

**PROCEEDINGS OF
NORTH EAST INDIA
HISTORY ASSOCIATION**

NINTH SESSION

GUWAHATI ; 1988

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Edited & Published by
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General Secretary
on behalf of

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PREFACE

The ninth session of the North East India History Association at the Gauhati University was indeed the fulfilment of a long cherished objective of the Association to hold a session in the premier University of the region. In fact, there had been efforts on the part of the Association ever since it came into existence in 1979 to hold a session at the Gauhati University. We are thankful to the authorities of the Gauhati University for inviting the ninth session and organising it in an excellent manner.

Shri Bhisma Narain Singh, the Governor of Assam, inaugurated the session. Professor D. P. Barooah, Vice-Chancellor, and Professor J. N. Phukan, Head, Department of History, Gauhati University did the Association a great honour as Chairman of the organising committee and Local Secretary respectively for the session. It was presided over by Professor Bhupen Qanungo of the North-Eastern Hill University. More than one hundred and fifty delegates attended the session in which eighty-five research papers were presented and discussed.

The present volume is the proceedings of the ninth session of the North East India History Association held at the Gauhati University on November 3-5, 1988. I am thankful to my colleagues Dr. J. P. Singh, Dr. O. P. Kejariwal, Dr. M. S. Sangma and Dr. D. R. Syiemlieh for the help in selecting and editing the papers and publishing the volume. We are also thankful to the Indian Council of Historical Research for the generous financial assistance extended to the Association.

J. B. Bhattacharjee

General Secretary,

North East India History Association.

Shillong

The 25 August 1989

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The Deity Kamakhya

N.N Acharyya

The religious history of ancient Assam has not yet been properly explored. The *Kalika Purana* and the *Yogini Tantra* point to the remote antiquity of the worship of goddess Kamakhya. The goddess is enshrined in the Temple at the Nilachal hill near Guwahati. According to B.K. Kakati, the word 'Kamrup-Kamakhya' symbolises a new cult, and in exaltation of the land itself was rechristened. We learn from the *Kalika Purana* that the goddess Kamakhya assumed to be the most important goddess of ancient Assam during the time of King Naraka of Bhauma dynasty in the proto-historic period. The said source enjoins upon Naraka to propitiate no other deity than Kamakhya. So Naraka established himself as the custodian of this Yoni goddess and made her the presiding deity of the state and thus Kamakhya cult became the state-religion. Subsequent religious history of Assam centres round Kamakhya and other goddesses were recognised as her various manifestations. The local goddesses like Uma, Kali, Karala and Chamunda gradually came to be considered as the other forms of goddess Kamakhya in different circumstances.

Few centuries later, we observe that goddess Kamakhya is referred to as Mahagauri in two copper plate inscriptions viz., Tezpur Copper Plate Grant of Vanamalavarmadeva (middle of 9th century A.D.) and Guwakuchi Copper plate grant of Indrapala. In the Tezpur Grant there is reference to Kamakutgiri on which God Kameswara and goddess Mahagauri are said to have been installed.

The names of the hill Kamakut and the god Kameswara suggest that the goddess Mahagauri is no other than the goddess Kamakhya, whose temple stands on the Nilachal hill. In this context it is worthwhile to mention that from sculptural point

of view the worship of goddess Kamakhya assumed new dimension from the 4th century A.D. i.e., during the age of the Imperial Guptas .

Kamakhya became a renowned centre of Tantrik sacrifices, mysticism and sorcery during the time of the Pala Kings of Assam (10th-12th Century A.D.). For sometime the Tantrik cult centering round the shrine of Kamakhya was the prevailing tenet of Assam⁵. The Muhammadan Chroniclers inform that the idol temple of Kamakhya is notorious for magic and sorcery and whoever happens to step into Assam, becomes enchanted and cannot find his way to come out of it⁶. In this background we may show that the Tantrik Centre of Kamakhya also received regard from many from distant lands. Kheyaj Pir or Khwaja Khizr hailed from the family of Hazarat Nur of the city of Siraj in Persia. A river named after him 'Khizr' near Kabul testifies his high honour in the Islamic world. This saint visited Assam with the invading Muhammadan army and inscribed a rock inscription saying: 'abe hayat Cashme Khizr' (Khwaja Khizr pays homage) in propiation of the goddess Kamakhya. The inscription is found on a stone slab lying near a stream on the foot of the eastern slope of the Kamakhya hill in the north of the steps leading to the temple. Many people of Western Assam even today accept this Pir as a messenger of God and held him in high esteem .

The Darrang Rajvangsabali and the rock inscriptions of the Nilachal, Kamakhya temple and Mankachar Kamakhya temple testify that Naranarayan, the Koch King of Kamrup and his brother Sukladhwaj alias Chilarai declared Kamakhya cult as the state-religion through expensive worship and extensive land grants.

In 1616 A.D. Nawab Saiyad Babakar of Bengal invaded Assam. He was accompanied with Raja Satrajit and his son Harneswaranand. Assam forces repulsed the invasion and their enemies were massacred.

Harmeswaranand was detained in confinement for twelve months by the Ahom King Pratap Singha and at last sacrificed in the temple of goddess Kamakhya¹⁰. We learn from the Sikh chroniclers that in 1669 A.D. when the Mughal General Raja Ram Singha accompanied with Guru Teg Bahadur came to invade Assam, the Ahom Kings of Assam went to worship at the temple of goddess Kamakhya, offered her sacrifice and received blessings from her priests to fight not only the military strength of the Mughal army but also the supernatural power of such divine personage like Guru Teg Bahadur¹¹. There is also reference in the Assamese chronicles that the Ahom rulers worshipped goddess Kamakhya and obtained her blessings to fight Raja Ram Singha, the powerful General of Emperor Aurangzeb¹². Subsequently the Land Grant Inscription of Kamakhya Temple of Siva Singha, 1715 A.D.¹³, the erection of Kamakhya Temple at Silghat along with its Rock Inscription by King Pramatha Singha, 1745 A.D.¹⁴, the Rock inscription of the Utsava-Mandir of king Rajeswar Singha, 1759 A.D.¹⁵ and the Copper Plate Inscription of goddess Kamakhya of King Gaurinath Singha, 1782 A.D.¹⁶ lead to the conclusion that the Kamakhya cult became the national religion of Assam during the Ahom Age.

The modern Khasis believe that the famous temple of the Mother Goddess Kamakhya, near Guwahati, was founded by the Khasis in the distant past. When they controlled that area, and that this Sanskrit name is in fact a corruption of the¹⁷ Khasi Ka-mei-kha, meaning the 'paternal grandmother'. According to the Garo tradition, Kamakhya has been derived from Ka-ma-Kha, a Garo word which means 'victory to my mother'. It is also stated that the keepers of the Kamakhya temple were of Garo origin whose ancient mother was transformed into a Hindu goddess, Kamakhya Devi, and was appeased with human sacrifices on the occasion of its principal pujas (worships). According to another tradition the Kamakhya temple was built by a Garo architect in honour of the goddess

of prolificacy¹⁸. A tradition in connection with Garo migration records that the Garos settled more than one hundred years at the present Kamakhya in Kamrup district and the Garos even to-day remember their songs on the subject¹⁹. Similarly a Boro tradition refers to the Boro formation 'Kangni Bima-Kha' meaning 'Mother Goddess really creates'²⁰ to be the basis for the Snskritised Kamakhya.

It therefore, becomes clear that the goddess Kamakhya played an important role in the religious history of Assam from very early times. She was the presiding deity of the Bhauma dynasty of the Kurukshetra age. During the Salastmbha and the Pala line of Kings the goddess Kamakhya was worshipped in the name of Mahagauri. During the entire medieval period the Kamakhya cult sometimes in the Tantrik and sometimes in the Sakta form was the leading religion of a vast tract of territory in North East India. During the British and Post-Independence period we have observed that the Kamakhya cult has become the living religious solace to the numerous souls from India and abroad. Thus it is not wide of the mark to conclude that the Kamakhya cult was the state-religion of Assam from the Epic age to modern time.

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