.

Thus, it may be assumed that till eight-ninth century CE, the art style of Kamarupa District was influenced by the Nāgara style of the North Indian art form. Then from ninth-twelfth century CE we found the influence of Pāla-Sena art of Bengal and Orissa. By ninth century CE the art form of the region was influenced by the evolutionary growth of stela formation of the Pāla art form of Bengal. The Eastern art form of Bengal and Bihar which derives the formation of stela along with *pīṭha* or plinth from the Gupta Classical Art and eventually developed into graduated projections of *tri-ratha*, *pañca-ratha*, *sapta-ratha* and so on.¹⁹ Such artistic traits are found at Kāmākhyā temple in Nilachal hill – the image of Cāmuṇḍā with rectangular top and rope design of the stela, the figure of Narasiṁha at Uzan Bazar (now at ASM), the figures with projected *pīṭhas* at Ambari, Hajo, Aśvakrāntā, etc. All these represent features of Pāla-Sena art form. The Eastern school of art, which is the distinctive art form of Bengal and Bihar, is characterised by dated sculptures

along with painted, sculptured and casting of metal images,²⁰ which also influenced the art tradition of Kamarupa District of Assam. Black chlorite (*kashti pāthara*) and *Aṣṭadhātu* (made of eight metals) were distinctive features of East Indian Art of early medieval period. There were references of importing of black-basalt from Rajmahal hills of Bihar as black basalt was not available in the region.²¹ There is a possibility of importing of black-chlorite through the river Brahmaputra by boat or ship from Bengal and Bihar. The present Dighalipukhuri adjacent to Ambari site, which was a part of the noubahar of the Latasil or Paniduar (Port) of the Ahom period was the water channel of the river Brahmaputra indicates flourishing trade in this region.²² The figure of Umāliṅgamūrti (ASM2424, Guwahati), mutilated figure of Viṣṇu (ASM2872, Caṇḍamāri), Hari-Hara (ASM6, Uzan Bazar), Gaṇeśa (ASM3540, Ambari), mutilated part of a stella with *kīrttimukha* on the top at Kāmākhyā were some of the images made of black-basalt found in the Kamarupa District. As regards dated sculptures, mention may be made of sixteen-handed inscribed image of Maḥiṣamardini bearing an epithet Caṇḍanāyikā inscribed in *circa* eleventh century CE and another figure of Sūrya with inscribed title Mitra on the pedestal found at Ambari which exhibits similar artistic features of Eastern Indian School of art. The Vedas identify Mitra, an Indo-Iranian form of God with Sūrya in North Indian Sun-worship. The deity wears a sacred waist girdle known as *avyaṅga*, which is the Indianised form of *Aiwiyaonghen*, the sacred waist-girdle of the Iranians. Further

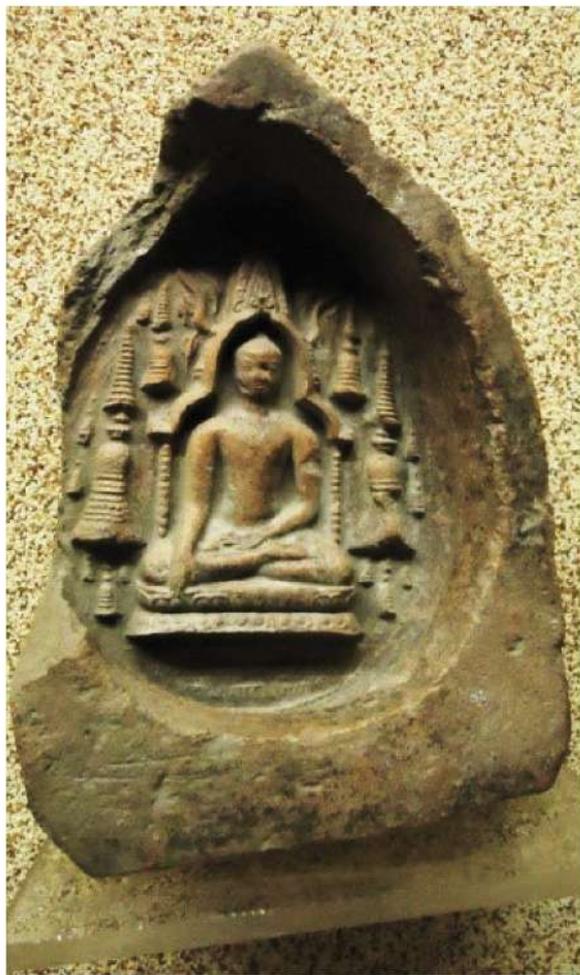


Fig.3 : Inscribed terracotta plaque of Buddha, Uzan Bazar, Guwahati

two numbers of terracotta plaques with the depiction of figure of Buddha found at Uzan Bazar in Guwahati (now at ASM) represent similarity with terracotta plaque of Buddha in *bhūmisparśa-mudrā* found at Nalanda, Bihar. Both the figures of Buddha are in *bhūmisparśa-mudrā* within an arch on a lotus pedestal and surrounded by *stūpas*, stylistically similar with the figure of Buddha in Nalanda.²³ Of them, one is inscribed below on the pedestal and datable to eleventh century CE representing inscribed features of Pāla-Sena art form of Bengal and Bihar (Fig.3).

Another feature of North Indian style is depiction of Sūrya cult wearing boots and covering the body up to the breast and same can be found in the depiction of the deity at Kāmākhyā, Ambari and Pandunath in Kamarupa District (Fig.4).²⁴

Further, the hoard of metal images found in the Narakasura hill at Kahilipara stylistically datable to *circa* ninth-twelfth century CE exhibits similar artistic form of Bengal and

Bihar. Of these, the figure of two handed Viṣṇu with *āyudha-puruṣa*, *cakra* and *gadā* is stylistically similar to the bronze figure of Viṣṇu with *āyudha-puruṣa* of eighth-ninth century CE of Patna Museum. Further there is a bronze figure of Indra with *chatrāvālī* on the top of the stela, which is a Buddhist iconographic feature, represents assimilation of Buddhism and Hinduism in art and stylistically similar to the bronze image of Buddha from Kurkihar, a Pāla art of ninth century CE of Patna Museum.²⁵ The metal image of the tantric Goddess of Buddhist pantheon Prajñāpāramitā or Cundā, found in the metal hoards of Narakasura hill, Kahilipara datable to eleventh century CE, stylistically appears to be similar with the metal images of Cundā and Śrī-Vasudhārā from Chittagong District of Bangladesh.

Another important feature, *kīrttimukha*, 'the face of glory', is one of the essential symbols of Indian and South-East Asian art tradition, which was also found to influence the art of this region. *Kīrttimukha* as a symbol was present in Indian art forms from the beginning of the present era and has been more explicit from the tenth century onwards. It was similar to the Chinese Tao Tieh, the *Devoure* datable from the second and first millennium BCE; in medieval Europe it is found in Notre Dame la Grande in Poitiers; in the Church it is known as the 'Green Man'. The face of Glory is known as *Grāsamukha* in Western India; and as *Rāhur-mukha* in Eastern India; *lord of wood* in Assam.²⁶ The sculptures found in Kamarupa District show the formation of *stella* with *kīrttimukha* and *vidyādhara* on the top from tenth century CE onwards, though its shape was different from time to time as found in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. This apart, *Kīrttimukha*, as the temple components found at Kāmākhyā, Madana Kāmadeva, Hayagrīva-Mādhava temple, etc. are more stylized in the eleventh-twelfth century CE like the rest of the Indian art style.



Fig.4 : Sūrya

The plinth of the Madana Kāmadeva temple at Baihata Chariali in North Guwahati is that of a *pañcaratha* temple with decorative motifs and *aṅgaśikharas*, resembling the temple architecture of Mukteśvara temple of Orissa of ninth-tenth century CE in the decoration of the outer surface and gradient of the *śikhara*.²⁷ The motifs like *gaja-vyāla*, *kīrttimukha*, *bhāravāhaka*, *gaṇa*, pillar capitals with bracket figures, *caitya gavoākṣa*, etc., which were characteristic features of Orissan temple architecture can be traced at Madana Kāmadeva temple in North Guwahati.²⁸ Similar motifs of *gaṇa*, *gaja-*

vyāla, bracket figure and *aṅgaśikharas* are found at Pingaleswar in Karara and Dol-Gobinda in North Guwahati, Nilachal hill and other places of Guwahati like Uzan Bazar, Judges field (now at Assam State Museum). Stone relics in mutilated condition which were components of a stone temple of early medieval period were found at Kāmākhyā in the Nilachal Hill. Sculptures having carvings of bust of female figures with



Fig.5 : Semi-divine nymph, Kāmākhyā

heavy ornamentation which appears to be semi-divine nymph or *apsarā* and may be stylistically similar with the *surasundarī* of the Sun temple at Konark in Orissa datable to eighth-twelfth century CE (Fig.5) are also found at Kāmākhyā. *Surasundarī* or 'celestial beauty' is identified with the image of Śakti and found to be carved on the walls of the temple.²⁹ The *puṣpakuṇḍala* and *hāra* adorning the sculpture exhibits similarity with the *surasundarī* of the Sun temple at Konark in Orissa.

Another important feature of Orissan architecture is that of Indian craftsmanship with sensuousness and love inspired by Tantricism. The same expression is found in the panels of erotic scenes as parts of the temple components at Khajuraho and other temples of Orissa of tenth-eleventh century CE. Similar depiction is found in the panels of erotic sculptures at Madana Kāmadeva and Piṅgaleśvara archaeological site in the Kamarupa District. Like the Orissan temple style of Khajuraho, the *adhiṣṭhāna* of the *garbhagr̥ha* of the Madana Kāmadeva temple at Baihata Chariali in North Guwahati bears panels of erotic figures on the *adhiṣṭhāna* of the temple.³⁰ The sculptures showing bestiality on the panels of both the temples exhibit similarity with Lakṣmaṇa temple of Khajuraho in Orissa. The *vimāna* up to the *varaṇḍa* level of the Kāmākhyā temple decorated with floral motifs, foliage, friezes and sculptures are stylistically and architecturally similar to the early medieval temples of Orissa like the Liṅgarāja. The original plinth of the Hayagrīva-Mādhava temple at Hajo has five *tharas* and is similar to the *pābhāga* of the monolithic Kailāśa temple of Ellora.³¹

In the later medieval period, the art activities of the region suffered a setback and lost royal patronage due to the political turmoil in the region. Due to lack of royal patronage the artisans either gave up their earlier professions or were engaged in the war effort by the royal authority. Art activity of this period deviated from earlier art style and a regional art form emerged as we found at most of the temple building activity of Kāmākhyā in Nilachal hill, Hayagrīva-Mādhava temple at Hajo,

Siddheśvara temple at Sualkuchi, Merghar ruins at Chaygaon, Maṇikarṇeśvara temple, Aśvakrānta temple in North Guwahati, Chatrakar temple, Umānanda temple, Śukreśvara temple at Panbazar, Baśiṣṭha temple, etc. where rebuilding or reconstruction of the temple were done either by the Ahoms or by the Kochas. During this period, it appears that the artisans lost their earlier working spirit and skill which reflected in the making of the sculptural art, both in quality and quantity. Though the artisans known as *śilākuityas* were still there and some specimen of their work were found at Ambari – the ten-handed Naṭarāja figure, sixteen-handed Mahiṣamardinī, Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Sūrya, Viṣṇu in continuation of the earlier art style. During this period the artists based their art style on folk elements with features like flat face, broad nose, thick lips and low relief. The sculptures are depicted in profile but are frontally carved.³² The figures are stiff and disproportionate and do not conform to the norms of the Hindu iconographic texts. Such elements can be found on the walls of the Aśvakrānta, Śukreśvara, Hayagrīva-Mādhava, Baśiṣṭha, Siddheśvara and on a few sculptures at Nilachal hill. The stone panels at Merghar, Chaygaon having the figures of warrior carrying swords on either side of his waist, other panels with carvings of social scenes as well as Śaivite figures; metal sculptures of a deity and a figure of Garuḍa found at Jamabari Mirza (Fig.6) are some of the evidences of the similar art form of the region. The Kochas reconstructed the *śikhara* and *antarāla* of the Kāmākhyā temple with the masons and artisans from Koch Bihar already accustomed with the Islamic architecture, in hemispherical shape of dome and *śikhara* like Minarates and Guldestās of the Islamic architecture. Thus the Kāmākhyā temple



Fig.6 : Garuda, metal,
Jamabari Mirza

had been reconstructed having *antarāla* and *mukha-maṇḍapa* of *do-cala* type by the Kochas. The repeated invasion of the Mughals from the west by this time is also reflected in the changes of the art form of the region. The Mughals during the course of their invasion, brought with them artisans, painters and musicians, etc. who later on involved themselves in the art activities of the region. This is reflected in different features of making of the sculptures like headgear, dress and other architectural components at Kāmākhyā temple along with other temples like Chinnamastā, Bhuvaneśvarī, Siddheśvara, Bhairavī, Kālī, Tārā, Kāmeśvara, Kamaleśvara, Pāṇḍunātha in Nilachal hill representing a blending of Indio-Islamic architecture. Similar architectures are also found in the Hayagrīva-Mādhava, Kāmeśvara, Kamaleśvara, Kedāra temple at Hajo which were reconstructed by the Kochas on the ruins of early medieval temples.

The carvings of the *devakoṣṭhas* or niche on the outer walls of the temples with a pointed arch on

the top as found in the Nilachal hill, Aśvakrānta, Baśiṣṭha, Śukreśvara temples and Siddheśvara temple of late medieval period art is also a typical feature of Islamic art style.³³ The original plinth of the Maṇikarṇeśvara temple at North Guwahati is stellate plan (star-shaped), based on triangles with unique six projections appears to be datable to the early medieval period upon which brick temple was built by the Ahoms in the later period. According to Pradip Sarma, this is one of the rare examples of such star-shaped stone temple-plinth, which is perhaps not found anywhere in India.³⁴ However, we find examples of stellate plan in the shrines of the Hoysala builders in the Hoysalesvara Temple at Halebid and Dodda Basappa Temple at Dambal.³⁵ Thus all these temples rebuilt in the later period reflects influence of the Indo-Aryan art from Gupta age of North India to the Pāla-Sena and Mughal art of Bengal, as well as the Vesara style of the Deccan, with regional and indigenous feature imbued in it. The terracotta boat at Navagraha hill is however unique in character and perhaps indigenous to the region.

As regards iconographic representation, the sculptures of Kamarupa District as in the rest of India, follows the earlier Indian texts like the Āgamas and the Purāṇas, though we find assimilation of some regional and indigenous characters in it. In India, the worship of God, both in iconic and anionic forms was prevalent from the earliest period even after the making of images in their respective symbols, like *Liṅga* and *Yoni* representing Śiva and Devī; *Viṣṇu-pada* (foot-print representing Viṣṇu); foot-print or tree worship representing the Buddha.³⁶ In the Kamarupa District of Assam, we also found both these representations as found in its Indian counterparts. Earliest reference of an iconic worship may be made of *pīṭhas* at Nilachal hill, Ugratārā and Baśiṣṭha, which represents non-anthropomorphic worship of non-Aryan cult, subsequently Aryanised as *śakti pīṭhas*. It has been observed that at Ambari archaeological site, we found some of the *caturvīṃśati* icons of Viṣṇu (the twenty-four forms of Viṣṇu), which were carved as per canonical norms. Mention may be made of the figure of Keśava, Trivikrama, Acyuta, Puruṣottama, Śrīdhara and Adhokṣaja.

Another reconstruction work at the Hayagrīva temple of Hajo exhibits irregular setting of sculptures on the ruins of the earlier temple. The irregular and haphazard settings of the sculpture on the outer wall of the *garbhagrha* of the temple represent inferior craftsmanship of the artisans of the late medieval period.³⁷ The sculptures were carved in profile and round in shape with stiff attitude. The costume of the sculptures exhibits Vaiṣṇavite influence as found on the temple walls and the figures of Jaya and Vijaya are carved on the *batchora* of the Hayagrīva-Mādhava temple (Fig.7). In the late medieval period the Vaiṣṇavite institutions of Assam under Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva brought about revolutionary changes in the religious, social and cultural life of the people, which in turn is also reflected in the art style of the region. Iconographic representations depicting the Vaiṣṇavite style was found at Jaya-Vijaya and Gaṇeśa figure at Baśiṣṭha, and figures of Veṇu-Gopāla playing flute at Kāmākhyā. Wooden sculptures of this period specially found at the *sattra* institutions of Assam, which developed

in late mediaeval period also exhibits similar art style.

Another important feature of the cult of Indian deities are the images of River-Goddesses in *dvāra-sākhās* or door-jambs of the *garbhagrha*. The carvings of River-Goddesses Gaṅgā and Yamunā of the Gupta temples as celestial body originates in heaven and descended to earth is also found in this region. River Gaṅgā is regarded as *śakti*



Fig.7 :: Jaya-Vijaya, Hayagrīva-Mādhava temple

in her sacred form and purifies the devotees from all the evils.³⁸ The figures of Gaṅgā and Yamunā are found during the course of excavation at Ambari and datable to thirteenth-fourteenth century CE (Figs.8-9). Both the figures are provided with snake-canopy which resembles the figures of River Goddesses carved in Amaravati reliefs.³⁹ In the sculptures of the late medieval period of the region up to the 18th century CE, a regional style has developed, having the impact of Pāla-Sena art style of the earlier period with deviations and innovations revealing lack of uniformity in art



Fig.8 :: Gaṅgā, Ambari

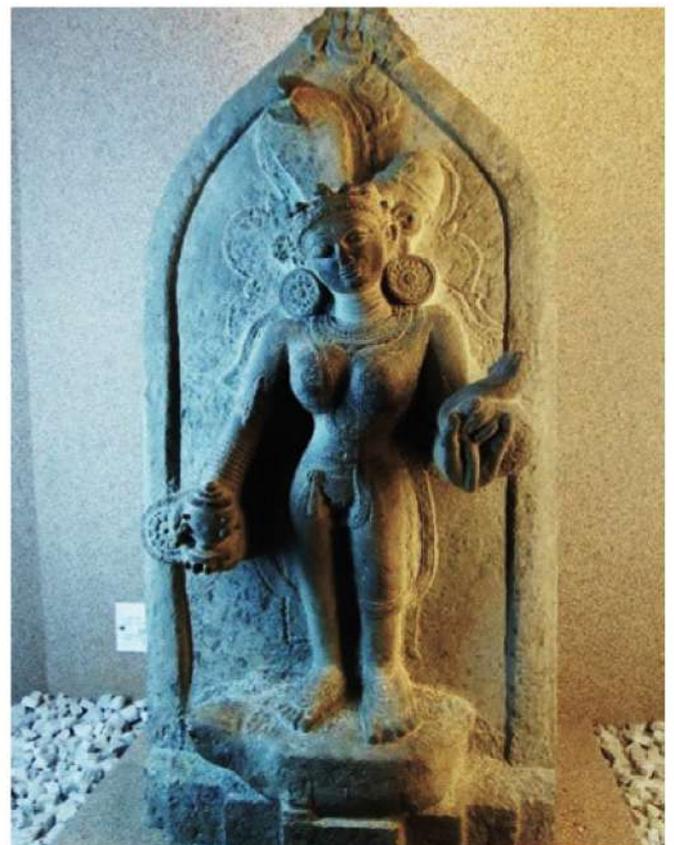


Fig.9 :: Yamunā, Ambari

form. Further the art style of the sculptures also exhibits South-East Asian influence in the physiognomy and facial traits in the Kamarupa District. In this connection mention may be made of the *kirītamukuta* of the sculptures at Kāmākhyā, Madana Kāmādeva and figures of Sūrya wearing *avyaṅga* (Fig.4).

In view of the above, a conclusion may be arrived at, that the sculptural art of the Kamarupa District represents similarity with the art activities and features as found in the Indian counterparts of Gaṅgā valley of Central India, Orissa and Bengal as well as that of South-East Asia and Bangladesh, having imbued with regional and indigenous features in it.

Endnotes

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