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BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY

**TEMPLES AND LEGENDS
OF
ASSAM**

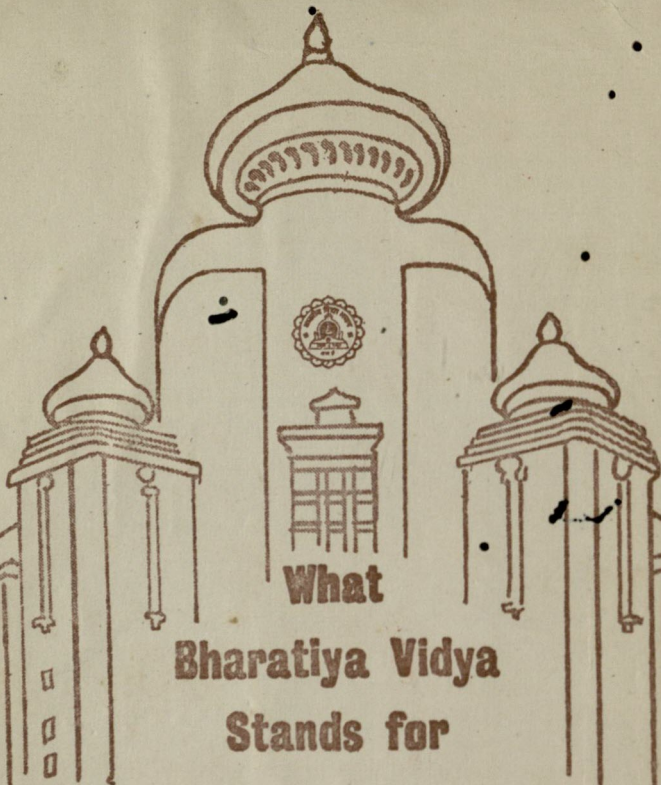
B. K. Barua
&
H. V. Sreenivasa Murthy

GENERAL EDITORS

K. M. MUNSHI

R. R. DIWAKAR





**What
Bharatiya Vidya
Stands for**

Bharatiya Shiksha must ensure that no promising young Indian of character having faith in Bharat and her culture Bharatiya Vidya should be left without modern educational equipment by reason merely of want of funds.

2. Bharatiya Shiksha must be formative more than informative, and cannot have for its end mere acquisition of knowledge. Its legitimate sphere is not only to develop natural talents but so to shape them as to enable them to absorb and express the permanent values of Bharatiya Vidya.

3. Bharatiya Shiksha must take into account not only the full growth of a student's personality but the totality of his relations and lead him to the highest self-fulfilment of which he is capable.

4. Bharatiya Shiksha must involve at some stage or other an intensive study of Sanskrit or Sanskritic languages and their literature, without excluding, if so desired, the study of other languages and literature, ancient and modern.

5. The re-integration of Bharatiya Vidya, which is the primary object of Bharatiya Shiksha, can only be attained through a study of forces, movements, motives, ideoforms and art of creative life-energy through which it has expressed itself in different ages as a single continuous process.

6. Bharatiya Shiksha must stimulate the student's power of expression, both written and oral, at every stage in accordance with the highest ideals attained by the great literary masters in the intellectual and moral spheres.

7. The technique of Bharatiya Shiksha must involve—

(a) the adoption by the teacher of the *Guru* attitude which consists in taking a personal interest in the student; inspiring and encouraging him to achieve distinction in his studies; entering into his life with a view to form ideals and remove psychological obstacles; and creating in him a spirit of consecration; and

(b) the adoption by the student of the *Shishya* attitude by the development of—

(i) respect for the teacher,

(ii) a spirit of inquiry,

(iii) a spirit of service towards the teacher, the institution, Bharat and Bharatiya Vidya.

8. The ultimate aim of Bharatiya Shiksha is to teach the younger generation to appreciate and live up to the permanent values of Bharatiya Vidya which flowing from the supreme art of creative life-energy as represented by Shri Ramachandra, Shri Krishna, Vyasa, Buddha and Mahavira have expressed themselves in modern times in the life of Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, and Swami Vivekananda, Shri Aurobindo and Mahatma Gandhi.

9. Bharatiya Shiksha while equipping the student with every kind of scientific and technical training must teach the student, not to sacrifice an ancient form or attitude to an unreasoning passion for change; not to retain a form or attitude which in the light of modern times can be replaced by another form or attitude which is a truer and more effective expression of the spirit of Bharatiya Vidya; and to capture the spirit afresh for each generation to present it to the world





आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः ।

Let noble thoughts come to us from every side

—Rigveda, I-89-i

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BY

B. K. BARUA

AND

H. V. SREENIVASA MURTHY

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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan—that Institute of Indian Culture in Bombay—needed a Book University, a series of books which, if read, would serve the purpose of providing higher education. Particular emphasis, however, was to be put on such literature as revealed the deeper impulses of India. As a first step, it was decided to bring out, in English 100 books, 50 of which were to be taken in hand almost at once. Each book was to contain from 200 to 250 pages and was to be priced at Rs. 2.50.

It is our intention to publish the books we select, not only in English, but also in the following Indian languages: Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

This scheme, involving the publication of 900 volumes, requires ample funds and an all-India organisation. The Bhavan is exerting its utmost to supply them.

The objectives for which the Bhavan stands are the reintegration of the Indian culture in the light of modern knowledge and to suit our present-day needs and the resuscitation of its fundamental values in their pristine vigour.

Let me make our goal more explicit:

We seek the dignity of man, which necessarily implies the creation of social conditions which would allow him freedom to evolve along the lines of his

own temperament and capacities; we seek the harmony of individual efforts and social relations, not in any makeshift way, but within the framework of the Moral Order; we seek the creative art of life, by the alchemy of which human limitations are progressively transmuted, so that man may become the instrument of God, and is able to see Him in all and all in Him.

The world, we feel, is too much with us. Nothing would uplift or inspire us so much as the beauty and aspiration which such books can teach.

In this series, therefore, the literature of India, ancient and modern, will be published in a form easily accessible to all. Books in other literatures of the world, if they illustrate the principles we stand for, will also be included.

This common pool of literature, it is hoped, will enable the reader, eastern or western, to understand and appreciate currents of world thought, as also the movements of the mind in India, which, though they flow through different linguistic channels, have a common urge and aspiration.

Fittingly, the Book University's first venture is the *Mahabharata*, summarised by one of the greatest living Indians, C. Rajagopalachari; the second work is on a section of it, the *Gita* by H. V. Divatia, an eminent jurist and student of philosophy. Centuries ago, it was proclaimed of the *Mahabharata*: "What is not in it, is nowhere". After twenty-five centuries, we can use the same words about it. He who knows it not, knows not the heights and depths

of the soul; he misses the trials and tragedy and the beauty and grandeur of life.

The *Mahabharata* is not a mere epic; it is a romance, telling the tale of heroic men and women and of some who were divine; it is a whole literature in itself, containing a code of life, a philosophy of social and ethical relations, and speculative thought on human problems that is hard to rival; but, above all, it has for its core the *Gita* which is, as the world is beginning to find out, the noblest of scriptures and the grandest of sagas in which the climax is, reached in the wondrous Apocalypse in the Eleventh *Cañto*.

Through such books alone the harmonies underlying true culture, I am convinced, will one day reconcile the disorders of modern life.

I thank all those who have helped to make this new branch of the Bhavan's activity successful.

1, QUEEN VICTORIA ROAD,
NEW DELHI,
3rd October, 1951.

K. M. MUNSHI



PREFACE

• It has been truly said that 'there is no part of India which is more interesting in some respects to the student of Hinduism than the Assam valley'. The fundamental streams of the Brahmanical religion had penetrated into Assam at an early period. Saivism, Saktism and Vaisnavism held sway in various forms. These cults underwent certain modifications in Assam. It is true especially of Saktism.

In India sculpture, fine arts and literature are closely connected with religion. It is the religion which fostered the growth of temples and images. In Assam also temple building and the arts of architecture and sculpture grew hand in hand with the spread of religion. The erection of temples in Assam goes back to an early century. At any rate, the existence of numerous shrines dedicated to Siva, Surya, Vishnu and Devi and other deities is fully attested to both by inscriptions and contemporary literature. But today not one of these early edifices exist, and the only memorials of ancient times, consist of jungle clad mounds scattered in such places as Gauhati, Tezpur, Nowgong, Sibsa-gar, Sadiya and a few big temples belonging to a comparatively late period.

• The reason for this total obliteration of old-sites, as given by Gait, is that nature has vied with man in destroying them. The Brahmaputra valley

is an alluvial country, and the impetuous, snow-fed rivers which debouch from the Himalayas find so little resistance in its friable soil that they are constantly carving out new channels and cutting away their banks; consequently no building erected in their neighbourhood can be expected to remain for more than limited time, except at few points like Gauhati, Tezpur, where solid rock pierces through the alluvium. Further, though occurring at distant intervals, violent earthquakes are, in Assam, quite as great cause of destruction as fluvial action. A less sudden, but almost equally potent, cause of damage is found in the luxuriant vegetation of the country. Instances are also not wanting where religious zeal led the early Moslem invaders to raze the temples to the ground.

We have, therefore, very little material for the study of temples in Assam although there are quite a few legends. We have here selected some of the important ones and have also added a chapter on Vaisnava religious centres or Satras so as to make them intelligible to those outside Assam.

The book is a joint work of Dr. B. K. Barua and myself. In fact, immediately after the receipt of the letter from the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan Dr. Barua invited me to associate with him in the preparation of the work. Before we could take it up, we had to complete the work in hand which was a revision of *A History of Assam* by E. A. Gait. After the completion of it, we took up the present work and prepared the draft. But before we could fina-

lise the draft, Dr. Barua left for U.S.A. as Visiting Professor, in the Indiana University. After his return from the States, we finalised the draft and were about to send it for typing, when suddenly Dr. Barua was taken ill and passed away. Therefore, I have written this preface on the lines we had thought out originally.

I would like to take this opportunity to place on record my deep debt of gratitude to Dr. B. K. Barua for giving me an opportunity to associate myself with this publication. I am grateful to Mrs. B. K. Barua, for kindly permitting me to send the manuscript for publication. I am indebted to Mr. M.S. Prabhakar, M.A., and Mr. G. Rajaram Rao, M.A., Lecturers in English, Gauhati University, for correcting the typescript; to Mr. Divya Kishore Singh, M.Sc., Lecturer in Geography, Gauhati University, for writing the map of Assam showing the sacred religious centres; and to Mr. S. Shankara Jois, M.Sc., Lecturer in Physics, Gauhati University, for helping me in typing the manuscript.

My thanks are due to the Director General of Archæology to the Government of India and to Sri Ganga Prasad Sarma of the Gauhati University Library, who have kindly lent me a few photographs of monuments and permission for the reproduction.

We are thankful to Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, the sponsors of this scheme, for providing us an opportunity to study this problem and to the publishers and authors of works quoted in this book.

We have tried our best to present the account in its true perspective and for any shortcomings we crave the indulgence of the reading public.

Gauhati University,
November, 1965.

H. V. SREENIVASA MURTHY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Assam, with a great and ancient heritage, has contributed richly both to the evolution and enrichment of the civilisation of India. As the frontier province of India on the north-east, Assam has a special position and importance. The boundaries of Assam lie between the latitudes $27^{\circ} 55'$ and 23° North and longitudes $89^{\circ} 46'$ and $96^{\circ} 10'$ East. It contains at present an area of 47,091 square miles, of which 24,414 square miles constitute the plain districts, 22,677 the southern hill tracts.

Assam is a part of the country known in ancient times as Pragjyotisa. By this name the country was known in the great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, as well as in some of the principal *Puranas*.

• The *Kalika Purana*, a work of the 10th century A.D., says, "Formerly Brahma staying here created the stars; so the city is called Pragjyotisapura, a city equal to the city of Indra".¹ This etymological explanation given by the *Kalika Purana* has been followed by the historians of Assam. Gait writes, "*Prag* means former or eastern and *jyotisa* a star, astrology, shining. Pragjyotisa may be taken to mean the city of Eastern Astrology. The name is interesting in connection with the reputation which

1. 39/126.

the country has always held as a land of magic and incantation and with the view that it was in Assam that the Tantrik form of Hinduism originated.'² K. L. Barua accepts the etymology but reads it in a different connotation. "It is significant that to the immediate east of the town of Gauhati there is a temple on the crest of a hill known as Citracala, and this temple is dedicated to the Navagrahas or the nine planets. It is probable that this temple is the origin of the name Pragjyotisapura."³ Pragjyotisa according to B. Kakati seems to be connected with topographical features of the land rather than with any religious cult. Earlier references clearly illustrate that Pragjyotisa or Pragjyotisapura was on an extensive hill. This topographical feature of Pragjyotisa as described in the earlier texts correspond to an Austric formation like *Pagar-juh* (*jo*)—tic (*c'=ch*), meaning a region of extensive hills. Thus Pragjyotisa may be a Sanskritisation of a non-Aryan formation.⁴

The modern name of the province, Assam, is actually of quite recent origin. In the ancient records, both inscriptional and scriptural, the province was severally referred to under the names of Lauhitya and Kamarupa. Some scholars hold the view that the present name Assam is the corruption of a contribution from the Tais, a group of Tibeto-Burmans, who migrated to this country at the close of the 8th century A.D.

2. *History of Assam*, p. 15.

3. *Early History of Kamarupa*, p. 13.

4. *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, p. 6.

Some present day Assamese writers hold that when the Tibeto-Burman invaders first migrated into this alluvial plains, they were greatly attracted by the abundant natural resources and the unlimited supply of food materials before them. It was for this reason, they say, that the invaders named the country 'Asam' meaning thereby 'peerless' or 'unique'. There are others who take a longer range of view and say that the name has existed since the first human habitation of the country. Circumscribed as they were, they argue, these first inhabitants used wider appellation when speaking of themselves and said among themselves 'I am the Lord of the land', whence comes the word 'Aham' which in the later ages degenerated into Asam.

These interpretations do not stand the test of philology and etymology. The Tibeto-Burmans, speaking a language different from the Indo-Aryans, could not be expected to use a nomenclature unknown to them, a compound Sanskrit word (Na+sama). The second derivation, though philologically permissible, cannot stand for the simple reason that the place name Assam is of recent origin.

The name of the province, Assam, is connected with the Shan invaders who entered the Brahmaputra valley in the beginning of the thirteenth century A.D., and who were known as Ahoms. The tradition of the Ahoms is that the present name is derived from *Asama* in the sense of "unequaled" or "peerless". They say that this was the term applied to them at the time of their invasion of the

valley by the local tribes, in token of their admiration of the way in which the Ahom king first conquered and then conciliated them.⁵ B. Kakati suggests that "Asama", "peerless", may be a later-day Sanskritisation of an earlier form, "A^ham". In Tai Cham means, "to be defeated". With the Assamese prefix a, Asam would mean "undefeated", "conquerors". If this is its origin, from the people, the name was subsequently applied to the country.⁶ However, another derivation has been suggested. "The name (Assam)", observed Baden-Powell, "is most probably traceable to (the Boro) Ha-com the low or level country".⁷ In this case, it was the country which gave its name to the people.

Assam is situated in a strategic position, lying in close proximity to Bhutan, Tibet, China, Burma and Pakistan. There are passes through the hills to Bhutan, Tibet, China and Burma. That these routes existed long ago is attested to by the Chinese Buddhist Pilgrim, Yuan Chwang. In the 19th Century A.D., the Burmese invaders followed these routes to Assam and so did the Japanese during the second World War. It may also be noted in this connection that in recent years the Dalai Lama came to India, after the Tibetan uprising, by a route through these hills and that the same route was followed by the Chinese in their naked and unprovoked invasion of India.

These passes and routes played a conspicuous role in shaping the cultural and economic life of

5. Gait; op. cit; p. 331.

6. *Assamese, Its Foundation and Development*, pp. 1-3.

7. *Indian Village Community*, p. 135.

INTRODUCTION

Assam, nay of India. In the first place, they facilitated India's cultural expansion to China and commercial transactions with Central Asia. Secondly, they helped a good deal the movement of the population of the Mongoloid blood, who came and settled in Assam. The Ahoms, who ruled Assam for 600 years and have left a deep impress on various aspects of her history, came to Assam as early as the 13th century A.D., from Thailand.

Assam is covered by many big rivers like Kapili, Dhansiri, Subansiri, Dikhow, Pagladia, and others. But the most important of them all and the one which runs through the heart of the State is the river called in Sanskrit the Brahmaputra or Sri Lauhita. In Assamese it is called Lohit or Luit. It enters the north-eastern corner of Assam through the Mishmi Hills and turning nearly due west, passes through all districts of north Assam. It is the chief artery and high way of Assam. For generations the Assamese have watered their fields with its blessed water; their whole history and culture are intimately connected with the Brahmaputra.

The seasons are marked by the monsoon rains and the climate is generally damp and enervating. The soil is very fertile and the landscape is always green and beautiful due to constant rainfall. Rivers, hills and plains make the State beautiful; the feeling is one of exuberant life.

The earliest inhabitants of Assam are the Austric speakers who began to filter into Assam long anterior to the advent of the Aryans from the west. Their culture still survives in many exist-

ing institutions, customs and manners of the Assamese people.

The next wave of Indo-Chinese invasion is represented by the various peoples speaking Tibeto-Burman languages. The most important group of tribes of the Tibeto-Burman race known as Bodo forms the numerous and most important section of the non-Aryan peoples of Assam. The Bodo group of tribes includes the Koc, the Kachari, the Lakung, the Dimacha, the Garo, the Rabha, the Tipura, the Chutiya and the Maran. The Bodo people who live to the west of the present Kamrup district are called Mec by their Hindu neighbours. Those of them who live in and to the west of the district of Kamrup are called Kāchārī or Kachārī.

The Bodos built strong kingdoms and with various fortunes and under various tribal names—the Chutiya, the Kachari, the Koc, etc., held sway over one or another part of Assam during different historical times. The Koces ruled Assam till the coming of the Britishers. Their kings like Durbala Narayana (13th century A.D.), Naranarayana (16th century A.D.) and Chilaray contributed greatly towards the spread and development of Hindu culture and literature in Assam. The first translation of the Ramayana into Assamese by Madhava Kandali in the 13th century was done at the court of the Kachari king Maha Manikya. In short, the contribution of the Bodos to the Assamese language, religion and culture is, indeed, very great.

In the 13th century A.D. one of the tribes of the Tais or Shans, the Ahoms overran and con-

quered Assam, giving their name to the country. Other Shan tribes who followed the Ahoms were the Khamtis, Phaliyals, Naras, Aitonyas who mostly inhabit the eastern part of Assam.

The Tibeto-Burman and the Shans today constitute the bulk of the population of Assam, Valley as well as Hills. Risley rightly remarks that the Assamese are unmistakably Mongoloid.⁸ Elwin considers them a rather modified Mongoloid with a dolichocephalic or long head but with the typical flat nose, high cheek bones and oblique slit-eyes.⁹

At what period of history the Aryan speakers came into the valley of the Brahmaputra we cannot say. But there is no doubt that they arrived at a fairly early period, as evidenced by the references in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and the Nidhanpur Copper plate grant.

The Aryan influence became so widespread and penetrating that even minor Vedic customs and rituals became deep-rooted in the life of the common people. For instance, the Vedic custom of worship of Indra by setting up *Indradhvaja* still survives in Assam in the popular festival of *Bhatheli* (Bhasthali). The existing practice of animal sacrifice by strangling on the *Siva caturdasi* day is also a Vedic survival. It is significant that the Assamese woman's undergarment *mekhela* is a phonetic variation of *mekhala* which was a girdle for woman or *Brahmacari* in Vedic times.¹⁰ But the

8. *The People of India*, Second edition, p. 42.

9. *The Aborigines*, p. 5.

10. *Assamese Grammar and Origin of the Assamese Language*, Introduction, xxix-xxx, xlvi.

greatest cultural influence of the Aryans which also brought unity among the diverse tribes and races of the province however, was the language. Sanskrit not only became the language of the court, it also became the medium of expression for poets, philosophers and preachers. Modern Assamese as an Aryan speech developed out of the Sanskrit as early as the 10th century A.D.

The language that is spoken by the majority of the people of the State is Assamese. This Aryan language checked the spread of Tibeto-Burmese language in Assam. It, however, took some words from these languages. Assamese is a very developed language and has a good old literature. Modern Assamese language is very vigorous.

The State of Assam has always held a distinct and independent political existence, though her political frontiers have advanced or receded according to her prosperity, and at times her area varied greatly from what it is today. It must, however, be noted that although the political boundaries of the country have changed from age to age, its geographical limits have been marked out by nature in such a manner as to ensure that it retained its cultural identity through ages. The unbroken unity of its history is the result of the geographical unity of the area of the Brahmaputra Valley with the heart of Assam.

CHAPTER II

TEMPLES IN KAMRUP DISTRICT

Kamrup, the modern district of Assam, takes its name from the great independent kingdom of Kamarupa. It is described in the *Kalika Purana* that immediately after Naraka of Mithila became the king of Assam and was placed in charge of the goddess Kamakhya, the name of the province was changed from Pragjyotisa to Kamarupa. The earliest epigraphic references to Kamarupa is however to be found in the well-known Allahabad inscription of Samudragupta, where Kamarupa is mentioned as frontier territory. In classical Sanskrit literature Pragjyotisa and Kamarupa both occur side by side; for instance, in Kalidasa. In the story of Raghu's *digvijaya* as given in the *Raghu-vamsa* the hero first came to Pragjyotisa and then to Kamarupa after having crossed the Lauhitya. Yadavaprakasa (c 1000 A.D.) in his *Vaijayanti* mentions Pragjyotisa and Kamarupa (*Pragjyotisa Kamarupa pragjatika*). Rajasekhara (c 900 A.D.) refers to Pragjyotisa as a country and Kamarupa as a mountain. The Jain lexicographer, Hemachandra (c. 1200 A.D.) says, "the Pragjyotisas are Kamarupas." Purusottama also states that Pragjyotisa is Kamarupa. Yasodhara (c. 1300 A.D.), the author of the *Jayamangala* commentary on the *Kamasutra* places Kamarupa as a country of the

CHAPTER III

1. DAH PARBATIYA TEMPLE AT TEZPUR

Tezpur is the headquarters of the Darrang district of Assam. It is a railway station on the North-East Frontier Railway and is about 150 kilometres from the Rangiya railway junction on the main line. It is a fine town and is widely known in India and outside in recent years. It may be noted here that it was the first major town of India to receive Dalai Lama when he came to India after the Tibetan Uprising. Tezpur has all facilities for tourists such as hotels, Dak bungalows, etc.

In pre-historic times Tezpur was known by the name Sonithpur or "the city of blood". It was the capital of Banasura, a great friend of Naraka, the Danava king of Pragjyotisha. At that time the whole of the present Darrang district and the North Lakhimpur subdivision were included in the kingdom of Bana. Bana was a great devotee of Siva and is said to have constructed the Mahabhairava temple. Bana had many sons and one daughter named Usha who was secretly married by Aniruddha, the grandson of Krishna. Aniruddha was then captured, but was subsequently released by Krishna, who defeated Bana in a great battle fought on the site of what is now known as the Tezpur bil.

Even in historical times that Tezpur was the centre of cultural activity is seen by the ruins of a temple discovered at Dah Parbatiya to the west

CHAPTER IV

TEMPLES IN SIBSAGAR DISTRICT

Sibsagar, one of the modern districts of Assam, came into prominence under the Ahom rulers. The Ahoms, a group of the Shan invaders, under the hegemony of Sukhapha, first conquered the eastern portion of the country and later on, his descendants ruled, the entire country for nearly six hundred years. It is an undeniable fact that the Ahom rule gave Assam for several centuries a good and strong government which, resisting successively several Muhammadan invasions, kept the country in peace, prosperity and order. The Ahoms liquidated all petty principalities, both within Assam and on the tribal frontier; and this led to the emergence of one closely knit geographical unit named Assam. The most notable achievement of the Ahom rule was this political unification of the country which in course of years led to social, cultural and linguistic unity. It also awakened the spirit of oneness among the Assamese people.

The Ahom kings were great builders. They set apart a good portion of revenue of the State for the construction of the temples and tanks. Most of these buildings that stand to this day, though in a ruined state, speak greatly of the artistic taste of the Ahom monarchs.

CHAPTER V

TAMRESVARI TEMPLE AT SADIYA

Sadiya is an important place in the North Lakimpur district of Assam. It was originally included in the North Eastern Frontier Agency and was later transferred to Assam. It now forms the Inner Line of NEFA regulations.

Sadiya was the capital of the Chutiyas, a Mongolian tribe, who were reigning there at the beginning of the thirteenth century A.D. There are numerous legends connected with the origin of the Chutiyas and how the capital came to be called Sadiya. The following account makes an interesting reading.

The Chutiya dynasty claimed descent from Bhismak, the father of Rukmini, consort of Sri Krishna. One Birapal, a descendant of the Bhismak line was ruling at Sonagiri. He had no children and therefore his queen Rupavati offered penances to Kubera, the God of Wealth, to bless them with a child. Kubera appeared in the form of her husband and had coition with her. Then she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. He was named Gaurinarayan.

When he came of age, he succeeded his father in 1244 A.D. and assumed the name Ratnadhvajapala. He was a great conqueror and his supremacy

CHAPTER VI

REMAINS OF OTHER IMPORTANT TEMPLES

1. SRI SURYA RUINS

Sri Surya Pahar is situated at a distance of some seven miles by the Dobapara road from the town of Goalpara, the headquarters of the modern district of Assam. Of all the ruins in the Goalpara district, the ruins of the Sri Surya Pahar hills occupies a significant place both in the religious and the artistic history of Assam. Rightly called 'a picture gallery of the archaeological remains' here one 'comes across' sculptural representations belonging to the three sects of Hindus, Saivism, Vaisnavism and Saktism. At the foot of the hill and covering the extensive area are found a good number of Siva Lingas cut out of granite stone. As a local tradition has it, there were about 99,999 lingas and these were established with a view to make this town a second Kasi.

In addition to Siva Lingas, the Sri Surya Pahar remains include many rock-cut figures of artistic merit. Of the many images mention may be made of Durga, Siva and Manasa. The image of Manasa goddess, also identified as Durga by some, is a twelve armed deity cut out of a single rock. She holds weapons of different kinds in each of her

CHAPTER VII

THE SATRAS

We now proceed to give an account of the Vaishnava religious centres, the Satras, which owe their origin to Sankaradeva (1449-1569), the fountainhead of the neo-Vaishnavite movement in Assam. Sankaradeva has left a deep impress on Assamese culture and literature, on Assamese religion and way of life. He was a great genius, prophet and seer in whom the whole of Assamese culture might be said to be epitomised. With his encyclopaedic knowledge, magnetic personality and brilliant power of exposition he summed up in his long life of 120 years all that was good in the known past. Even after four centuries of his passing away the essentials of his teachings are not only not exhausted but are ever on the increase.

Sankara was born in a Bhuyan family at Ali-pukhuri, a place about sixteen miles from the present town of Nowgong, on the south bank of the Brahmaputra in the bright *dasami* of Asvin in 1371 Saka (1449 A.D.). The Bhuyans were at that time a very important people holding landed estates and enjoying other privileges from the king. Sankara's family was called the Siromani Bhuyan, being the chief among the Bhuyans. His father was Kusumavara. Sankara's mother died within three days

GLOSSARY OF ASSAMESE
VAISHNAVA TERMS

- Aldhara*: Personal attendant of Satradhikar or superior monk.
- Athpariya*: Officer who keeps vigil at Satra (literally, having the eight stages of a day or night).
- Bahar*: Temporary camp for Satradhikar during his periodic visit to villages.
- Bargit*: Devotional songs in classical tunes particularly composed by Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva.
- Bayan*: Officer-in-charge of instrumental music.
- Bhagavati*: Ecclesiastical officer engaged in reading and expounding the *Bhagavata*.
- Bhajana*: Higher form of ordination.
- Bhakat*: Monk; initiated disciple.
- Bharali*: Provision-keeper of a Satra.
- Bhawana*: Religious theatrical performance.
- Cari-vastu*: Four fundamental principles of Sankarite religion: *deva* (refuge in Lord or Krishna), *nama* (glorification of the name of god), *guru* (acceptance of a preceptor), and *bhakat* (good company or *satsanga*).
- Carit-puthi*: Biography of Vaishnava saint.
- Damodariya*: Followers of Damodaradeva who established the Brahmana-samhati.
- Deka Adhikar*: Vice-pontiff of Satra.
- Deuri*: Distributor of sacred offerings in religious gathering.
- Gayan*: Officer-in-charge of music and singing.
- Guru*: Preceptor.
- Guru-kar*: Tithe: religious tax or contribution.
- Hatis*: Group of huts.
- Karapat*: Gateways.
- Kevaliya*: Celibate monk.
- Kirtan-ghar*: Prayer-hall, term used mostly in Lower Assam.
- Krishna-nac*: Form of dance by Krishna.

Mahanta: Leader of Satra; usually Sudra.

Mahapurushiya: Sankaradeva's sect.

Mah-prasad: Sacred offerings consisting of pulse, uncooked rice and fruit.

Manikut: Shrine: small house attached to Namghar where sacred text is placed on *thapana* or *singhasana*.

Medhi, Raj-Medhi: Officers who periodically supervise the religious life of the disciples.

Mekhela: Woman's lower garment.

Namghar: Prayer-hall; used mostly in Upper Assam.

Nam-kirtan: Community singing and praising of god.

Pacani: Officer who collects tithes and contributions from disciples.

Padasila: Foot-prints (of Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva).

Pathak: Reciter of religious texts.

Prasanga: Religious service; matins.

Prasad: Sacred offering.

Saj-tola: Officer who collects contributions from disciples.

Samhati: Sect. The four principal Samhatis are: Brahma-Samhati, Kala-Samhati, Nika-Samhati and Purusa-Samhati.

Saran: Initiation.

Satra: Monastery.

Satradhikar: Head of Satra; pontiff.

Sisya: Laity.

Singhasana: Wooden throne standing on four carved lions; sacred text is placed on it for worship.

Sravani: Devotees especially appointed to listen to reading and expounding of sacred texts at services.

Than: Sacred place; Satra.

Thapana: Altar; place set up for worship.

Udasin: Unmarried; celibate.

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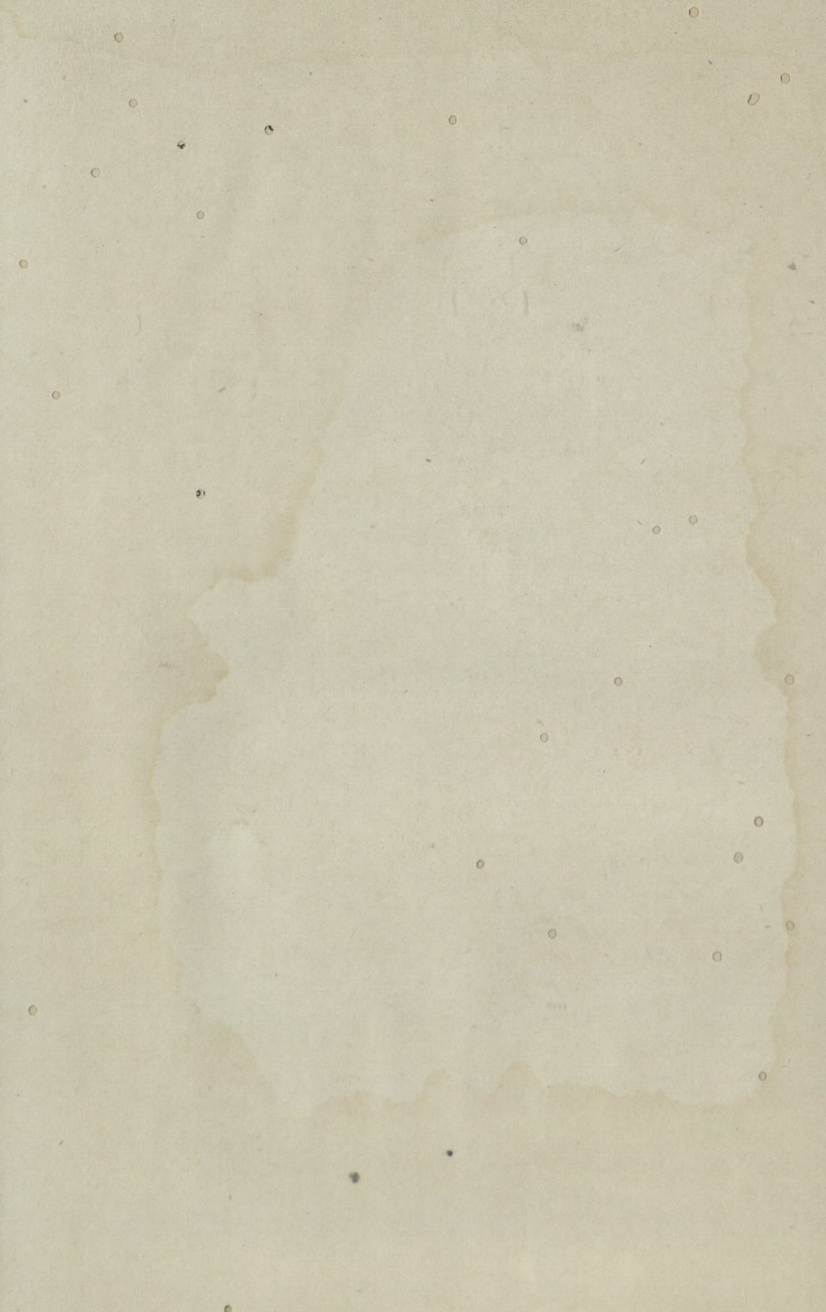
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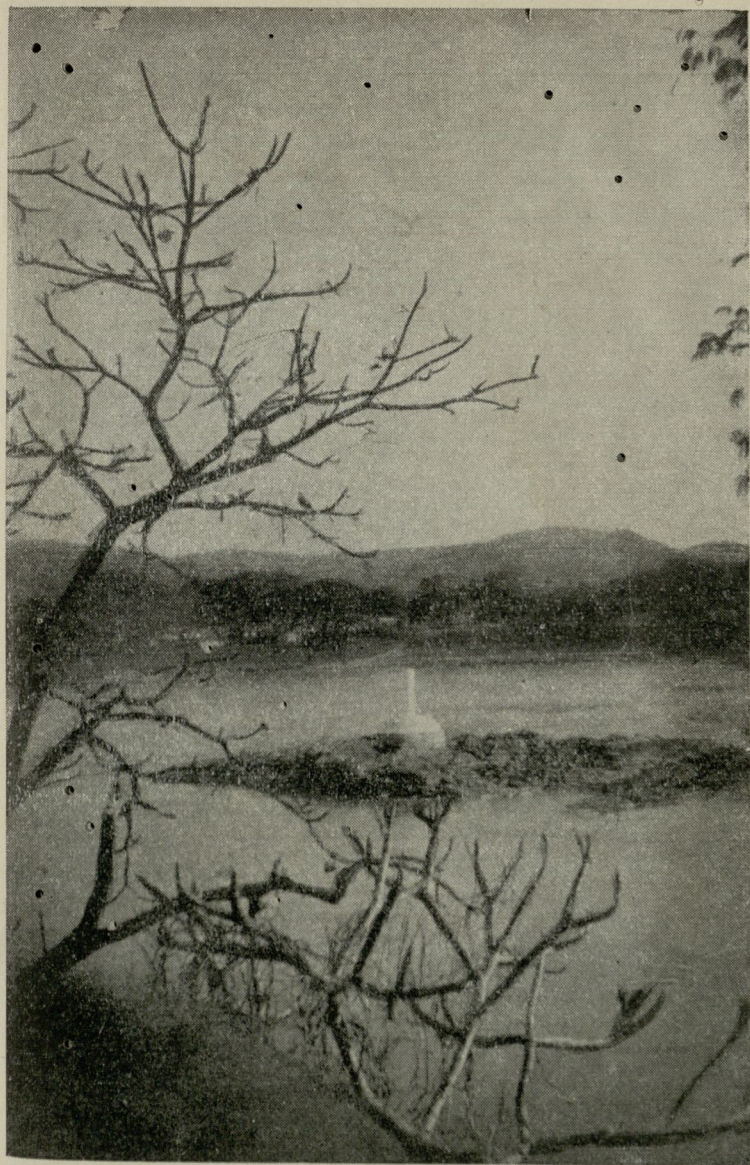
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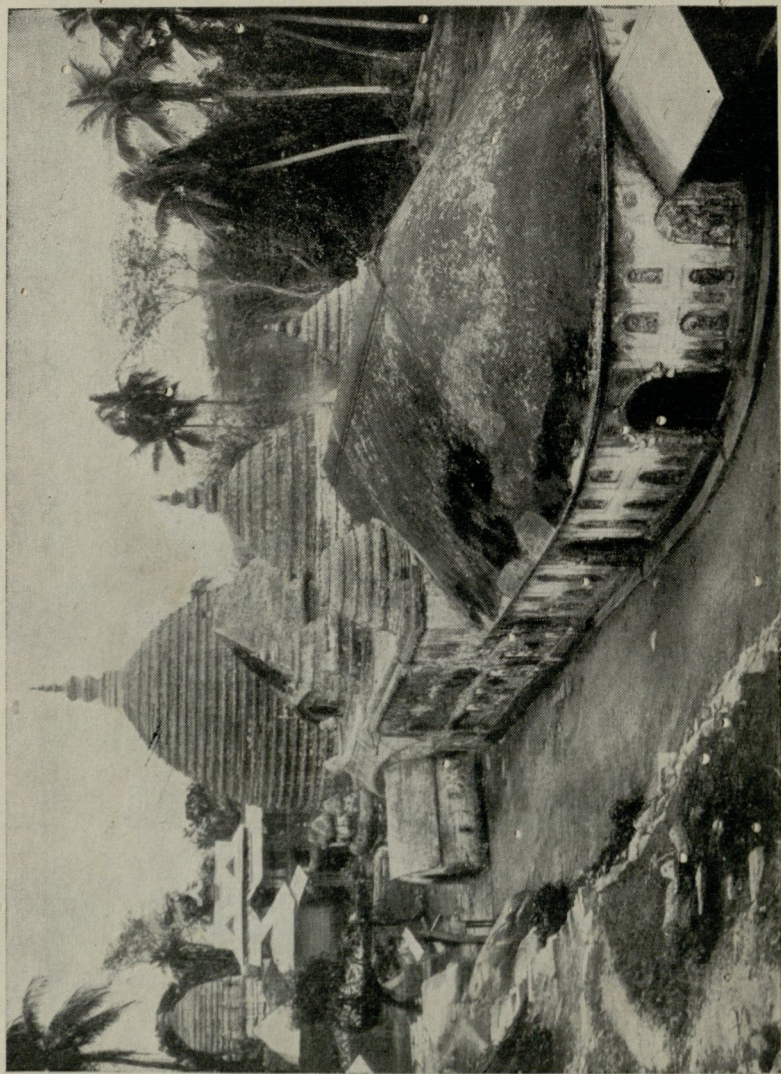
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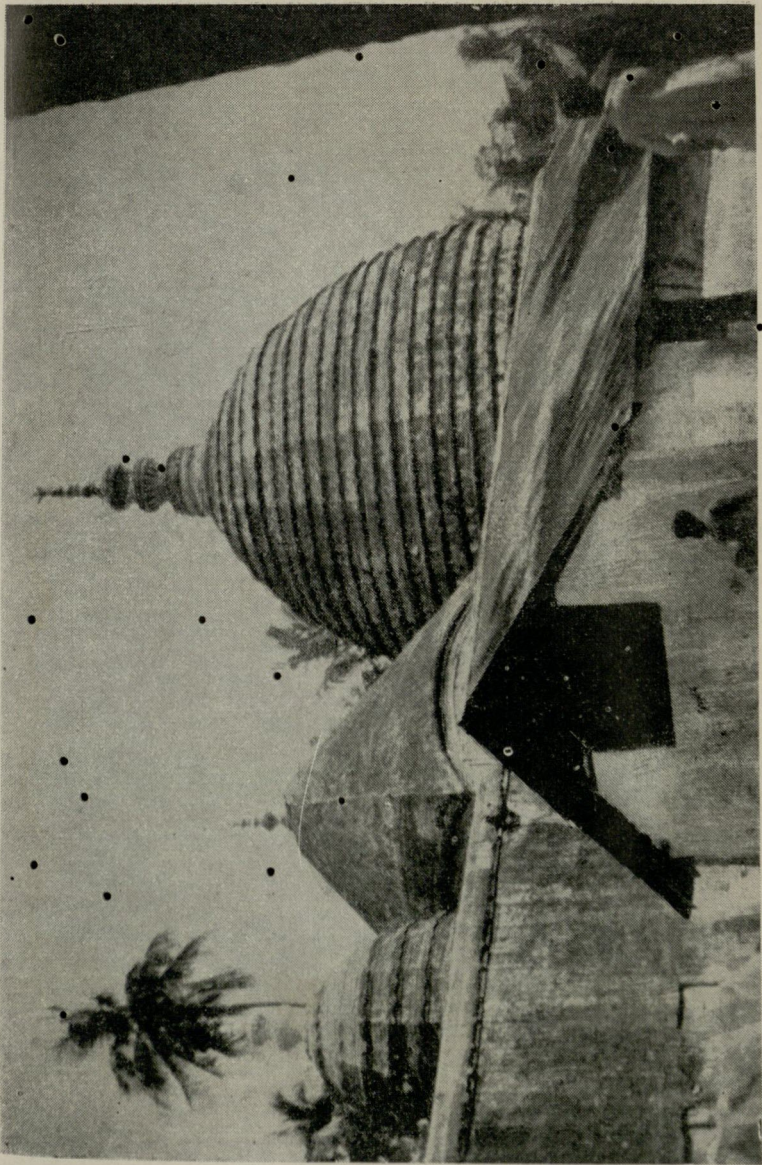




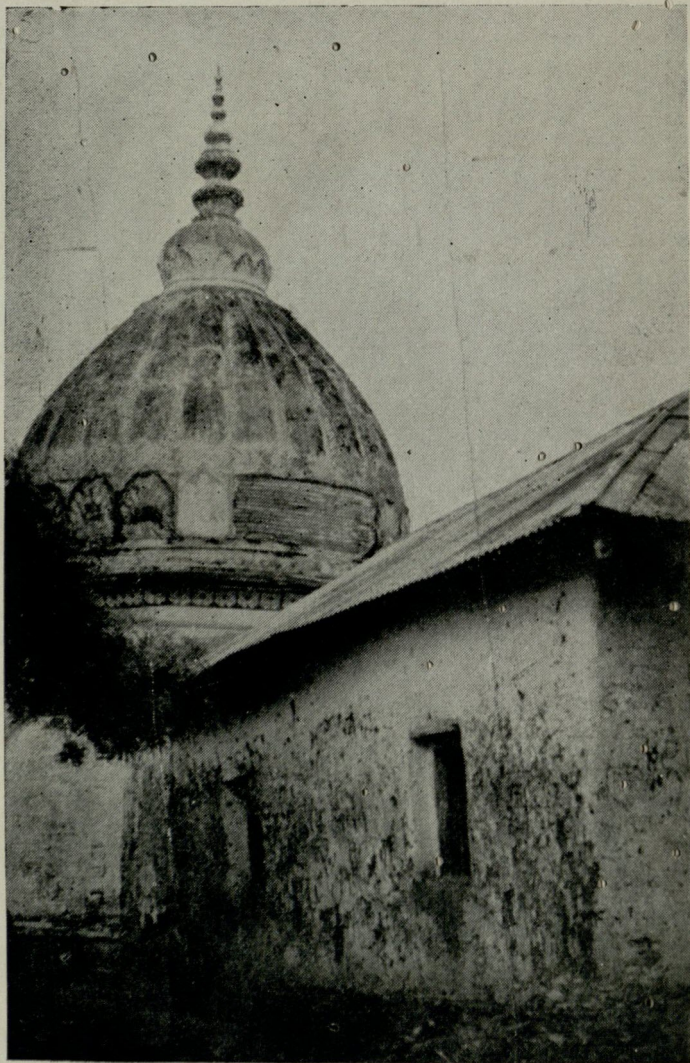
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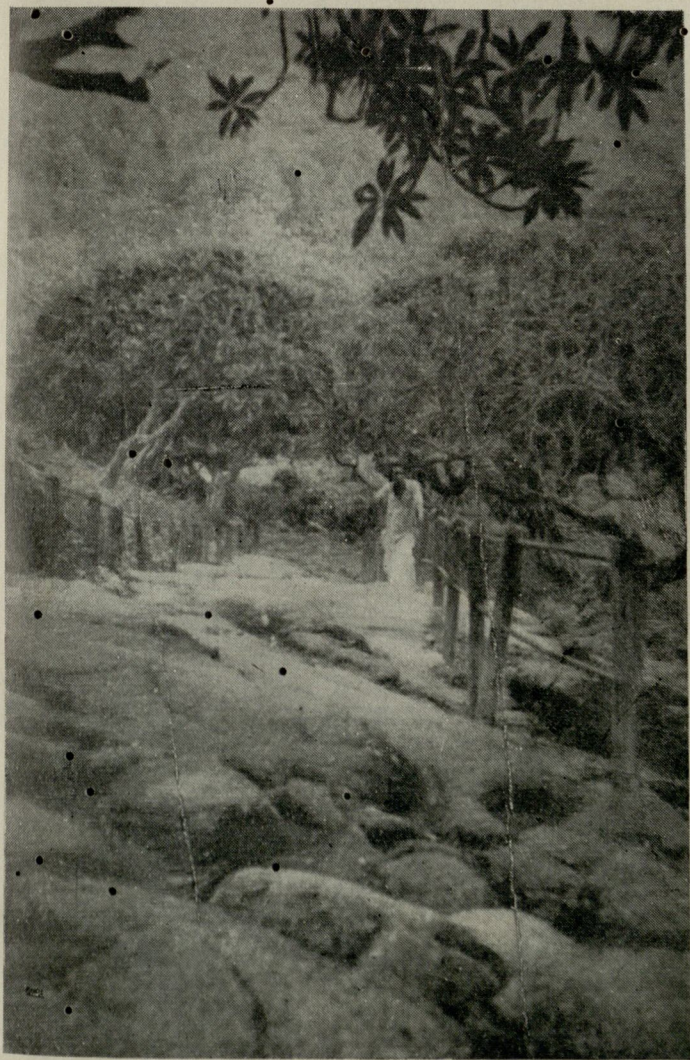
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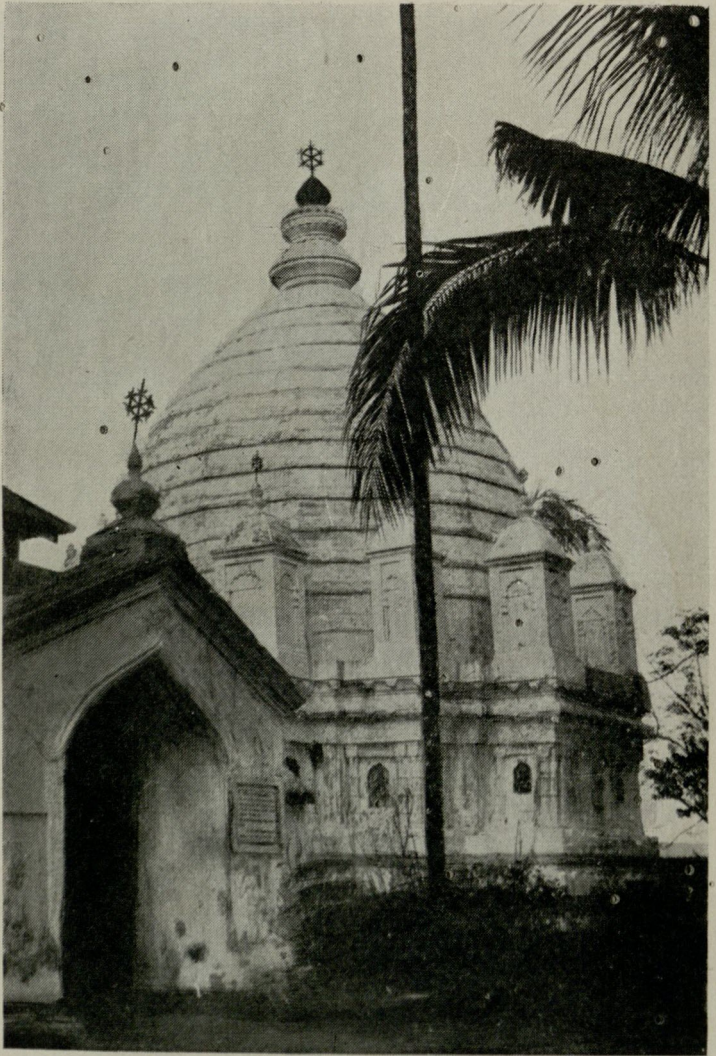
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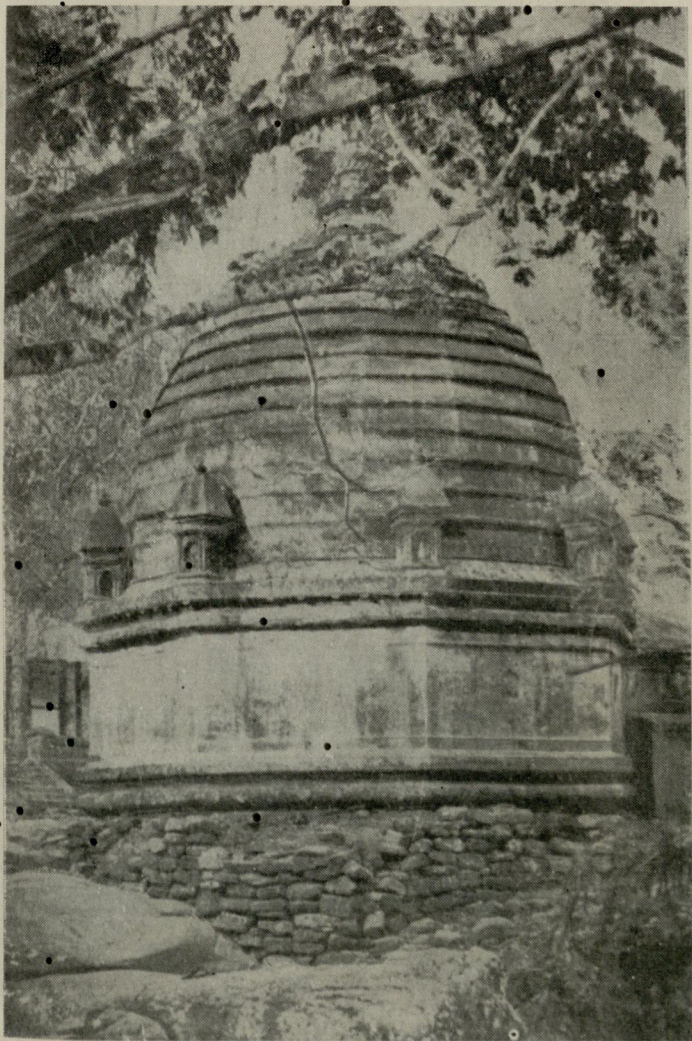
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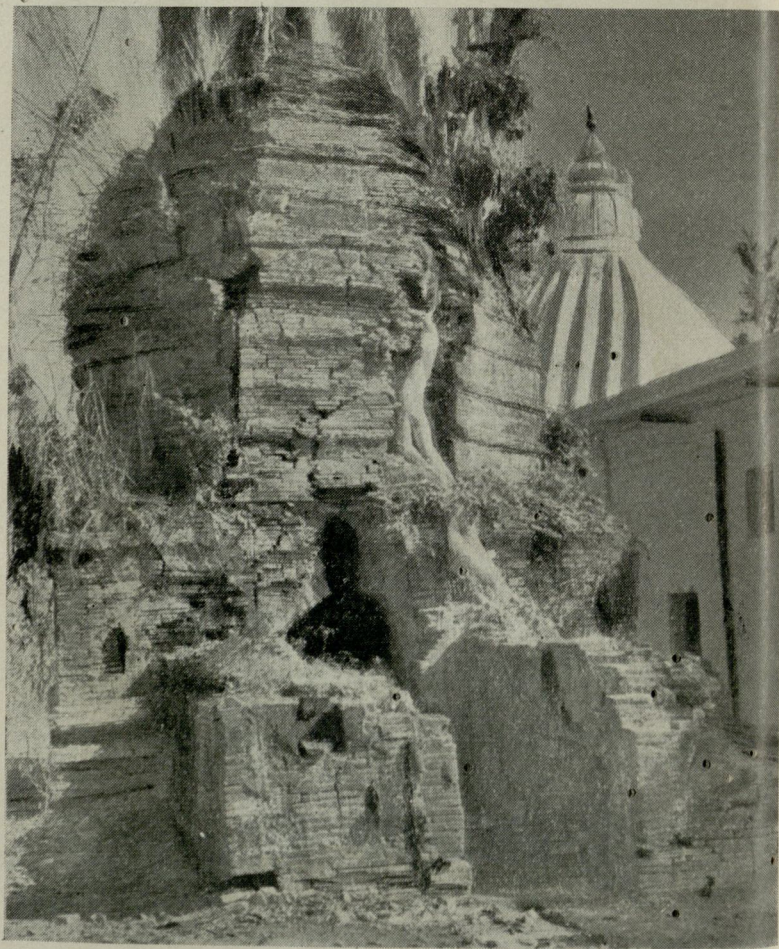
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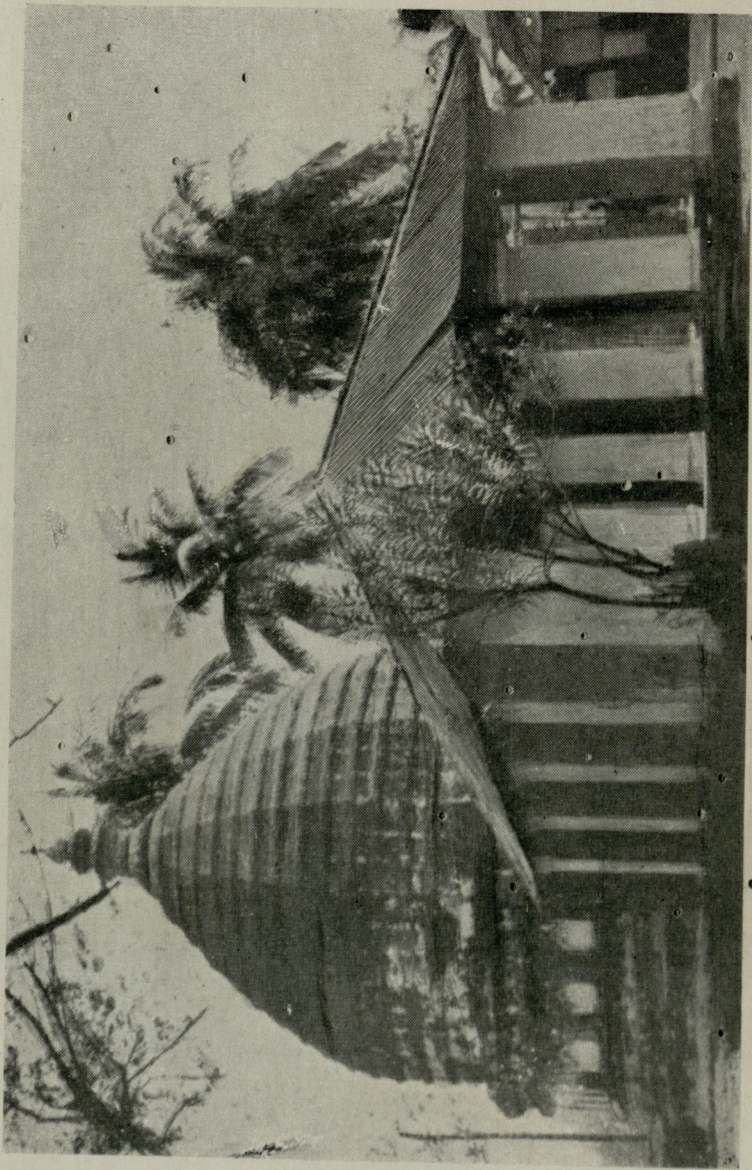
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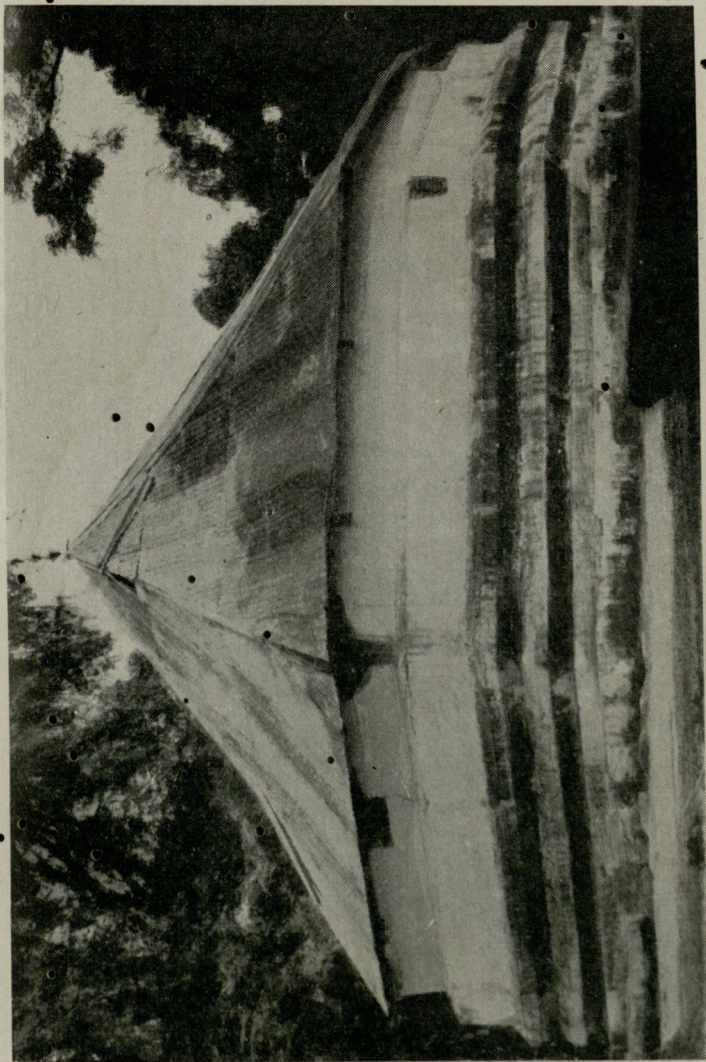
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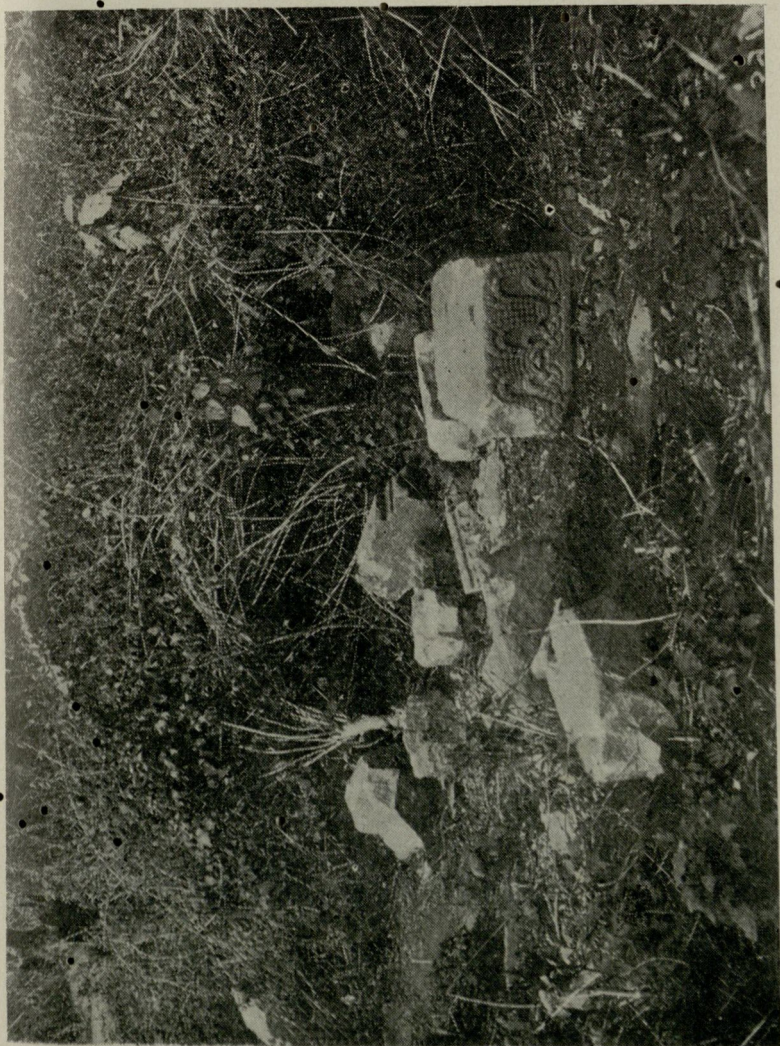
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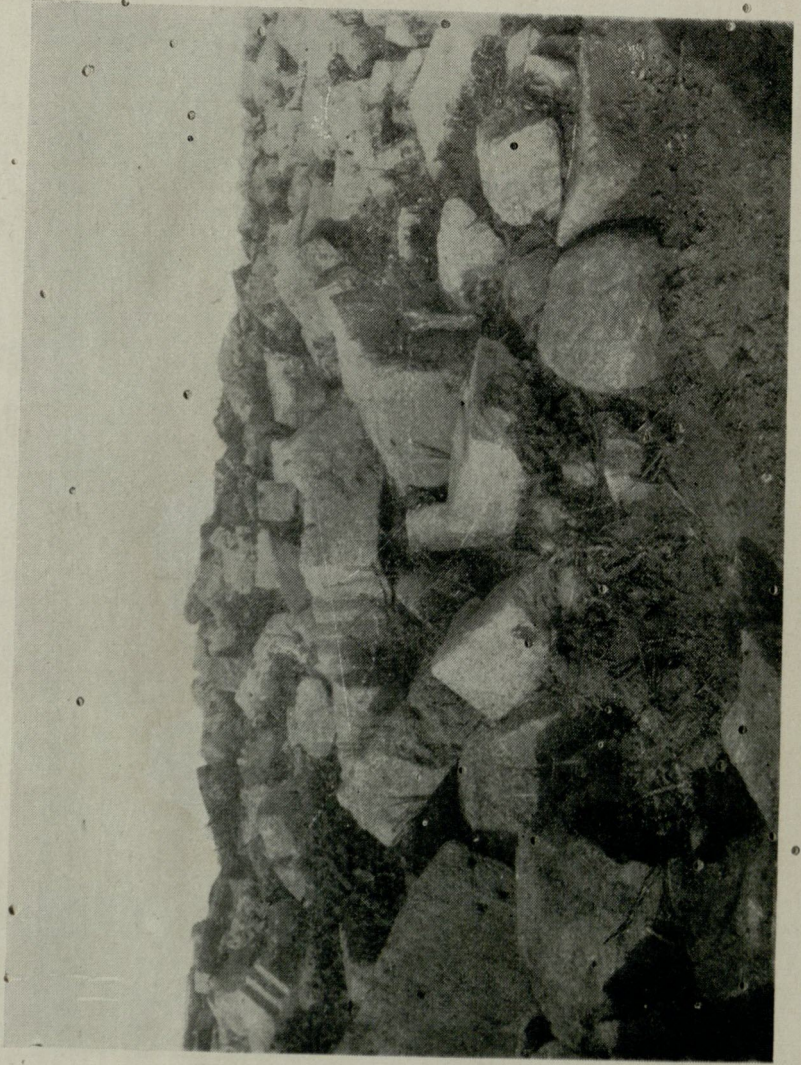
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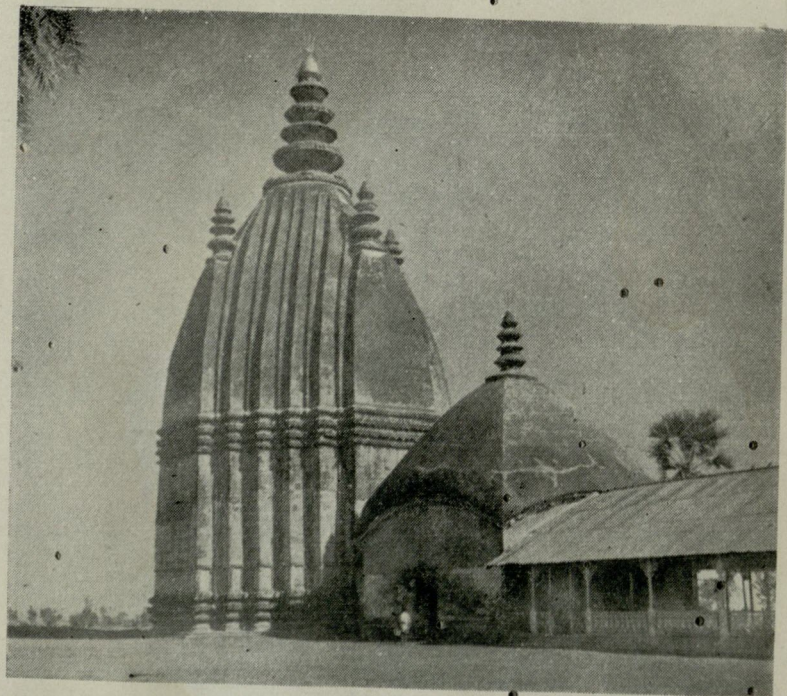
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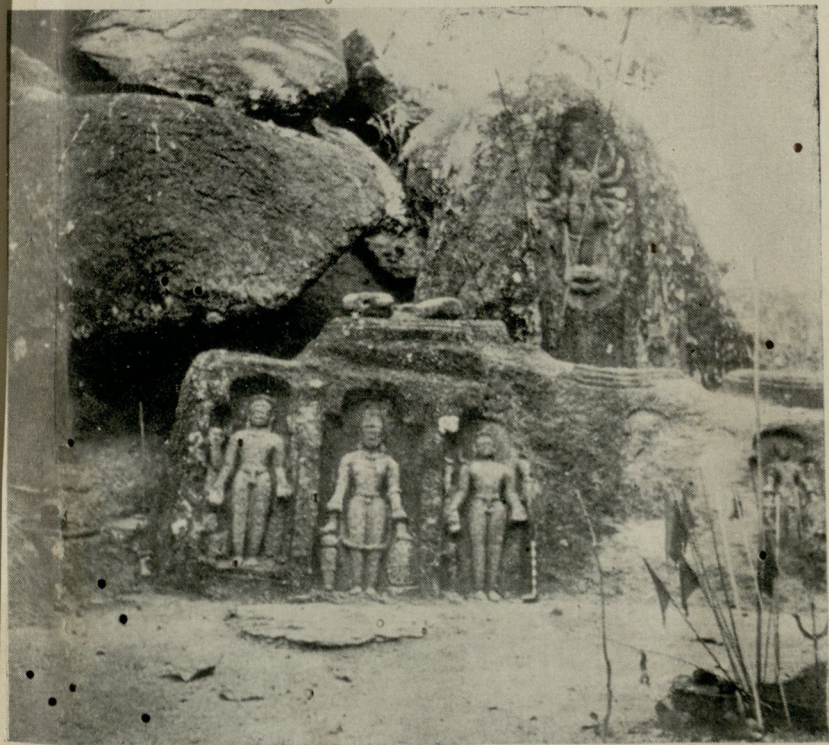
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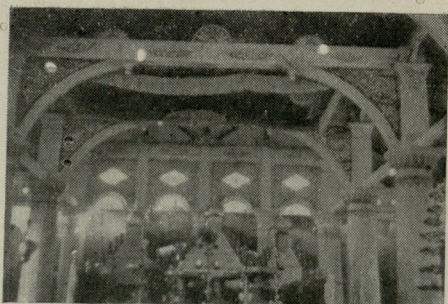
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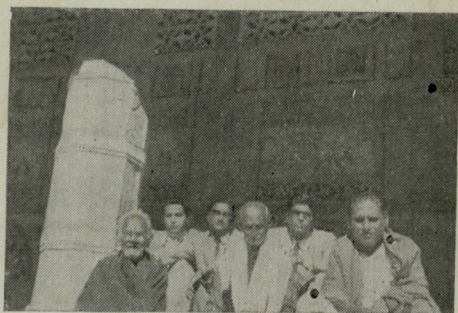
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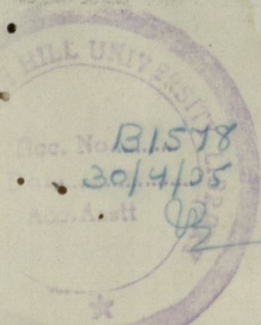
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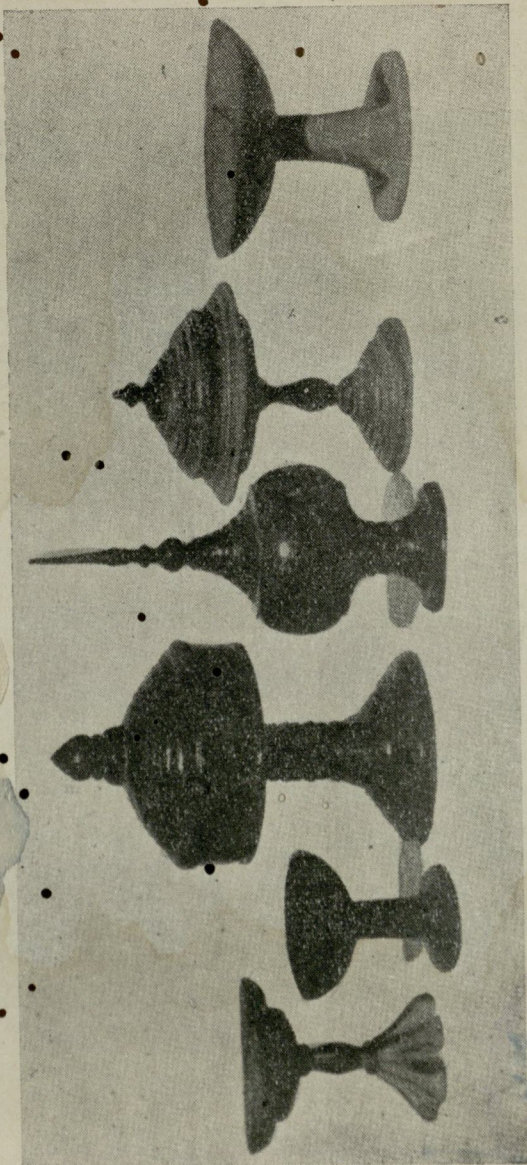


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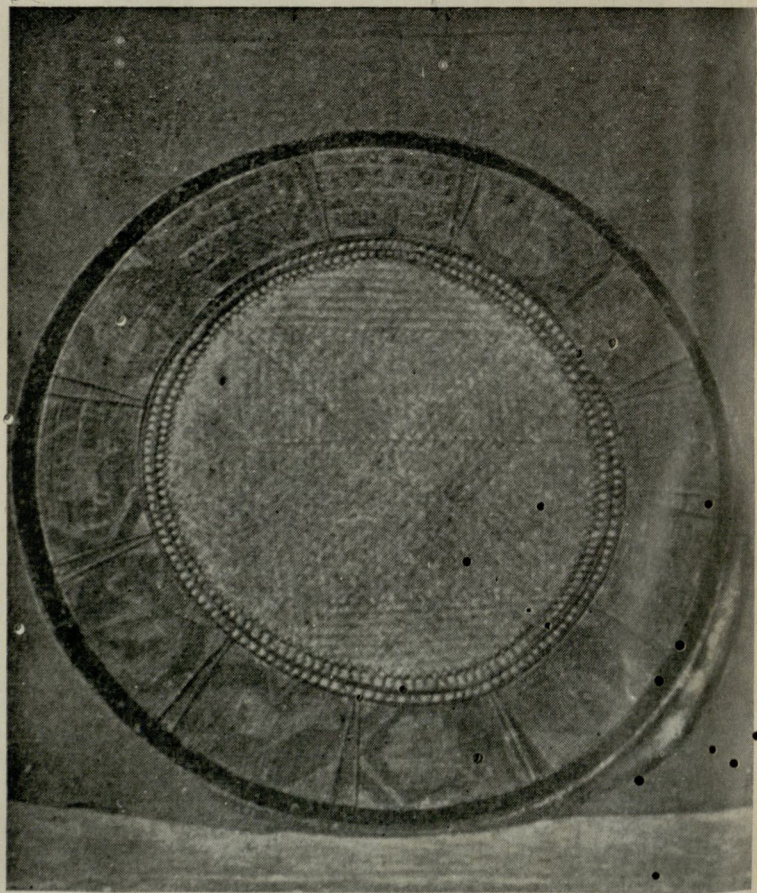
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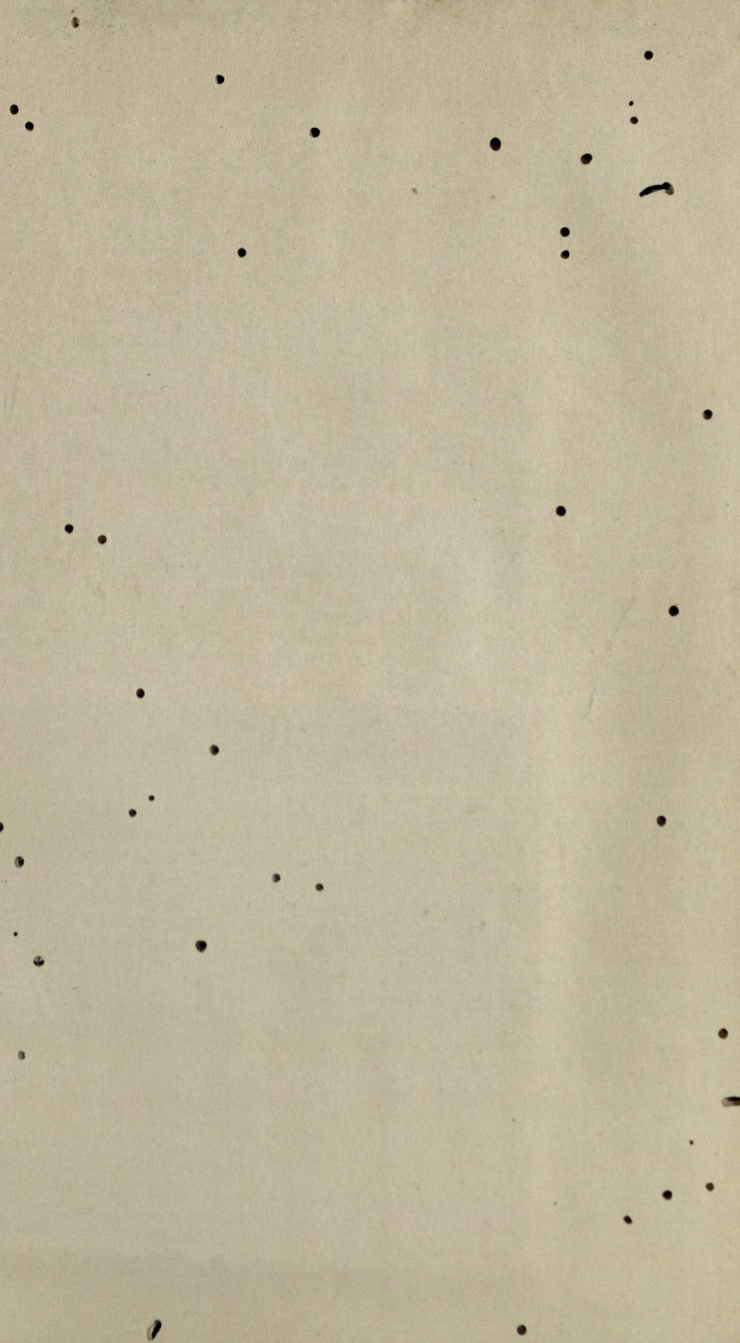


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Dr. B. K. Barua

Litterateur, historian, author and teacher, Dr. Birinchi Kumar Barua (1910-1964) received his education from the Calcutta and London Universities. With the establishment of Gauhati University in 1948, he joined the Assamese Department as Reader and later became Professor. He also served the University in various other capacities. He went to U.S.A. in 1963 where he lectured at the Indiana University as Visiting Professor of Indian Folklore. Among his English works may be mentioned—*A Cultural History of Assam, Vol I, Early Geography of Assam, Assamese Literature Sankaradeva—a Vaishnava Saint of Assam* etc. In Assamese, his mother tongue, Dr. Barua is one of the foremost writers of novels, short-stories and plays. He has also edited a number of old Assamese classics. His work *Assamar Lokasamskriti* received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1965.

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Dr. H. V. S. Murthy