

Chapter 4

Iconology of Some Selected Images/ Forms of the major pan- Hindu Goddesses : Laksmī, Sarasvatī, Durgā and Sapta Mātrkās/ Saptamātrkās represented in the Relief Sculptural Art of the Architecture of the Douls built by the Ahoms from late 17th to 18th century CE

Devīs/ Śaktis in the Late Medieval style of Stone relief sculptural art of the Architecture of the Āhom built Douls

Out of all the Douls built by the Āhoms within the time period from late 17th to 18th century CE, the ones described below contains all the extant stone sculpted representations or images of Devī-s or goddesses on their architecture. The forms of the major pan- Indian Purāṇic and Tāntric Devī-s or goddesses Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Durgā, Mātrkā-s and several other unidentified goddess forms that will be discussed in detail in this chapter as well as Chapter 5 are all featured in the imagery of relief sculptural art of the architecture of the Douls described below. A brief account of these Douls is given as under :

Māghnowā Doul at Lakhimpur district

The Māghnowā Doul is situated at Padmapur village in Dhalpur division in present day Lakhimpur district of eastern Assam. The present temple building has been described by the State Archaeological Department and the regional historians to be built by the commission of Āhom king Rudra Simha or Siu-Khrung- Phā in the 1705 CE (early part of the eighteenth century CE). Several features might also be added to the structure of the temple by the Āhom rulers succeeding Rudra Simha. The temple has an octagonal plan and has a brick built structure. It has two existing architectural parts- the Maṇḍapa and the Garbhagrha topped by a conical Śikhara (already discussed in the previous sections). The temple was severely affected during the invasion and tyrannical rule of the Burmese during the early nineteenth century CE . It is said that it faced severe desecration and destruction by the hands of the Burmese invaders (Neog, 2008a, 66). In present times, poor and unplanned conservation techniques and sheer negligence and ignorance of the surrounding people

have also contributed to the temple losing several of its structural details. Though many of the stone relief sculpted images/ icons of deities placed within niches on the outer and inner portions of the Bada of the Garbhagr̥ha of the Doul are missing and mutilated, a sufficient number of them is still left for study. The condition of these remaining images are also not satisfactory. They are showing signs of erosion, mutilation and maltreatment.

The images of the different deities, majorly emanations of different Devīs or goddesses are seen to be arranged on the outer part of the Bada in two parallel rows. The images are all housed inside separate quadrangular niches. The Doul was an important centre of Śākta or Śaiva-Śākta worship during the rule of the Āhoms. There are claims that the Māghnowā Doul was either a reconstructed version or was built over the ruins of an earlier temple dedicated to Śākta Tāntric worship possibly built by the Bhuyan chiefs who are said to have ruled the region. There is a miniature bronze sculpted image of a goddess identified as Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā dating back to circa 8th to 10th century CE preserved at the Assam State Museum in Guwahati. This image was found at the Māghnowā Doul site [**Appendix D1 : Figure (i)**]. The goddess in this image appears to be standing in a Āliḍha or Pratyāliḍha pose, and it seems that it portrays several stylistic features of Tibetan and Newari/ Nepalese sculptures, though it is not clear. This image said to be dating back to the 8th to 10th century CE and found at the site of Māghnowā Doul indicate or prove that a flourishing seat of Śākta worship or a Śākta shrine was possibly there even before the present structure of the Māghnowā Doul was erected by the Āhoms. Many people are of the opinion that the concerned image belonged to the Bhuyān chieftains. It is not clear whether this image was worshipped in the Doul as a Vighraha.

Neog (2008a, 66) says that the main deity worshipped inside the Doul was *Guhyakālī*, one of the several emanations of Kālī. *Guhyakālī* is one of the most esoteric and mysterious goddesses in the Tantric traditions. It is said that there was also another deity worshipped along with *Guhyakālī*. This deity is known as *Bar Kālīkā* (66). Presently, the material Bigrahas/ Vighrahas or icons of both *Guhyakālī* and *Bar Kālīkā* are not seen in the Garbhagr̥ha of the Doul. These two Bigrahas were removed from the Garbhagr̥ha of the Doul during the wake of Burmese invasion in the early 19th century CE and were kept hidden for the fear of desecration by the Burmese tyrants

(64). Later, the Vighraha of Bar Kālikā was recovered, established and re-consecrated at Kalabari, in modern day Sonitpur district. the shrine where it is enshrined is now known as the Bar Kālikā Thān (66).

There is no consecrated Vighraha or material anthropomorphic representation or icon of any deity in the Garbhagr̥ha of the DouL, now. Instead, several erect monoliths or pointed stone slabs, of different sizes are being installed, inside the Garbhagr̥ha for worship. The symbolism of these stone slabs and who installed these cannot be known and the Garbhagr̥ha shows signs of poor preservation and maintenance. The stone slabs or the monoliths revered inside the DouL reminds of the *Menhirs* prevalent in the ethnic cultures like that of Khāsi-s, Tiwā-s and Kārbi-s [**Appendix D1 : Figure (ii)**].

The Māghnowā DouL is associated with the folk belief and ritual system centred around the worship of Āi or Āisakal. The Picalā river which flows at a close distance from the DouL also has been seen as an important motif in the belief system centred around Āi and Āisakal. The tradition of worship of Āi or Āisakal (group of Āi-s or mother goddesses) has been a very important part of the Laukika or folk Śaktism of Assam. Its history is unclear but it must have evolved from the pre-historic modes of nature and mother worship. It cannot be exactly said from when the Māghnowā DouL and Picalā river became an important motif in the ritual practices, particularly in the ritual songs known as Āi Nām venerating Āi or Āi Sakal. There is a Tantra known as *Piccilā Tantra* which has been somewhat associated with the river Picala. It is not clear whether the name Piccilā refers to the river Picalā. As per the Yoginī Tantra [2. 39] composed in Assam circa 10th to 16th century CE, the river Picalā mentioned as Piccilā is said to have bestowed fruits of penance to Ṛsi or sage Gautama (Bhattacharya, D.N., 2012, 240).

Though the majority of stone sculpted images seen featured on the architecture of the DouL are of different aspects of Devī-s or goddesses, there are also images of Viṣṇu and Gaṇeśa. Most of the goddesses depicted in the sculptural imagery or iconographic programme of the sculptural art of the Māghnowā DouL can be said to of Purāṇic and Tāntric derivation. Apart from them, there are several images depicting unidentified goddess forms which have never appeared in the religious sculptural art of Assam before the Āhoms, nor forms similar to them are seen in the extant

sculptural art of other parts of the Indian subcontinent. These goddess forms are also not seen amongst the evidences of art of other religious traditions contemporary to the tradition of temple relief sculptural art patronized by the Āhoms. The detailed iconological study, and finding interpretations for all these goddess forms will be made in Chapter 5. Āi Nāms often narrate the sojourn or journey of the goddess/goddesses Āi. There is an image featured in the architecture of the DouL which portrays a four handed goddess riding a chariot drawn by four horses. A goddess bearing such combination of iconographic feature is rare and unique in the whole range of temple sculptural art of Assam as well as the Indian subcontinent. This image, may be thought of as reflecting the association of the DouL, or can be understood in relation with the imagery of journeying Āi found described in the Āi Nām. This is just an assumption. More insight will be laid into this image and interpretations will be found out for this image in Chapter 5.

Devī DouL at Gaurīsāgar/ Gaurīsāgar Devī DouL in Sivasagar district

The Gaurīsāgar Devī DouL [**Appendix D1 : Figure (iii), (iv), (v)**] was built in 1724 CE (early 18th century CE) by the orders of *Bar Rajā* Pramatheśvarī Devī or Phuleśvarī Kunvarī, the queen of king Śiva Simha or Siu-Tān-Phā. It is situated on the banks of the tank known as Gaurisagar. This DouL is seen to feature the largest number of images of Devī-s or goddesses in their independent or solitary aspects/forms. Along with the images of a diverse plethora of goddesses and other deities, there are intricately and meticulously rendered portrayals of floral compositions in the relief sculptural art of this DouL, which can be said as one of the most fine and subtle artworks in the context of the sculptural art of Assam during the late medieval period (17th to 18th century CE). Here too, are seen images featuring such forms of goddess Durgā which i) have never appeared in the religious sculptural art traditions of Assam before the Āhoms and other than the Āhoms, as well as in the sculptural art known from other parts of the Indian subcontinent, and ii) which are identified by archaeological and popular sources but require re-interpretation and further study and inquiry of their iconographic identities. The architectural sculptural imagery of the Gaurisagar Devī DouL also feature images of several unidentified goddesses or goddess forms. Some of these selected images will be discussed in this Chapter and Chapter 5. At present, the DouL is not functional. No ritual worship takes place inside the DouL.

Bar Pukhurī Śīva Doul at Sivasagar town, Sivasagar district

The Sivasagar Śīva Doul [**Appendix D1 : Figure (vi), (vii), (viii)**] was built by the commission of king Śīva Simha and his second queen Bar Rajā Ambikā Kunvarī/ Draupadī or Mādambikā Devī in circa 1734 CE (Neog, 2008a, 90). The Doul is known locally as Bar Pukhurī Siva Doul as it has been built on the banks of the tank known as Bar Pukhurī. The tank is actually named Sivasagar after which the town and the whole district got its name. The Sivasagar tank too, was built by the orders of king Śīva Simha and queen Ambikā Kunvarī. Ambikā Kunvarī or Draupadī was the younger sister of Śīva Simha's first queen Bar Rajā Phuleśvarī Kunvarī. He married her after the death of Phuleśvarī Kunvarī. The Bar Pukhurī Śīva Doul showcases the zenith of architectural grandeur and monumentality of Hindu temple architecture that was achieved by the Āhoms during the reign and by the encouragement of the above three rulers. Though most of the stone relief sculptural representations or images featured on its architecture have faced defacement, erosion and damage, still many are left to give an enough idea of the exquisiteness and intricacy of the relief sculptural art of the Late Medieval style of the Āhoms that once adorned the architecture of the Doul. There can be seen remnants of certain sculpted compositions, visualizations and adornments that are found to unique and peculiar only to the architecture of this Doul. They are not seen in the relief sculptural art of any other Doul built under the Āhom patronage, for example- There can be seen panels containing an intricately carved composition consisting of a stylized garden or a forest or a bower of flowering trees and creepers with a winged female figure aiming an arrow by a bow positioned in midst of it [**Appendix D1 : Figure (ix), (x)**]. The identity and symbolism of such composition or imagery is till now not clear. It seems that the winged figures aiming their target are hovering over the thicket of tree branches and creepers.

The Bar Pukhurī Śīva Doul is the only intact Doul built under the Āhom patronage during the late 17th to 18th century CE which features images of the sixteen-handed form of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā in the sculptural imagery of its architecture. These images will be discussed in the section 4.3 of this Chapter .

Bar Pukhurī Devī DouL at Sivasagar town

This DouL is just adjacent to the Bar Pukhurī Śiva DouL [**Appendix D1 : Figure (xi) and (xii)**] and was also built by the orders of king Śiva Simha and queen Bar Rajā Ambikā Kunvarī. The present condition of the images of Devī featured in the sculptural imagery of the architecture of this DouL are seen to be pathetic. Only some of them are recognizable to a certain extent. The images are either mutilated, defaced, eroded or have chipped off due to weathering. The unplanned, unscientific restoration methods have contributed more to the derogation of these images. Some of the few intact images here portray unidentified goddess forms, which will be discussed in Chapter 5 .

Jagaddhātrī DouL, Kalugaon, Sivasagar district

The Jagaddhātrī DouL, also known as Barpātra DouL is situated on the banks of the tank known as Lakṣmī Sāgar or Barpātra Pukhurī at Kalugaon in Sivasagar district [**Appendix D1 : Figure (xiii) and (xiv)**]. The building of this DouL was commissioned by Harināth Barpātra Gohāin, who happened to be the younger brother of queen Bar Rajā Phuleśvarī Kunvarī. The tank Lakṣmī Sāgar was also dug under his orders. Harināth was in the chief ministerial position in the court of king Śiva Simha. As suggested by its name , the DouL must have been dedicated to Jagaddhātrī, which is another name of Durgā or an aspect of Durgā. It is known as Barpātra DouL because Harināth, who commissioned its building was the Barpātra Gohāin or the chief minister at the court of Śiva Simha (Neog, 2008a, 93). The DouL features an exquisite image of ten- handed Mahiṣāsūramardinī Durgā and several other images of different goddesses or goddess forms. The DouL contains in its sculptural imagery the only available image of Sarasvatī playing a Vīnā in the whole known range of temple stone sculptural art of the late medieval style patronized by the Āhoms. Apart from this image, there are two more images featuring Sarasvatī featured in the sculptural imagery of the DouL. One of them depicts Sarasvatī seated on a lotus and playing on a bowed stringed instrument. These two images will be discussed in detail in the section 4.2 of this Chapter .

Though the Keśavarāi DouL do not contain any image of solitary or independent aspects of Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Durgā and the Mātrkāś in the iconographic programme of the relief sculptural art on its architecture, it has representations of two images,

one featuring a female figure carrying a baby on her lap and the another also featuring a solitary female figure wringing or tending to her long tresses of hair. These two images will also be considered in the upcoming study.

On the basis of their bodily forms, the images of Devīs/ Śaktis or goddesses featured in the relief sculptural art of the above Douls can be divided into two types- i) images depicting the anthropomorphic forms of goddesses, which form the major part, and, ii) images depicting the theriomorphic forms of goddesses. *Vārāhi* is the only theriomorphic goddess seen depicted in the imagery of the temple relief sculptural art of the late medieval style patronized by the Āhoms. *Vārāhi* is having the head of a boar and torso of a human female. Images depicting anthropomorphic forms of Devī are numerous in the sculptural art of the Douls. Majority of the goddesses having anthropomorphic and theriomorphic forms are shown dressed in the costumes described in Chapter 3. But, goddess *Cāmuṇḍā* shown in the sculptural imagery of the *Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul*, *Bar Pukhurī Śiva Doul* and *Jagaddhātrī Doul* is shown clad in a short lower garment which is just above her knees. It is not known whether this garment denotes the garment of animal hide or skin generally described to be worn by *Cāmuṇḍā* in most of the known *Purāṇas*, *Tantras* and *Śilpaśāstras* or is it a type of a traditional skirt like *Mekhelā*. *Cāmuṇḍā*, in the image from the *Māghnowā Doul* is shown clothed in the female costume described in the previous paragraphs. In all her depictions, she is shown wearing a *Muṇḍamālā* or a garland of heads which is characteristic to her iconography. She is shown as wearing the characteristic crown or *Mukuta* with pointed triangular ribs in the image from the *Bar Pukhurī Śiva Doul*. In the image from the *Jagaddhātrī Doul*, she is shown as having matted hair locks. *Cāmuṇḍā*, in her images from the *Māghnowā Doul* and *Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul* must be wearing a headgear made of severed human heads or skulls. The iconography of all these images will be discussed in detail in the section 4.4 of this Chapter.

The image of *Gaja Lakṣmī* aspect of *Lakṣmī* finds its depiction in the sculptural art of all the above Douls. The *Gaja Lakṣmī* images featured in these Douls are amongst the very few examples of sculpted *Gaja Lakṣmī* images found in Assam from circa 9th to 18th century CE. In the sculptural art of the Indian subcontinent, including the sculptural art of Assam before the prevalence of the late medieval style of the Āhoms, *Gaja Lakṣmī* images, mostly, are seen to feature two elephants, each

positioned on either side of the figure of Lakṣmī and lustrating her with waters from pitchers held high in their trunks. But, neither of the intact images of Gaja Lakṣmī in the late medieval sculptural imagery of the Āhom built Douls are seen to feature two elephants offering bath to Lakṣmī. Instead, all of these images feature four elephants offering lustration to Lakṣmī. Images of Gaja Lakṣmī where Lakṣmī is shown bathed by four elephants is very rarely seen in the extant sculptural art of the Indian subcontinent, but, images of such a type is profusely seen to be portrayed in the miniature painting traditions, mainly the Rājasthānī and Central Indian traditions dating from the 17th to 19th century CE. The Gaja Lakṣmī images portrayed in the sculptural imagery of the concerned Douls can be counted amongst the very rare and few examples of such a type in the context of pan-Indian temple sculptural art. The Tāntric texts like Śāradatilaka describe several *Svarūpas* or forms of Gaja Lakṣmī. In each of the forms, Lakṣmī is described to be lustrated by four elephants. It is not clear why the form of Gaja Lakṣmī where Lakṣmī is bathed by four elephants finds so less depiction in the sculptural art of the Indian subcontinent, and why the form of Gaja Lakṣmī where Lakṣmī is bathed by two elephants is seen to be preferred comparatively more to be depicted in the sculptural art. The Gaja Lakṣmī images in the relief sculptural art of the above Douls and their interpretation will be made in the Section 4.1 of this chapter.

There is found to be only one intact image of Sarasvatī playing a Vīṇā in the whole range of the stone relief sculptural art of the late medieval style patronized by the Ahoms. This image is depicted in the architecture of the Jagaddhātṛī Doul. It has been already mentioned in the previous paragraphs. There is one more image of Sarasvatī featured in the architecture of the same Doul where she is shown playing a bowed stringed instrument of regional derivation in place of the Vīṇā. In the sculptural imagery of the Māghnowā Doul too, there is an image of Sarasvatī playing a bowed stringed instrument of the regional type, but not the Vīṇā. The substitution of Vīṇā by a bowed stringed instrument of folk and regional culture as an attribute of Sarasvatī is one of the several iconographic visualizations unique to the late medieval style of stone relief sculptural art patronized by the Āhoms. The goddesses playing the bowed stringed instruments of folk and tribal derivation in the above images can either be identified with a pan-Indian conception of the same Sarasvatī as *Vāgiśvarī* or *Vāgvādinī*- the one presiding over speech, sound and music but in a

completely folk, tribal or sylvan context, or, as a goddesses belonging to some Laukika traditions of Śāktism or the Āhom religious tradition, who are associated with music or arts, and because of an affinity with Śarasvatī included as a part of the iconographic programme of the sculptural art of the above Douls. These images and finding out interpretations of their possible cultural associations will be done in the Section 4.2 of this chapter. The images of goddesses shown as playing bowed stringed instruments prevalent in regional musical traditions, will be discussed in this section.

The most popular and profusely depicted iconographic form of Durgā in the sculptural history of the Indian subcontinent is Mahiṣāsūramardīnī. Images of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī in both her ten- handed and sixteen- handed forms, as mentioned earlier are seen as important part of the iconographic programme of the Gaurīsāgar Devī DouL, Jagaddhātrī DouL and Bar Pukhurī Śīva DouL. The Bar Pukhurī Devī DouL has no sculpted depiction of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā on its architecture, but has a small stone sculpted image of her worshipped as the main Vighraha or the icon inside its Garbhagrha. The stylistic features of this image is not clearly understandable, and we are uncertain of whether it belongs to the time period of Āhom rule, or to the earlier periods. Though the practice of worshipping Durgā in her Mahiṣāsūramardīnī form became very much popular and got deeply absorbed into the culture of the Āhom royal court right from the period of reign of king Pratāp Simha onwards, very less intact representations of her in the stone sculptural art of the Douls are presently seen. But images of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā crafted in metal, mostly in brass and Aṣṭadhātu- the sacred 8 metal alloy under the patronage of Āhom court are abundantly found in different regions of Assam. Two of these examples are the Aṣṭadhātu Vighraha of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā enshrined at the Bilveśvara Devālaya at Belsar in Nalbari district of western Assam and the Aṣṭadhātu Vighraha of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī worshipped in the sanctum sanctorum of the Bhairavī temple or Māi Thān at Tezpur in central Assam [**Appendix D1 : Figure (xv)**]. Mahiṣāsūramardīnī images featured in the architecture of Gaurīsāgar Devī DouL, Jagaddhātrī DouL and Bar Pukhurī Śīva DouL are, presently not in good condition. But, a major portion of their iconographic features are still identifiable. Amongst all the extant images of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durga in the stone relief sculptural art of the above Douls, the one from the Jagaddhātrī DouL can be said as bearing a intricate,

sensuous naturalism and an evocativeness, though not completely, which is suggestive of the style of EISMA or the Pāla school. The bodily volumes and lines of the figure of Durgā as well as of Mahiṣāsura and the pouncing lion, here in this image, do not seem stiff and are well articulated. They seem infused with a lively grace of the classical order unlike in the Mahiṣāsuramardinī images portrayed in the sculptural imagery of rest of the Douls. The study of all the Mahiṣāsuramardinī images will be taken up in the third section or Section 4.3 of the present chapter.

Other than the Mahiṣāsuramardinī aspect of Durgā, there are several goddesses or goddess forms having either one or a combination of certain iconographic elements generally ascribed to or characterizing Durgā or Gaurī / Pārvatī in any Purāṇic, Āgamic, Tāntric and Śilpa text. These goddess forms are not seen appearing in the religious sculptural imagery in Assam preceding the period of the Āhoms. Images similar to them are also not seen in the other religious artistic traditions of the Indian subcontinent. As these goddesses bear iconographic characteristics of Durgā and her benign aspect Pārvatī, they can, undoubtedly be identified as several rare or lesser known manifestations or emanations of Durgā and Pārvatī. The absence of their representation in the religious sculptural art of the preceding periods may be because : either they were a part of the conception of a newly introduced ritual system of worship of Durgā which was not in prevalence before the period of the Āhoms, or, they were, for the first time, conceived during the Āhom period, in the context of the cultural setting under the Āhom rule. They might be evolved in the context of the unique and a new system of iconographic knowledge in the tradition of the temple stone relief sculptural patronized and encouraged by the Āhom royal court. The detailed study and finding out proper and justifiable interpretations for the identity of these rare iconographic forms of Durgā will be done in the Section 4.3 of the present chapter .

Another category of goddesses which are generally associated with Durgā in Purāṇas and Tantras, the Mātṛkās or Saptamātṛkās, find their extensive representation in the sculptural imagery of the above Douls. The manner of representation of one of the Mātṛkās- Cāmuṇḍā has already been discussed in the previous paragraphs. The cult of the Mātṛkās has been a pan- Indian tradition. Several exquisite representations of the Mātṛkās have been found in the sculptural art of Assam from 8th to 12th century CE (the early medieval period), before the Āhom period. The images of the Mātṛkās

featured in the sculptural imagery of the above Douls, or in the stone relief sculptural art of the late medieval style patronized by the Āhoms, show certain iconographic characteristics that hint towards a conception of them very different from that in the images dating back to the early medieval periods. For example, images of two iconographic types of Cāmuṇḍā are mostly seen in the early medieval sculptural traditions of Assam- the first type of images depicts her as seated on her haunches or in a squatting pose like Pralambapada, two handed and having a fully emaciated skeletal body with a dreadful horrendous countenance. Such an iconographic form or emanation of Cāmuṇḍā may be known as *Dānturā* or *Jumekāmāh* (very rarely) [**Appendix D1 : Figure (xvi)**]. The second type of image depicts Cāmuṇḍā as having a fully emaciated skeletal body, with dreadful looks, sunken eyes and a mouth having fangs, seated on a corpse and endowed with more than two hands, either four or ten or even more. One of her front hands is usually shown as holding a *Kharpara* or a bowl made of a human skull containing flesh or blood near her mouth. The expression of her mouth as well as her face is crafted as such as if she is relishing or incessantly licking the flesh and blood contained in the *Kharpara*. Such a form of Cāmuṇḍā depicted in the second type of image is generally known as *Carcikā* [**Appendix D1 : Figure (xvii)**]. Images of Cāmuṇḍā in her aspect as *Dānturā* is not seen to be featured in the late medieval style sculptural imagery of the Douls built by the Āhoms.

The architecture of the above Douls also feature images of goddesses the iconography of whom conform with that of certain goddesses of Tāntric or Vajrayāna Buddhism. Since the 10th to 12th century CE, the Śākta tradition in Assam have been a blend of both Hindu and Buddhist Tāntric ritual and iconographic systems (Sarma, K.C., 1994, 114- 115). An exchange and intermingling of ideas, motifs and symbols occurred between the two systems, during the above time period, thus giving rise to complex imageries and ritual ideologies, mainly in the worship of *Devī/ Śakti*, *Śiva* and *Gaṇeśa*, and even *Viṣṇu*. No clear demarcating line can be drawn between the Hindu conceptions and the Buddhist conceptions in the Tāntric ritual practices that proliferated during the above time period. for example, deities like *Heruka*, *Ugratārā* and *Kāmākhyā* have in their iconographic and ritual conceptions, a sophisticated concoction of Tāntric Hindu and Buddhist conceptions that cannot be differentiated from each other, for e.g. the six- faced and twelve-armed form of goddess *Kāmākhyā*

is derived from the iconography of Tāntric Buddhist goddess *Vajradhātviśvarī Māricī* (Deka, 2004, 55). The iconographic features of a form of *Vajradhātviśvarī Māricī* from the Buddhist text *Sādhanamālā* have been discussed by Bhattacharya (1958, 214). A large number of representations of deities appeared in the sculptural art of Assam during 10th to 12th century CE, which reflect the context of a flourishing Tāntric tradition characterized by a confluence and undifferentiated combination of Hindu and Buddhist Tantras. The *Kālikā Purāṇa* was also composed during the above time period and in such a cultural setting. It also contains descriptions of several deities which were actually sourced from the Tāntric Buddhist systems. The images of goddesses featured in the sculptural art of the above Douls who have iconographic resemblance with certain goddesses of the Tāntric or Vajrayāna Buddhist pantheon hint towards a possibility that Śaktism impregnated with the practices, systems and ideas of Vajrayāna or Tāntric Buddhism had not lost its prominence during the Āhom period, they were in practice or were patronized by the Āhom royalty.

Section 4.1

Images or Representations of Lakṣmī

The first type of images or representations of goddess Lakṣmī that is seen depicted in the stone relief sculptural art of the architecture of the Douls portray her as seated on a lotus, either two or four-handed. She is shown bathed by waters pouring from pitchers held in the trunks of four (two elephants positioned on either sides of the figure of the goddess).

The above imagery or iconographic form which show goddess Lakṣmī seated (or standing) on a lotus or any throne, having either two or four hands, and bathed or lustrated by four elephants are generally classified as *Gaja Lakṣmī* or *Abhisheka Lakṣmī*. An idea about *Gaja Lakṣmī* has already been given in the preceding paragraphs. *Gaja Lakṣmī* is described as one of *Aṣṭa Lakṣmī* or eight forms or *Svarupa-s* of Lakṣmī (Sastri, H.K., 1916, 187). Not only in the architecture of the concerned five Douls built by the Āhoms, sculpted and painted representations of Lakṣmī as *Gaja Lakṣmī* have been a part of the religious artistic tradition and visual culture of almost every civilization that have flourished in the Indian subcontinent since the Maurya and the Sunga periods (circa 2nd century BCE to 1st and 2nd century CE). The earliest extant sculptural representations of *Gaja Lakṣmī*

are from the Buddhist architectural structures, particularly the Stupas at Sanchi and Bharhut (dating back to the 2nd century BCE to 2nd century CE). The various forms of Gaja Lakṣmī have been understood and revered as symbols of wealth, growth, prosperity, grandeur and also fertility and hence seen established as auspicious doorway motifs in the iconographic programme of almost all the major temples and shrines of not only Hinduism, but also Buddhism and Jainism.

Descriptions of varieties of forms of Gaja Lakṣmī are found in the Purāṇas, Upa-Purāṇas, Āgamas/ Tantras and Śilpaśāstras . Each of these forms are seen to be known by different names like Srī, Kamalā, Sūbha Lakṣmī, Sāmānya Lakṣmī (Donaldson, 2001, 60-61) etc. The elephant motif remains common to all these forms, provided the number of elephants varies, sometimes two or sometimes four. These forms differ in the number of hands of Lakṣmī, the type of attributes or objects she holds in her hands, and alignment of the attributes and her body colour. In the iconographic scheme seen in the architectural sculpture of most of Hindu temples, images of different forms of Gaja Lakṣmī, mainly those which portray Lakṣmī as two handed (or sometimes four handed) are posed as Lalāta Bimba-s [**Appendix D1 : Figure (xviii) and (xix)**], as a symbol that brings good luck, fame, productivity and positivity. In the iconographic scheme of the relief sculpture of the already mentioned five Douls built by the Āhoms that have been taken up in this study , no images of Gaja Lakṣmī are seen posed or established as Lalāta Bimba-s.

Some of the most common iconographic forms of Gaja Lakṣmī seen in the sculpted and painted imagery in the temples and shrines across the Indian subcontinent are of the following types : a) featuring Lakṣmī as seated, two handed and one of her hands holding a lotus , a pair of elephants (one on each side of the figure of the goddess) bathing her with nectarine waters pouring from pots held high up by their trunks , b) featuring Lakṣmī as seated and as two- handed and both her hands hold lotuses. A pair of elephants, flanking her, offers her bath, and c) featuring Lakṣmī as four- handed, her upper hands holding lotuses by their long stems , while both her lower hands are in *Abhaya* pose (pose of assurance) and *Varada* pose (pose of bestowing boons and merits). Apart from the above commonly depicted forms, there are other forms of four- handed Gaja Lakṣmī featuring in the temple sculptural art of the Indian subcontinent where the figure of Lakṣmī holds lotuses in both her upper hands, and one of her lower hands holds either a *Amṛtaghaṭa* (pot of nectar)

or a fruit like a *Bilva* (wood apple) or *Mātulunga/ Bijapuraka* (citron) or a *Sankha* (conch shell). In many forms of Gaja Lakṣmī in the sculptural imagery of temples, particularly in Odisha, the two elephants offering bath are shown standing on the lotuses held by the goddess in her two hands (in case of the two- handed forms) or two upper hands (in case of the four-handed forms). All the above types of forms of Gaja Lakṣmī have their sources in the different Purāṇas, Tantras, Āgamas, iconographic and image making texts like Śilparatna, Śilpaprakāśa, Viṣṇudharmottara, *Rupa Maṇḍana* etc. There are found certain lesser known forms/ images or visualizations of Gaja Lakṣmī that are found as unique to a specific artistic tradition, sometimes to a specific temple architecture, sometimes to a specific time period and sometimes to the religious culture of a specific dynasty or royal family. Srivastava (2014, 35- 43) discusses of a very unique marble sculpted image of Gaja Lakṣmī from Bundī in Rajasthan where the figure of Lakṣmī is portrayed in the form of a *Sadyasnātanāyikā* and accompanied by motifs of Śrī Cakra/ Śrī Yantra and bathed by eight elephants (**Appendix D1 : Figure (xx)**]. This image is only one of its kind and no similar images are known to be found elsewhere.

The Gaja Lakṣmī forms which feature Lakṣmī as four-handed and accompanied by four elephants offering bath to her are sometimes known as *Kamalā* , *Kamalekāminī* or *Kamalātmikā* . *Kamalā* is Gaja Lakṣmī or Lakṣmī as one of the ten Tāntric Mahāvīdyās or Daśamahāvīdyās. According to some views, in her *Kamalā* aspect, she becomes associated more with Śiva (Kinsley, 1998, 229-230) rather than being an ideal consort of Viṣṇu, and hence known sometimes as *Kamalāmbikā* (as *Ambikā* is another name for Durgā/ Caṇḍī/ Pārvatī, the consort of Śiva). Śiva as *Kamaleśvara* has been described as her Bhairava or Puruṣa¹ in several Tāntric systems, may be in some tradition of the Śaiva Bhairava Tantra. Another view or conceptualization is that Lakṣmī in the form of *Kamalā* has Viṣṇu as her Bhairava. In the iconographic programme of the sculptural art adorning the outer walls of the Garbhagrha-s of the Douls built by the Āhoms, images of Gaja Lakṣmī featuring the figure of Lakṣmī as four handed, and sometimes two handed, and bathed by four elephants are found to be portrayed . These images will be discussed in the upcoming paragraphs.

Iconographic forms of Gaja Lakṣmī described in some of the Mahā Purāṇas-

Bhāgavata Purāṇa

The episode of *Samudra Manthana* (or the Churning of the Cosmic Ocean jointly by the *Devas* and *Asuras*) elaborated in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa [VIII. 8. 8-14] mentions that when goddess Lakṣmī came out of the cosmic ocean in the act of churning it, she was offered prostrations, ablutions, anointments and gifts by all the beings of the creation. She was bathed by the sacred waters by the *Dik Gaja*-s or elephants of the four quarters amidst chanting of Vedic hymns by the great seers. Her brilliant form is described to be two handed, seated on a throne (offered by Indra) and one of the hands holding a lotus (Shastri, Tagare , 1999, 1038- 1039) .

Viṣṇu Purāṇa

The Viṣṇu Purāṇa [I. IX] also describes goddess Lakṣmī or Śrī arising out of the cosmic ocean as seated on a blown lotus and also holding a lotus in one of her two hands. She is said to be delighted by the chanting of the *Śrī Sūkta* hymn by the mighty saints and *Gandharvas* headed by *Viśvavasu*. Gangā and all other great rivers are described to come with water for bathing her. An elephant from each of the cardinal points or directions is said to be taking water out of the golden vessels and bathing the goddess with that water (Dutt, 1896, 44-45) .

Matsya Purāṇa

The Matsya Purāṇa [CCLXI. 40-47] prescribes that the image of Lakṣmī should be made as having two hands and having a very youthful appearance. She should be made seated on a lotus seat surrounded by buzzing black bees and bathed by a couple of elephants with vases. Her left hand should be holding a lotus and her right hand holding a *Śrī Phala* or Bilva fruit. The goddess has to be portrayed as accompanied as attended upon by female attendants, each of them holding a *Cāmara* or a fly whisk in their hands (Wilson, Singh, 1997, 1133) .

Iconographic forms of Gaja Lakṣmī described in Śilpa texts or Śilpaśāstras-

Apart from the Purāṇas, innumerable forms of Gaja Lakṣmī are also found described in the *Śilpaśāstras* like the *Viṣṇudharmottara*. In the image/ form of Gaja Lakṣmī described in the *Viṣṇudharmottara* [III. 82. 3-15], the goddess is four handed, holding

a lotus, a pot of nectar, a conch and a Bilva fruit. Two elephants are to be shown at her back, each pouring jars of water and lustrating her. She is to be shown on an auspicious throne on which a lotus with beautiful pericarps and eight petals is placed. The Viṣṇudharmottara [III. 82. 1- 2] also describes a two handed form of Lakṣmī which is to be portrayed when she is with her consort Hari/ Viṣṇu (Shah, 1990, 229-230) .

Iconographic forms of Gaja Lakṣmī described in Tāntric texts-

Bṛhat Tantrasāra

The 16th century CE Tantric digest *Bṛhat Tantrasāra* mentions several forms of Lakṣmī. Out of these, there are mention of only two images or forms where Lakṣmī is described to be four handed and bathed/ lustrated by four elephants (Chattopadhyay, 2010, 212- 218).

Śāradatilaka

Another Tāntric text *Śāradatilaka* dating earlier than the Bṛhat Tantrasāra, mentions of three forms of Śrī or Lakṣmī which can be categorized as Gaja Lakṣmī. Out of these, one form of Gaja Lakṣmī meditated upon as *Jagatsvāminī* or the empress of the creation describes her as being consecrated or lustrated by four elephants holding vessels of nectar in their trunks. She is said to hold a lotus in her upper right hand while her lower right hand holds a *Akṣamālā* or rosary. A manuscript/book is said to be held in her lower left hand. Her upper left hand again holds a lotus . Another two Gaja Lakṣmī forms are different from the previous one in respect of the attributes held in the lower hands of the goddess. In both these forms, the lower hands of the figure of Lakṣmī are described to be in the *Abhaya Mudrā* (gesture of protection and assurance) and *Varada Mudrā* (gesture of wish granting). The upper hands of the goddess in both these forms are holding lotuses (Bühnemann, 2016, 166-167), same as that in the Jagatsvāminī form.

Śrī Vidyārṇava Tantra

A Gaja Lakṣmī form similar to Jagatsvāminī of the Śāradātilaka (in respect of the attributes) is also found described in the *Śrī Vidyārṇava Tantra* (Sastri, S. S., 1944, 12). The Śrī Vidyārṇava Tantra belongs to a much later age than the Śāradātilaka

and according to Sastri (1944, 1), it is “a voluminous digest of several Tantras dealing with the Śrī Vidyā or the Śrī Kula form of Śākta Tāntric worship”.

Sufficient examples of sculpted and painted images of Gaja Lakṣmī where the form of the goddess Lakṣmī is portrayed (either two or four handed) holding rosary and manuscript as attributes are found in the art of the Indian subcontinent. One of such examples should also include the Gaja Lakṣmī image depicted in the sculptural imagery of the architecture of Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul which will be discussed in the upcoming paragraphs.

In the Gaja Lakṣmī image portrayed in the architecture of Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul, the figure of Lakṣmī is featured as four handed and one of her hands holds a rosary. Such a conception of Gaja Lakṣmī is till now not met with in the available religious sculptural art in stone found in Assam and dating back to the 8th to 12th century CE (early medieval periods). Almost all the available stone sculpted Gaja Lakṣmī images from the early medieval periods feature Lakṣmī as either two or four handed, seated on a lotus pedestal, one or two hands holding lotuses and bathed by two elephants. Many of such sculpted images in stone and metal are preserved now at the Assam State Museum in Guwahati. The Museum houses a miniature metal image of Gaja Lakṣmī image dating back to the 15th or 16th century CE . There is also a rock cut Gaja Lakṣmī image from Sivasagar dating back to the 8th or between 11th to 12th century CE [**Appendix D1 : Figure (xxi)**] housed in the same museum. The District Museum of the Sonitpur district at Tezpur has in its collection a miniature brass Gaja Lakṣmī image dating circa 10th- 12th century CE. It was found at the Helem Tea Estate in Sonitpur district of central Assam. The goddess in this image has four hands, but the attributes held by the hands cannot be clearly pointed out [**Appendix D1 : Figure (xxii)**].

In the known sculptural art produced under the patronage of other cultures contemporary to the Āhoms too, the iconographic conception of four handed Gaja Lakṣmī holding a rosary as one of her attributes is not seen. It can be said that only in the temple sculptural art of the late medieval style patronized by the Āhoms, such an iconographic conception of Gaja Lakṣmī has featured.

4.1 (a) The image of four- handed Gaja Lakṣmī holding a rosary from the Gaurīsāgar Devī DouI

The Gaja Lakṣmī image from the Gaurīsāgar Devī DouI illustrated in Fig 4.1 (i) shows the figure of Lakṣmī as four handed and seated cross legged in *Padmāsana* pose on a full blown lotus. The four elephants are shown bathing her with the nectar or nectarine waters flowing out from pots held high up and upside down by their trunks. Two of the four hands along with their attributes are damaged. Only her two left hands are seen to be intact. Her upper left hand is seen to hold the rosary and the lower one may be holding an uncertain object or posed in some gesture without any object.



Figure 4.1 (i) : A line drawing of the image of four- handed Gaja Lakṣmī holding a rosary from the Gaurīsāgar Devī DouI [Refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 4.1i (p) in Appendix 4A]

The absence and uncertainty of the three attributes causes a hindrance in deciphering which iconographic form or *Svarūpa* of Gaja Lakṣmī is being represented in the image in Fig 4.1 (i). Due to the presence of the rosary in one of her hands, the form in the image can be identified as featuring either of the forms of Gaja Lakṣmī described in the *Śāradātilaka* and *Śri Vidyārṇava Tantra* mentioned in the previous paragraphs. But, it may be not be correct. It is because in the forms described in both the above texts, the rosary is held by the goddess in her lower right hand, whereas in the image from the Gaurīsāgar Devī DouI illustrated in 4.1 (i), the rosary is shown as held by the upper left hand of Lakṣmī. Singh (1982, 47- 50) mentions

of three sculpted images of Gaja Lakṣmī featuring Lakṣmī as having four hands and may be dating back to circa 10th- 13th century CE. Two of these images are from Khajuraho and the third one is from eastern India and preserved in the collection of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, Kolkata. In the forms portrayed in all these three images, goddess Lakṣmī is shown as four-handed and holding rosary as one of the attributes. The goddess is shown to be bathed by two elephants in the forms featured in each of the three images. Interestingly, a lion is shown as couched below the seat of Lakṣmī in one of the Gaja Lakṣmī images from Khajuraho probably hinting towards a conception where she is understood as inseparable from Ambikā / Durgā / Caṇḍikā / Pārvatī, as *Pārvatī-Lakṣmī* (Bhattacharya, D.C., 1980, 35). The goddess in the image from the collection of Bangiya Sahitya Parishat is said to be holding other than the rosary, a lotus, an arrow and a manuscript. She is shown to be seated on a lotus (Singh, 1982, 49). The presence of the manuscript, lotus and the rosary as attributes of the goddess in the image somewhat allows us to draw a parallel between it and the three Gaja Lakṣmī forms described in the Śāradātilaka and Śrī Vidyārṇava Tantra, mentioned in the earlier paragraph. But, the presence of the arrow in one of her hands refutes this assumption.

The form of the Gaja Lakṣmī in the image from Gaurīsāgar Devī Douḷ illustrated in Figure 4.1 (i) can be thought of as having some affinity with either of the forms featured in the above three sculpted images. This resemblance has been assumed only because of the rosary which is common to all these forms. Except the rosary, no other attribute of the goddess in the image from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Douḷ in Fig 4.1 (i) is discernible and identifiable. As mentioned earlier, two right hands of the figure of the goddess in the image are completely obliterated making it difficult to identify the attributes that were placed in them. The lower left hand seem to be holding some kind of a solid oval shaped object, or it may be bare. If the presence of some object is assumed, it may either be a fruit, a conch, manuscript or some vessel. Gaja Lakṣmī forms featuring four handed figures of goddess Lakṣmī holding a combination of conch and wood apple or Bilva fruit in their hands are described in Viṣṇudharmottara and Śilparatna (Rao, 1997, 374). The Matsya Purāṇa and the *Devī Purāṇa* [50. I. 115- 117] also describe forms of Gaja Lakṣmī where Lakṣmī holds a Bilva fruit in one of her hands. The icon worshipped at the Mahālakṣmī temple at Kolhapur in Maharashtra features goddess Lakṣmī or Mahālakṣmī [Note- this image of

Lakṣmī is not of the Gaja Lakṣmī type] as four handed and holding a *Khetaka* (shield) and a *Gadā* (mace) in her upper hands, and, a *Pātra* (vessel) and a *Matulunga/ Bijapuraka* or a Citron fruit in her lower hands [**Appendix D1 : Figure (xxiii)**] . This form of hers is described in the verses 4-6 of the *Prādhānika Rahasyam* of the *Devī Māhātmyam/ Durgā Saptasatī/ Śrī Śrī Caṇḍī* of the *Markaṇḍeya Purāṇa* (Bhattacharya, D.P., 2016, 209). Now if, for a while, the lower left hand of Lakṣmī in the Gaja Lakṣmī image from the *Gaurīsāgar Devī Dou*l in Fig 4.1 (i) is assumed to have held a Bijapura or a Citron , then her form will roughly come to resemble a form of Lakṣmī as a *Māṭṛkā* described in the *Śrī Vidyārṇava Tantra* . Here, the goddess is described holding a combination of attributes like a rosary, a citron fruit, a skull/ skull bowl and a lotus (Sastri, S.S., 1944, 37). But, this particular form cannot be categorized as Gaja Lakṣmī as there are no elephants offering bath to her .

A section of Śākta religious practitioners say that in the tradition of eastern India, including Assam, a particular invocation or Dhyāna which describes/ visualizes Lakṣmī as four handed, and holding a lotus, a *Ankuśa* (goad), a *Pāśa* (noose) and an *Akṣamālā* or rosary, and seated on a lotus² is the most prevalent and is used till date to invoke the goddess in most of the *Anuṣṭhānas* or ritual ceremonies centred around her worship, particularly during her Pūjā held annually on an autumnal full moon night known as *Kojāgari Pūrṇimā*³. The above form is also sometimes said as a variation of *Vira Lakṣmī* (Sastri, H.K., 1916, 189) who is also one of the *Aṣṭa* or eight Lakṣmīs. In the Gaja Lakṣmī image portrayed in the *Gaurīsāgar Devī Dou*l illustrated in Fig 4.1 (i), the attributes held by Lakṣmī in her two right hands are not clear and are damaged. Her lower right hand might also had held something which is damaged or missing. If the damaged and missing attributes in these hands are assumed to be a lotus, a *Ankuśa* and a *Pāśa*, then the form of Lakṣmī, featured in the image will be same as that described by the above mentioned invocation. It is not known since when the above invocation or Dhyāna have been prevalent in the ritual worship of Lakṣmī in Assam, but it is said to be taken from the *Mayukha Tantra* and it is used to invoke goddess Lakṣmī when she is to be worshipped following the *Smārṭa Raghunandana* code or model of worship⁴. The *Smārṭa* system of *Raghunandana*, as discussed earlier, is said to have been introduced into the religious culture of Assam by *Kṛṣṇarām Bhattāchārya* or *Parbatīā Gosāin* under the

patronage and encouragement of the Āhom rulers, particularly queen Phuleśvarī Kunvarī, the patron of the Gaurīsāgar Devī DouL during the 18th century CE. Moreover, Kṛṣṇarām Bhattāchārya is said to have codified and modelled the ritual worship in temples during the rule of the above rulers (Gogoi, L., 1994, 248). Under his influence and instructions, the Āhom royalty, particularly Phuleśvarī Kunvarī / Pramathesvarī Devī might have strictly allowed or ordered that the worship of deities and ceremonial ritual worship in the Āhom kingdom (or Assam) should be carried out following the Raghunandana Smārta code and several other ritual codes introduced by him (Tamuli, 2019, 135). If this was so, then they might have also wanted that the (majority of) sculpted images of the deities to be depicted on the walls of their commissioned Douls should be following or corresponding to the images or forms described in the ritual texts accepted, recognized or referred by the Raghunandana Smārta system, for example- the Mayukha Tantra. If these contexts are considered, it will not be wrong in identifying the form of Lakṣmī intended to be portrayed by the artisans in the image from the Gaurīsāgar Devī DouL in Fig 4.1 (i) with the form of hers described in the invocation from the Mayukha Tantra.

But, the Dhyāna in Mayukha Tantra does not specify about the order of arrangement of the attributes (Pāśa, Ankuśa, Akṣamālā and the lotus) in the hands of Lakṣmī. There has been a general convention, informed by a Śākta practitioner in Guwahati, that while visualizing and making the form of Lakṣmī described in the Dhyāna in the Mayukha Tantra, the Akṣamālā should be placed in a lower hand, below the hand which hold the Pāśa. But in the image in Fig 4.1 (i), the Akṣamālā is seen to be held by the upper left hand which may mean that either the form of Lakṣmī in the image is surely a rendering of the form described in the Dhyāna from the Mayukha Tantra, but not following the above mentioned required general convention, or, the form of Lakṣmī has no relation with the form visualized in the Dhyāna from the Mayukha Tantra.

Further the Dhyāna in the Mayukha Tantra does not speak of elephants lustrating the figure of Lakṣmī. So, even if the form of Lakṣmī in the Gaja Lakṣmī image carved on the wall of the DouL and illustrated in 4.1 (i) is surely the form of Lakṣmī described in the Mayukha Tantra, then the four elephants can be thought of as an addition by the artisans who might be inspired from the continuing conventional concept of association of the elephant motif with Lakṣmī.

The forms of Gaja Lakṣmī where Lakṣmī is described or portrayed holding attributes like rosary and manuscript/book- the characteristic attributes of Sarasvatī indicates towards a syncretism between the symbolisms or imageries of the two goddesses (Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī). Several images or iconographic forms which are a composite or amalgamation of two or more different deities or sectarian principles/ iconographic concepts are met with in the different traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Some examples of such identified syncretic iconographic forms are *Harihara*, *Śiva-Lokeśvara*, *Mārtaṇḍa Bhairava*, *Hanubhairava*, *Vāsudeva-Kamalaja*, *Ardhanariśvara* to name a few. D.C. Bhattacharya has discussed in length about the above forms in his book *Iconology of Composite Images* (1980). There are many syncretic deity forms other than the above mentioned ones in the art of the Indian subcontinent which are yet not identified by art historians and archaeologists and are lesser known. Many of these forms might have evolved as a result of certain inter- sectarian/ inter- religious interactions, acculturation and socio- religious and political changes. It has been observed that a particular syncretic/ composite iconographic form and its reverence and worship is prevalent and popular in a particular region (geographical as well as cultural), for example- the worship and belief of *Hanubhairava*, a composite form of Hanumāna and Bhairava [**Appendix D1 : Figure (xxiv)**] and *Vāsudeva-Kamalaja* or *Ardhalakṣmīhari*, an androgynous form- composite of Viṣṇu/ Vāsudeva and Lakṣmī [**Appendix D1 : Figure (xxv)**], are more prevalent and popular in Nepal. But several *Vāsudeva Kamalaja* images, both sculpted and painted, and dating back to 8th, 9th and 10th century CE are also found in Kashmir, indicating a possible existence of the cult there too.

Also included in the list or category of syncretic iconography/ imagery are those deities whose forms are a composite of i) a Buddhist/Jaina and a Hindu deity, ii) a folk/ tribal deity and a Hindu/Buddhist/Jaina deity, and iii) a folk/ tribal deity and a deity shared by or revered in Hinduism, Buddhism as well as Jainism. Some of these deity forms are found described in a range of ritual and iconographic texts that are a part of some esoteric and very less known ritualistic traditions (mostly affiliated to the Tāntric order). Sometimes in the Purāṇas, Upa Purāṇas and known folk religious oral literature too, references (both direct and indirect to such syncretic deity forms are found. These texts, along with Āgamas and Tantras contain certain narratives, ideas and theories that can explain particular types of syncretic deity forms featured

in art. The finding of sculpted and painted images of syncretic deity forms independently or as a part of the iconographic programme of some Hindu, Buddhist or Jaina religious architecture hints us towards their possible presence and mention in the Śilpa texts.

One of the syncretic iconographic forms frequently represented in the sculptural art of Assam from the 6th to 8th century CE onwards is *Harihara* or the syncretic form of Viṣṇu and Śiva. The most exquisite sculpted stone icons or images of Harihara were unearthed from the Doiyāng- Dhanśiri valley region and a part of these are presently preserved at the Assam State Museum in Guwahati [**Appendix D1 : Figure (xxvi) and (xxvii)**]. All of them belong to the early medieval stylistic traditions of the valley, namely Dubarani, Deopānī and Deoparvat. Coming to the image of Gaja Lakṣmī from the Gaurīsāgar Devī DouL in Fig 4.1 (i), the rosary placed in the upper left hand of the goddess Lakṣmī goes on to hint towards a possible amalgamation of the iconography and symbolism of Sarasvatī with Gaja Lakṣmī. But, the amalgamation can also be between Gaja Lakṣmī and a goddess other than Sarasvatī, considering the artisans adhering to a folk and popular belief in the regional Hinduism of Assam that Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī cannot stay together or should not be placed or depicted together. The Kālikā Purāṇa composed around 10th to 12th century CE in the cultural context of Assam, describes a form of the goddess Kāmākhyā or Kameśvarī known as *Siddhakāmeśvarī*. She is said as the form of Kāmākhyā who is all pervading and is conceived by everyone. She is four handed, her lower hands are in Abhaya and Vara, and one of her upper hands holds a Akṣasutra or rosary, she is seated on a red lotus on the bosom of a Śava or Śiva as a corpse [**Appendix D1 : Figure (xxviii)**]. All the prime and renowned places are said to be assigned to her (Shastri, B., 1994, 73). The Kālikā Purāṇa [62. 145- 146] says that she grants immense wealth and merits to her votaries/ worshippers and is to be worshipped by everyone for attaining *Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Mokṣa* (Bhattacharya, D.N., 2008, 814-815). These attributes of her, viz. a bestower of wealth and satisfaction, somewhat associates her with Gaja Lakṣmī. It is noticed that in the Kālikā Purāṇa [62. 146], Śrī is used as an appellation for Siddhakāmeśvarī (Bhattacharya, D.N., 2008, 815). Śrī is another name of Lakṣmī and in most cases, the Gaja Lakṣmī form is only known and identified as Śrī. The appellation Śrī used for Siddhakāmeśvarī indicates that she may be inseparable from Lakṣmī and she can be identified with Lakṣmī as Gaja Lakṣmī. The

Kālikā Purāṇa does not mention of any form of Gaja Lakṣmī anywhere. The form of Siddhakāmeśvarī as described in the Kālikā Purāṇa is four handed, seated on a lotus on the body of a corpse or Preta. She holds a Akṣamala in one of her hands (Shastri, B., 1994, 73). The figure of Lakṣmī in the Gaja Laksmi image from the Gaurisagar Devi Doual in Fig 4.1 (i) also holds a rosary in one of her upper hands like that of Siddhakāmeśvarī, and there is also a context of an idea or concept where the identity of Gaja Lakṣmī merges or equates with that of Siddhakāmeśvarī. Considering these, it can be assumed that the iconographic form featured in the image illustrated in Fig 4.1 (i) may be of Siddhakāmeśvarī tried to be identified with, or merged with Gaja Lakṣmī or Śrī following the aforesaid interpretation in the Kālikā Purāṇa. But, as pointed out repeatedly, the image in Fig 4.1 (i) is obliterated to a great extent. If the iconographic form depicted through it is surely of Siddhakāmeśvarī endowed with the attributes of Gaja Lakṣmī / Śrī, then there must have been the presence of the motif of the corpse, the mount of Siddhakāmeśvarī underneath the lotus seat (on which the goddess is seated). But, no such motif is visible at present.

It is not always necessary that an image or form of Siddhakāmeśvarī should have the motif of the corpse or corpse as her mount along with the lotus. There are interpretations that Kameśvarī is one of the *Pañcamūrtis* or five forms of Kāmākhyā, and has further two forms or *Mūrtibhedas* : Siddhakāmeśvarī and *Sarvakāmeśvarī*. The Dhyāna of the Siddhakāmeśvarī form in the Kālikā Purāṇa has no mention of the corpse or Śava, neither it has the mention of lotus as her seat. But, the Sarvakāmeśvari form do have mention of the corpse as her mount (Das, 2011, 110-111). But though these are different forms, they both are known as Siddhakāmeśvarī. In other words, Siddhakāmeśvarī can be depicted both with or without the Śava or corpse as her mount. The image in Fig 4.1 (i), though having no depiction of the motif of corpse, can still be assumed as Siddhakāmeśvarī endowed with the attributes of Lakṣmī as Gaja Lakṣmī considering the appellation Śrī given to Siddhakāmeśvarī and a similarity in the nature (mainly the bestower of wealth) between Siddhakāmeśvarī and Lakṣmī said by the Kālikā Purāṇa. The right hands of the goddess in the image which are damaged seem to be not bare, there might have been objects held in both the hands. If the image is assumed to be a syncretic form of Siddhakāmeśvarī and Gaja Lakṣmī, then the right hands of the goddess might have

been made to held attributes typical to Gaja Lakṣmī, the lower right hand might also be holding or had held some typical attribute of Gaja Lakṣmī (as there are no descriptions of objects other than the Akṣamālā held by Siddhakāmeśvarī). But, there is no certainty in it. The missing and supposed attributes may not be characteristic of Gaja Lakṣmī. Thus, the image can be assumed as either having the attributes or iconographic features of another goddess along with that of Siddhakāmeśvarī and Gaja Lakṣmī, or, it may be a very different conception of Gaja Lakṣmī, not having any iconographic element of Siddhakāmeśvarī.

The form of Lakṣmī in the image illustrated in Fig 4.1 (i) can also be related to a Dhyāna or Dhyān where Lakṣmī is visualized as four-handed and seated on a lotus. She is said to be holding a Akṣamālā and a lotus in two of her hands. Her other two hands are positioned in the Abhaya and Varada poses. It has been found as a part of the Ananta Kandalī's *Lakṣmī Carit-* a eulogy of goddess Lakṣmī said to be composed in Assamese by the medieval Assamese poet and scholar Ananta Kandalī who might have lived during the 15th to 17th century CE (Choudhury, A.P., 4). The original Sanskrit source of this Dhyāna is not known. It is also not known whether such a Dhyāna of Lakṣmī was described there in the original text or was it included later on in the transcribed printed versions of the same text which are available now and which have been referred here. The form described in the Dhyāna somewhat seems to come close to a four handed form of Gaurī/ Pārvaṭī described by Sastri (1916, 190). But, Gaurī is said to hold a lily, instead of a lotus. It is not at all known since when the above conception or visualization of Lakṣmī has been in prevalence in the culture of Assam. Moreover, there is no mention of elephants illustrating Lakṣmī in the above Dhyana. Therefore, it cannot be surely said that the form of Lakṣmī featured in the sculpted image from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul illustrated in Fig 4.1 (i) relates to the form described in the Dhyāna or Dhyān found as a part of Ananta Kandali's *Lakṣmī Carit*.

If the object held in the upper left hand of Lakṣmī in the image illustrated in Fig 4.1 (i) is assumed as a garland, not as a rosary, then her form can also be related to that of a form of Śrī or Gaja Lakṣmī described in the *Nāradiya or Nārada Purāṇa* [84. 59-60]. In this form, Lakṣmī is said to hold a garland and a lotus in two of her four hands, and display the gestures of boon (*Varada*) and fearlessness (*Abhaya*) by her other two hands (Tagare, 1997, 1218).

The chapter in which the aforesaid form is mentioned constitutes the 3rd part of the Nārada Purāṇa which deals with Tantra and Tāntric worship of deities. The chapters of this part of the Purāṇa which deals with Tantra has been placed by Tagare (1950, 23) to the early part of the 11th century CE. He speculates that the contents in these chapters were written or have taken form in eastern India, which may include Assam too. It hints towards a possibility that the imageries or visualizations of the deities included in these chapters were prevalent in the culture of the eastern Indian regions including Assam which were important seats of Tāntric practice. Considering this, it can be interpreted or speculated that the image of Gaja Lakṣmī depicted on the architecture of the Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul [illustrated in Fig 4.1 (i)] as having some affinity or relation with the above mentioned form of Śrī or Gaja Lakṣmī and the practices and ideas associated with it as described in the 84th chapter of the 3rd part of the Nārada Purāṇa. The Nārada Purāṇa is also seen to be a very significantly cited and referential text in the neo- Vaiṣṇava knowledge system of Śankardeva.

It has been said that the image in 4.1 (i) can't be understood as portraying a syncretic form of Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī considering a prevalence of a local belief and practice that the two goddesses or principles should not be placed together. But there are evidences in pan- Indian sculptural art of images of such goddesses having a syncretism of Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī and Durgā in their forms. An example of such an image is from the Durgā- Kālī temple at Sarai Mira at Kannauj in Uttar Pradesh. The image is dated back to the 8th to 10th century CE. Such a syncretic iconographic form can be explained in the lines of texts like the Devī Māhātmyam. The Prādhānika Rahasyam of the Devī Māhātmyam says that Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī and Gaurī/ Durgā/ Caṇḍī are parts or emanations of the same supreme primordial existence *Triguṇa Parameśvari Mahālakṣmī* who in her *Saguṇa* (with attributes) form is described as having a complexion of molten gold, wearing Linga, Yoni and serpent on her head and holding a Matulunga, Gadā, Khetaka or shield and a Pānapātra (Vidyanidhi, 2012, 435). Further, the verse 25 of the Vaikṛtika Rahasyam section of same text says that the three Devīs- Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Durgā / Kālī are one and the same Śakti Maheśvarī.

Rather than identifying the iconographic form featured in the image in Fig 4.1 (i) as just Gaja Lakṣmī, it can also be interpreted as featuring a syncretism of Lakṣmī as Gaja Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī due to the presence of the rosary as an attribute. Such an

interpretation of the image is justifiable if, a possible following of the concept of inseparability of Lakṣmī, Durgā / Kālī and Sarasvatī, and they emanating from a single primordial goddess (in the Rahasyam sections of the Devī Māhātmyam) by the artisans who made the image is considered. Moreover, assuming the artisans portraying the iconographic attributes of Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī together in the image in 4.1 (i) by following the concepts in the Rahasyam sections of the Devī Māhātmyam may not be wrong because, the Devī Māhātmyam, known as Caṇḍī had become a popular and revered text in Assam, in the Āhom kingdom by the 17th to 18th century CE as evident from its different renderings by poet scholars of the Āhom court, for e.g. Rucinātha Kandalī, and also the inclusion and references of its narratives and symbolisms in the different folk ritual texts on worship of Durgā.

There is further a conception that Sarasvatī as Mātangī and Lakṣmī as Kamalā resides along with Kāmākhyā in her main Pītha, in the main *Yoni Śilā*. There is no separate Mātangī / Sarasvatī and Kamalā / Lakṣmī shrine in the Nīlācala hill. Both of them preside along with Kāmākhyā in the main or Mula Yoni Śilā or Yoni Pītha (Barpujari, 1949, 51). Kāmākhyā is also addressed as Durgā/ Kālī. It can be said that that the conception in the Prādhānika and Vaikṛtika Rahasyam sections of the Devī Māhātmyam of Lakṣmī, Durgā / Kālī and Sarasvatī as different emanations and names of a common Śakti or supreme feminine energy somewhat relates to the above conception of Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī as residing in or parts of the same primordial energy Kāmākhyā represented by the Yoni Śilā or the Yoni Pītha. In the image illustrated in Fig 4.1 (i), if the Kamalāsana or the lotus flower seat and the four elephants are assumed to be representing Lakṣmī as Kamalā, the rosary in the upper left hand of the goddess as representing Kāmākhyā, again, in the form of Siddhakāmeśvarī and the damaged or missing attributes (in her right hands of the goddess) are assumed or thought to be representing Sarasvatī as Mātangī, then an explanation can be given that the image could have depicted the concept of Lakṣmī as Kamalā and Sarasvatī as Mātangī residing ,enthroned along with Kāmākhyā or merged along with Kāmākhyā in the same Mula Yoni Śilā or Yoni Pītha in the heart of the Nīlācala/ Nīlakuṭa or the blue mountain. Further, if the damaged or missing attributes in the right hands of the goddess in the image are of Mātangī, then it must be the attributes of Mātangī in her aspect as *Modinī*. It can be said, from evidences, that Matangi has been possibly receiving worship in her Modinī form in Assam. One

of such evidences is the goddess *Jayantī* worshipped at the *Jayantī* temple in Rangia in the Kamrup district [**Appendix D1 : Figure (xxix)**] who has been worshipped through the Dhyāna Mantra of *Mātangī* as *Modinī*. The Dhyāna describing the form of the *Modinī* form of *Mātangī* is found in the *Dakṣinamūrti Samhitā*⁵. According to this Dhyāna, the goddess is of a greenish or bluish dark complexion, has four hands, holding a *Pāśa*, *Ankuśa*, *Khetaka* or shield and a *Khadga* or a sword.

Understanding or interpreting the image in Fig 4.1 (i), as a syncretic form of *Siddhakāmeśvarī*, *Lakṣmī* as *Kamalā* and *Sarasvatī* as *Mātangī* can be justifiable considering the understanding of *Kāmākhyā* as *Sarvamahāvidyāmayī* or *Sarvadevīmayī* which means that goddess *Kāmākhyā* has in her or is the form of all the goddesses and *Mahāvidyās* including *Kamalā Lakṣmī* and *Mātangī Sarasvatī*⁶. The consideration of the context of the final and synthesized form given to the worship of goddess *Kāmākhyā* at *Nīlācala* by *Kṛṣṇarām Bhattāchārya Nyāyavāgiśa* (Deka, 2004, 43), who was very much revered by queen *Phuleśvarī Kunvarī*, the patron of the *Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul* also makes the above interpretation somewhat reasonable.

4.1 (b) Image of four handed Gaja Lakṣmī from the Jagaddhātrī Doul at Kalugaon.

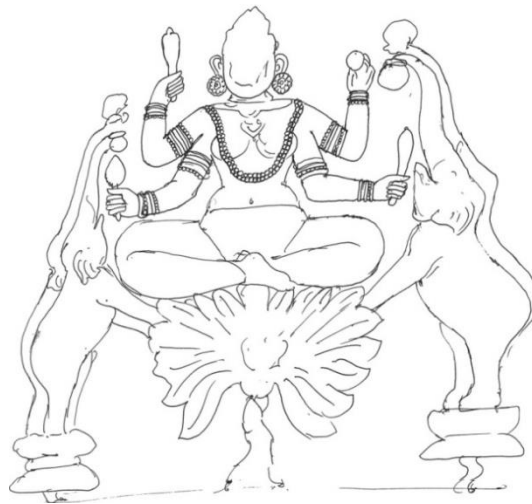


Fig 4.1 (ii) : A line drawing of the image of four handed Gaja Lakṣmī from the Jagaddhātrī Doul [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 4.1ii (p) in Appendix 4A]

In the image in Fig 4.1 (ii), the goddess is seen holding a lotus and other attributes. The elephants are positioned in such a way that their hind legs are on lotus pedestals

and the front legs are rested on the lotus on which Lakṣmī is seated. There are attributes held in all the four hands of the goddess. The facial features, and attributes held in the hands of the goddess except the lotus are uncertain and chipped off, thereby creating a problem in deciphering the image. The attribute held in the upper left hand is damaged and those held in the lower left hand and upper right hand are almost seen to be identical in their designs. Nothing can be known about the identities of these hand-held attributes. But Das (2011-12, 11) has identified them to be Sankha, Cakra, Gadā and Padma.

The object held in the upper right hand of Lakṣmī in the image illustrated in 4.1 (ii) somewhat seems like a Sankha and the object held in the lower left hand seems like a Gadā or a club. If the damaged attribute in the upper left hand is a Cakra, then her form will go to resemble the form of Lakṣmī described in the 20th verse of the 50th Chapter of the Agni Purāṇa (Shastri, J.L., 1998, 133). But, the arrangements of the attributes in this form will not be the same as that in the image in Fig 4.1 (ii).

There is no known conception and portrayal of Gaja Lakṣmī in Purāṇic and Tantric texts where Lakṣmi holds Sankha, Cakra, Gadā and Padma. Even representation of such a form is not seen amongst the extant sculptural art of the pre-Āhom periods in Assam and of other cultures within the Indian subcontinent. If the figure of Lakṣmī in the Gaja Lakṣmī image from the Jagaddhātṛī Douḷ illustrated in Fig 4.1 (ii) surely holds a combination of Sankha, Cakra, Gadā and Padma, then it will be a very unique and rare conception of Gaja Lakṣmī. The image may be interpreted as featuring a composite of Durgā as Viṣṇu Durgā and Lakṣmī as Gaja Lakṣmī.

In the *Indra Kṛta Mahālakṣmī Aṣṭakam*, Lakṣmī is described to be holding Sankha, Cakra and Gadā (*Sankhacakraḡadāhaste*) and the destroyer of evil and sorrow and cause of fear for the wicked (*Sarvaduṣṭabhayaṅkarī, Sarvapāpahare*). These two attributes hint her towards her inseparability from Durgā, Durgā as Nārāyaṇī Śakti. The Aṣṭakam further says that Lakṣmī is seated on a lotus, and one who recites the stanzas contained in it twice a day, he/she gets endowed with sovereignty, wealth and food. This undoubtedly connotes towards her conception as Gaja Lakṣmī or Śrī. It can be understood that in the same Aṣṭakam or eight-stanza eulogy, Lakṣmī is conceived both as Durgā Nārāyaṇī and Gaja Lakṣmī. Now, if the figure of Lakṣmī in the image illustrated in Fig 4.1 (ii), certainly holds attributes like Sankha, Cakra and

Gadā, then the whole image can be interpreted as visualized according to the aforesaid conception in the Indra Kṛta Mahālakṣmī Aṣṭakam. The Sankha, Cakra, Gadā represent the Durgā or the Nārāyaṇī Śakti principle, and the Padma or lotus held in the lower right hand, along with the lotus seat and the motif of elephants offering bath represent her as bestower of wealth, food and sovereignty, as Śrī.

In the Lakṣmī Tantra, a Pāñcarātra text, said to be a part of another Pāñcarātra text known as Jayākhyā Saṁhitā, Lakṣmī or Śrī explains to Indra that She and Viṣṇu are inseparable and are inherent in each other. Further, in the same text [verse 1 of Chapter 4], Lakṣmī says that she is Nārāyaṇī, Hari's state of existence and her nature resembles that of his (Gupta, S., 2003, 19). If Lakṣmī in the image illustrated in Fig 4.1 (ii) certainly holds a Sankha, Cakra and a Gadā along with the lotus or the Padma, then the artisans in visualizing and crafting her form might have conformed to or derived inspiration from the above concepts found elaborated in the Pāñcarātra texts like the Lakṣmī Tantra.

There is a metal Gaja Lakṣmī image worshipped in the Garbhagr̥ha of the Parihareśvara Devālaya at Dubi in Bajali district of Assam. The present architectural structure of the Parihareśvara Devālaya was also built under the commission of king Śiva Siṁha and queen Phuleśvarī Kunvarī. The Gaja Lakṣmī image made of *Aṣṭadhātu* worshipped here along with the main deity (Śiva) is said by the priests of the Devālaya to be presented or offered to the temple by the two rulers. The figure of goddess Lakṣmī in the image is four handed. She is seated in *Lalitāsana* on a lotus pedestal. Her two lower hands may be in Abhaya and Varada Mudrās and the upper two hands are seen holding the stalks of lotuses issuing out from her either sides. Positioned on each of the two lotuses, there is a figure of an elephant. The elephants are shown engaged in lustrating her by water or nectar from a pot jointly held high in their trunks. The crown/ Mukuṭa and the facial features of the figure portray the Āhom idiom and have similarities with those depicted in the stone relief sculptures of the Douls (The photography of this image was not allowed). In the stone relief sculpture of the architecture of the Douls, rarely, or no image of Gaja Lakṣmī where there is a portrayal of only two elephants lustrating Lakṣmī, is found.

But, in 4.1 (c) a severely obliterated image of Gaja Lakṣmī from the Bar Pukhurī Devī Doul , there seem to be the portrayal of figures of two elephants lustrating

Lakṣmī, though there is no certainty in it. The elephants might have been positioned on lotus blossoms issuing out from the sides of the goddess just like in the metal image enshrined in the Parihareśvara temple . The figure of the goddess is severely eroded and it cannot be made out whether she was depicted four handed or two handed. it cannot be said whether the stalks of the lotuses were depicted as held in the hands of the goddess.

4.1 (d) Images of two- handed Gaja Lakṣmī from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Douḷ and the Māghnowā Douḷ.



Fig 4.1 (iii) : Line drawing of the image of two handed Gaja Lakṣmī from the Māghnowā Douḷ



Figure 4.1 (iv) : Line drawing of the image of two handed Gaja Lakṣmī from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Douḷ [refer to the photographs of the two images in Fig 4.1iii (p) and Fig 4.1iv (p) in Appendix 4A]

In both the images illustrated in Fig 4.1 (iii) and (iv) , the figure of Lakṣmī is two handed, seated on a lotus and shown lustrated by four elephants. The image from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Douḷ is broken at several places. In one of her hand, the goddess is

seen holding a lotus. No attribute can be seen in her other hand. In the image of Gaja Lakṣmī from the Māghnowā Doul too, one of the hands of the goddess is shown holding a lotus whereas her other hand is damaged.

A form or image of Gaja Lakṣmī where Lakṣmī is two handed, holding lotus in one hand or lotuses in each of the hands and bathed by elephants is also known as *Indra Lakṣmī* according to the text *Śilpasāra* (Bidyabhushan, 1963, 51).

4.1 (e) Again, in the relief sculptural art of the Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul, there is a depiction of an **image where a goddess is shown as having two hands and seated on a lotus blossom. Both of her hands are shown holding lotuses.**



Fig 4.1 (v) : Line drawing of the image of a two handed goddess holding lotuses from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 4.1v (p) in Appendix 4A]

The lotus seat and the lotuses held in both the hands of the goddess in the image from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul illustrated in Fig 4.1 (v) brings her nearer to the form of Lakṣmī as *Padmāvati* described in the *Śāradātilaka* and several other Tāntric texts like the *Mahākāla Saṁhitā* and *Śrī Vidyārṇava Tantra*. *Padmāvati* is also said to be seated on a lotus and holding a lotus in each of her two hands. She is further described to be three eyed, bedecked with ornaments and having a red complexion (Bühnemann, 2016, 217). Though the features like lotuses held in her two hands and her lotus seat identifies her as a form of goddess Lakṣmī, but the presence of a third eye associates her with Gaurī / Caṇḍikā / Durgā or consort of Śiva. It is known that in certain Tāntric texts and ideologies, Lakṣmī as *Kamalā* is also conceived or

understood as the consort of Śiva and she is also known by the epithets Rudrāṇī, Bhadrakālī etc. In the Tāntric Mahāvīdyā Kramas of Śaktism, Lakṣmī as Kamalā is said to be accompanied by Viṣṇu as her Bhairava (not as her husband or consort), and here she is not to be perceived in the Vaiṣṇava or Purāṇic terms as a consort or dutiful wife of Viṣṇu.

Padmāvātī is said to be that form of Lakṣmī or Kamalā whose Mantra is connected to the rite of magical subjugation or *Vaśīkaraṇa* (Bühnemann, 2016, 217). Considering the context of a prevalence of strong tradition of occult practices as a handmaiden of the Tāntric tradition in Assam, it may not be wrong in identifying the image of Lakṣmī from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Douḷ in Fig 4.1 (v) as Padmāvātī. The traditional occult texts like *Mantra Puthis*, *Karati Puthis* etc. recovered from different parts of Assam and which are mostly kept very secretly and out of access for non-practitioners, contain invocations and hymns to certain forms or aspects of the major deities for the purpose of casting different magical spells and influences, for warding off evil inflictions and even curing diseases and defects. The form of Lakṣmī as Padmāvātī may be included there as one of such aspects. The Āhom royalty, who were strong believers in occult, incantations, astral predictions and omens, might have wanted the Padmāvātī form of Lakṣmī to be portrayed on the wall of the Gaurīsāgar Devī Douḷ for the purpose of subjugating the ‘power’ and influence of their political rivals or enemies.

Now, if the goddess in the image is certainly Lakṣmī as Padmāvātī, and derived from some text (Mantraputhi) containing incantations and elaborating methods and formulae for casting spells, subjugation and immobilization. It will mean that the artisan or the artisans who sculpted it were equipped with or were practitioners of such texts or rituals. Again assuming the goddess as Lakṣmī in the form of Padmāvātī, the image in Fig 4.1 (v) will not be the only one example of depiction of her in art. The form of Padmavati has also appeared in the imagery of the illustrated manuscripts produced in the northern Indian court painting traditions. One of such manuscripts containing a painting of Padmavati have been mentioned by Bühnemann in his book *The Iconography of Hindu Tantric Deities*. The manuscript is an illustrated *Devīsaptasatī* from Kashmir, dated to circa 19th century CE (Bühnemann, 2016, 217).

The Devī Purāṇa [50. I. 126-127] also describes a form of Lakṣmī where she is seated in midst of a lotus and holding lotus blossoms in her hands (Tarkaratna, Nyayatirtha, 294-295), may be similar to the previous one (Padmāvātī) from the Śaradātilaka . The form featured in the image from the Gaurīsagar Devī Doul also resembles this form of Lakṣmī described in the Devī Purāṇa. A form of Lakṣmī known as Ramā and holding lotuses in both of her hands finds its mention in the Nārada Purāṇa [III. 68. 26- 28] (Tagare, 1952, 970) which also tally with the form of the image featured in Fig 4.1 (v).

An association can also be made of the image in Fig 4.1 (v) with the conception of Lakṣmī as *Padmalakṣmī* in the folk ritual texts like Lakṣmī Carit and also her Vedic conception as a lotus goddess (Zimmer, 1990, 91). According to the Lakṣmī Carit text said to be composed by the poet Ananta Kandalī, goddess Lakṣmī resides as the lotus goddess Padmalakṣmī in the *Padma Bana* or the garden/ forest of lotuses⁷. In the folk beliefs prevalent amongst Āhoms and other communities in eastern or Upper Assam, Lakṣmī or Lakhimī is said to reside in water, in water bodies. As a part of the ritual of *Lakhimī Sabāh*, mentioned in Chapter 2 which propitiates Lakṣmī or *Lakhimī* during the rainy season or monsoons, women flock to nearby rivers, marshes, ponds or lakes carrying along with them all the votive offerings and paraphernalia of worship. They set up the ritual arrangements and as a part of the ritual, the women enter the water bodies carrying bamboo fishing implements like *Jākoī* and fish out whatever they could find inside the water. These may be decaying aquatic debris, aquatic plants, fish, tadpoles, mud, crustaceans, insects anything. Whatever they acquire, they bring them and worship them as Lakhimī or Lakṣmī (Hakacham, 2018, 287-288). In the ritual practice of the Lakhimī Sabāh amongst the Āhoms, propitiations are made to *Khāo Khām* who may be identified with Varuṇa- the Vedic deity of water (Sarma, H.K., 2006, 102) . This Āhom belief of Lakhimī / Lakṣmī as residing in water bodies and the practice of venerating Khāo Khām or Varuṇa pleading him to offer or give Lakhimī to the mankind somewhat draws parallel with the Purāṇic conception of Lakṣmī as the ocean/ water borne and as the daughter of the ocean or lord of the waters . The image in the Gaurīsāgar Devi Doul in Fig 4.1 (v) may be thought of as the visualization of the belief shared by the Āhoms and other ethnic communities in eastern Assam of Lakṣmī or Lakhimī as a deity of water which is also a symbol of fertility and growth. The two lotuses held

in the hand of the goddess and the lotus seat in the above image may be symbolizing the water element.

The style of portrayal and the form of the two lotuses held by Lakṣmī in the image comes to somewhat resemble the forms of the two floral forms portrayed in the Anantasāyī/ Anantasayana Viṣṇu image enshrined at the Aśvakrānta Devālaya in north Guwahati [**Appendix D1 : Figure (xxx) and (xxxi)**], which was also sculpted under the patronage of the Āhoms. These two floral forms are identified to be *Puni* or a type of water weed (Sarma, H.C., Bhattacharya, S.M., 1982, 6), not lotuses. *Puni* may either be the local name for a species of small aquatic angiosperms belonging to the genus *Wolffia* which is found abundantly growing in the marshy areas, ponds, lakes and water holes across Assam, or it may include several distinct aquatic plants belonging to different genus or species. The Anantasāyī image at Aśvakrānta Devālaya also belongs to the late medieval Āhom style of sculptural art. The resemblance of the forms of the lotuses held by Lakṣmī in the image from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Doull illustrated in Fig 4.1 (v) with the forms of *Puni* portrayed in the Anantasāyī Viṣṇu image from the Aśvakrānta Devālaya can have several explanations. It might be because of the artisans' chiselling that resulted in the forms of lotuses in the image in Fig 4.1 (v) seem like the forms of *Puni* depicted in the Anantasāyī Viṣṇu image, or, there may be a possibility that the artisans had depicted *Puni* in place of lotuses in the two hands of Lakṣmī in the image. If it is so, then there must be some reason. *Puni*, as said already, is abundantly seen growing in the marshy lands across Assam. And as discussed earlier, the rituals of Lakhimī Sabāh are also performed near marshes, small rivers/ rivulets and ponds which teem with fish, crustaceans, and growth of aquatic plants like *Puni*. As said, all these things are collected and fished out with the help of the Jākoi during the course of the initiation of the ritual, brought and worshipped as symbols of Lakṣmī or Lakhimī, *Puni* being one of them. If the two floral forms depicted in the hands of Lakṣmī in the image in Fig 4.1 (v) are surely none other than *Puni*, then it will not be wrong to say that the artisans might be trying to connect the visualization of Lakṣmī in the image with the practice of Lakhimī Sabāh and trying to establish some prevalent local belief where *Puni* may/ might be regarded as having more importance than the lotus as an attribute of Lakṣmī. More needs to be studied on this subject. Floral forms resembling that of the *Puni* in the image from the Aśvakranta Devālaya are also seen depicted in the hands

of several other deities represented in the relief sculptural imagery of the Gaurīsāgar Devī DouL.

The floral forms depicted in the image in Fig 4.1 (v) may not be lotuses, because in the style of the Āhom relief temple sculpture, lotuses as hand held attributes of deities are portrayed near to naturalistic mostly in the manner when the lotus blossoms remain closed) or sometimes styled like the representations of lotuses in Yantras, Mandalas and the gold and silver lotuses traditionally used as votive offerings to deities in Sattra Nāmghars and Devālayas across Assam [**Appendix D1 : Figure (xxxii)]** .

The above discussed practice and belief of collecting humid mass from water bodies and worshipping them as a form of Lakṣmī or Lakhimī somewhere corresponds to the Vedic concept/ belief of Lakṣmī as presiding over or related to moisture (*Chiklita*) and mud (*Kardama*) (Zimmer 1990, 91). According to one more belief prevalent amongst the Āhoms and also other communities of eastern Assam like the Cutiyās and Kacārīs, Lakhimī or Lakṣmī, during the dry season, is said to go and reside in a water body or lake on the top of a mountain. She again comes down or descends to the fields through rains, rivers and streams, during the monsoon or rainy season (Sarma, H.K., 2006, 102). This belief or narrative found elaborated in the ritual songs sung during Lakhimī Sabāh by the Āhoms seems to have similarities with a narrative of Lakṣmī (popular in northern, central and western India) where there is an imagery of her seated in penance on the *Vindhyācala* or Vindhyā mountain ranges and the elephants of the directions bringing pitchers of nectarine waters from the ocean and bathing/ lustrating her with these waters. These life giving waters then flowed and descended as rivers Luni and Chambal from her body and her hair locks. The narrative further says that the goddess squeezes her hair locks to let the water retained in them flow as rivers⁸ .

Both the above narratives, though having different imageries and formed in different cultural contexts, are common in the symbolism which associates Lakṣmī with the water element.

It is necessary to mention here of the **sculpted image of a female figure depicted on the outer wall of the Garbhagrha of the Keśavarāi DouL/ Jaysāgar Viṣṇu DouL/ Jay DouL. She is portrayed as standing, and holding her exceptionally long**

tresses of hair with both of her hands towards one side . Her hair seems as if it is wet and the manner in which she holds it seems as if she is trying to dry it by squeezing or wringing out the excess water from it.



Fig 4.1 (vi) : Line drawing of the image of a female figure holding her long tresses of hair from the Keśavarāi Doul [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 4.1vi (p) in Appendix 4A]

It can be assumed that the artisans were surely trying, through the image in Fig 4.1 (vi), to depict a female figure squeezing out water from her long wet hair tresses. If it is assumed as so, then identifying the female figure letting out water from her hair, for a while with goddess Lakṣmī (seated on the Vindhyā mountain) squeezing out water from her hair locks described in the above narrative may not be wrong. The female figure in the image illustrated in Fig 4.1 (vi) may also be identified as a visualization of the motif of a young heroine or Nāyikā after her bath (*Sadyasnātanāyikā*) squeezing her wet locks of hair to drain out the water (*Keśanistoyakārinī*) which had found its representation in numerous poetic texts, sculptural art and miniature paintings produced since 10th century CE onwards or even before [**Appendix D1 : Figure (xxxiii), (xxxiv)**] , the most important being the *Karpuramañjarī* composed by a poet Rajaśekhara. In every representation of the *Sadyasnātanāyikā Keśanistoyakārinī* or the Nāyikā as *Sadyasnātakeśanistoyakārinī*, a goose or swan is always shown standing beside her beneath her hair and drinking the droplets of water that are drained out from her hair mistaking them for pearls

(Srivastava, 2014, 41). But in the image from the Keśavarāi Doul illustrated in Fig 4.1 (vi) , no depiction of a goose or swan beside and beneath the hair lock of the female figure is seen. Therefore, the female figure cannot be identified as a Sadyasnātakeśanistoyakārinī Nāyikā.

The female figure in the image in Fig 4.1 (vi) also relates to the imagery of *Phra Mae Thorani/ Wathundaye/ Vasundharā/ Bhūmi Devī/* earth goddess in the *Mārā Vijaya* episode of Buddha's life described in the *Jātakas*. In this episode, Phra Mae Thorani/ Wathundaye wrings water gathered by Buddha's merits from her long hair tresses and drowns Mārā and his troops (Shaw, 2006, 36). The material image of Phra Mae Thorani/ Bhūmi Devī standing or seated, and holding and squeezing or wringing her own hair lock/ tresses has been a revered symbol in every Buddhist shrine, spread across Myanmar, Thailand and Laos in Indo- China/ south- east Asia- the ancestral lands of the Āhoms [**Appendix D1 : Figure (xxxv)**]. Considering the observations put forward by scholars like Lila Gogoi that Ahoms who migrated to Assam were primarily Buddhists, and that significant cultural practices of the Āhoms like digging of ponds, planting of Bātbar saplings, Caklang etc., are a result of a Buddhistic influence (Gogoi, L., 1994, 178), thinking of the female figure in the image from the Keśavarāi Doul in Fig 4.1 (vi) as Phra Mae Thorani/ Wathundaye/ Bhumi Devī in the act of washing away Mārā and his demons of temptation by the waters from her hair locks or braids can be to some extent justifiable. Bhūmi Devī / Bhū Devī or the earth goddess has been conceived as no different from Lakṣmī, and Buddha, too, has been considered as a Avatāra/ Vibhāva or incarnation of Viṣṇu , Laksmi's consort. So, considering these in mind, it can be speculated that the image illustrated in Fig 4.1 (vi) is of Bhumi Devī or Wathundaye from the Buddha's Mārā Vijaya narrative and it is placed on the architecture of the Keśavarāi Doul conceiving her to be none other than Lakṣmī and the consort of Viṣṇu, may be in his form as Buddha Janārdana. Can it be possible that the narrative and imagery of Phra Mae Thorani or Bhumi Devī washing away the demons of temptation from distracting Buddha was prevalent amongst the Āhoms, who are said to be practitioners of a form of Buddhism before their Hinduization, and, in the context of their complete Hinduization during king Rudra Simha's reign, this imagery was interpreted in terms of the Vaiṣṇava Hindu ideology of the region and thus depicted through the image

on the architecture of the Keśavarāi Doul illustrated in Fig 4.1 (vi) ? It may be possible, and there can be numerous other possibilities as well.

Proceeding further, the association of elephants with Lakṣmī or Śrī is continuing from the prehistoric times. Lakṣmī actually originated or evolved from a prehistoric earth, nature and fertility goddess and a goddess of food, bounty and earthly treasures like a Yakṣī. As she is a goddess of fertility, growth and abundance, she has been made a presiding divinity of agriculture and hence rain and water- the prime requisites and integral elements in agricultural practice. As elephants have an ability to sense the coming of rains and are intimately associated with water and behaviour of the land systems, they too got linked and made a part of the attributes and aura of Lakṣmī, as symbols of fertility, growth and abundance, of agriculture, crops and natural resources. Thus, a well knitted iconographic form known as Śrī and later Gaja Lakṣmī came into being. With the coming of the age of the Purāṇas and Tantras, and the evolution of different cultural and religious systems, the imagery or iconography of Gaja Lakṣmī took on different interpretations and underwent lots of changes. But, the belief of Lakṣmī as a presiding deity of water, agriculture, fertility and growth remained intact in all the regional, village and folk/tribal systems of the Indian subcontinent. Though the Gaja Lakṣmī imagery originated from the folk and sylvan beliefs regarding agricultural practice, it slowly became associated with royalty, royal grandeur, lavishness, wealth, abundance and also valour. It is believed that worshipping Gaja Lakṣmī, particularly in her form as *Indra Lakṣmī* a king (or anyone) gets blessed with immense wealth, prosperity, power, grandeur and particularly with elephants. Elephants, during the medieval period in the Indian subcontinent were very integral to the martial prowess of the kings and chieftains. They were specially tamed, taken care of, trained and prepared to serve as war machines, royal conveyances, vehicles and also for serving as votives in religious rituals or ceremonies. Particularly, in the context of the Āhom royalty, elephants held profound importance. They were used as war machines, royal escorts, means of transportation and for several other purposes. The importance and the place of reverence that elephants held in the Āhom royalty is proven by the different treatises and manuals dealing with the selection, behavioural patterns, keeping and care of elephants which were composed under the patronage of the Āhom court. One of such treatises is the *Hastividyaṛṇava*. An exquisite illustrated manuscript of *Hastividyaṛṇava*

was produced in the court of king Śiva Simha and his second queen Bar Rajā Ambikā Kunvarī or Mādambikā. This manuscript is counted as amongst the finest artworks produced in Assam under Āhom patronage during the 18th century CE. Capturing, selecting, taming and keeping elephants was one of the favourite pastimes of the Ahom rulers, particularly Pratāp Simha / Siu-Seng-Phā (early 17th century CE) who is found described in several historical accounts as *Gajapati* or the owner of a thousand or more elephants (Basu, 1970, 173). This passion and zeal for elephants or for acquiring the wealth in the form of elephants might have continued from the days of Pratāp Simha till his succeeding rulers like Śiva Simha. The images of Gaja Laksmi, portraying the Indra Lakṣmi form on the architecture of the Douls, which have been discussed already, can also be thought of as connoting towards the profound importance elephants held in the Āhom royalty. These images, in the context of the Āhom built Douls may be interpreted as a proof of how the belief centred around the Indra Lakṣmī aspect as a bestower of regal splendour, valour, wealth and mainly elephants had been internalized by the Āhom royalty, in their process of gradual absorption to Hinduism.

4.2 Sarasvatī

The most common type of images of goddess Sarasvatī that are seen in the relief sculptural art of the architecture of the concerned five Douls features her as playing a musical instrument. Only one image of her where she is depicted playing on a Vīṇā has been found in the whole range of extant architectural relief sculptural art of the Douls. This image is from the Jagaddhātṛī Doul at Kalugaon.

4.2 (a) The image featuring the form of goddess Sarasvatī playing on a Vīṇā from the Jagaddhātṛī Doul



Fig 4.2 (i) : Line drawing of the image of Sarasvatī playing on a Vīṇā from the Jagaddhātṛī Douḷ [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 4.2i (p) in Appendix 4B]

In the context of the Āhom temple relief sculptural art or the temple stone relief sculptural art of the late medieval style patronized by the Ahoms, the above image can be said as the only available portrayal of the goddess Sarasvatī playing the classical instrument Vīṇā or the Indian lute.

The figure of the goddess featured in the image in Fig 4.2 (i) is two- handed and she is seated in a pose akin to *Mahārājālīlāsana* on a lotus. The Vīṇā is either of the type *Rudra* or *Vicitra Vīṇā* which are integral to the northern Indian *Mārgīya* or classical music traditions. No other human or animal figure is seen accompanying the goddess, neither there is depiction of any other motif or symbol in the image. Both the hands of Sarasvatī are engaged in plucking the strings of the Vīṇā.

The iconographic form of Sarasvatī playing a Vīṇā is seen to be most commonly conceived and revered in the cultures of the Indian subcontinent including Assam. Several of such iconographic forms are found to be described in the Purāṇic, Tāntric, Āgamic and Śilpa texts . Some of them are described below :

Iconographic forms of Sarasvatī playing Vīṇā or Vīṇāhastā Sarasvatī in Purāṇic texts-

Agni Purāṇa

The Agni Purāṇa [50. 16] says that the image of Sarasvatī should be made as holding and playing on a Vīṇā , rosary and book in her hands (Shastri, J.L., 1998, 132).

Devī Māhātmyam of the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa

The Devī Māhātmyam of the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa describes Sarasvatī as having four hands and holding a Vīṇā along with a Ankuśa, a Akṣamālā and a Pustaka or book/ manuscript (Rao, 1997, 378).

Iconographic forms of Sarasvatī playing Vīṇā in Tāntric texts-

Śāradātilaka

Elaborate descriptions of different iconographic forms of Sarasvatī are found in the Śāradātilaka. Here, the form in which Sarasvatī is described playing Vīṇā is four handed and is known by the name *Vānī* (or speech) or *Hamsavāgiśvarī*. Sarasvatī as *Vānī* is described to be riding a goose or swan (Bühnemann, 2016, 191) .

Bṛhat Tantrasāra

The Bṛhat Tantrasāra mentions of a form of Sarasvatī known as *Pārijātā Sarasvatī* . In this form too, Sarasvatī is four handed, playing a Vīṇā and has the goose as her vehicle or mount. Apart from the Vīṇā, Pārijātā Sarasvatī holds a book/ manuscript, a pot of nectar and a Japamālā or rosary / meditation beads (Chattopadhyay, 2010, 202).

All the above texts have no mention of any image or form of Sarasvatī where she is two handed, playing a Vīṇā and seated on a lotus, and without the goose or swan as her mount.

The image of Sarasvatī from the Jagaddhātī Doull illustrated in Fig 4.2 (i) comes more near to the form or image of Sarasvatī when she is depicted as the consort of Viṣṇu, accompanying him as his beloved wife, or more appropriately subordinate to him . Sarasvatī as the consort of Viṣṇu finds mention in the Purāṇic and Āgamic texts which are claimed or said to be of eastern Indian origin like the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*, *Agni Purāṇa*, *Kālikā Purāṇa*, *Devī Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa* and *Hayaśīrṣa Pañcarātra* (Bhattacharya, G., 108). The *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*, is a

text that has been holding a significant place in the cultures of Assam and Bengal. It mentions that Sarasvatī is one of the three consorts of Hari or Viṣṇu, the other two being Lakṣmī / Śrī and Gangā . The Agni Purāṇa [I. 44. 48-49] mentions that in an image of Vāsudeva or Viṣṇu, Sarasvatī as *Puṣṭi* and Lakṣmī as *Śrī* should be placed on either side of the figure of Viṣṇu . *Puṣṭi* or Sarasvatī should be portrayed as two handed, playing a lute or a harp (Shastri, J.L., 1998, 122). The Hayaśirsa Pāñcarātra, an important *Pāñcarātra Āgama* text mentions of Sarasvatī as one of the consorts of Viṣṇu and *Puṣṭi* being her another name . The vast majority of sculpted images of Viṣṇu produced by the schools of EISMA, mainly the Pāla school and the early medieval schools of sculptural art in Assam during the 9th to 12th century CE influenced by the order and idioms of the Pāla school, features his figure as flanked by Śrī or Lakṣmī and *Puṣṭi* or Sarasvatī on his both sides. The figures of Lakṣmī or Śrī are seen portrayed in the Pāla Viṣṇu images as two handed with one hand holding a lotus (or sometimes a Cāmara or fly whisk) and the images of Sarasvatī or *Puṣṭi* (also two handed) as holding or playing on a Vīṇā or lute, as per the descriptions given in texts like the Agni Purāṇa [**Appendix D2 : Figure (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv)**]. The Vīṇā depicted as held by Sarasvatī in all these images is a *Ekatantrī Vīṇā*¹. In most of the Viṣṇu images of the Pāla style or styles influenced by EISMA, Śrī and *Puṣṭi* are depicted standing on lotus pedestals, but images where the two goddesses are portrayed as seated on lotuses or a throne on either sides of Viṣṇu are also not rare. In these type of images, goddess Sarasvatī or *Puṣṭi* is mostly depicted seated in a Mahārājililāsana pose on a lotus or any throne and plucking the strings of a Vīṇā or lute , similar to the form featured in the image from the Jagaddhātṛ Doull illustrated in Fig 4.2 (i).

The concept of Sarasvatī as a consort of Viṣṇu is also seen acknowledged in the neo- Vaiṣṇava culture of Assam. In several paintings of the illustrated manuscripts of the neo- Vaiṣṇava tradition produced during the time period from 16th to 19th century CE, Viṣṇu/ Hari/ Kṛṣṇa when in his celestial abode or Vaikuntha, is shown attended upon by his consorts Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī. In these paintings, they are not found described as Śrī and *Puṣṭi*. Instead, they are described as Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī. Both are shown as two handed in all these illustrations. For example, in a painting from an illustrated manuscript of the Bhāgavata or the Kīrtana Ghoṣā (?) in the neo- Vaiṣṇava or the Sattriyā style , the four- handed Viṣṇu is shown seated in a

Padmāsana pose under a decorated canopy. His two consorts Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī are seated on his either sides and are attending on him. Lakṣmī is holding a Cāmara by one of her hands whereas Sarasvatī is shown holding an offering tray, may be a Śarāi or Batā by her two hands [**Appendix D2 : Figure (v)**] in place of the Vīṇā . Almost all the sculpted images of four handed Viṣṇu in the Pāla or the style of EISMA, and other regional styles that continued with the Pāla style or idiom, dating back to 11th- 13th century CE and discovered from different regions of Assam feature two-handed Sarasvatī as playing on a Vīṇā [**Appendix D2 : Figure (vi), (vii), (viii)**]. Moreover, there are evidences of images dating back to the above time periods or earlier time periods where Sarasvatī as Puṣṭi (two handed, seated or standing on a lotus or any seat, playing a Vīṇā and without any animal mount/ vehicle/ companion) is portrayed independently or alone without her consort, Viṣṇu. Two of such sculpted images each featuring a single, solitary figure of Sarasvatī standing, and playing on a Vīṇā, or in the form of Puṣṭi, are from Sivasagar and Guwahati [**Appendix D2 : Figure (ix) and (x)**]. In both the images, Sarasvatī is shown standing in a Dvibhanga pose. But, these two images can be said as fragments of a larger image of Viṣṇu, if observed closely , and so cannot be called as independent representations of Sarasvatī as Puṣṭi. A sculpted image which feature an independent or solitary aspect of Sarasvatī as Puṣṭi, in the actual sense, is from Tezpur. This image is featured in a stone architectural fragment, may be a lintel of some ruined temple dating back to 11th or 12th century CE, presently displayed at the *Citrলেখা Udyān* or *Cole Park* in Tezpur town. Here the goddess is shown seated , probably in a Lalitāsana pose and playing a Vīṇā. She may be seated on a lotus pedestal. No other animal or human figures are seen to accompany her. Here the question arises that, will in all cases, the form of Sarasvatī, as two handed, seated on a lotus seat or any other seat, playing the Vīṇā by her two hands and unaccompanied by her animal vehicle be identified as Puṣṭi ? The Agni Purāṇa mentions the form of Sarasvatī as Puṣṭi only in relation with Viṣṇu and in the presence of Viṣṇu or Vāsudeva. There is no mention of any independent or solitary image of Sarasvatī where she is in the form of Puṣṭi. The images portrayed in the architectural fragment from Tezpur and in the architecture of the Jagaddhātrī Doul forces us to think whether there is any convention or tradition which allows the independent portrayal of Sarasvatī as Puṣṭi. A possibility is also there that the sculpted images, though resembling the form of Sarasvatī as Puṣṭi in the Agni Purāṇa are not Puṣṭi at all.

They may be portrayals of another aspect or form of goddess Sarasvatī which is conceptually very different from her aspect as Puṣṭi, the consort of Viṣṇu.

In the tradition of eastern India, it is seen that the images or conception of two handed form of Sarasvatī playing a Vīṇā is more popular. The two-handed Sarasvatī playing a Vīṇā is worshipped either as *Vāgvādinī* or with the *Ekākṣara* or one syllable Mantra as Viṣṇuvallabhā or consort of Viṣṇu. It means that the two-handed Sarasvatī even if unaccompanied by Viṣṇu is worshipped as his consort or his beloved. The two-handed Sarasvatī is invoked and worshipped as *Vāgvādinī* if worshipped through Tāntrika methods².

In the Vajrayāna Buddhist texts, there is a *Sādhanā* form of Sarasvatī which is known as *Vajravīṇā Sarasvatī*. One of such important texts, the *Sādhanamālā* describes the goddess Vajravīṇā Sarasvatī to be two-handed and playing the Vīṇā by both of her hands (Bhattacharya, B., 1958, 350). She is described as having no animal vehicle or mount. She may be seated or standing on a lotus or any other seat. The form of Vajravīṇā Sarasvatī comes to sharply resemble the form of Sarasvatī in the image portrayed in the Jagaddhātī Dou, illustrated in Fig 4.2 (i). As discussed earlier, Tāntric Buddhist elements were an integral part of Śāktism that was practiced in Assam since the 10th to 12th century CE. Though during the Āhom period and under the patronage of the Ahom court during the 18th century CE, Śākta worship and Śāktism in Assam acquired a new form under the influence of the orthodox Raghunandana Smārta and other ritual and philosophical systems introduced by Kṛṣṇarām Bhattāchārya, still the presence of Tāntric Buddhist presence in it could not be denied and it stayed prominent. Considering the context of the strong Vajrayāna influence in the Śākta culture of Assam and its continuity in ritual and artistic expression since the 11th and 12th centuries, it can be assumed that the form of Sarasvatī in the image from the Jagaddhātī Dou in Fig 4.2 (i) is of Vajravīṇā Sarasvatī, but there is no certainty about it .

In the Devī Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa also known as *Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa* [41-43], Brahmā explains to Rāma the divine realms of *Gaurīloka* and *Mahādurgāloka*. In the Chapter 43 (verse 67- 86), Brahmā says that goddess Durgā is seated inside her resplendent apartment in the realm known as *Mahādurgāloka* in her four-handed form. This four-handed form of hers is known as *Mahādurgā* or *Mūla Durgā* or

Jagaddhātrī and it is the supreme *Tāntrikī Mūrti*. Her mount is a lion and she is meditated upon by Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva and all other prominent gods and goddesses. Crores of *Bhairavas* and other gods are holding gem studded *Daṇḍa*-s or staffs and swords and standing there as gatekeepers. It is further described that the goddess *Jayā* is standing to the left of *Durgā* and goddess *Vijayā* is standing right to her. They both are moving beautiful *Cāmaras* or fly whisks. Goddess *Lakṣmī* is described to be on the right of *Durgā* and goddess *Sarasvatī* is on the left. Both of them are also said to attend upon the goddess *Durgā* and are also said to carry betel plates made of ruby and offering betel to her. Goddess *Sarasvatī*, on the left side of *Durgā* is also described to be playing on a *Vīṇā* and singing hymns from the Vedas dedicated to the great goddess (Kumar, 1983, 185- 186). There is no mention of any animal mount of *Sarasvatī*, and even of *Lakṣmī*. The form of *Sarasvatī* portrayed in the image from the *Jagaddhātrī Douḷ* in Fig 4.2 (i) may also be thought of as corresponding to this form in the *Devī Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa*. Images featuring goddesses *Lakṣmī* and *Sarasvatī*, without their *Vāhanas* or animal mounts/ vehicles, two handed and as attendant goddesses of goddess *Durgā* in accordance to the above description in the *Devī Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa*, are seen to be frequently portrayed in the art of the terracotta temples of Bengal built during the 16th to 18th century CE and also in the modern times. In the Āhom built Jay *Durgā* temple (also dating to the 18th century CE) at Hajo in Kamrup district of Assam, sculpted images of *Lakṣmī* and *Sarasvatī* without their respective animal mounts, two- handed and standing on lotuses are seen portrayed on the either sides of the door leading to the sanctum sanctorum where a stone sculpted ten- handed image of *Mahiṣāsura* *mardinī* *Durgā* is enshrined and worshipped as the main *Vīgraha* [**Appendix D2 : Figure (xi), (xii), (xiii)**]. The *Jagaddhātrī Douḷ* at Kalugaon, from its name, can be understood as a shrine to goddess *Durgā* as *Mahadurgā* or *Jagaddhātrī*. So, it may not be wrong to understand the form of the goddess *Sarasvatī* featured in the image Fig 4.2 (i), as depicting her conception in the *Mahābhāgavata* as an attendant goddess, or a *Sakhī* (companion) of goddess *Mahādurgā*.

4.2 (b) Images featuring *Sarasvatī* playing bowed stringed instruments- Images depicting goddess *Sarasvatī* playing different varieties of bowed stringed instruments or fiddles are seen depicted in the iconographic programme of the sculptural art of *Māghnowā Douḷ*, *Jagaddhātrī Douḷ* and *Gaurīsāgar Devī Douḷ* . Except the previous

image of Sarasvatī discussed in Fig 4.2 (i) and discussed in 4.2 (a), rest of the very few intact portrayals of her that are seen in the relief sculptural art of the Āhom Douls show her as playing bowed stringed instruments of different varieties, majority of which seem to be derived from the folk and tribal cultures of the region. The image discussed previously is the only one intact image of her where she is shown playing the Vīṇā. The relatively greater number of images featuring Sarasvatī as playing bowed stringed instruments of the folk or tribal type indicate that the artisans who sculpted them were possibly, not much acquainted or familiar with the Vīṇā, or might be, the folk bowed instruments were much more revered and were, or had possibly become more intimately associated with their lifestyles and cultural consciousness. It cannot be said that the artisans and the communities of artisans who sculpted or carved the reliefs in the architecture of Āhom built Douls were completely unaware or unknown of the different types of Vīṇās, for portrayal of Rudra Vīṇās are seen in the sculptural art of the Douls like the Jay Doul or Keśavarāi Doul which was built much before the Jagaddhātī Doul . In the Keśavarāi Doul, Rudra Vīṇā is seen to be portrayed as played by the figures of winged celestial musicians like the *Gandharvas* and *Kinnaras*. Though the classical Rudra Vīṇā or Vīṇā was known by the artisans, its portrayal is not seen as an attribute of Sarasvati in the relief sculptural art of the late medieval style in the architecture of Āhom built Douls until the image in the Jagaddhātī Doul illustrated in 4.2 (i) which has been discussed already. It might be because, rather the classical Vīṇā, the bowed stringed instruments were understood to be more integral in the folk or sylvan conception or symbolism of Sarasvatī in the region, or in the culture of the artisan communities during that time.

In majority of the images from the above three Douls showing Sarasvatī playing folk bowed stringed instruments , the figure of the goddess is two-handed.



Fig 4.2 (ii) : Line drawing of the image of Sarasvatī from the Māghnowā Doul [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 4.2ii (p) in Appendix 4B]

In the above image from the Māghnowā Doul, the goddess Sarasvatī is depicted seated on a lotus blossom and have no animal mount or vehicle accompanying her. She is shown playing on a bowed stringed somewhat similar to a *Serendā / Serjā* which is seen presently as an important part of the musical traditions of the *Bodo Kacārī* and *Koch* communities, residing in western Assam [**Appendix D2 : Figure (xiv)**].

The Serendā became an integral part of the neo-Vaiṣṇava musical traditions during the 16th to 18th centuries and it began to be used as an accompaniment in the singing of neo-Vaiṣṇava devotional lyrical compositions known as *Bargit* (Kalita, 2021, 79). The Serendā might have entered the tradition of neo-Vaiṣṇava music when neo-Vaiṣṇavism was receiving immense patronage and was nurtured by the Koch rulers like Naranārāyaṇa in the Koch kingdom. There are accounts of the wife of the Koch general Cilārāi or Śukladhvaja playing a Serendā and singing Bargit and compositions by the neo-Vaiṣṇava saint Śankardeva to its tunes (Basu, 1970, 288). The use of Serendā is not seen amongst the ethnic communities residing in the regions surrounding the Māghnowā Doul and also eastern or upper Assam. It is not clear whether Serendā was prevalent amongst these communities during the late medieval period. But the image of Sarasvatī playing the Serendā portrayed in the Māghnowā Doul hints towards a possibility that the Serendā was not unknown of in the culture

of this region during the late medieval period. Another possibility is that in making of the sculptural imagery of the architecture of the Māghnowā DouL, there might be involvement of artisans coming from the regions and cultures where use of Serendā is integral, for example the Koch and Bodo cultures in western Assam and northern Bengal.

The Jagaddhātrī DouL features an image of Sarasvatī seated on a lotus and playing on a bowed stringed instrument must be of the folk derivation [refer to Fig 4.2iii (p)]. The design of the instrument resembles that of two bowed stringed instruments prevalent in the culture of Assam- a *Bīn* and a *Kumli Eng* [**Appendix D2 : Figure (xv) and (xvi)**]. It may be identified as either one of them. Kumli Eng is a bowed stringed instrument of the ethnic Karbi community³ residing mostly in central and eastern Assam. It somewhat resembles the Chinese bowed stringed instrument known as *Erhu*.

The Serendā and several other folk bowed stringed instruments like a *Bīn* or *Kumli Eng* shown as played by Sarasvatī in the images from the Maghnowa DouL illustrated in Fig 4.2 (ii) and Jagaddhātrī DouL [refer to Fig 4.2iii (p) in Appendix 4B], respectively had attained a place of prominence under the aegis of the neo-Vaiṣṇava institutions as well as the Āhom court, particularly from the reign of king Rudra Simha onwards. To this date, in the musical traditions of certain neo-Vaiṣṇava Sattras, these stringed instruments, particularly the Serendā are used. In the folk culture of Assam, these stringed instruments and a host of other musical instruments are often associated with Śiva and Pārvatī. It is said in the Tokārī Gīts or Deha Bicāra Gīts that Śiva himself had designed or crafted many of these musical instruments. In the tradition of performing Bihu Nām or Hucari, it is generally observed that the initiation of the songs starts with a short propitiation to goddess Sarasvatī, then to Hari/ Viṣṇu/ Kṛṣṇa and then to the assembled audience- *Prathame Pranāmo Āi Sarasvatī, Dvitiya Pranāmo Hari, Tṛitiya Pranāmo Samajua Rājī*. Propitiation to the goddess also is seen in several other traditions of singing and music prevalent in Assam, e.g. Ojā Pāli. The images in the sculptural art of the Māghnowā DouL and Jagaddhātrī DouL featured in Fig 4.2(ii) and 4.2iii (p) featuring Sarasvatī playing folk bowed stringed instruments can be thought of as reflecting how different folk tribal or Laukika traditions got absorbed into the mainstream Hindu traditions, made affiliated to or identified themselves with the Purāṇic and Tāntric

symbolisms, how the essential attributes and symbolisms of the deities like Sarasvatī were understood and internalized by the people of the region in the course of time.

Neog (2008c, 67) mentions of how in some devotional songs and poetry of the neo-Vaiṣṇava tradition, Āi- the widely and popularly worshipped folk patron goddess of smallpox is totally seen brought out from her usual identity and belief system as the patron goddess of smallpox and made associated with *Ratnāvalī* or *Bhakti Ratnāvalī*- one of the four chief scriptures or *Cāri Śāstras* of the Assamese neo-Vaiṣṇavas . In some verses of *Ratnāvalī*, the goddess is said to be playing on folk stringed instrument or fiddles like *Tokārī* or sometimes, a *Vīṇā* . Now, questions arise like why Āi, a folk sylvan goddess associated with the Śākta system/ faith of the region, was chosen to be included in a neo-Vaiṣṇava scripture, that too endowing the characteristics usually attributed to Sarasvatī like playing musical instruments, particularly a *Vīṇā* ? Was it some kind of strategy by the neo-Vaiṣṇava institutions to bring in more people into their fold ? Neog did not mention anything about it in his book. Considering the profound influence of neo-Vaiṣṇava texts like *Ratnāvalī* on the cultural and religious orientation of the non- elite common people, including the artisan communities from the 15th century CE onwards, and the Vaiṣṇava acculturation of the widespread belief centred on Āi or the small pox goddess, it can be, in a way, assumed that the images from the *Māghnowā Doul* and *Jagaddhātṛī Doul* featuring a goddess playing *Vīṇā* and various other fiddled instruments depicted in the Fig 4.2 (i), 4.2 (ii) and 4.2iii (p) actually portray the above concept or visualization of the popular, widely venerated smallpox goddess Āi in the *Bhakti Ratnāvalī*, and not Sarasvatī.

The portrayal of folk musical instruments as attributes of Sarasvatī in these images from the *Douls* also points towards an eclectic attitude or approach of the Āhom rulers from the period of reign of king Rudra Simha onwards. The portrayal of not only the *Vīṇā*, but also the different varieties of folk stringed instruments as musical attributes of Sarasvatī, possibly hints towards the liberty the artisans took in presenting an iconography of the goddess that would be more appealing to and readable in the context of the culture of the region during the 17th to 18th century CE.

Again coming to the image from the Jagaddhātṛī Douḷ in Fig 4.2iii (p), Das (2011-12, 110) has identified it as a depiction of Lakṣmī playing a *Tokārī*, which is another type of folk stringed instrument prevalent in the culture of Assam. She has not mentioned of any text or imagery on the basis of which such an identification was made. The deciphering of the image as Lakṣmī playing a *Tokārī* was certainly done relying on some proper text. There must be presence or evidences of such texts where Lakṣmī gets associated with the symbolism of music which is otherwise known to be a typical attribute of Sarasvatī.

If carefully observed, the musical instrument in the image in Fig 4.2iii (p), though identified to be *Tokārī*, may not be a *Tokārī*. As seen generally, *Tokārī* is not a bowed stringed instrument. Its strings are only played with fingers, no bow is used. Therefore, the instrument shown in the image must be either a *Bīn*, or a *Kumli Eng*, or a *Serjā* or *Serendā*.

4.2 (c) Image featuring Sarasvatī, two handed, seated on a lotus and holding a manuscript and a lotus from the Jagaddhātṛī Douḷ- The form of Sarasvatī in this image corresponds sharply to the form of *Vajrasāradā*, a Dhyāna or Sādhana form of goddess Sarasvatī described in the Vajrayāna Buddhist text *Sādhanamālā* (Bhattacharya, B., 1958, 351).



Fig 4.2 (iv) : Line drawing of the image of two- handed Sarasvatī seated on a lotus and holding a manuscript and a lotus from the Jagaddhātṛī [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 4.2iv (p) in Appendix 4B]

This similarity again hints towards the presence and continuation of the Vajrayāna Buddhist elements in the Śākta tradition in Assam.

4.2 (d) Image of a four-handed goddess from the Māghnowā Doul featured holding a pot/ jar/ vessel and a Akṣamālā or rosary-

In the architecture of the Māghnowā Doul, there is a partially damaged image featuring a four-handed goddess seated on a lotus and holding a pot of water/ nectarine water and a Akṣamālā- attributes that are usually identified with Sarasvatī.



Fig 4.2 (v) : Line drawing of the image of a four-handed goddess holding a pot and a rosary from the Māghnowā Doul [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 4.2v (p) of Appendix 4B]

A combination of attributes like pot or Kamaṇḍalu/ Kalaśa/ Kumbha and Akṣamālā/ Japamālā or rosary is seen in different forms of Sarasvatī. The form of Sarasvatī or Vāgīśvarī invoked through the *Ṣoḍāśākṣara* or 16 syllable Mantra described in the Bṛhat Tantrasāra is four handed. Three of her hands are described holding a Japamālā/ Akṣamālā, a *Sudhāpūrṇa Kalaśa* or a pot of nectar and a book/ manuscript. Her fourth hand is posed in the *Vyākhyāna* pose (Chattopadhyay, 2010, 199). The Viṣṇudharmottara describes a form of Sarasvatī where she holds a Kamaṇḍalu along with a Vīṇā having a bamboo stem. The *Prapañcasāra* describes a form of Sarasvatī known as *Bhāratī* who is four handed and holding a Kumbha or a pot, a rosary and a manuscript in her three hands. Her fourth hand is either in a gesture of knowledge known as *Cintā* or in the boon giving gesture known as *Vara* or *Varada*. She is said

to be seated on a white lotus. The same text describes another form of Sarasvatī as Bhāratī known as Vāṇī where she holds a nectar filled vessel/ pot or Ghata along with a Vīṇā or lute, a rosary and a manuscript, and is seated on a goose or Haṁsa (Bühnemann, 2016, 31-32, 35). Ten different iconographic forms of Sarasvatī are described in the Śāradātilaka. Out of these four forms are described to be holding a combination of a pot/ vessel and rosary. In the architecture of the 11th century CE Bṛhadeśvarar temple at Gangāikondacholāpuram in Tamil Nadu built during the Cholā/ Chozhā period, there is placed an exquisite stone sculpted image of Sarasvatī, seated and holding a rosary, a Kamaṇḍalu/ Kalaśa and a manuscript in three of her hands. one of her hands is in the *Vyākhyāna* pose or gesture of exposition. This image is identified as *Jñāna Sarasvatī* [**Appendix D2 : Figure (xvii)**].

In the image featured in the relief sculptural art of the architecture of Māghnowā Doul and illustrated in Fig 4.2 (v), two of the four hands of the goddess are shown holding a pot/ jar or lidded vessel and a rosary, whereas rest of her two hands are seen to posed in certain gestures which may be gestures of boon giving or assurance. The presence of the vessel and the rosary in the two hands of the goddess may be an indication towards her identity as Sarasvatī. Moreover , if the descriptions in the above paragraph are followed, the goddess will seem as none other than an iconographic form of Sarasvatī. But, the arrangement and gestures of rest of her hands are uncertain which prevent putting forward the identification of the goddess conclusively as Sarasvatī.

The pot or jar held in the upper left hand of the goddess, in its design, resembles a *Bhogjarā* or *Jarā*- a type of lidded jar with a spout the use of which was prevalent amongst the Āhom royalty and nobility. Bhogjarā-s made of silver, copper, brass and bell metal are being found amongst the possessions of different neo- Vaiṣṇava Sattras and Devālaya-s across Assam [**Appendix D2 : Figure (xviii) and (xix)**]. Many of these Bhogjarā-s feature exquisite designs and workmanship and these date back mostly to the 18th - 20th century CE. They are known to be used for holding liquids like water and sometimes liquor. They were also used to hold consecrated water for several types of ritual oblations in Sattras and Devālaya-s.

Images depicting independent four- handed forms of Vīṇāhasta Sarasvatī are not found in Assam, in none of the known sculptural art traditions that have flourished here

since the 7th century CE, including the tradition of relief sculptural art of the late medieval style patronized and which flourished under the Āhoms. But numerous images featuring independent four- handed forms of Sarasvatī have been found in Bengal. Majority of these images are dated to the 10th to 12th century CE and they belong to the Pāla style. There is a class of sculpted images produced during the Pāla period which feature four- handed Vīṇāhastā Sarasvatī having a *Meṣa* or Ram as a vehicle [**Appendix D2 : Figure (xx)**]. Numerous images featuring such an iconography are found in Bangladesh. Not a single image of Meṣavāhana Vīṇāhastā Sarasvatī has been found in Assam so far. In the present day, clay crafted images featuring two handed Vīṇāhastā Sarasvatī having Haṁsa or swan or goose as her vehicle are the most popular. But, such an iconographic form is rarely found or absent in the sculptural art of Assam preceding the modern period.

4.3 Durgā

4.3.1 Mahiṣāsūramardīnī

Durgā/ Caṇḍīkā has been conceived both as the consort or Śakti of Śiva in the form of Gaurī / Pārvatī and as an independent goddess, the sole source of every existence and the only supreme being in the creation. According to the *Muṇḍamālā Tantra* [3. 45], there is no Śāstra as superior as the Tantra, no Bhakta or devotee as superior as Keśava/ Viṣṇu, no Yogī as superior as Śankara/ Śiva and no Devatā or God as supreme as Durgā (Rai, 2010, 66). In various texts and traditions, Durgā has been visualized as having a myriad of forms or aspects. Each of her form and emanation is a distinct Devī/ Śakti. It has been mentioned in several Tantras that all goddesses or goddess forms can be addressed or identified as Durgā. Flood (1996, 177) says that the name or concept Devī is interchangeable with Durgā. Further several Tantras or Tāntric texts say that any goddess or Devī can be addressed as Durgā. Durgā as an independent goddess is more closely associated with the cult of Śiva, than Viṣṇu. The Vaiṣṇavas, especially the neo- Vaiṣṇavas of Assam, conceive Durgā as Yogamāyā, the younger sister of Viṣṇu as Kṛṣṇa and a manifestation of Viṣṇu's illusory power, following the narratives elaborated in the 10th Canto or *Daśama Skandha* of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa [verses 9-13] and the *Harivaṁsa* of the Mahābhārata. Yogamāyā is also known as *Vindhyavāsīnī* and her form is described by

Rao (1997, 344) to be four handed, where her two back hands should be carrying the Sankha and Cakra- the characteristic attributes of Viṣṇu and her front hands should be placed in Varada and Abhaya poses. She is said to be having a lion as her mount. In some Tāntric texts, Vindhyaśinī is described to having the head of a bird, may be an eagle and body of a human. She holds Sankha, Cakra and Gadā in her three hands and her fourth hand is placed in Abhaya pose. She adorns a Muṇḍamālā or a garland of severed human heads and mounts a lion. Such a form of her may be rare and esoteric. Vindhyaśinī is also amongst Nava or nine forms of Durgā in certain Āgamic texts.

Durgā's numerous forms- *Ugra* (terrific/ malevolent), *Saumya* (benign/ benevolent) and *Miśrita/ Miśra* (having a combination of both Ugra and Saumya) are part of both Tāntric and Purāṇic traditions of Hinduism. One of her most popular and prominent iconographic forms falling in the category of either Ugra or Miśrita is *Mahiśāsuramardinī* or she as the slayer of the buffalo demon Mahiśāsura. The Mahiśāsuramardinī form, particularly in the Śākta tradition of eastern India (Assam and Bengal), has been conceived as the ultimate, highest form of Durgā and all other goddesses and goddess forms are a part of her. This form is seen to be conceptualized and presented in diverse manners in the literary traditions and in the religious art of the Indian subcontinent.

Mahiśāsuramardinī Durgā, in the study of Hindu iconography or Śākta iconography can be called as a general umbrella term for visual depictions or images of diverse martial and protective goddesses identified with or idealized as forms and emanations of Durgā or Caṇḍikā- the consort of Śiva taming or destroying a monstrous buffalo/ shape- shifting buffalo / a buffalo headed human entity/ a half human- half buffalo demon identified with Mahiśāsura described as none other than a part incarnation of Śiva (not always) in the mainstream Purāṇic and Tāntric literature. But there are certain images or image types in the religious art of the Indian subcontinent, especially found and popular in eastern India depicting martial and warrior goddesses slaying a human bodied or anthropomorphic demon having no element of a buffalo in his morphology. Neither there is found any symbol or figure of a buffalo accompanying him. Though these goddesses can be identified with or understood as emanations of Durgā or Caṇḍikā, there arises a problem in identifying the slain demon as Mahiśāsura because of the absence of the buffalo imagery. But, these

image types are being accepted and categorized as Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā. A variation is also seen within this type of images. In some of the images of such type, a head of a buffalo is portrayed as placed at the extreme bottom of all the figures.

The goddesses taming or destroying a buffalo bodied demonic entity or a shape shifting buffalo demon unified and classified under the conception of Durgā slaying Mahiṣāsura actually belong to diverse ritual systems within the Purāṇic and Tāntric traditions, and appropriated from numerous folk and tribal/ Laukika mother- goddess worshipping traditions and cultures styled as Śākta Tantra within the Indian subcontinent. Each of the Tāntric traditions or ritual, or more appropriately Mantra systems/ Mantra Krama-s focus or visualize a different form of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā or Caṇḍikā. Some Tāntric systems visualize or instruct the worship of a form of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā where the figure of Durgā is eight handed, whereas other systems instruct the worship of a Mahiṣāsūramardīnī form where Durgā is four-handed. The royal family of Tripura has been worshipping an unique image of ten-handed Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā which is crafted in such a manner that the goddess looks two-handed, and both the hands are engaged in slaying Mahiṣāsura with the spear. The rest of the hands are kept 'hidden' and undiscernable through some visual tactics and craftsmanship. In some Tāntric Kulācāra systems , a form of the Mahāvidyā Cīnamastā known as *Gupta Durgā*, also known by names such as *Raṇajaitrī*, *Cinna Muṇḍā*, *Cāmuṇḍā* etc. [**Appendix D3 : Figure (i)**] has been worshipped as *Mahiṣaghātī* or the destroyer of Mahiṣāsura during the *Sandhikṣaṇa* period of Durgā Pūjā¹. She has been prominently worshipped in some Kṣatriya Kulas or Kṣatriya clans². According to some practitioners of Tāntric rituals, the forms of eight-handed and four-handed Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā are strictly Tāntric or *Tantroktā*³. The Purāṇic ritual systems which are again an consolidation of Vedic Brāhmaṇic / non- Tāntric and Tāntric systems visualize or instruct the worship of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā in her ten-handed form. The ten-handed Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā form is often called by the adepts of Hindu ritual systems as the Purāṇic form or *Paurāṇika Mūrti*. The Devī Mahābhāgavata/ Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa [43. 87] clearly speaks of the ten-handed form of Durgā as Paurāṇika Mūrti (Kumar, 1983, 186). The ten-handed form of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā has been the most widely depicted of all the Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā forms in pan- Indian sculptural art, as

well as painting. It is only the ten- handed form whose clay image have been worshipped during the annual autumnal Durgā Pūjā festival in eastern India, including Assam. The second chapter of Devī Māhātmyam [2. 9-38] describes an eighteen- handed form of Mahiṣāsūramardinī who is known as *Mahālakṣmī* . She, has been described as the *Madhyama Caritra* of Caṇḍikā or Durgā and has been formed from the assembled energies of all the gods and goddesses (Bhattacharya, D.P., 2016, 84-90) . According to the Tāntric *Navārṇa* Mantra system, Mahālakṣmī is known as a form of the supreme *Caṇḍikā*. In another Krama of this Navārṇa Mantra system, the Tantric goddess *Dāmara Bhairavī* or *Dāmareśvarī Bhairavī* [**Appendix D3 : Figure (ii)**] has been conceived and worshipped as the supreme Caṇḍikā⁴ . The form of Dāmara Bhairavī [shown in Figure (ii) in Appendix D3] has been described in the Dakṣiṇamūrti Saṁhitā, and she is said to be the *Caṇḍī Vidyā* of goddess Bhairavī⁵ and she is the Candika or Candi of the *Uttarāmnaya*- one of the six Āmnayas or Tāntric paths of revelation (Vidyanidhi, 2012, 470- 471) . The 59th and 60th chapter of Kālikā Purāṇa speaks of eighteen- handed and sixteen- handed forms of Mahiṣāsūramardinī Durgā (Shastri, B., 1994, 57- 61). Portrayals of Eighteen- handed and Sixteen- handed forms of Mahiṣāsūramardinī Durgā are also found in several sculptural traditions in the history of the Indian subcontinent, mostly in the sculptural traditions falling under the EISMA that flourished during the 8th to 12th century CE. Images of eighteen handed Mahiṣāsūramardinī Durgā are most frequently found in the religious art of Nepal. In Nepalese Śaktism, the worship of eighteen handed form of Mahiṣāsūramardinī Durgā is seen to be the most widespread [**Appendix D3 : Figure (iii)**]. The Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa speaks of a twenty handed form of Mahiṣāsūramardinī Durgā under the name of Caṇḍikā (Rao, 1997, 346). Images of twenty handed form of Mahiṣāsūramardinī Durgā are also not rare in the sculptural art of the Indian subcontinent. Some Tāntric texts say that Mahiṣāsūramardinī Durgā is amongst the major 18 or Aṣṭadaśa *Mahāvidyās*⁶ or emanations of Tāntric wisdom.

Almost every two- handed or multi- handed warrior goddesses slaying or wounding a buffalo bodied demon or a half human- half buffalo demon by spears , tridents as well as Cakra-s or discuses in the religious art, particularly sculptural art of the Indian subcontinent can be understood and interpreted as illustrating or as visualizations of the numerous, diverse Purāṇic narratives and Tāntric conceptions of Durgā in her various identities slaying a common buffalo demon Mahiṣāsura.

But, there are several other images, the first type of which depict a martial, strongly built goddess catching hold of a buffalo with one of her hands and suffocating its mouth or strangulating it by her other hand. Images of this type are mostly found amongst the evidences of the sculptural art of the Kuśanas dating to the 1st to 4th century CE and also the Guptās and Rastrakuṭas [**Appendix D3 : Figure (iv) and (v)**]. The second type depicts a goddess with eight or ten hands standing on a head of a Mahiṣa or buffalo and sometimes accompanied by a lion as well as a stag/ antelope. This type of images locally known as *Kotravai/ Korravai/ Vana Durgai/ Durgai* [**Appendix D3 : Figure (vi) and (vii)**] in the Tamil region and mentioned in ancient Tamil *Sangam* or *Caṅkam* literature (Flood, 1996, 180) are most frequent in the sculptural art of the temples built by the Cholās/ Chozhās, and the Pandyās in the Tamil region. The Śāradātilaka [11. 25] mentions of a eight handed/ armed form of Durgā where she stands on the head of a Mahiṣa. This form is named as Mahiṣamardinī and it can be said as similar to the form of Kotravai (Shastri, P., 2011, 287). There is also a image type featured frequently in the sculptural art of the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava temples as well as other temples in southern India where Durgā is shown as having four hands, where two back hands hold Sankha and Cakra and the front hands are either posed in Varada and Abhaya, or the left hand in *Kaṭihasta* or *Kaṭyavalambita* pose and the right hand showing Abhaya Mudra. She is shown sometimes as standing on a buffalo head or sometimes on a *Padmapītha* or lotus pedestal. Such an image type of Durgā is known as *Viṣṇu Durgā*, or Durgā as the sister of Viṣṇu [**Appendix D3 : Figure (viii)**]. The *Suprabhedāgama* describes Durgā as the ‘ dear younger sister of Viṣṇu’, and informs that she came out of the Adīśakti, or the supreme cosmic feminine power (Rao, 1997, 341- 342). There is also an evidence of a Viṣṇu Durgā image in Assam dating back to the 8th to 10th century CE, and found in the Doiyāng- Dhansīri valley region.

The aforesaid types of images can be simply identified just as different stylizations or variants of Mahiṣāsūramardinī Durgā. But some of these images, may be featuring distinct folk, tribal or clan war goddesses associated with the practice of buffalo sacrifice and buffalo totem worship who became appropriated during the course of time as Mahiṣāsūramardinī Durgā. It is because the act of suffocating a buffalo is one of the prescribed methods of animal sacrifice. The head of a buffalo in the second type of image may be either a suggestion of *Ghāta Bali*- another mode of

animal sacrifice where the animal is ritually decapitated, or a tribal or folk totemic symbol or a tribal practice of displaying the heads of hunted and killed animals as a trophy of heroic merit. The buffalo in the aforesaid two types of images may not be necessarily a demonic entity. As the above types of images have been found mainly in the context of sculptural art of the temples built according to Purāṇic, Āgamic and Tāntric norms, and the goddesses featured in them are infused with Purāṇic, Āgamic and Tāntric attributes of Durgā, they can be interpreted as belonging to the category of Maḥiṣāsūramardinī Durgā, but their possible tribal associations cannot be denied. In the culture of Assam too, numerous fierce tribal and folk war goddesses, presiding goddesses of forest and hunting, and goddesses worshipped on the periphery of the society who were satiated through buffalo sacrifice have been appropriated as Maḥiṣāsūramardinī Durgā across history, as a result of several tribal clans and kingdoms absorbing themselves to Purāṇic and Tāntric traditions and manners of Hinduism. Presently, no distinction can be made between these tribal war goddesses and Maḥiṣāsūramardinī Durgā, mainly in their visualized forms, and rituals. In most cases, the rituals and lore related to the Purāṇic and Tāntric Maḥiṣāsūramardinī Durgā are seen merged with the ritual and lore related to these folk and tribal war and nature goddesses, e.g. *Ranacaṇḍī*, *Bāgheśvarī*, *Banabāsī* etc. There are accounts of Āhoms worshipping a goddess at a Deośāl or shrine located in Bardubi in the Dibrugarh- Tinsukia region of eastern Assam (Neog, 2008a, 81). The image of this goddess is known to be brought by the Āhoms and might be a folk and clan war goddess of the Āhoms. Whether she has also been assimilated into the imagery or conception of Maḥiṣāsūramardinī or any other Purāṇic or Tāntric goddess in the later years is not clear. The Assam State Museum at Guwahati has in its collection a bronze plaque featuring a relief sculpted face or head of a female deity directly on top of a buffalo head [**Appendix D3 : Figure (ix)**]. This image has been obviously identified as a stylized Maḥiṣāsūramardinī Durgā. But from several of its visual features, and arrangement, it may be again interpreted, either as a tribal totemic symbol representing some goddess cult subduing or humbling a cult centred on worshipping buffalo totem (Rao, 1997, 354), or a goddess worshipped through offering heads of sacrificed buffaloes. She might have been assimilated into the dominant narrative of Maḥiṣāsūramardinī Durgā under the context of a possible Sanskritization of the tribal culture in which she was venerated.

All the visualizations and descriptions of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā found in the Purāṇic and Tāntric texts have Durgā severing the head of the buffalo body of Mahiṣāsūra, trampling and wounding his emerging human form from the severed throat of the buffalo by her trident [**Appendix D3 : Figure (x)**]. Such a visualization of Mahiṣāsūra is referred to as *Ardhaniskranta* by the Devī Māhātmyam [3. 41-42] (Bhattacharya, D.P., 2016, 105). Images of Durgā slaying the Ardhaniskranta form of Mahiṣāsūra in accordance to the Purāṇic, Āgamic and Tāntric texts began to appear in the artistic traditions of the Indian subcontinent from the Gupta period onwards (Choudhury, N.D., 1992, 31). In the sculptural art of Assam, mainly dating from 9th to 12th century CE, which was the period of rise of Śaktism, all Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā images are found to feature the Ardhaniskranta form of Mahiṣāsūra as slain by Durgā. But, in the newly emerged Late Medieval style of temple stone relief sculptural art, and even metal sculptural art of the Āhoms, there is no intact image featuring Durgā slaying the Ardhaniskranta form of Mahiṣāsūra as described by the Purāṇic and Tāntric texts.

In the relief sculptural art of the late medieval style patronized by the Āhoms, Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā is seen to be portrayed only in her ten-handed and sixteen-handed forms/ aspects. Images showing the goddess Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā as sixteen-handed are featured only on the architecture of Bar Pukhurī Śiva Doul . In the architecture of Devī Doul at Gaurīsāgar and Jagaddhātrī Doul at Kalugaon, the images of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā depicted are of the ten-handed type. Māghnowā Doul and the Bar Pukhurī Devī Doul, presently contain no sculpted image of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā on their architecture.

According to the Kālikā Purāṇa [59. 10- 23 ; 60. 56- 64a; 60. 118-122a], the ten-handed form of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī is known by the name *Durgā / Kātyāyanī/ Mahiṣamardīnī*, the sixteen-handed form as *Bhadrakālī* and the eighteen-handed form as *Ugracaṇḍā* (Shastri, B., 1994, 57-61). In the sculptural art of the architecture of the concerned five Douls, no representation or image of the Ugracaṇḍā form of Durgā Mahiṣāsūramardīnī has been found. The Matsya Purāṇa [CCLX. 55- 64] also describes the ten-handed form of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā as Kātyāyanī and her form is almost similar to that described in the Kālikā Purāṇa (Wilson, Singh, 1997, 1128). The Agni Purāṇa [50. 1-5] describes Mahiṣāsūramardīnī as Caṇḍī and that she can be endowed with either twenty or just ten hands (Shastri, J.L., 1998, 132). Most of the

Mahiṣāsūramardīnī images crafted out in the present day for worship in eastern India including Assam conform to the descriptions given in the texts like Kālikā Purāṇa, Matsya Purāṇa and Mahākāla Saṁhitā. The Smārṭa Durgā Pūjā Paddhati-s also prescribe the worship of the image of ten-handed Durgā made in accordance to the description given by Matsya Purāṇa and the Kālikā Purāṇa. According to the 43rd chapter of Devī Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa , the ten handed Durgā is described as the *Paurāṇika Mūrti* and the four-handed *Mula Durgā* is known as the *Tāntrikī Mūrti* (Kumar, 1983, 181- 187) . In the same Purāṇa [43. 88] , Brahmā advises Rāma to worship the clay image of the ten-handed Paurāṇika form of Durgā through elaborate rituals for the purpose of gaining victory over Rāvana (Kumar, 1983, 187).

Intact and recognizable images of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā as a part of the architectural stone relief sculptural art of the Āhom built Douls are found to be very less. Among the five Douls considered in this chapter, sculpted images of ten-handed form of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā are only seen on the outer walls of the Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul and Jagaddhātrī Doul. The Mahiṣāsūramardīnī image from the Jagaddhātrī Doul can be called as unique in the context of the tradition of temple stone relief sculpture that proliferated under the Āhom court. The features of the Mahisasuramardini image from the Gaurisagar Devi Doul have got eroded and obliterated, might be due to unplanned restoration. Still, the features of image are , too an extent, discernible.

4.3.1 (a) Image of ten handed Mahiṣāsūramardīnī from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul-



Fig 4.3 (i) : Line drawing of the image of ten-handed Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 4.3i (p) in Appendix 4C]

Many features of the image illustrated in Fig 4.3 (i) have suffered damage but still are discernible to a certain extent. The left five hands of the goddess have faded beyond recognition and it is not clear what attributes are held in them. The right five hands, are to an extent intact and the attributes held in them are identifiable. Starting from the upper right hand, the goddess holds the shaft of the *Śūla* or a *Triśūla* (trident) with which she pierces the body of Mahiṣāsura, a *Khadga/ Asi* (sword), an unidentified weapon, may be a *Khetaka/ Muṣala* (a mace/ club/ pestle), a *Cakra* (discus) and a *Śakti* (a spear or lance). The attribute in the uppermost left hand is not at all clear. It may be a shield. The left foot of the goddess must be on the body of Mahisasura or may be trampling his head and her right foot is established on the back of her mount, the lion, corresponding to her forms described in the texts like *Kālikā Purāṇa*, *Matsya Purāṇa*, *Agni Purāṇa* and *Kālī Vilāsa Tantra*. According to the *Kālikā Purāṇa* [59. 10- 21], the goddess holds in her five right hands (starting from the top) a *Triśūla/ Śūla* or a trident with which she pierces the body of Mahiṣāsura, a sword, discus, arrow and a lance. In her five left hands (starting from the top), she should hold a shield, a full drawn bow, noose, a goad and an axe or a bell. It is further said in the description that the goddess should be standing in a *Tribhanga* or three bended pose of the body. The anthropomorphic or human like figure of Mahiṣāsura should be emerging from the cut off head of his buffalo body and pierced by the *Triśūla* held by the goddess in her uppermost right hand. He holds a sword in his hand. The goddess strangles him with the noose known as *Nāga Pāśa* held in one of her hands as well as she is also said to catch hold of his hair by the hand in which she holds the noose (Shastri, B., 1994, 57-59) .

In the image from the *Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul* in Fig 4.3 (i), some of the attributes held in the five right hands of the goddess *Durgā* like the trident, sword, discus and lance are similar to that described to be held by her in the form described in the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, but there are minor variations in the arrangement. As per the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, the *Cakra* or discus should be held in the third right hand from the top (Shastri, B., 1994, 57). But in the image, the third right hand is seen holding an unidentified attribute the design of which seem to resemble either a *Nākoī Dā*, a *Lāngkhor*, a *Āmfāi* or a *Dākhār* all of which are different types of weapons of the local or regional variety used by the *Āhoms* and the *Kacārīs*. It may also be a club/

mace or a pestle. The Cakra is instead, placed in the fourth hand and the fifth hand is holding a lance or a spear.

Coming to the left hands of the goddess in the image, they are damaged and none of the attributes held in them are intact. But if clearly observed, a contour of a serpentine form or object can be traced descending downwards from the lowermost hand of the goddess towards the figure of Mahiṣāsura which is completely damaged. Though the figure of the Asura is completely damaged, some faint edges of its form are left through which the position in which he was portrayed can be made out. But it is not clear of whether he was portrayed in an anthropomorphic form or in a half human- half buffalo form as described in the aforesaid Purāṇas. The hand of the Asura which holds a sword is visible. The serpentine object or form may be the Nāga Pasa or the serpent noose, which according to the description in the Kālikā Purāṇa is let by the goddess Durgā to strangle or bind Mahiṣāsura. It is described that the noose is held along with the hair tuft of the Asura in the fourth left hand (from the top) of the goddess whereas the fifth or the lowermost hand of the goddess is said to hold either an axe or a bell. But, in the image from the Gaurīsāgar Devī DouL in Fig 4.3 (i), the noose seems like it is held by the goddess in her lowermost or fifth hand.

The figure of the Simha or lion, the mount of the goddess in the image is totally damaged except for a part of its jaw shown as thrusting itself on the hand of Mahiṣāsura which is holding the sword. From a close observation of the form of the jaw and some remaining contours of its head and neck, it can be understood that it had a hybrid form combining the characteristics of a horse, a dragon like mythical reptile and a feline creature. Sculpted and painted figures of lions represented as hybrid forms of reptile, horse and a feline are seen to be common in the art of Assam as well as Bengal. Mainly, in the Durgā images crafted in Bengal and Assam from 17th century CE onwards, it can be seen that the lion is always depicted as a creature having a long curved serpentine neck, a long snout, ears and manes like that of a horse and facial features (jaws and eyes) like that of a dragon or a crocodile. Because of the sharp equine morphological characteristics, such a lion is commonly called *Ghotak Rūpī Simha*⁷ in the culture of Bengal. Such a manner of portraying the lion having a composite of morphological characteristics of lion, horse and reptile is also met with in the miniature painting traditions of the Rājput and

Mughal courts of the same time period. Even in the art of some of the cultures of the Indian subcontinent from 1st century BCE to 12th century CE, figures of lions portrayed in such a form are seen. In the Dravidian temple architectural sculpture too, images of nearly identical leonine creatures having certain reptilian and equine features known as *Shardula*-s and *Yāli*-s are frequently seen.

The figure of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā in the image illustrated in Fig 4.3 (i) is not accompanied by figures of other deities or attendants. In the iconographic scheme of the sculptural art of the architecture of the Douls, there are no evidences of any such image of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā where she is featured as accompanied by deities like Gaṇeśa, Kārtikeya, Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī. But, in the sculptural art of the temples in Bengal, dating back to the same period as well as later than the Āhom built Douls, several images of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā where Durgā is flanked by the above four deities are seen. The practice of worshipping the image of ten-handed Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā along with the images of Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Gaṇeśa and Kārtikeya in the manner as it is seen nowadays in Assam and Bengal finds mention in the Kālī Vilāsa Tantra. It mentions of a procedure of worship of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā with accompanying deities like Jayā, Vijayā, Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Gaṇeśa and Kārtikeya (Tarkatirtha, 1917, 7) The Smārṭa authors or the Nibandhakāras who composed the several *Durgā Pūjā Paddhati*-s or texts/manuals on the elaborate worship of Durgā might have included the procedure of worship of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā with accompanying deities like Jayā, Vijayā, Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Gaṇeśa and Kārtikeya from texts like the Kālī Vilāsa Tantra. According to this Tantra, these six deities are to be placed at different positions flanking the image of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā. According to a prevalent belief in Bengal, the deities Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Gaṇeśa and Kārtikeya are children of goddess Durgā. Though this belief is seen to be prevalent in the culture of Assam too, though this belief or conception is an integral part of the ritual poetry on Durga, for example- the *Durgā Nām* or Gosānī Nām mainly prevalent in the culture of eastern or upper Assam, very negligible number of such visual images, both sculpted and painted, dating prior to the 19th and 20th century CE are found in Assam where the figure of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā is flanked by the figures of above four deities. Numerous sculpted images featuring Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā as flanked by Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Gaṇeśa and Kārtikeya had appeared in the sculptural art of Bengal by 18th

century CE. But, in the art of Assam, till the 18th century CE, such images were not common or almost absent as per the evidences found. Only one mutilated and broken terracotta image of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī accompanied by Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Gaṇeśa and Kārtikeya has been recovered from Belsar in Nalbari district of lower Assam [**Appendix D3 : Figure (xi)**]. The image seems to exhibit certain features of Durgā portrayed in *Kālighat Paṭa* paintings and the 19th century CE coloured lithographs/ oleographs of Bengal, mainly in the style of arrangement of the hands of Durgā and the overall positioning of the deities which allows us to date it to a period not earlier than late 18th or 19th century CE. The modelling of the figures are sharply similar with that of the images featured in the terracotta sculptural art of the temples of Bengal built from 18th to 19th century CE which may hint that this image was crafted somewhere in Bengal and then brought to Assam. The arrangement which consists of the image of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā in the centre, flanked by Lakṣmī , Sarasvatī, Gaṇeśa and Kārtikeya together in the same visual frame is commonly known as a *Ek Cāla Pratimā* and it is very popular in Bengal [**Appendix D3 : Figure (xii)**].

Turning to the image from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Douḷ in Fig 4.3 (i), there might have been another figure or object near the head of Mahiṣāsura, just below the left hands of the goddess [marked with red circle in Fig 4.3i (p) in Appendix 4D], but there is no certainty of its presence. It seems as if there was some other animal figure there, as the broken fragments somewhat are shaped like that of the hind legs or hind part of a four footed animal. The icon or image of goddess *Bara Devī / Dāngar Āi* or *Bhavāni*, the *Kuladevī* or tutelary goddess of the Koch royal family of Koch Behar⁸ who is said to have been worshipped since the days of reign of king Naranārāyaṇa or Malladeva (16th century CE) features none other than the ten handed Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā. The peculiar feature in this image is that in addition to the figure of the lion, the conventional mount or the vehicle of the goddess, there is also a figure of a tiger which is positioned on the left side of the goddess, just below the left hands of the goddess. The tiger is shown biting or thrusting his jaw on the Asura's left arm from behind, whereas the lion is biting the right arm of the Asura which is holding a sword [**Appendix D3 : Figure (xiii) and (xiv)**]. If the forms of the two images- the Mahiṣāsūramardīnī image featured in the Gaurīsāgar Devī Douḷ illustrated in Fig 4.3 (i) and the Mahiṣāsūramardīnī image

known as Bhavānī / Bara Devī, the tutelary goddess of the Koch royalty are compared, it is found that both of them may have a certain similarity in the positioning of the figures. But, there is no certainty about whether the figure of a tiger was present (like in the Bhavānī or Bara Devī image of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī) in the image portrayed in the Gaurīsāgar Devī DouL.

As mentioned earlier, the tradition of crafting and worshipping clay images of ten-handed Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā in the Āhom kingdom inspired by the ones crafted for worship by the Koch royalty was initiated under the encouragement and patronage of king Siu- Seng- Phā or Pratāp Simha. According to historians, Pratāp Simha was the one under whose patronage, the tradition of ceremonial, public scale worship of the clay image of ten-handed Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā following the model of the Koch kingdom was first introduced in the Āhom kingdom , and it was continued by the succeeding Āhom rulers like Śīva Simha and Phuleśvarī Kunvarī. The Burañjīs say that the king heard about the tradition of ceremonial worship of the clay ten- handed image of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī in the Koch royal household from his emissaries and wanted it to be celebrated and observed in the same way as that held in the Koch royal household. There are accounts of him sending artisans like Marangiyāl Khanikar to the Koch kingdom to learn the art of crafting clay images of ten- handed Mahiṣāsūramardīnī (Basu, 1970, 329) . The Koch royalty, till to this date, has been worshipping the clay image of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī crafted in the form of Bara Devī or Bhavānī during the annual Durgā Pūjā festival. The Bara Devī image is said to have been crafted in the same, unaltered manner since the period of reign of Naranārāyaṇa or even earlier, during the reign of Viśvasimha- the founder of the Koch or Kamatā kingdom. Possibly, the artisans who were sent by the Āhom king Pratāp Simha to the Koch kingdom had learnt to craft the Bara Devī image because the Koch royalty has never worshipped a clay image of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā having a formal and iconographic setup other than Bara Devī or Bhavānī during the annual Durgā Pūjā festival. The Mahiṣāsūramardīnī image in the sculptural art of Gaurīsāgar Devī DouL in Fig 4.3 (i) seems to parallel the Bara Devī Mahiṣāsūramardīnī image worshipped by the Koch royalty in many respects. Now, if the unclear, indistinct object below the left hands of the goddess in the image, seen is surely the remaining faded fragment of the obliterated figure of a tiger, then it can be concluded that the image in Fig 4.3 (i) was a copy of the Bara Devī or

Bhavānī image of Maḥiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā worshipped by the Koch royalty. Moreover, if the figure of Maḥiṣāsura is carefully observed, it is found that one of his hands holds the sword by its hilt whereas his other hand might have held the blade of the sword, just like the figure of Mahisasura in the Bara Devī or Bhavānī Maḥiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā image.

4.3.1 (b) Image of ten-handed Maḥiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā from the Jagaddhātrī DouL, Kalugaon- This Maḥiṣāsūramardīnī image illustrated in Fig 4.3 (ii), is perhaps the most intricately rendered one in the whole range of Maḥiṣāsūramardīnī images portrayed in the late medieval style of stone sculptural art adorning the the Āhom built Douls.

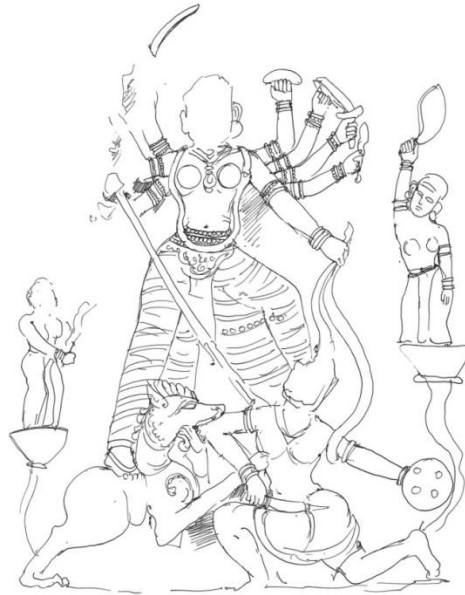


Fig 4.3 (ii) : Line drawing of the image of the ten handed Maḥiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā from the Jagaddhātrī DouL [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 4.3ii (p) in Appendix 4C]

Several features of the image illustrated in Fig 4.3 (ii) are damaged. The right five hands of the figure of the goddess are completely damaged. In her two left hands, starting from the top, the goddess may be holding a Khetaka or a shield (?) and a full drawn bow. The attributes or weapons in the third and fourth hands are indistinct and unidentifiable. The fifth and the lowermost hand holds the Nāga Pāśa as well as the hair tuft of Mahisasura. The lion, the mount of the goddess, as per convention and the prevalent stylistics of the period, is shown as a hybrid creature having a

combination of reptilian, equine and feline characteristics. It is shown as pouncing upon and in an act of mauling Mahiṣāsura. It is catching hold of the right arm of Mahiṣāsura which is holding a sword. The left hand of Mahiṣāsura holding a shield is bound by the Nāga Pāśa held in the lowermost left hand of Durgā. On the either sides of the goddess, are figures of two female attendants standing on lotus pedestals. One of the attendants is waving a Cāmara or a fly whisk and the figure of the other attendant is damaged. There is a canopy (?) over the head of the goddess [refer to the photograph in Fig 4.3ii (p) of Appendix 4C]. The Triśūla/ Śūla or the trident which is piercing the body of Mahiṣāsura is broken and it is not clear in which right hand of the goddess it is held. The sword held in the uppermost right hand has a fragment of it remaining.

The two female attendant figures with one of them waving a fly whisk, must be goddesses *Jayā* and *Vijayā*, known as the *Nitya Sakhīs* or companions / attendants of goddess Durgā. They are actually the Śaktis or personifications of the energy of goddess Durgā. In the Bara Devī image too, the figure of goddess Mahiṣāsuramardinī Durgā is also shown as flanked by Jayā and Vijayā, and no other deities . In the Kālikā Purāṇa [59. 22-23] , it is mentioned that the image of Mahiṣāsuramardinī Durgā should be constantly encircled by eight Śaktis or eight goddesses but does not mention of Jayā and Vijayā in this group (Shastri, B., 1994, 59). But in every Smārṭa or Purāṇokta Durgā Pūjā Paddhati texts elaborating the theory, model or procedure of ritual worship of goddess Durgā , the image of Mahiṣāsuramardinī to be worshipped should include the figures of Jayā and Vijayā. Worship must be offered to the two goddesses during the course of the ritual. The forms of Jayā and Vijayā, when accompanying goddess Durgā in all images, should be portrayed two handed. In an image of Durgā, Jayā should be placed on the left side of the goddess whereas Vijayā on the right hand side, as per certain iconographic conventions prevalent in eastern India. The forms of Jayā and Vijayā may differ with respect to text and tradition. In some images of Durgā, Jayā and Vijayā, both, are portrayed holding swords and shields. The Kālī Vilāsa Tantra [18. 11- 16] mentions that Jayā and Vijayā, should both be two- handed when accompanying goddess Durgā. Jaya is described to have the colour of molten gold , decked in divine ornaments and offering boons, merits and powers to her votaries. Vijayā, on the other hand is described to have the colour of mixed collyrium,

bedecked in divine garments and ornaments and adorned with a *Gāna Yantra*- may be a musical instrument (Tarkatirtha, 1917, 39-40), the presence of a *Gāna Yantra* may associate her with Sarasvatī but it requires more insight. The 43rd chapter of the *Devī Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa* or *Mahābhāgavata Purana* in its description of the *Mahādurgāloka* or the supreme abode of *Mahādurgā* or *Mūla Durgā*, tells of goddesses *Jayā* and *Vijayā* to be attending upon the goddess *Mahādurgā*/*Mūladurgā* or the *Tāntriki Mūrti* of *Durgā* with fly whisks [verse 74] and other offerings (Kumar, 1983, 186). This imagery of *Jayā* and *Vijayā* in the *Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa* might have inspired the forms of *Jayā* and *Vijayā* in the *Mahiṣāsūramardinī* image from the *Jagaddhātṛī Douḷ* featured in Fig 4.3 (ii).

In all the forms of *Mahiṣāsūramardinī Durgā* described in the *Purāṇas*, *Tantras*, *Āgamas* and *Śilpaśāstras*, she is visualized as standing either in *Tribhanga*, or *Ālīḍha* poses. In the image of *Mahiṣāsūramardinī Durgī* from the *Jagaddhātṛī Douḷ* illustrated in Fig 4.3 (ii), an attempt is seen by the artisans to render the *Ālīḍha* pose in a graceful and articulated manner and almost bearing the lyricism and aesthetic intricacy advocated by the *Śilpaśāstras* or image making treatises/texts and descriptions in *Purāṇas* and *Tantras*. No other *Mahiṣāsūramardinī Durgā* image (considered here) in the context of the relief sculptural art of the *Āhom* built *Douls*, is seen to feature such a clear, articulated, lyrically resonated and near to natural rendering of the bodily nuances of the goddess. The tenderness of the lithe flesh can be sensed in the bodily form of *Mahiṣāsūramardinī Durgā* in the image from *Jagaddhātṛī Douḷ* in Fig 4.3 (ii). The figure of *Mahiṣāsūra*, in the image, also bears a very lively tension and a lyrical grace in his bodily form. He is shown in his complete human form here, not in his theriomorphic half human half buffalo form. But, there might have been some depiction of a buffalo motif accompanying him or placed near him in the image, but it is not seen now.

The image of *Mahiṣāsūramardinī Durgā* portrayed in the *Jagaddhātṛī Douḷ* has sharp resemblances with a metal image of *Mahiṣāsūramardinī* found at *Tinisukia* preserved now at the *Assam State Museum* in *Guwahati* [**Appendix D3 : Figure (xv)**]. This image from *Tinisukia* dates back to the 18th century CE itself and is counted as amongst the finest specimens of metal sculpture produced in late medieval *Assam*. From the resemblance, it can be said that it too, may have been produced in the ateliers patronized by the *Āhom* court.

4.3.1 (c) Images featuring sixteen handed Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā from the Bar Pukhurī Śīva Doul -

Images of sixteen-handed Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā are seen to be depicted only in the relief sculptural art of the architecture of Bar Pukhurī Śīva Doul. The outer part of the Bāda of the Garbhagṛha of Bar Pukhurī Śīva Doul contains more than one image of the sixteen-handed Mahiṣāsūramardīnī on its architecture, that too positioned or placed at different directions.



Fig 4.3 (iii) : A Line drawing of one of the images of sixteen handed Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā from the Bar Pukhurī Śīva Doul [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 4.3iii (p) in Appendix 4C]

But why the image of the sixteen handed form of the goddess is seen to be repeated several times on the temple architecture ? There can be several explanations for it.

The Agni Purāṇa [50. 6-12] describes the imagery of *Nava Durgā* or nine Durgās. The nine Durgās are said to be worshipped in a diagram of nine lotuses issuing from the central eighteen- handed form of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā. Each of these nine goddesses commencing with *Rudracanḍā* have the form of sixteen- handed Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā but having different body colours (Shastri, J.L, 1998, 132). In the architecture of the Bar Pukhuri Śīva Doul, presently, there are six images of sixteen- handed Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā, connoting towards a possibility that once there might have been nine of these representations on the temple body and the

artisans had intended to depict the Nava Durgā imagery as per the Agni Purāṇa. Now the question arises that why the artisans would have chosen to depict the above Nava Durgā imagery only in the iconographic programme of the Bar Pukhurī Śiva DouL and not in any other DouL, even in the nearby Bar Pukhurī Devī DouL where the presiding deity or Vighraha is Maḥiṣāsuraṃardīnī Durgā ? No clear interpretation can be given for it.

According to the Kālikā Purāṇa [59. 22- 23], an image of goddess Durgā, in her ten handed Maḥiṣāsuraṃardīnī form should be encircled by eight Śaktis or eight Yoginīs, namely- *Ugracaṇḍā*, *Pracaṇḍā*, *Caṇḍogrā*, *Caṇḍanāyikā*, *Caṇḍā*, *Caṇḍavatī*, *Cāmuṇḍā* and *Caṇḍikā* (Shastri, 1994, 59). The Kālikā Purāṇa does not give any description of their forms. The Purāṇic/ Smārṭa Durgā Pūjā Paddhati-s which have been composed and prevalent in eastern India since the late medieval period, also say that an image of goddess Durgā, in her Maḥiṣāsuraṃardīnī form should be accompanied by eight Śakti-s which are reflections of her power. Each of these eight goddesses known as *Aṣṭanāyikās*, are described to be the fierce warrior attendant goddesses of the ten-handed Maḥiṣāsuraṃardīnī Durgā. These eight goddesses placed in the eight different directions as per the Bṛhannandikeśvara/ Nandikeśvara Purāṇa are *Ugracaṇḍā*, *Pracaṇḍā*, *Caṇḍogrā*, *Caṇḍa*, *Caṇḍanāyikā*, *Caṇḍarūpā*, *Caṇḍavatī* and *Aticaṇḍikā*⁹. The prevalent Bṛhannandikeśvara Purāṇokta Smārṭa Durgā Pūjā Paddhatis further say that except *Pracaṇḍā*, rest all should be meditated upon and worshipped as having the form of sixteen- handed Durgā, riding a lion and slaying Maḥiṣāsura¹⁰. Considering this, the six images of sixteen- handed Durgā, riding a lion and slaying Maḥiṣāsura portrayed on the architecture of the Bar Pukhurī Śiva DouL can be interpreted as six of the above Nāyikās excluding *Pracaṇḍā*, who surround or accompany goddess Durgā.

The Kālikā Purāṇa mentions that the eight Nāyikās of ten-handed Maḥiṣāsuraṃardīnī Durgā can also be worshipped or placed along with sixteen-handed Bhadrakālī and eighteen-handed *Ugracaṇḍā* forms¹¹. Considering this, it can be assumed that one of the six extant sixteen-handed images of Durgā on the architecture of the Bar Pukhurī Śiva DouL is of Bhadrakālī herself and the rest five of them are among the Aṣṭa Nāyikās. The Kālikā Purāṇa is silent on the describing the forms of the eight Nāyikās. It is in the texts like the *Skanda Yāmala* that the forms of the eight Nāyikās as sixteen and eighteen-handed are found to be described along with the descriptions of how they should be placed and arranged around the central figure of

Durga. The artisans might have followed the above texts in crafting the forms of the (supposed) Nāyikās on the architecture of the Bar Pukhurī Śiva DouL.

The Navadurgās or the Aṣṭa Śaktis/ Nāyikās of Durgā are not worshipped or depicted through their material images in the prevalent traditions of worship of her, particularly in eastern India. During the course of the ritual of Durgā Pūjā, the Aṣṭa Nāyikās are mentally invoked through their *Tattvākṣaras* and Dhyāna Mantras in the diagram known as *Sarvatobhadramaṇḍala* [**Appendix D3 : Figure (xvi)**]. There is no evidence of any ritual of Durgā worship in eastern India in the present day where separate material images of each the Aṣṭa Nāyikās or Navadurgās are placed along with the image of Durgā and worshipped. But, the possibility of prevalence of a practice of making and worshipping material images of each of the Aṣṭanāyikās or Navadurgās in Assam as well as in Bengal in the pre-modern periods cannot be ruled out. A stone sculpted image of sixteen-handed Caṇḍanāyikā is recovered from the archaeological site at Ambari in Guwahati [**Appendix D3 : Figure (xvii) and (xviii)**]. This image is now preserved at the Assam State Museum in Guwahati. The image cannot be dating back earlier than 13th to 15th century CE and it is not clear whether it was a venerated/ consecrated icon inside a temple or a part of the architectural body of a temple. The inscription on the base of the image identifies the goddess to be Caṇḍanāyikā. This image somewhat indicates that the material images of the Navadurgās in accordance to the Agni Purāṇa or the Aṣṭa Nāyikās of Durgā were either worshipped or placed as a part of the religious architecture in Assam, and this practice might had been kept continued upto the Āhom period and the sixteen-handed Maḥiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā images featured on the architecture of the Bar Pukhurī Śiva DouL may be a evidence of that continuity.

As per Kālikā Purāṇa [60. 55- 63] , during the period or *Manvantara* of Swayambhuva Manu, and in the beginning of Kṛtayuga, the supreme goddess Mahāmāyā/ Yogamāyā/ Yoganidrā, who is the Yogic slumber of Viṣṇu and who pervades the entire universe manifested on the northern shore of the cosmic Milky Ocean assuming a gigantic mighty form with sixteen hands, holding various weapons and having a complexion like that of a *Atasī* or flax flower. She assumed this mighty form known as Bhadrakālī with a view to destroy the tyrant Maḥiṣāsura and bring peace to the creation (Shastri, B., 1994, 59). All the gods watched with awe and silence how the mighty sixteen-handed goddess, who is the supreme Creatrix, showed

them the vision of piercing Mahiṣāsura with her trident and crushing him under her left foot. In the 76th verse of the *Caṇḍīśatakam* by Bānabhatta, it is said that when Mahiṣāsura wearing the form of a buffalo, proud, inwardly full of anger and delusion, was boasting of his ‘immense’ strength and said to goddess that she is vainly or uselessly bending the bow of her brow whose arrow is her quivering glance, and derisively speaking about *Piṇākin* or Śiva, then the goddess as Bhadrakālī killed him, the foe of the Gods with her excessively hard foot (Fatahsingh, 1968, 123).

The Kālikā Purāṇa [60. 110- 111] further says that it is only in this Bhadrakālī form that the goddess enlightened Mahiṣāsura about his liberation (or death) at her hands during three Kalpas or epochs/ eras/ stages of creation. Mahiṣāsura was granted the boon by the goddess in her Bhadrakālī form, of getting a share of worship in any ritual invoking and venerating her. It was in this form that the goddess blessed Mahiṣāsura that, in any worshipped image of her, his Asura form will continue to be portrayed near her feet, tamed and defeated (Bhattacharya, D.N., 2008, 771). The Kālī Vilāsa Tantra [19.1] mentions that in the ritual worship of goddess Durgā, Mahiṣāsura should be invoked as *Śiva Rūpa* (Tarkatirtha, 1917, 42). Different Purāṇic, Upa- Purāṇic narratives and Śākta texts like the Kālikā Purāṇa describe that he was none other than a *Aṃsa* or part of Śiva, a manifestation of Śiva or bearing the principle of Śiva in a Asura body. The Yoginī Tantra [9. 70- 73] mentions of goddess Dakṣiṇa Kālī / Kālī saying to Sadāśiva or Śiva that she had killed an Asura named *Ghora* or *Ghorāsura* in a past epoch/ eon. She further seeks the attention of Śiva towards her prophecy that his (Śiva’s) Aṃsa or part will be born as Mahiṣāsura in the womb of a buffalo maiden known as Mahiṣī. She will then be fighting him in this Mahiṣāsura form in a furious bloody battle thus killing him. She explains that the form in which she will be killing him is the sixteen- handed Bhadrakālī Durgā form (Bhattacharya, D.N., 2012, 115- 116). It can be interpreted that she as Bhadrakālī, by killing him will make him release himself from his *Jīvatva* or the corporeal ego ridden body or existence as Mahisasura to attain his *Śivatva* or his true unblemished existence.

It can be said in a way that in her sixteen- handed Bhadrakālī form, goddess Durgā made Mahiṣāsura realize the Śiva principle within him [**refer to Appendix D3 : Figure (xix) for a clear understanding**]. Also, it can be inferred from the above narratives that Durgā as Bhadrakālī is the representation of supreme energy and

knowledge which can tear apart the inertial body of ego and delusion represented by Mahiṣāsura and liberate from its shackles the latent Śiva or the embodiment of knowledge and consciousness. The portrayal of the image of sixteen-handed Mahiṣāsuramardinī Durgā repeatedly on the architecture of the Bar Pukhurī Śiva Doul might indicate towards an intention to convey the idea that one can realize the Śiva principle within himself/ herself like Mahiṣāsura only through surrender to the goddess Śakti/ Mahāmāyā or Durgā. The repeated portrayal of the Bhadrakālī image on the architecture of the Doul may also be thought of as a result of the wishes of the patrons- king Śiva Simha and queen Ambikā Kunvarī or Draupadī / Mādambikā who were staunch followers and adepts of the Śākta tradition. They, might have wanted the images of Bhadrakālī to be placed repeatedly on the temple walls to put forward an ideology that Śiva can be attained or realized within oneself only through veneration to Durgā. Even though the Doul is a house of worship of Śiva, the repeated portrayal of the images of Bhadrakālī Durgā on its architecture might be intended for reminding the profoundness of Śaktism that had grown amongst the Āhom royalty during the reign of Siva Simha, and particularly queen Phuleśvarī Kunvarī. The images of Bhadrakālī might also be placed there as a strategy to portray the ‘greatness’ or ‘superiority’ of the Śākta tradition or sect over other forms/ traditions of worship, the Śakti worship as pervading or acquiring a prime place in every other form of worship.

In the Devī Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa, it is mentioned that after immolating her own mortal body, goddess Sati assumed her supreme Bhadrakālī form and destroyed the Yajña organized by Dakṣa and so she came to be known as *Dakṣayajñavināsinī*. But, the Purāṇa does not mention about the Bhadrakālī form having sixteen hands and mounted on a lion (Kumar, 1983, 52). If it is assumed that the narrative or the underlying essence of the narrative of the destruction of Dakṣa Yajña, which is one of the important motifs in both Śaiva and Śākta traditions, was tried by the artisans to portray in the architecture of the Bar Pukhurī Śiva Doul, then the images of sixteen-handed Mahiṣāsuramardinī Durgā can be understood as their conception of the Bhadrakālī; which means that the artisans might have understood the form of Bhadrakālī who destroyed the Yajña of Dakṣa as no different from the sixteen-handed Mahiṣāsuramardinī Durgā also known as Bhadrakālī in the Kālikā Purāṇa and hence portrayed it as such on the walls of the Doul.

In the popular and folk belief prevalent in Assam, Durgā, who is also known as Āi, Śītalā, Kālikā, Bhagavatī, Gosānī, Mahāmāyā is conceived as the patron goddess of epidemics like pox, measles and cholera (Rajkhowa, 2016, 135). She is to be venerated and pleased so that she does not get offended and cause these epidemics. Till date, in certain pockets of Assam, when a person or several families get inflicted with smallpox, or during the season where there is fear of a possible outbreak of smallpox, a ritual service known as Āi Sabāh is performed by women where they make offerings of food, flowers etc. to Āi or Durgā and sing songs in her praise. This is done in order to appease her and calm her down so that she does not aggravate the epidemic. These songs also contain verses that ask for forgiveness from the goddess for doing such things that are offensive to her glory. The practice of Āi Sabāh may have evolved from the very ancient Shamanic and healing practices and it is one of the important part of the Śākta tradition of Assam. Most of the songs known as Āi Nām containing eulogies to the goddess Durgā as Āi or patron of epidemics are seen to be composed during the time period between 16th to 18th century CE, i.e. During the reign of the Āhoms (Bardaloi, 2007, 390). This may connote towards a possibility that might have been frequent outbreaks of epidemics during that period which contributed to the strengthening of the belief in Durgā or Āi as a patron and protector from epidemics. The growth of Śaktism as a prominent faith under the encouragement of the Āhom court might had made this belief firmly grounded. Now, if a context of an outbreak or devastation by an epidemic like cholera or pox during the period of construction and development of the Bar Pukhurī Śiva Douḷ is considered, the repeated portrayals of the image of sixteen-handed Mahiṣāsūramardinī Durgā on its walls might be intended as a charm, for pleasing the goddess immensely and innumerable times so that she gets satisfied and nullifies the epidemic and its adverse catastrophic affects. If this is the supposed reason, then why the sixteen handed form of Mahiṣāsūramardinī Durgā was preferred over all her other forms ? Again, why only in the iconographic scheme of the sculptural art of Bar Pukhurī Śiva Douḷ, were these images depicted ? These images could have been portrayed in the iconographic scheme of the nearby or adjacent Bar Pukhurī Devī Douḷ, which has Durgā as its presiding deity. But it was not done so. The reasons can be numerous. It can either be a temple iconographic convention, matter of some personal preference of the patron, the preference of the court, the creative liberty or persuasions of the artisans or influence of some kind of prophecy. It may also be

assumed as done because of some divine intervention that might have happened in the life of the patrons.

It has to be noted that Eight is a very important digit or numerical motif in the culture of the Āhoms and in the Āhom religion. The coins or *Mohars* issued by the Āhom rulers are all seen to be octagonal in shape. There is an account in the *Naobaisha Phukan Asam Buranji* of how and why the octagon was preferred as the shape for the gold and silver coins issued by the Āhom rulers. King Siu-Seng-Phā or Pratāp Simha once thought of introducing a new and unique type of coin in the Āhom kingdom. So, he consulted the scholars of his court about what should be the design and shape of the coins. The scholars then studied the Tantras and cited a verse from them which goes like : *Aṣṭa Konañca Saumāram, Yatra Dikkaravāsiniṁ Tasminnivasanti Ye Lokā, Jñānad Jñānate Piva, Tepi Devyah Prasadena Siddhim, Gaccanti Nanyatha*. The basic meaning of this verse is that Saumārapītha or Saumāra Priṣṭha or eastern Assam is octagonal or have eight major corners, parts or directions. Saumārapītha also comprises the heartland of the Āhom kingdom and so the Āhom kings are being addressed as *Saumārādhipati* in numerous epigraphs and documents. The court scholars explained to king Pratāp Simha that according to the above verse the Saumārapītha is octagonal and he was the sovereign ruler of this *Āṭh cukiyā* or octagonal Saumārapītha, and so the shape and design of the new Āhom coins should be made octagonal. Further, they further elaborated that there is no such country or kingdom other than the Āhom kingdom which is Āṭh Cukiyā and have octagonal coins. Pratāp Simha obeying to the suggestions of the learned scholars of his court introduced and started the minting of octagonal gold and silver coins in the Āhom kingdom embossed with his name bearing the title *Svarganārāyaṇa* (Tamuli, 2019, 75).

From the above account, it can be understood that the number Eight is also a symbol connoting the political power and dominance attained by the Āhoms in Assam. It is also a symbol of how the conquest of the Āṭh Cukiyā Saumārapītha had been the foundation of the rise of Āhom kingdom and its influence in Assam.

Sixteen is a multiple of eight. So can there be a possibility that the placing the images of sixteen-handed Bhadrakālī Durgā on the architecture of the Bar Pukhurī Śiva Doul was done intentionally to tactfully project the doubling of the Āhom political power and sovereignty symbolized by the number Eight as a result of the

establishment of Śaktism as the state religion ? It is just an assumption, but it cannot be overlooked.

4.3.2 Iconographic conceptions or goddess forms which can be categorized and studied as *Simhavāhinī Durgā* featured in the relief sculptural art of the Gaurīsāgar Devī DouL, Bar Pukhurī Devī DouL and Jagaddhātrī DouL

Apart from images featuring the Mahiṣāsuramardinī form of Durgā, there are several other images or representations in the sculptural art of the architecture of the Gaurīsāgar Devī DouL, Bar Pukhurī Devī DouL and Jagaddhātrī DouL which feature goddesses either in warring attitudes brandishing weapons of war, not shown in slaying or vanquishing any Asura or, in benign non-warring modes carrying various attributes and riding a *Simha* or a lion/ leonine beast. These representations or goddess forms can be categorized under an iconographic type known as *Simhavāhinī Durgā*. Images of Durgā falling under the *Simhavāhinī* type have also appeared in the sculptural art traditions of Assam dating from 8th to 12th century CE. Choudhury (1992, 39) has mentioned of three images of the *Simhavāhinī* type found in different regions across Assam. In all these images, Durgā is shown as having four hands. One of these images datable to the 9th century CE is preserved in the Assam State Museum. In this image Durgā is shown sitting astride her mount or *Vāhana*- *Simha* or the lion and holds a *Khadga* with her right hand. Her left hand holds a *Khetaka* while the left back holds may be a *Śūla*. The second image of the *Simhavāhinī* type is said to be sculpted on a rock of the *Vasundharī* or *Basundharī Pāhār* at Nagaon in central Assam. She is said to be holding a *Cakra*, *Khadga*, *Pāśa* and a *Gadā* in her four hands and standing in a *Samapāda*-*Sthānaka* attitude on her *Vāhana Simha*. She is locally known as *Vasundharī*/ *Basundharī*. Images of the *Simhavāhinī* type featuring four-handed Durgā seated or standing on or along with a *Simha* (placed beneath her) dating to the 9th to 10th century CE are numerously found in Bengal. One of them is seen preserved at the Museum of the palace or *Rājbarī* of the Koch royal family at Koch Behar [**Appendix D3 : Figure (xx)**]. The details of this image will be discussed in the upcoming paragraphs.

Images of Durgā of the *Simhavāhinī* type where the figure of Durgā is two-handed are seen featured in the sculptural imagery of the Douls. Such depictions of *Simhavāhinī Durgā* are not known to have appeared in the sculptural imagery of

Assam before the temple sculptural tradition of the Āhoms. Moreover, the *Simhavāhinī Durgā* image types in the sculptural imagery of the Douls have such combination of motifs and iconographical features that are not met with in the sculptural art found in other parts of the Indian subcontinent. A detailed study of these iconographic aspects have, till now, not been taken up by majority of archaeologists and art historians. The iconography and nomenclature of some *Simhavāhinī Durgā* images portrayed in the architecture of the Douls, though claimed to have been ascertained by the governmental archaeological sources, may demand further observation and study. In the upcoming sections, an insight will be given into three such *Simhavāhinī Durgā* images featured in the sculptural imagery of the Douls :

4.3.2 (a) A *Simhavāhinī Durgā* image from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul which features a two- handed *Durgā* riding a *Simha* or lion and holding an animal horn or tusk like object in one of her hands-



Fig 4.3 (iv) : Line drawing of the *Simhavāhinī Durgā* image from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul featuring two- handed *Durgā* holding an animal or tusk like object in one of her hands [refer to the photographic image in Fig 4.3iv (p) in Appendix 4C]

In the above image from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul in Fig 4.3 (iv), *Durgā* riding a lion is holding an object shaped like a buffalo horn or a tusk of an elephant in her right hand and an object resembling either a spear or lance in her left hand. It may also be a *Bāna* or an arrow. If the object in the right hand is assumed to be a

buffalo horn and the object held in the left hand is assumed to be a spear, it may be an indication towards the defeated and destroyed Mahiṣāsura and as a result the whole image in Fig 4.3 (iv) will be an illustration of the narrative of Durgā as Mahiṣāsuramardinī. It may be thought of as an unique visualization of Mahiṣāsuramardinī Durgā or the narrative of Durgā killing the buffalo demon Mahiṣāsura by the artisans, where Durgā is not shown in the act of fighting and killing Mahiṣāsura in the image, but posing alone victoriously after vanquishing him by piercing his chest by the spear and flaunting a horn severed from his buffalo head.

The importance place that buffalo horn has in the material culture of Assam is well known. Pipes made of buffalo horn known as Pēpā [**Appendix D3 : Figure (xxi)**] are intrinsic to the musical tradition of the springtime Bihu or Bahāg/ Rangālī Bihu- the established national festival of Assam which received royal patronage during the reign of king Rudra Simha. There are also accounts of use of buffalo horns as devices for sending messages and warnings. The museum at Śrīmanta Śankardeva Kalākṣetra at Guwahati has in its collection a particular type of buffalo horn pipe known as Śīṅgā . It has been identified as a war horn and is very much resembling to the form of the object assumed as a buffalo horn held by Durgā in the image from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Doull illustrated in Fig 4.3 (iv). Therefore , if the object in the image is again assumed to be a buffalo horn, but now in the aspect of a Śīṅgā or a war horn, then it will indicate Durgā's conception as a symbol of martial prowess, as Ranacaṇḍī/ Ranacaṇḍikā.

If again, the object held in the right hand of Durgā in the image is assumed as a tusk of an elephant and not as a buffalo horn, it may hint towards the narrative of vanquishing or slaying of the elephant bodied Asura known as *Karindrasura* by goddess Durgā in her form as Jagaddhātṛī or Mahādurgā . In other words, if the object held in the right hand is assumed as an elephant tusk suggesting towards the defeated elephant bodied *Karindrasura*, then Durgā in the image in Fig 4.3 (iv) will undoubtedly be identified as an visualization of her in the form of Jagaddhātṛī or as the Mahāvidyā Jagaddhātṛī or Mahādurgā who is also known as Simhavāhinī. If it is so, then it will be a very unique visualization of Jagaddhātṛī, very different from her imagery generally conceived following her description in the Tāntric texts, chiefly the Kātyāyanī Tantra, Māyā Tantra and the Viśvasāra Tantra¹², and the imagery of her

which is a combination of her four-handed *Simhavāhinī* form, carrying bow, arrow/arrows, *Sankha* and *Cakra* described by the aforesaid Tantric texts, and her form as the slayer of *Karindrasura*. This combined form has been traditionally visualized and crafted in the religious art traditions of eastern India [**Appendix D3 : Figure (xxii)**].

Presently, in the ritual culture of Assam, there is seen the prevalence of a type of *Jagaddhātṛī* image which is very different from the descriptions in the aforesaid Tāntric texts and the ones that are traditionally worshipped in Bengal. Here, *Jagaddhātṛī* is depicted as directly combating and piercing the body of elephant bodied *Karindrasura* by a spear [**Appendix D3 : Figure (xxiii)**]. From when such an imagery became prevalent and worshipped in Assam is not known. Coming to the image in Fig 4.3 (iv), if the object held in the right hand of the goddess is assumed to be a tusk of an elephant connoting towards *Karindrasura* and the object in the left hand is assumed to be a spear, then it can be explained that the visualization of *Jagaddhātṛī Durgā* in the act of combating and slaying *Karindrasura* by a spear, and a spear as attribute of *Jagaddhātṛī Durgā* depicted in images in present day Assam, may have been in prevalence since the Āhom period, and the image from the *Gaurīsāgar Devī Douḷ* illustrated in Fig 4.3 (iv) is an evidence of it.

The *Devī Purāṇa* describes a goddess *Jayāvātī* amongst the sixty four *Yoginī* goddesses or sixty four forms of *Durgā* as holding a *Śṛṅga* or an animal horn in one of her hands. She is said to ride a *Simha*/ lion and hold a *Bāna* or arrow in her other hand (Misra, 2001, 208). In the image from the *Gaurīsāgar Devī Douḷ* in Fig 4.3 (iv), the pointed curved object held by *Durgā* in her right hand can be somewhat identified as a horn of a large bovine animal like a buffalo. If the sharp blade at the downward or down facing end of the weapon held in her left hand is carefully observed, its shape somewhat can be thought of as resembling that of an arrow. Its other end positioned upward is blunt and somewhat broad and conical may be suggesting the feathered end of the arrow. Now, if the weapon is surely an arrow, then *Durgā* in the image should be interpreted as *Jayāvātī* as per the above description in the *Devī Purāṇa*.

There can be yet another interpretation that can be given for the above image. In many representations of *Kṛṣṇa* as a cowherd in the sculptural art and painting

traditions of Assam, particularly the neo-Vaiṣṇava or Sattriyā tradition, he is often seen as carrying and playing on a horn of a buffalo or any other animal also known as Singā, along with his flute or *Venu/ Benu*. Singā or a animal horn mainly of the buffalo has been an important paraphernalia of the cowherds or *Garakhīyās* along with Benu and *Laru* (a staff). The presiding deity of the Garakhīyās has been undoubtedly understood and worshipped as Kṛṣṇa as *Garakhīyā Gosāin* or *Rākhāl Gosāin* or the lord of cowherds, livestock and pastures, in the culture of Assam, as well as in a major part of the Indian subcontinent. The cowherd imagery or iconographic representation of Kṛṣṇa as holding the flute, horn and staff has been continuing as the most widely portrayed theme in the art and literature of the Indian subcontinent, made more popular by the Bhakti movements. The Nārada Purāṇa [III. 82. 51-60] mentions of Kṛṣṇa as the one who is armed with a horn and a stick amongst one of his *Sahasranāmas* or thousand names (Tagare, 1997, 1184). According to the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Kṛṣṇa grew up in the house of Nanda, his foster father and the chief of cowherds and milkmen and women in Gokula. His elder brother is Balarāma and his sister is Subhadrā. In sculptural or painted representations, particularly produced by the neo -Vaiṣṇava culture in Assam, Balarāma as a cowherd boy is seen to be portrayed as also holding a Singā but not flute along with it, because flute has been exclusive to the iconography of Kṛṣṇa. Subhadrā is none other than or identified as Yogamāyā/ Yoganidrā or Durgā. She is none other than Vindhyaśinī Durga, *Ekanāmsa* and *Nandā*. The *Mūrti Rahasyam* of the Devī Māhātmyam speaks of six Devīs or goddesses arising from the supreme Durgā or Caṇḍikā or Mahālakṣmī- Nandā, Raktadantikā, Śākambharī, Durgā, Bhīmā and Bhrāmarī. Nandā is described as *Nandajā* or the dear daughter of Nanda (Bhattacharya, D.P., 2016, 226-230) which hints towards her as none other than Subhadrā, the sister of Kṛṣṇa. The *Arya Stuti* of the Harivaṁśa Purāṇa describes Durgā as Nārāyaṇī (Pandey, 219). Further the 10th and 11th verses of the same Stuti says of Durgā as *Bhaginī Baladevasya* or sister of Baladeva or Balarāma, and *Nandagopasutā* or the dear daughter of Nanda- the chief of the cowherds, also hinting towards Durgā as Ekanāmsa or Subhadrā (220) and sister of Kṛṣṇa.

Considering the above, it can be said that in the image in Fig 4.3 (iv), Durgā holding a buffalo horn or Singā (supposedly) is an unique visualization and rendering by the artisans of her identity and conception as Nandā- the daughter of the chief of

cowherds Nanda, and Subhadrā/ Ekanāmsa/ Yogamāyā, the sister of Garakhīyā Gosāin or Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. It can be assumed that in the image, the artisans had depicted Vindhyavāsini Durgā. Possibly, they had portrayed her Simhavāhana in accordance to certain mainstream Śāstric texts but have chosen to depict one of her hand held attributes as a buffalo horn to project the conception of her as none other than sister of Kṛṣṇa, as none other than sister of Kṛṣṇa as Garakhīyā Gosāin- the aspect and narrative imagery of him as a cowherd and herdsman widely understood, worshipped and lived by people, mainly in the culture of Assam.

There are several narratives and legends that have been prevalent in the folk oral literature of Assam across ages which bear a common motif- of cowherd boys or Garakhīyās offering worship to Gosāin or Durgā at some particular spot in grasslands, fields and pastures by sacrificing *Faring* or grasshoppers. These spots may have taken the form of Thāns or village shrines with time. Thāns associated with Garakhīyās are spread across Assam, two of such revered Thāns are the Garakhīyā Gosāin Thān and Thethā Gosāin Thān in Nalbari district. Some narratives in royal dynastic chronicles also have references to Durgā as worshipped by Garakhīyās or cowherds. An example of such a narrative finds mention in the *Darrang Rajvamsāvalī*- a 16th century CE chronicle of the Koch dynasty. Here, the founder of the Koch dynasty Biśvasimha has been described as a chief of cowherds in his early phase of life, as *Bar Garakhīyā Biśu*. Bar Garakhīyā means a chief of cowherds. Biśu or Biśvasimha used to regularly worship Durgā by offering sacrifices of grasshoppers or beetles to her. The other Garakhīyās who were subordinate to him used to arrange those insects for him for sacrifice. One day, one of the Garakhīyās could not arrange grasshoppers for him, so out of rage he sacrificed that Garakhīyā to Durgā by severing his head by the strip or a sharp peel of the Kāka or Kākowā type of bamboo. It is said that like this, by offering uninterrupted sacrificial worship to Durgā, Bar Garakhīyā Bisu attained her favour and grace and thus became a powerful ruler and the founder of the Koch dynasty (Sarma, N.C., 2016, 256-257).

From the above narratives, it can be understood that there were traditions of worship of Durgā by Garakhīyās or cowherds in the folk culture of Assam. Such traditions and their underlying belief systems may be thought of as rooted in or associated with a conception like Durgā/ Kālī/ Devī as *Goṣṭhamātā*, or Durgā/ Kālī/ Devī as the mother of Kṛṣṇa and the Goṣṭhas/ Govālas/ Garakhīyās or cowherds¹³. Such traditions may

also have some link with the description of Durgā/ Devī as residing in the form of Kātyāyanī in Braja or Vṛndāvana (*Braje Kātyāyanī Parā*) offered by the *Ādyā Stotram* - a part of the Tāntric text *Brahmayāmala*. Braja or Vṛndāvana is the place where Kṛṣṇa spent his early life as a cowherd boy or Garakhīyā and performed his exploits along with the fellow cowherds. In other words, it can be said that Kātyāyanī Durgā was the mother goddess of all the cowherds of Braja as well as Kṛṣṇa.

If the object held by Durgā in her right hand in image illustrated in Fig 4.3 (iv) is again assumed to be a horn or Singā used by the Garakhīyās, then she may be interpreted as bearing some relation with the Durgā or Gosānī worshipped by the Garakhīyās spoken about in the aforesaid types of narratives, or hinting towards a tradition or belief, either known or obscure, where Durgā or any other goddess identified with Durgā presides and receives worship as a mother or protector goddess of the Garakhīyās or cowherds, or livestock as a whole.

In the history of the Indian subcontinent, there have been several folk, tribal and clan goddesses who are associated with war, procreativity and nature and are satiated through offerings of heads of sacrificed buffaloes. Many of these goddesses have, in the course of history have got assimilated into the imagery and narrative of Mahiṣamardinī or Mahiṣāsūramardinī Durgā. Buffaloes as food totem, as war totems and as fertility totems have been a defining feature of several ethnic cultures in north eastern India as well as in southern India. Offering of buffalo or Mithun horns as trophies and cult symbols have been a practice amongst several tribal communities in the Naga hills and Arunachal Pradesh. There has been a practice of displaying or placing a buffalo skull with its horns intact in the entranceways of several traditional affluent households in Assam. This may be done as a protective charm or a symbol of power and wealth. Assamese folklore has an evil spirit known as *Mah Jakh*. It is a spirit who takes the form of a monstrous buffalo (*Mah* or *Muih* means buffalo in Assamese) and roams amidst buffalo herds. The Mah Jakh can be thought of as amongst the various folk spirit imageries which might have assimilated and contributed to the mainstream imagery of Mahiṣāsura.

The Āhoms have a belief of the buffalo horn as having medicinal properties. In the ritual known as *Ap- Tang* of *Caklang* or the marriage ceremony following the

traditional tenets of the ancestral Āhom religion, sacred water containing in it a mixture of a buffalo horn along with several other ingredients believed to have medicinal properties is used to bathe the bride and groom. While pouring this medicated water on the head, the bride or groom should utter the name of *Phrā Tārā* (Gogoi, P., 1976, 73-74). Buffalo meat, along with swine meat has also been spoken as the staple and favourite food of the Āhoms in the Burañjīs and also modern and colonial historical accounts of Assam. Moreover, the Burañjīs also mention of how the meat of buffaloes, and swine were sources of the strength and the virility of the Āhoms, thereby indicating the buffalo as well as boar to be a food totem in the Āhom culture.

Again assuming the object held in the right hand of the goddess in the image in 4.3 (iv) as a buffalo horn symbolizing the above mentioned Āhom beliefs regarding the buffalo, she may be interpreted as some clan deity (either living in some form or forgotten) of the Āhoms who was invoked for gaining protection, strength, virility and invincibility. Further, she may be related with the practices of feasting of buffalo meat as integral parts of majority of ritual ceremonies performed according to the tenets and codes of the ancestral Āhom religion. A possibility is also there that in the image, she has been merged with the identity and narrative of Durgā in the context of the growing influence of Śaktism amongst the Āhoms during the 18th century CE.

4.3.2 (b) A *Siṃhavāhinī* Durgā Image featuring a two-handed Durgā from the architecture of the Bar Pukhuri Devī Dou-



Fig 4.3 (v) : Line drawing of the *Siṃhavāhinī* Durgā image featuring two-handed Durgā with indistinct attributes in her hands from the Bar Pukhuri Devī Dou [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 4.3v (p) in Appendix 4C]

The two hands of this *Siṃhavāhinī* Durgā image are mutilated, and it is not at all known what was held in them or how they were posed. Coming to the form of the lion portrayed in the above image, it is also a hybrid creature having a mix of the morphological features of a dragon like reptile, horse, lion and a bird. The most noticeable aspect in its form is the wing like structure . The above image from the Bar Pukhuri Devī Dou illustrated in Fig 4.3 (v) is not the only one where such type of a winged lion with one of its front legs raised in a manner of advancing is portrayed. This type of hybrid winged lion appear frequently as vehicles or mounts of Durgā or as decorations in the sculptural art of the architecture of the temples built by the Āhoms, not only in those Dous taken up here in this study, but also other temples built/ rebuilt/ renovated by them elsewhere in Assam during the 18th century CE, e.g. the Kāmeśvara temple near the Kāmākhyā temple at Nīlācala in Guwahati [**Appendix D3 : Figure (xxiv)**]. Similar hybrid winged lion figures are also seen portrayed in the miniature paintings of the manuscripts produced in the ateliers of the Āhom court and also the Vaiṣṇava Sattras. Such type of a hybrid winged lion resembles the form of the *Ngī Ngāo Khām*- a highly venerated and sacred symbol of

the Āhoms. It is also found to be the royal insignia of the Āhoms and a symbol of Āhom power and sovereignty. Ngī Ngāo Khām is a mythical beast which is a hybrid of five different types of animals, each having a specific power and significance, and it forms the central motif of the *Khring Fra*- the royal or national flag of the Āhoms (Sarma, R., 2017, 15). In the relief sculptural art of the Douls, the hybrid lions are never seen to be portrayed as having wings in the images of Mahiṣāsūramardīnī Durgā, but in the available images of Durgā, of the Simhavāhinī type, these lions are depicted as having wings and shaped like the Ngī Ngāo Khām. What could be the intention behind shaping or envisioning the lion of Durgā in the form akin to the Ngī Ngāo Khām ? It may be thought of as some kind of political agenda, an attempt by the Āhom royalty during the rule of Śiva Simha and his queens in order to project the inseparability between Śaktism, the worship of Śakti or Devī and the Āhom state power and sovereignty. Moreover, the lion mounts of Durgā represented in the form akin to Ngī Ngāo Khām somewhere, can be called as projecting either the so called ‘triumph’ of Śaktism over the original Āhom religion during the rule of Śiva Simha and his queens , or, it may be connoting towards the Āhom royalty not completely giving up their ancestral religious practices and how they had been keeping a harmony or negotiation between their original or ancestral religious traditions and the Hindu traditions, mainly the Śākta traditions which they adhered to and followed for attaining the motive of political and military dominance.

A sculpted Simhavāhinī image similar to the image in Fig 4.3 (v) is seen placed inside a niche on one of the inner walls or inner part of the Bāda of the Garbhagrha of the same Doul (the photography of this image was not allowed). Though the image on the inner wall is in a somewhat better condition than the image on the outer wall of the Doul in Fig 4.3 (v), the attributes held by the goddess are not at all discernible. According to the priests who have been performing the daily worship in the Doul, the two attributes are meant to be a Sankha and a Cakra and the whole image features Durgā as Jagaddhātṛī. The priests gave the same interpretation for the image in Fig 4.3 (v) placed on the outer wall of the Doul.

Both Sankha and Cakra are characteristic Vaiṣṇava attributes and they are, in fact described by the 43rd chapter of Devī Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa as placed in the hands of Durgā as Mula/ Mahādurgā. Sankha and Cakra are also held as attributes by Durgā in her form as *Jayadurgā* or *Śokarahitā* / *Bipadtāriṇī*. Durgā is often

conceptualized as *Nārāyaṇī* or *Vaiṣṇavī*. According to the *Kūrma Purāṇa*, she is said to be inseparable from Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa (Siddhantabhusana, 1929, 28). In certain folk songs/ ritual poetry or Nām known as Durgā Nām or Gosāni Nam sung as a part of worship of goddess Durgā, mainly in eastern or upper Assam, it has been found that Durgā is often invoked as *Nārāyaṇī*- having a form like Viṣṇu and holding attributes like him, which is also hinting towards her conception as a *Vaiṣṇavī* or *Nārāyaṇī Śakti*¹⁴ (Sarma, H.K., 2006, 1-2). In the previous paragraphs, mention of the iconographic forms of Viṣṇu Durgā and Vindhyavāsini, their association with Viṣṇu and Viṣṇu as Kṛṣṇa and they displaying attributes of Viṣṇu have already been made.

In the two images from the Bar Pukhurī Devī Douḷ including the one illustrated in Fig 4.3 (v), the attributes held by Durgā are not at all clear. In the image placed in the inside wall of the Garbhagṛha, the forms of the attributes are totally faded. The circular contours of one of the attributes might have allowed the priests to interpret it as a Cakra, and the other faded attribute has been assumed as a Sankha. If it is assumed that that the unknown and faded attributes held by the two hands of Durgā in the *Siṃhavāhinī* image depicted in the outer wall [in Fig 4.3 (v)] and in the *Siṃhavāhinī* image depicted on the inner wall the Bar Pukhurī Devī Douḷ, are surely a Sankha and Cakra, inference will be that Durgā as Vindhyavāsini is depicted in both the images, and having the form of two-handed Viṣṇu holding a Sankha and a Cakra. Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa is invoked or meditated upon as situated in the midst of the solar orb or *Savitramaṇḍala* as two-handed, and holding a Sankha and Cakra¹⁵. The two-handed Viṣṇu in midst of the solar orb is perceived as *Savitramaṇḍalamadhyavartī Nārāyaṇa* or Nārāyaṇa/ Viṣṇu as the presiding deity of the sun, probably hinting towards his Vedic origins as one of the twelve Ādityas or solar deities [**Appendix D3 : Figure (xxv)**]. The Lakṣmī Tantra [10.12-16] speaks of a form of Viṣṇu where he is two-handed. His two hands are held in the gestures of boon giving and promising protection and traced with lines representing the disc or Cakra and the conch shell or Sankha. It is further said that such a form is Viṣṇu's supreme and most exalted form, representing his absolute manifestation (Gupta, S., 2003, 55).

A form of two-handed Durgā riding a lion and holding a Sankha and Cakra is mentioned in the Śrī Vidyārṇava Tantra. This form of Durgā is mentioned as a

Dvāra Devatā or a deity of the entranceway (Sastri, S.S., 1944, 10). In other words, in this form she must be a subsidiary or minor deity. If two-handed *Simhavāhinī* Durgā in both the images from the Bar Pukhurī Devī Douḷ are again assumed to be holding a Sankha and Cakra, then they can be somewhat related to the form of two-handed Durgā carrying a Sankha and a Cakra and riding a lion described in the Śrī Vidyārṇava Tantra.

The Kālikā Purāṇa [58. 59-60] says that Mahāmāyā/ Kāmākhyā/ Durgā is Kāmadā when she moves hither and thither sitting on the lion. She is further said to take her shape at her will (possibly referring to a characteristic attributed to the Yoginī goddesses), and likes to seat sometimes on a white ghost or Śīta Preta, at times on the red lotus or *Raktapankaja* and still at other times on the back of the lion (Shastri, B., 1994, 55). The two-handed *Simhavāhinī* image placed on the outer part of the Bāda of Bar Pukhurī Devī Douḷ illustrated in Fig 4.3 (v) as well as the two-handed *Simhavāhinī* image placed on the inner wall can also be somewhat related to or understood as a visualization of the imagery of Kāmākhyā / Mahāmāyā or Durgā as Kāmadā in the Kālikā Purāṇa.

If it is assumed that the broken hands of Durgā in the *Simhavāhinī* image illustrated in Fig 4.3 (v) were in Abhaya and Varada poses, then she can be associated with *Abhayā Durgā*- a iconographic conception of Durgā, mainly popular in Bengal, where she sits on the back of a lion, bearing a benign and pleasing countenance and having two hands displaying Abhaya and Varada Mudras [**Appendix D3 : Figure (xxvi)**]. Further considering the influence of the ritual codes and practices brought in from Bengal by Kṛṣṇarām Nyāyavāgiśa during the reign of Śīva Simha and his queens, and the infusion of artisans and artistic practices, mainly religious artistic practices and texts from Bengal said to be occurring since the reign of king Rudra Simha, assuming the image as featuring *Abhayā Durga* cannot be unjustifiable.

Again assuming the two hands of Durgā in the image as placed in Abhaya and Varada, her form will sharply resemble that of *Mangalacaṇḍikā* described in the Kālikā Purāṇa. According to the Kālikā Purāṇa [80. 64b-66a], Kāmākhyā as *Dikkaravāsini* residing in the Saumārāpīṭha or eastern Assam has two forms- one the fierce *Tikṣnakāntā* and the other the benign and pleasing *Lalitakāntā* who is also known as *Mangalacaṇḍikā* (Shastri, B., 1994, 97-99). It may be possible that in the

image, the two-handed form of Mangalacaṇḍikā or Mangalacaṇḍī has been depicted riding a lion resembling the Ngī- Ngāo- Khām. As, there is a context of presence of narratives and evidences in the form of epigraphs like copper plate inscriptions, and accounts in the Burañjīs that the Āhom rulers considered themselves the overlords of the Saumārapīṭha region, therefore thinking of the image in Fig 4.3 (v) as a possible depiction of the presiding goddess of Saumārapīṭha Mangalacaṇḍikā Durgā as mounted on a lion resembling the Ngī- Ngāo- Khām- the insignia of the Āhom dynasty , may not be wrong.

Āhom king Kamaleśvar Simha who ruled during the last phases of the Āhom dynasty, much after Śiva Simha and his queens, erected three temples on the *Catrākāra* hillock in Guwahati. Two metal Vighras or icons of two- handed Mangalacaṇḍikā showing Abhaya and Varada by their hands and standing on Padmapīṭhas were installed in the Garbhagrha of the central temple. These two Vighras are said by the officiating priests of the temple to be originally belonging to chieftain brothers Rājā Haradatta and Rājā Bīradatta who ruled a part of the Kāmṛp region and who led a uprising against the atrocities committed by the Āhom governors and generals in Kāmṛp and declared war on the Āhom kingdom [**Appendix D3 : Figure (xxvii)**]. The Āhom royalty installing the metal Vighras of Mangalacaṇḍī or Mangalacaṇḍikā once worshipped by their enemies or rivals, in full honour in their commissioned temples may indicate the extent of devotion they had for the concept and cult of worship of Mangalacaṇḍikā.

4.3.2 (c) *Siṃhavāhinī* Durgā image from the Jagaddhātrī Doul where Durgā is four- handed and holding an Akṣamālā/ Japamālā or a rosary-



Fig 4.3 (vi) : Line drawing of the *Siṃhavāhinī* Durgā image featuring four- handed Durgā holding an Akṣamālā or rosary from the Jagaddhātrī Doul [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 4.3vi (p) in Appendix 4C]

In the above image, Durgā is featured holding a Akṣamālā/ Japamālā or rosary in one of her right hands. This hand is shown as positioned close to chest of the goddess. Her whole stance gives us a feeling as if she is engrossed in counting the beads of the rosary. Coming to the rest of her hands, her other right hand is holding an object having the shape of something like a spear or a sharp weapon. The upper left hand is damaged and the lower left hand is positioned in an uncertain gesture. The form of Durgā in the above image has been identified by the local people of Kalugaon as well as the State Archaeological department as Jagaddhātrī. But the attributes held in her hands, particularly the rosary does not confirm to the prevalent Tāntric descriptions of Jagaddhātrī. In her commonly perceived form, Jagaddhātrī Durgā is described as holding a Sankha, Cakra, bow and arrow(s) in her four hands and riding the lion. So, there is a need to find other possible interpretations for the image.

Durgā in the image illustrated in Fig 4.3 (vi) engrossed in Japa or the meditative counting of the rosary beads somewhat relates to the benign aspect of her as

Pārvatī/ Gaurī/ Umā engaged in severe austerities and penance like the *Pañcāgni Tapa* . Japamālā / Akṣamālā or rosary is the characteristic attribute of the different iconographic forms of Durgā as Gaurī/ Pārvatī/ Umā. Therefore, can the image be thought of as featuring a form or visualization of Gaurī/ Pārvatī, she as a symbol of austerity and detachment or Sanyāsa, or as dedicatedly immersed in Tapa or penance ? If it is considered for a while that the image surely depicts the form of Pārvatī or Gaurī as engaged in a severe austerity or Tapa, then the attribute held in the upper right hand will no more be identified as a spear like weapon. It will be something else, anything related to or associated with the practice of Sanyāsa or extreme penance. If it is so, then what could it be ?

In the sculpted representations of Pārvatī/ Gaurī as an ascetic or a strict practitioner of austerities and celibacy, a type of staff known as Tridaṇḍa or Triśikha is usually shown held in one of the goddess's hands. the Tridaṇḍa/ Triśikha is a type of staff made of a type of tree branch having three sub-branches or projections. It is generally portrayed or conceived as a paraphernalia of ascetics and persons practicing extreme penance and celibacy. The sharp pointed triangular object held by the goddess in the image in Fig 4.3 (vi) have no projection that can prove it as a Tridaṇḍa. Neither it is a Triśūla or trident which is sometimes also portrayed as an attribute of Pārvatī in her mild, benign aspect of performing penance and austerities.

The lower left hand of the goddess might had held some type of object which got damaged and disappeared in the course of time. The manner of positioning of the wrist of the hand somewhat hints that a representation of an object like a vessel or a bowl might had been placed there, which is now missing. If the goddess in the image in Fig 4.3 (vi) is assumed as Pārvatī/ Gaurī engaged in Tapa or as a symbol of penance and Sanyāsa, then the absent attribute thought to be there in the lower left hand should either be a Kamaṇḍalu or a begging bowl- two prime objects that define the practices of Tapa and Sanyāsa. It can also be assumed as a Kamaṇḍalu because there are different iconographic forms of Gaurī/ Pārvatī/ Umā mentioned in texts like Sūtradhāra Maṇḍana's Rupamaṇḍana where she holds a rosary/ Japamālā along with a Kamaṇḍalu or any water pot. Rao (1997, 360) has made mention of different forms of Gaurī like Umā and Pārvatī who hold Kamaṇḍalu and Akṣamālā/ Japamālā as attributes. Sculptural representations of Pārvatī engaged in severe Pañcāgni Tapa crafted in the style of EISMA (Pāla and Sena styles) have been found in Bengal

and Bihar. One of such representations is from Munger or Monghyr in Bihar and it dates back circa 9th to 11th century CE [**Appendix D3 : Figure (xxviii)**]. The representations of Pārvatī as a symbol of asceticism in the different traditions and in different time periods of art are seen to portray different variations. Somewhere, Pārvatī is portrayed alone engaged in penance, and in others, she is shown accompanied by a lion and deer or a lion, deer and bull. In most of the images showing Pārvatī's Pañcāgni Tapa, she is shown surrounded by five types of fires.

If the image in Fig 4.3 (vi) is portraying the aspect of Pārvatī as a presiding deity of Sanyāsa and Tapa, the lion might have been placed there as her mount by the artisans in an intention to convey that Pārvatī is none other than Durgā or Caṇḍikā.

The pointed object depicted as held by the goddess in her upper right hand, again, if observed carefully, resembles either a spear head or a blade of a spear, or a lotus/lily. The possibility of identity of the object as a war weapon such as a spear is completely denied assuming the goddess to be a form of Pārvatī in her ascetic aspect. Considering the identity of the goddess in the image in Fig 4.3 (vi) as the ascetic Pārvatī, and supposing the object to be a spear or lance, it can be said that the artisans might have intended to project the presence of the fierce warrior Durgā/ Caṇḍikā within the benign Pārvatī engrossed in austerities.

A combination of a Śūla which may either mean a spear or a chopper or a sharp piercing weapon, or a trident/ Triśūla and a *Kamalākṣa Mālā* (which may either mean a rosary of lotus seeds or a lotus garland) is carried by *Mangalā* who is amongst the 64 Yoginīs or 64 forms of Durgā mentioned in the Devī Purāṇa (Misra, 2001, 204). *Mangalā* is further described to show the gesture of Varada or boon by one of her other hands. She is said to be seated in Padmāsana on a lion. Similar combination of Śūla, and a *Kamalākṣa Mālā* is again described by the Devī Purāṇa to be held as attributes by goddesses named *Vijayā* and *Bhadrā* (204). They too, are amongst the sixty-four forms of Durgā. *Bhadrā* is described to be seated in *Bhadrāsana* pose over a lion. She is said to hold other than the Śūla and *Padmākṣa Mālā*, a blue lotus and conferring auspiciousness possibly hinting towards portraying the Varada Mudrā. In the image from the Jagaddhātṛī Doull illustrated in Fig 4.3 (vi), if it is assumed that the sharp pointed object held in her upper right hand as none other than a representation of a Śūla, the rosary held in her lower or front left hand

as a Padmākṣa Mālā, and her lower left hand shown as forming a boat like or cup like shape as placed in Varada pose, then the goddess in the above image can be associated or identified with either of the above three goddesses described in the Devī Purāṇa. But, with whom out of the three ? All three of them have the Śūla, Padmākṣa Mālā, the boon giving gesture and the lion mount in common. But, Bhadrā is said to hold a blue lotus along with the three. Mangalā is said to be seated in a Padmāsana pose whereas Bhadrā is described as seated in Bhadrāsana. The manner or pose in which the goddess is shown seated in the image in the Fig 4.3 (vi) seems somewhat like a type of Bhadrāsana as practiced in Aṣṭāṅga Yoga [**Appendix D3 : Figure (xxix)**], possibly bringing her identity close to Bhadrā described in the Devī Purāṇa.

In the preceding paragraphs, a mention has been made of a stone sculpted Simhavāhinī Durgā image preserved at the museum of the Rājbarī or palace of the Koch royal family at Koch Behar, West Bengal. The image is said to be dating back to 10th century CE and it clearly portrays the Pāla Style or the style of EISMA. It is partially damaged and mutilated. Like the image from the Jagaddhātṛī Douḷ illustrated in Fig 4.3 (vi), Durgā in this image is also four handed and holds a rosary in her front right hand. She holds a Khadga which is damaged in her back right hand and a Khetaka or a shield in her back left hand. The object held by her front left hand is damaged and it may be a Mudgara or club, or the shaft of a damaged Trīśūla or a Daṇḍa or staff. The rosary and its positioning here, is similar to that of Durgā in the image from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Douḷ in Fig 4.3 (vi), but there is seen no similarity between the two images in respect of rest of the attributes.

The Kālikā Purāṇa [53. 21- 36] describes a form of Ambikā or Durgā who is four handed, her lower left hand holding a *Siddhasūtra* or a rosary, and upper right hand holds a *Nistrimśa* which may mean either a sword or any sharp weapon. Her left hands are placed in Abhaya and Varada poses. She is seated in a *Baddha Paryāṅka* or the Yogic Cot posture. Her mount, the lion is said to be standing in front of her and she is said to be looking at it. The goddess is said to be seated on a red lotus lying on a couch of gems placed in a pavilion of gems in the golden island or Svarṇadvīpa in midst of the ocean of syrup (Shastri, B., 1994, 51).

The above form known as Ambikā is also known as *Mahotsāhā* and she is the fifth of the Pañcamūrtis or five emanations of goddess Kāmākhyā. She is also addressed by the name Māhāmāyā (Das, 2011, 111).

Now, in the image from the Jagaddhātī Doul illustrated in Fig 4.3 (vi), the position in which the legs and lower torso of Durgā is shown, somewhat, also comes near to that in the Yogic posture of Baddha Paryāṅkāsa [**Appendix D3 : Figure (xxx)**]. Her lower right hand is also holding a rosary and the sharp weapon like thing can be assumed as a Nistriṁśa. Further, the gesture of her lower left hand seems as if she is about to give something, in other words- Varada pose . If her damaged upper left hand is assumed to be showing the Abhaya pose, then the whole form of Durgā depicted in the image will come near similar to the above form or imagery of Ambikā / Mahotsāhā / Mahāmāyā described in the 53rd chapter of the Kālikā Purāṇa. If it is so, then it can be said that in the image, the artisans had either chosen not to depict the cot of gems separately and instead placed the figure of the goddess positioned in the Yogic cot pose, directly on the back of her mount, the lion, or, they had conceived the couch of gems as the royal Āhom throne which is said to have intricately carved ornate lions as its significant structural motifs (Gogoi, L., 1994, 203). Possibly, in the image, they have creatively portrayed the couch of gems in the form of the Āhom throne and the lion mount of Ambikā together through the single image of the winged hybrid lion.

It has been found that images of conceptions like Mangalacaṇḍikā, Mahotsāhā, and also Siddhakāmeśvarī mentioned in the Kālikā Purāṇa are not seen to have appeared in the sculptural art of Assam dating to the early medieval periods. Even, neither of the sculpted images depicted on the architecture of the Kāmākhyā temple or found in its vicinity at Nīlācala are found to have their descriptions in the Kālikā Purāṇa, as per information. It may be possible that the forms/concepts of Siddhakāmeśvarī, Mangalacaṇḍikā, and Mahotsāhā appeared much later, might be after 13th century CE in the pantheon and theogony of Kāmākhyā and got included in the Kālikā Purāṇa which is said to be composed around 10th to 12th century CE. The identification and establishing possible affinities of the images in Fig 4.3 (v) and (vi) with Kāmadā, Mangalacaṇḍikā, Mahotsāhā described in the Kālikā Purāṇa can be reasonable keeping in consideration the context of a possible appearance and popularity of the above concepts in the Śākta system of Assam after or from the 13th century CE, a context

of the final form given to the cult of Kāmākhyā by the Rājaguru of king Śiva Simha and his queens Kṛṣṇarām Bhattāchārya during the 18th century CE, and lastly, a context of a possible following of the Kālikā Purāṇa by the artisans during the 17th to 18th century CE in making images of deities, mainly goddesses.

There can also be a possibility that the images illustrated in Fig 4.3 (v) and (vi) may not be actually featuring any Purāṇic or Tāntric form of Simhavāhinī Durgā. If the figures of the winged lions are considered as Ngī- Ngāo- Khām, but intended to be portrayed solely as royal insignias, the female figures riding them can be explained as deified or over- glorified forms of either the two queens of Śiva Simha- Bar Rajā Phuleśvarī Kunvarī and Bar Rajā Ambikā Kunvarī. An explanation can be given as such that in both the images, Ngī- Ngāo- Khām has been depicted as the royal insignia of the Āhom dynasty, and the deified figures of either of the two queens were placed on their backs to convey or symbolize a message and an idea that the power of the Āhom royal house was in their hands and under their guidance and direction. The Burañjīs say that the two queens of Śiva Simha died young. Considering this, it can also be said that the two images in Fig 4.3 (v) and (vi) were post- mortuary portraits of either of the two queens in the forms of Simhavāhinī Durgā. Sculpting portraits of rulers in the form of deities, and placing them on the architectural structures of their commissioned temples or enthroning them along with the main icons of the deities inside the sacred spaces of these temples, has been observed as an integral part of the temple architecture and sculpture of the Indian subcontinent as well as south east Asia. Bronze sculpted portrait images of the Cholā/ Chozhā queen Sembiyan Mahādevī / Mādevī [**Appendix D3 : Figure (xxxi)**] in the form of Pārvaī dating back to the 9th to 10th century CE are among such examples. Both the queens of Śiva Simha are described to be devout Śākta initiates. In the image from the Jagaddhātrī Doul illustrated in Fig 4.3 (vi), in particular, if the goddess is actually a deified form of one of the queens of Śiva Simha, the rosary may be explained as representing her identity as a devout Śākta.

The features of the lion in the image from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul illustrated in Fig 4.3 (iv) are not clear. It must also have been with wings and resembling the Ngī- Ngāo- Khām. This image can also be assumed as a deified portrait of queen Phuleśvarī Kunvarī. In 4.3.2 (a), an identification of the goddess as possibly a clan deity of the Āhoms associated with strength, protection, and virility was made. If the

leonine figure is certainly or akin to Ngī- Ngāo- Khām, such an identification can become more justified, because Ngī- Ngāo- Khām is also a clan symbol of the Āhoms and represents their traditional and ancestral religious ethos, their strength and vigour.

4.3.3 Apart from the images discussed in 4.3.2 (a), (b), (c), there are certain images in the relief sculptural art of the Māghnowā Doul and Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul featuring other iconographic conceptions or goddess forms that can be categorized and studied as manifestations of Durgā, and that are not found depicted in the evident sculptural imagery of Assam other than the temple relief sculptural art of the Āhoms. These goddess forms can also be called as rarely appearing in the overall extant sculptural art of the Indian subcontinent. Interpretations for some of these selected images are given in the following paragraphs.

4.3.3 (a) Image of a two handed goddess seated on a lotus and holding a Triśūla and a Akṣamālā from the Māghnowā Doul-



Fig 4.3 (vii) : Line drawing of the image of a two handed goddess seated on a lotus and holding a Triśūla and Akṣamālā from the Māghnowā Doul [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 4.3vii (p) in Appendix 4C]

In this image, the presence of the Triśūla in one of the hands of the goddess hints towards her identity as a form or an emanation of Durgā / Gaurī / Pārvatī. The goddess is shown seated on a lotus and she holds a Akṣamālā in her other hand.

The form of the goddess in the image illustrated in Fig 4.3 (vii) sharply resemble that of Ambikā described in the Devī Purāṇa [50. III. 14]. Ambikā is also described to be holding a Śūla/ Triśūla and a Akṣasūtra (or a Akṣamālā) in her two hands. She is said to bestow merits and auspiciousness if worshipped with red- coloured offerings and *Balidāna* or sacrifices (Tarkaratna, Nyayatirtha, 1993, 303). Ambikā is amongst the sixty four Yoginī goddesses or forms of goddess Durgā as per Devī Purāṇa.

4.3.3 (b) Image from the Gaurīsāgar Devī DouI featuring a two handed goddess holding a Darpaṇa or mirror and an uncertain object and seated on a lotus-



Fig 4.3 (viii) : Line drawing of the image of a two-handed goddess holding a Darpaṇa/ mirror and an uncertain object from the Gaurīsāgar Devī DouI [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 4.3viii (p) in Appendix 4C]

In the image illustrated in Fig 4.3 (viii), the goddess holds a Darpaṇa or mirror in her left hand. The object held in her right hand may be a spear or a lotus. The goddess is shown seated in a Padmāsana pose on a lotus.

There is a class or type of images of Gaurī or Durgā appearing in the sculptural art traditions of eastern India including Assam dating from 8th to 11th century CE where the common attribute held by her is a mirror or Darpaṇa/ Ādarśa. In these images, the four handed, *Samapada Sthānaka* or straight unbent standing figure of Gaurī or Durgā, one of her hands holding a mirror and flanked by figures of Gaṇeśa and Kārtikeya are the common motifs. The variations amongst the images only appear in

the attributes or objects depicted in other hands of Gaurī / Durgā. References of such forms of four handed Gaurī or benign, non- martial aspects of Durgā as holding a mirror as an attribute in one of her hands are described in various Purāṇic, Tāntric, Āgamic and Śilpa texts. The Sutradhāra Maṇḍana's Devatāmūrtiprakaraṇam and Rūpamaṇḍana [8. 3] describes a form of Gaurī / Durgā known as Umā in which she holds a mirror, a lotus, a rosary and a water pot (Sankhyatirtha, 1936, 144). There is a form of Gaurī / Durgā known as Lalitā who is said to be holding a mirror along with objects like a *Añjanasalaka* or a stick or sharp needle like instrument for applying Añjana or collyrium to the eyes. Such a form of Lalitā Gaurī finds mention in the Agni Purāṇa [I. 52. 15] (Shastri, J.L., 1998, 139) . A four handed form of Lalitā holding a mirror along with a conch, box containing collyrium and a fruit is described by Rao (1914 ,359) . There are certain iconographic forms of Lakṣmī too where she is featured holding a mirror as one of her attributes. In traditional Nepalese iconography, Lakṣmī is often depicted four handed and having a tortoise as her mount or vehicle. She holds a mirror as one of her attributes [**Appendix D3 : Figure (xxxii)**].

In the architectural relief sculptural art of the late medieval style patronized by the Ahoms , no image of four handed or *Caturbhūjā Gaurī* as holding a mirror in one of their hands and flanked by Gaṇeśa and Kārtikeya has been found portrayed.

Images featuring *Caturbhūjā* forms of Gaurī holding a mirror in one of her hands and flanked by Gaṇeśa and Kārtikeya are sufficiently found in the sculptural art of Assam dating from 9th to 10th century CE (early medieval period). The image of Gaurī worshipped as Durgā at the *Deopānī Durgāṭhān* in Karbi- Anglong district in eastern-central Assam and another image of Gaurī from Telisal at Kasomaripathar in Golaghat district of eastern Assam are two such examples (Dutta, H.N., 2021, 116). Though no such conceptions of four handed or *Caturbhūjā Gaurī* as holding a mirror in one of their hands has been found portrayed in the imagery of architectural relief sculptural art of the late medieval style patronized by the Āhoms, the image from the *Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul* illustrated in Fig 4.3 (viii) can be either a hint towards a possible continuation of the above conception, a completely different visualization of the above conception, or the goddess may have a different identity, different from the idea and conception of Gaurī.

It is seen in the sculptural art or imagery of the Indian subcontinent that usually, when Gaurī is portrayed along with Śīva, she is two handed and she holds a mirror in one of her hands. Images where Gaurī, two handed and holding a mirror in one of them, and portrayed solitary or independent (not accompanied by Śīva) are rarely found.

The Agni Purāṇa [I. 52. 14] describes an independent two handed form of Gaurī / Durgā where she is three eyed, two handed and holding a mirror in one of her hands and a spear in the other (Shastri, J.L., 1998, 139). In the form of the goddess featured in the image from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Douḷ in Fig 4.3 (viii), the shape of the remaining contours or the fragments of the damaged or obliterated object in the right hand of the goddess allows to assume that it might be a spear or a spear like weapon. If the obliterated object held in the right hand of the goddess was surely a spear, the above image has to be identified as the exact representation of the above two- handed form of Gaurī described in the Agni Purāṇa. If this is so, then it will be one of its kind in the whole known range of temple sculptural art of Assam.

The Sutrādhāra Maṇḍana's Devatāmūrtiprakaraṇam and Rūpamaṇḍanam [8. 9] describes a form of Gaurī known as *Himavantī* or *Haimavatī*. She is amongst the twelve forms or Dvādaśa Mūrtis of Gaurī. She is described as *Śailarājī* or the queen/princess of the mountains, as the bride of Śīva/ Maheśvara. In one of her hands she is said to hold a Darpaṇa or mirror and a Padma or lotus (Sankhyatirtha, 1936, 145). The Śīva Purāṇa [46. 24-30] in the episode of Śīva's marriage with Pārvatī, describes the auspicious form of the bride Pārvatī where she is carrying a gem set mirror in one of her hands and a toy lotus in the other. In the image illustrated in Fig 4.3 (viii), the contours of the damaged object held in the right hand also seems like a lotus bud with its long stalk. If it is assumed as a lotus then the form of the goddess can be identified with either of the above two forms or imageries of Gaurī or Pārvatī or Durgā as the the bride and wife of Śīva. The episodes and narratives of Śīva and Pārvatī's marriage ceremony elaborated in the Śīva Purāṇa and several other such texts have been important motifs in the culture of Assam. Śīva and Pārvatī, their wedding and their marital life has a significant place in the lore associated with the rituals of marriage in the culture of Assam. Śīva/ Hara and Pārvatī / Durgā / Gaurī has been understood and revered as the symbol of ideal married couple in the culture of Assam. Even the groom and bride, during the course of the

ritual of marriage are being viewed as Hara and Gaurī respectively and they receive blessings from the elders as *Hara- Gaurī Bās Hauk* which translates to ‘may Hara and Gaurī reside forever in your marital life’. Taking into account the popularity and a deep seated reverence for the imagery of Śiva and Pārvatī as a symbol of ideal marital life and as presiding deities of marital life, household and mutual love and respect between a married man and woman, in the culture of Assam, it can be, in a way, said that the artisans engaged in making the sculptures in the architecture of Gaurīsāgar Devī Dou, might had chosen to feature such a form of Pārvatī or Durgā where she may represent marriage or marital bliss and where she may be endowed with objects or symbols integrally associated with the nuptial rituals in the culture of the region, i.e. Assam, like a mirror or a Darpaṇa or *Dāpon*. Therefore, they might have resorted to descriptions of Pārvatī / Gaurī / Durgā as a bride or in her role of becoming a bride of Śiva mentioned in the texts like Śiva Purāṇa and the Rūpamaṇḍana and as a result portrayed it through the image illustrated in Fig 4.3 (viii).

The image in Fig 4.3 (vii) can also be interpreted in yet another way. One of the central concepts of classical or mainstream Tantric philosophy is that of *Prakāśa* and *Vimarśa*, which means the Light of Consciousness and the Power of Self-Awareness, respectively. Tompkins and Wallis (2009, 1) explains Prakāśa and Vimarśa as such : Prakāśa is associated with Śiva, which is simply a name for the universal Consciousness that is the ground of all reality. Vimarśa, as a power (Śakti), is associated with the Goddess (Tripurasundarī / Durgā / Kālī), also known as Śakti. Prakāśa may also be translated "Manifestation," for the Light of Consciousness manifests all things, which are never separate from that divine Light. However, the manifestation of the universal would be sterile and meaningless without Vimarśa, the power by which we know ourselves as individual expressions of that universal. Vimarśa is also translated as "representation" for it is the power by which the divine re-presents itself to itself—as us. We are each representations of divine reality, and when we know ourselves as such, we fully exercise the Power of Self-awareness (Vimarśa). Finally, Vimarśa may be translated as "reflection," for it is the reflection of the Absolute in the mirror of awareness within a given individual that expresses specifically and concretely the exquisite beauty that inheres potentially within the Absolute.

In the image in Fig 4.3 (viii), the Devī or goddess holding the mirror or Darpaṇa—the concrete symbol of reflection can be understood as a visualization of the above Tāntric philosophical concept of Śakti/ Devī or the feminine principle as Vimarsa, but there is no certainty about it.

In the Devī Gītā [10. 28-29], the supreme Devī or the Great Goddess, in her spiritual counsel says that whole of her worship should be performed with the *Hrillekha Mantra*. She further says that the Hrillekha or the Hrīm Mantra is regarded as the supreme director of all Mantras and she is ever reflected in the Hrillekha as in a mirror (Brown, 2002, 123). This conception, explained by the goddess herself in the Devī Gita, can be related to the ritual of worshipping of the reflection of the image of goddess Durgā in a mirror marked with the Hrīm Mantra, in the traditions of Dūrgā Pūjā in eastern India including Assam. In the whole course of the ritual of Dūrgā Pūjā, it is seen that all the oblations and offerings are done to the mirror marked with Hrīm (usually seen to be marked with vermilion or Sindura mixed with oil) which reflects the earthen image of Durgā and her family enthroned. The image in Fig 4.3 (viii) can also be interpreted as the Great Goddess, who is Durgā in general sense, holding a mirror which is nothing but a representation of the Hrillekha or Hrīm Mantra where she gets reflected. It may be a visualization by the artisans after having acquainted themselves with the aforesaid conception in the Devī Gītā. There may be a second possibility that the image in Fig 4.3 (viii) is a creative rendering by the artisans of the thought and essence behind worshipping the reflection of the earthen image of Durgā in a mirror in the ritual of Dūrgā Pūjā.

Durgā as Gaurī or Pārvatī or Umā, as the beloved and devoted consort of Śiva , as undifferentiated from Śiva, as always accompanying Śiva has remained amongst the most prominent conception of her in the culture of Assam. Gaurī / Pārvatī / Umā in association or in union with Śiva or Maheśvara has been the symbol of reverence of the kings and dynasties that flourished in Assam from the 6th century CE onwards till the 18th century CE. The majority of copper plate grants, and also weapons like cannons or *Bar Top* of Āhom rulers, dated between the 17th to 18th century CE, are seen to feature inscriptions/ epigraphs which opens with lines/ verses like Śrī Śrī Hara- Gaurī- Pada- Dvandāravinda- Makarandānanda- Madhukaro..... Such lines speak of these rulers projecting themselves as servants of Umā- Maheśvara or Hara- Gaurī or devoted to their feet (Neog, 2008b, 110-111) . The worship of Śiva in association

with or as inseparable from Durgā as Gaurī / Pārvatī / Umā was very much profound amongst the Hinduized Āhoms, mainly the Āhom royalty. Though, the worship of Śiva accompanied by or jointly with Gaurī / Pārvatī / Umā was profound amongst the Āhom royalty, not a single image has been found in the relief sculptural art adorning the architecture of their commissioned Douls which features Śiva or Maheśvara in an intimate embrace or *Ālingana* with Gaurī / Umā / Pārvatī. But images and fragments depicting such an iconographic concept are sufficiently found amongst the evidences of sculptural art found in Assam dating back to the time period from 9th to 11th century CE. *Ardhanārīśvara*- the androgynous anthropomorphic form which is a combination of the morphology and iconographic principles of Śiva and Pārvatī / Umā / Gaurī has also been a very important and significant and revered concept in the culture of Assam as evident from the different epigraphs, and folk narratives prevalent across Assam. The temples like the *Ardhanārīśvara* temple at Pāti Darrang in the Darrang district of central Assam can also be an evidence of the prevalence of the worship of *Ardhanārīśvara*. Though the concept of *Ardhanārīśvara* has been a prominent presence in the culture of Assam, till now, either very few or no sculpted image featuring the Śaiva-Śākta composite has been found in the region. No *Ardhanārīśvara* image, both of architectural and free-standing types, in the tradition of Ahom late medieval style stone relief sculptural art, has come to light.

Another significant iconographic conception of Durgā found elaborated in the Purāṇic, Āgamic, Tāntric texts and in the texts collectively known as Śilpaśāstras is *Navadurgā*. *Navadurgā* means nine forms of Durgā, or more appropriately, nine different iconographic forms of Durga which have been arranged as a group. *Navadurgās*, or the nine *Durgās*, or the nine goddesses conceived as Durgā and arranged as a compact iconographic group, generally vary and differ according to texts, ritualistic traditions and regional Hindu cultures. Sometimes, certain goddesses who are known as generally a part of other pantheons or iconographic groups within Śaktism like the *Māṭṛkās* are also included amongst the *Navadurgās* in certain eastern Indian traditions. The most commonly perceived and understood *Navadurgā* group within the Indian subcontinent is the one described in the system of the *Devī Māhātmyam*. These nine *Durgās* are mentioned in its *Devī Kavaca* section [verses 3-5] . In the eastern Indian Śākta traditions including Assam, in particular no sharp

distinctions can be made between Navadurgās and the Mātṛkās- who are either seven, eight, nine or sixteen in number.

4.4 The Saptamātṛkās

The Mātṛkās are numerous mother goddesses who are related to the pan- Indian Purāṇic, Āgamic and Tāntric traditions of Śakti / Devī and also Śiva, and sometimes Viṣṇu. These goddesses were originally village or tribal malevolent and blood thirsty goddesses associated with epidemics, calamities and also occult practices, who in the course of history, were gradually endowed new interpretations and symbolisms, acculturated, and incorporated into the Purāṇic and Tāntric Śaiva and Śākta systems, as well as Buddhism and Jainism too . In the Purāṇic and Tāntric traditions, these goddesses got evolved to be none other than the ramifications or reflections of energy of Durgā / Caṇḍikā, Kālī and Tripurasundarī. In the Matsya Purāṇa [II. 179. 8- 86], different Mātṛkās are described to be created by Śiva and Viṣṇu (in his Narasimha form) for the annihilation of the demon Andhaka/ Andhakāsura (Wilson, Singh, 1983, 842- 849) . In the *Devī Māhātmyam* or Caṇḍī [8. 12-28], eight Mātṛkās are said to aid the supreme Durgā or *Caṇḍikā* in her battle against the destructive demonic forces of *Caṇḍa- Muṇḍa*, *Raktabīja* and *Śumbha- Niśumbha* (Bhattacharya, D. P., 2016, 148-151). According to the commentaries on the *Devī Māhātmyam* by the Śākta theologians, all the Mātṛkās are the manifestations of energies of the supreme Bhagavatī Māhāmāyā Caṇḍikā / Durgā / Kātyāyanī inherent or distributed in every Devatā or god. The Mātṛkās, are also described to be the attendants or companions of Durgā or Caṇḍikā. In almost all Purāṇic narratives, the Mātṛkās are described to be associated with war, destruction and annihilation. The Varāha Purāṇa even states that eight Mātṛkās represent eight mental qualities that are morally bad (Rao, 1997, 381). The Mātṛkās' profound thirst for blood and flesh as described in the Purāṇic literature is their original tribal characteristic which have been retained, but seen pacified and subdued to a certain extent . Their destructive energies are seen to be channelized towards the purpose of upholding the cosmic order or *Dharma*. Even if they tend to move towards devastation and bloodshed, they are seen to be pacified, or made benign and instilled with the virtue of protection. The instilling or attempts to instil compassionate and protective attitudes to the Mātṛkās are excellently traced in their numerous literary, artistic and visual representations. In many visual

representations of the Mātṛkās, for example, in the sculptural traditions of Odisha dating from 9th to 12th century CE, and also in some Odiya Paṭacitra paintings, it is seen that each of them are portrayed carrying or cuddling a child on their laps. This indicates towards their conception and reverence as protective mother figures and givers of progeny. In the Matsya Purāṇa [II. 179. 73-84], Viṣṇu as Narasiṃha explains to the Mātṛkās that they should give all the desires to mankind upon being worshipped. He further says that those who are desirous of progeny will worship the Mātṛkā Śuskadevī (Wilson, Singh, 1997, 848).

In most of the texts of Purāṇic, Āgamic and Tāntric systems, the Mātṛkās are described together to be mostly eight in number or even more. The Mātṛkās Brahmāṇī / Brāhmī, Vaiṣṇavī, Māheśvarī, Kaumārī, Vārāhī, Indrāṇī / Aindrī and Nārasimhī are described to having almost the same iconographic forms and attributes as the male gods of whom they are inherent energies. These Mātṛkās are the only ones who bear the names of the male gods in whom they reside and originate from. The six Mātṛkās- Brāhmī, Vaiṣṇavī, Māheśvarī, Kaumārī, Vārāhī and Aindrī are seen as generally common to all the Mātṛkā groups mentioned in the Purāṇas, Āgamas and Tantras. Cāmuṇḍā is seen to be included as one of the Mātṛkās in Purāṇas and Śilpa texts like Viṣṇudharmottara, Rūpamaṇḍana etc. but, in the Devī Māhātmyam [8. 20], she gets replaced by Nārasimhī. Here, Cāmuṇḍā is not described to be a Mātṛkā. She is Caṇḍikā or Durgā as Kālī herself. There is also an eighth Mātṛkā described here who is known as Śivadūtī. Coming to the Matsya Purāṇa, the Mātṛkā group described here has seven Mātṛkās- the above six (said as staying common to all Mātṛkā groups) and a seventh Mātṛkā known as Yogeśvarī of whom Cāmuṇḍā is an aspect. The Varāha Purāṇa states that Yogeśvarī is the eighth Mātṛkā along with the above common six Mātṛkās and Cāmuṇḍā (Rao, 1997, 381). In the Kālī Krama, or in the system of the Kālī Kula, one of the two important traditions/ schools of Śāktism, centred in Bengal and Assam, a Mātṛkā known as Aparājitā [**Appendix D4 : Figure (i)**] is included in place of Aindrī or Indrāṇī. Here, she has been worshipped along with Brāhmī, Vaiṣṇavī / Nārāyaṇī, Māheśvarī, Kaumārī, Vārāhi, Camunda and Narasimhi (Bhattacharya, S.C., 2012, 75).

It is seen that the concept of the group of eight or more Mātṛkās are generally seen in the literary descriptions and representations. In artistic representations, particularly in sculptural art, the Mātṛkās are mostly depicted and seen to be seven in number.

These seven Mātṛkās or Saptamātṛkās are Brahmāṇī/ Brāhmī, Vaiṣṇavī, Māheśvarī, Kaumārī, Vārāhī, Indrāṇī /Aindrī and Cāmuṇḍā. But, sculptural representations featuring figures of nine or *Navamātṛkās* are also found. An example of such a representation is found at Rajshahi in Bangladesh, and it dates back to the 10th century CE [**Appendix D4 : Figure (ii)**]. Most of the available representations or portrayals of the seven Mātṛkās in the sculptural art of the Indian subcontinent date back not earlier than the Kusana and the Gupta periods. Most of these date from circa 4th to 7th century CE onwards. In all of the known representations or images, the above seven Mātṛkās are found to be either sculpted together as a compact group, on a single panel, or sometimes, each of them sculpted separately and arranged side by side systematically as one compact set or group. In some representations, for example, portrayal of Gaṇeśa accompanying the seven Mātṛkās or sometimes both Gaṇeśa and Vīrabhadra/ Bhairava are depicted as flanking them [**Appendix D4 : Figure (iii) and (iv)**]. The Smṛtis instruct the Pujā or worship of the Saptamātṛkās-Brāhmī, Vaiṣṇavī, Māheśvarī, Kaumārī, Vārāhī, Aindrī and Cāmuṇḍā along with Gaṇeśa and Vīrabhadra. This may explain the frequent and widespread depiction of above Saptamātṛkās together along with Gaṇeśa and Vīrabhadra in the temple sculptural art of the Indian subcontinent. It is seen that in most of these images, Vīrabhadra is depicted as playing on a Viṇā [**Appendix D4 : Figure (v)**]. The Matsya Purāṇa says that an image of Gaṇeśa/ Vināyaka should be established near the images of Mātṛkās, and an image of Vīreśvara or Vīrabhadra with matted hair locks or Jatājuta, holding a Trīśūla and a Viṇā, and mounted on a bull or Vṛsabha should be placed in front or facing the images of Mātṛkās (Misra, 2001, 219).

Mātṛkās Vārāhī, Nārasimhī and Cāmuṇḍā have independent traditions or cults of their own. Therefore, several sculpted representations of them where they are shown as independent goddesses and not a part of any Mātṛkā group are found. Vārāhī along with her numerous forms like *Mahāvārāhī*, *Svapna Vārāhī*, *Vārthalī* etc., and Nārasimhī as *Pratyangirā* or *Atharvaṇa Bhadrakālī* are two major goddesses in the Śākta tradition of Śrī Kula or Śrī Vidyā, particularly in southern India. In Assam, there is rarely any evidence of sculpted representation or temple structure/ architectural fragment dating back to the time period from 8th to 12th century CE which portray the seven Mātṛkās together in a set or group. But, there is an exquisite stone image of a goddess identified as *Tripura Bhairavī* found at Jogijan in Nagaon

district, where small images of the seven Mātrkās are seen depicted together accompanying a central large image of Tripura Bhairavī. The small figures of the seven Mātrkās along with the figures of Bhairavas are seen carved on the surface of the stone *Śilapatta* or stele forming the backdrop of the central seated figure of the goddess identified as Tripura Bhairavī (Choudhury, R.D., 2010, 103). From the observation of its stylistic features which are sharply of the EISMA, Choudhury (2010, 104) places the image in around 10th century CE [**Appendix D4 : Figures (vi) and (vii)**]. Except this image of Tripura Bhairavī, other sculptural representation in Assam which features the figures of the seven Mātrkās carved or sculpted together on a single panel, stele or rock face are unknown. But, independent representations of Mātrkās Vaiṣṇavī, Vārāhī and Cāmuṇḍā have been found amongst the evidences of sculptural art in Assam belonging to the time period from 11th to 12th century CE. A miniature black basalt stone sculpted image identified as Vaiṣṇavī dated circa 10th to 11th century CE, was found at the Helem Tea Estate in Gahpur in Sonitpur district, and is kept preserved at the Sonitpur District Museum in Tezpur [**Appendix D4 : Figure (viii)**].

Images of the Mātrkās are featured in the relief sculptural art of the Māghnowā DouL, Gaurīsāgar Devī DouL, Bar Pukhurī Devī DouL and Jagaddhātrī DouL. In the architectural relief sculptural art of none of these Douls, the images of these seven Mātrkās are seen arranged side by side or near each other as a set or group. They are placed separately with images of other gods and goddesses in between them. It is seen that a single DouL contains the depiction of either six, three or two of the seven Mātrkās, but not all the seven at a time. Even, in a single architectural structure, the representations or images of more than one iconographic form of a single Mātrkā are seen. The reason and such convention which allowed for such repeated portrayal of images of a particular iconographic form or portrayal of images of different iconographic forms of a single Mātrkā in the architectural body of a DouL is not known. In the Douls, the mode of arrangement of their images may point towards a different conception of them, not as Mātrkās who are always conceived in majority of the Purāṇic and Tāntric texts as remaining and appearing together in a group.

In the iconographic scheme of the sculptural art of the architecture of the above Douls, all the forms of the Mātrkās are portrayed as either two- armed or four-

armed. An insight into the iconographic conceptions of the seven Mātṛkās in the relief sculptural art of the above Douls will be given in the upcoming paragraphs :

a) Mātṛkā Brāhmī / Brahmāṇī

Mātṛkā Brāhmī or Brahmāṇī, the inherent female energy within Brahmā is described in most of the Purāṇas, Āgamas and Śilpaśāstras as having the basic form same as that of Brahmā- having four faces/heads and having swan and lotus as seat or mount. But, though having the same form as Brahmā, variations are seen to appear, particularly in the number of hands/arms and the type of attributes held in the hands. The four face motif is seen to remain common or constant in all her forms. In the Viṣṇudharmottara, Brahmāṇī is described to have six hands, four of them holding different attributes like *Pustaka* (book/ manuscript), *Kamaṇḍalu* , *Sūtra* (either a rosary or thread) and a *Sruva* which is a type of wooden spoon or ladle for offering ghee into the fire in a *Yajña*. The rest two hands are in *Abhaya* and *Varada* poses (Rao, 1997, 384). The *Matsya Purāṇa* [II. CCLXI. 24] describes Brahmāṇī as having four arms and mounted on or riding a swan or a crane/stork. She is said to hold a *Akṣasūtra* (rosary) and a *Kamaṇḍalu*. The other two hands may be in *Abhaya* and *Varada* poses but is not mentioned in the *Purāṇa* (Wilson, Singh, 1997, 1131) . The form of Brāhmī described in the *Devī Māhātmyam* or the *Caṇḍī* of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* is same as that mentioned in the *Matsya Purāṇa*. The *Devī Purāṇa* [50. II. 1-2] describes Brahmāṇī or Brāhmī to be four- handed and seated on a *Yogapatta*. She is said to hold a *Daṇḍa* (staff), *Kamaṇḍalu*, *Akṣasūtra* or rosary and a *Sruva*. She is further described to be reciting Vedic hymns (Tarkaratna, Nyayatirtha, 1993, 296). The *Aṁsumadbhedāgama* describes Brahmāṇī as four- handed, with the front two hands posed in *Abhaya* and *Varada* and the other two holding a *Akṣamālā* and a *Śūla* (lance/ chopper) . She is seated on a red lotus and have a swan as her vehicle. Further, she is said to be situated under the canopy of a *Palāśa* tree (Rao, 1997, 383-384). The *Agni Purāṇa* [50. 18-19] describes Brahmāṇī to be four- handed, riding a swan and holding a rosary, a *Sura* (drinking vessel) and a *Kunda* (may be a kind of flower) in three of her four hands. Nothing is said about the fourth hand, about its position or what is held in it (Shastri, J.L., 1998, 133) .

The image of Brahmāṇī / Brāhmī portrayed in the relief sculptural art of the architecture of the Jagaddhātṛī Doul is shown as having four faces, which is common

to all the Brahmāṇī images described in the Purāṇic, Āgamic and Śilpa texts. She is seated on the back of a swan or goose, and is four-handed. One of her left hands is seen holding or grabbing the neck of the swan which is a very unique feature. Rest of her hands are seen to be holding different objects. Akṣamālā/ Akṣasūtra or the rosary which is generally seen as an important and common attribute of Brahmāṇī is absent in this image.



Fig 4.4 (i) : Line drawing of the image of Mātṛkā Brahmāṇī/ Brāhmī from the Jagaddhātṛī Douḷ [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 4.4i (p) of Appendix 4D]

The most striking feature in the image of Brahmāṇī from the Jagaddhātṛī Douḷ illustrated in Fig 4.4 (i) is the wrist of her left lower hand catching hold of the neck of the swan or goose on which she is mounted. Why is it portrayed like this is not clear. It may also be assumed as just a stylistic or formal device. As the hand does not hold any attribute, the artisans might have chosen to use the neck of the goose or swan as a support or a kind of armrest in order to show the hand as engaged. It may also be possible that this hand of the goddess was intended by the artisans to show as a device to control the movement of the goose/swan which serves as the vehicle of the goddess.

Further, the figure of Brahmāṇī in Fig 4.4 (i) is not shown as holding a Kamandalu which is otherwise described as another typical attribute of her in most of the Purāṇas, Tantras and Śilpa texts. Both rosary and Kamaṇḍalu are absent in the hands

of Brahmānī in this image. Her lower right hand may be holding a lotus. The upper hands of the goddess are holding two instruments, out of which one held in the upper left hand seems like either a club or a spoon/ ladle used to pour oblations of ghee or clarified butter to sacrificial fire in a Śrauta or Vedic Yajña. There is more possibility of it being a ladle because in her many images and forms, Brahmānī (like Brahmā), is said to and made to hold such ladles or spoons . There are different types of such wooden ladles, for e.g. *Sruk*, *Sruva*, *Dhruva*, *Juhu*, *Upabhṛt*, *Vasordharā*, *Upayamani*, *Prokṣaṇī* etc . The attribute held in her upper left hand, if observed closely, seem to come near to the form of the sacrificial ladles *Sruk*, *Dhruva*, *Juhu* and *Upabhṛt*. It may be any one of them, but the probability of it being a *Sruk* is more because *Sruk* and *Sruva* are the most common, prescribed and prevalent sacrificial ladles. The *Sruk* represents the Prakṛti or the female principle (Boddupalli, Sastri, 2015, 553). The object held in the upper right hand of the goddess, it must be a *Sruva* because *Sruva* is always seen to be used along the *Sruk* in any Yajña. *Sruva* represents the Puruṣa or the male principle (553).

All the forms or images of Brāhmī mentioned in the Purāṇic, Āgamic and Tāntric texts feature her as holding a rosary and a Kamaṇḍalu. According to the Devī Māhātmyam or Śrī Śrī Caṇḍī [8. 33], in the battle between the goddess Durgā / Caṇḍī / Śakti and the demonic armies of Caṇḍa- Muṇḍa, Raktabīja and Śumbha- Niśumbha, Brahmānī is said to immobilize, curb and nullify the strength and vigour of the demonic armies by sprinkling the water contained in her Kamaṇḍalu (Bhattacharya, D. P., 2016, 151- 152). The Kamaṇḍalu and the rosary are the essential attributes of Brahmā and so of Brahmānī who is none but the personification of his energy, and almost every known Purāṇic or Śilpa text mentions it. The image of Brahmā without the presence of Kamaṇḍalu and rosary, featured in the Jagaddhātṛī Douḷ and illustrated in Fig 4.4 (i) is an unique one. The lower right hand of the goddess, in this image, further, holds a Padma or lotus. The Bangla encyclopaedic text on Hindu rituals *Purohit Darpan* do mention of a form of Brahmānī who holds a lotus in one of her hands (Smrititirtha, 1989, 287). The text does not mention anything about the actual source of this form . Even if this form features Brahmānī holding a lotus as an attribute in her hands, it cannot be related to her form featured in the image from the Jagaddhātṛī Douḷ in Fig 4.4 (i). Its because, in the form of Brahmānī described in the *Purohit Darpan*, the goddess is shown holding along with

the lotus, a Daṇḍa and a Akṣamālā (287), different from the form of her portrayed in the Jagaddhātī Douḷ in which she is seen holding a complete different combination of attributes.

(b) Vaiṣṇavī

Vaiṣṇavī has the same form/appearance as Viṣṇu but variations are seen to appear in the number of arms/hands, the type and arrangement of attributes held in the hands, the poses of the hands and the seats/ mounts. The Devī Purāṇa [50. III. 19-20] describes Vaiṣṇavī as having exactly the same form as Viṣṇu. She possesses four hands in which she is said to carry conch, discus, mace and lotus. She rides the bird Garuḍa, the characteristic vehicle of Viṣṇu and is clad in yellow garments just like him. Further, she is also said to adorn the Vanamālā, Viṣṇu's characteristic garland (Tarkaratna, Nyayatirtha, 1993, 303) . Vaiṣṇavī is known as the *Sthiti Śakti*- energy of preservation and nourishment of the supreme Caṇḍī / Durgā embodied by Viṣṇu in Śākta ideology. The Viṣṇudharmottara describes Vaiṣṇavī to be six-handed. Two of her right hands are described to be carrying the mace and lotus, while the third one is posed in Abhaya Mudra. Her two left hands are carrying the discus and the conch while her third left hand is said to be posed in Varada Mudrā (Rao, 1997, 384- 385). The Matsya Purāṇa [II. CCLXI. 28-29] offers a very different description of the form of Vaiṣṇavī. Here she is described to possess four hands, out of which three are holding discus, conch and a mace. The fourth hand is posed in Varada Mudrā. The goddess is said to be accompanied by a child or she may be carrying or cuddling the child on her lap. She along with the child is described to be seated on a throne (Wilson, Singh, 1997, 1131). Another text, *Purvakanāgama*, a Śaiva Āgama, describes Vaiṣṇavī as four-handed and riding the Garuḍa. She, like Viṣṇu is said to have a dark complexion, and dressed in yellow garments (Rao, 1997, 385). Two of her hands are said to hold a discus and a conch, and the rest two are posed in Abhaya and Varada Mudrās. The Devī Māhātmyam [8. 18] does not specify about the number of hands of Vaiṣṇavī but says about the sharp resemblance of her form with that of Viṣṇu. She is said to ride the Garuḍa and holding the characteristic attributes of Viṣṇu like conch, discus, mace, the bow called *Śāranga* and a sword (Bhattacharya, D.P., 2016, 149) .

The image of Vaiṣṇavī featured in the architecture of the Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul illustrated in Fig 4.4 (ii) features her as four- handed. Her facial features and several details of it are obliterated. Only the part of the Cakra or discus held in her upper right hand and the theriomorphic figure of her mount Garuḍa crafted like the ones placed in the Nāmghars of the neo- Vaiṣṇava Sattras and illustrated in the paintings in the manuscripts produced by the neo-Vaiṣṇava Sattra ateliers point us towards her identity as Vaiṣṇavī. The objects held in the other hands are damaged and have chipped off. The object held in the upper left hand may be a conch. The lower right hand is damaged and it is not at all clear what was placed in it. The object held in the lower left hand is also damaged but if we closely observe the shape and arrangement of its remaining parts and contours, and the way it is held, it appears like a Ghaṇṭā or a metal bell used in Hindu and Buddhist rituals and meditational practices.



Fig 4.4 (ii) (in the previous page) : Line drawing of the image of Vaiṣṇavī from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 4.4ii (p) of Appendix]

A form of Vaiṣṇavī or Nārāyaṇī is mentioned in the Śāradātilaka [6. 22] where the goddess holds Cakra, Sankha, Kapāla and a Ghaṇṭā in her four hands, and riding on the Garuḍa (Shastri, P., 2011, 160). If the unclear object in the lower left hand of Vaiṣṇavī in the image from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul illustrated in Fig 4.4 (ii) is assumed as a bell and the other unclear damaged attributes of her as a conch/ Sankha

and a Kapāla (skull/ skull bowl), it may go to resemble her form mentioned in the Śāradātilaka.

In the eastern Indian Kālī Āvaraṇa Krama, there are eight Matr̥kās : Brāhmī, Vaiṣṇavī, Māheśvarī, Kaumārī, Vārāhī, Cāmuṇḍā, Nārasimhī and Aparājitā¹. All these Matr̥kās occupy different positions in the Yantra or diagram of Kālī, and they are to be worshipped during the course of ritual of Kālī Pūjā. The form of Vaiṣṇavī or Nārāyaṇī, in particular, is visualized in this Krama as well as the Yantra to be holding Sankha, Cakra, Kapāla and a Ghaṇṭā or bell². This form or conception of hers may be inspired or taken from the Śāradātilaka.



Fig 4.4 (iii) : Image of a goddess carrying a child from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 4.4iii (p) of Appendix 4D]

The above image in Fig 4.4 (iii) is depicted on the architecture of the Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul and can be, at first, identified as that of Vaiṣṇavī if her description in the Matsya Purāṇa where she is described as four- handed and accompanied by or carrying a child, is considered. In the above image, the four handed goddess is featured standing in a Samabhanga Sthānaka (?) pose and carrying a child in her lap. The figure of the goddess may be standing on some kind of pedestal or a lotus but its not clear. The attributes held in the hands of the goddess are missing and are damaged. Due to the absence of the attributes in the hands of the goddess, and the

uncertainty of whether the goddess is standing on some kind of pedestal, it is not certain that she is Vaiṣṇavī sculpted following the description in the Matsya Purāṇa.

In the Viṣṇu Purāṇa [V. II], there is an elaborate invocation to Devakī, the mother of Kṛṣṇa, as the supreme Prakṛti, the supreme nurturer and progenitor of the universe and all its beings. It is narrated in the Purāṇa that when the supreme Viṣṇu descended to the womb of Devakī to be born as Kṛṣṇa, Devakī was praised and eulogized day and night by the celestials, the gods and goddesses as none other than the mother of the creation, as the progenitor of Brahmā and the mother of the Devas and Asuras (Dutt, 1896, 323-324) . Following or considering this eulogy in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, the image of the goddess holding a child from the Gaurisagar Devi Dou in Fig 4.4 (iii) may also be identified as the conception of Devakī as the supreme mother, creative and nurturing principle, and the child on her lap being Kṛṣṇa, who is universe himself. Mathurā- the birthplace of Kṛṣṇa is considered as one of the 108 supreme Śakti/ Devī Pīṭhas or Devī Kṣetras , and here the Devī/ Śakti presides over as Devakī- the mother of Kṛṣṇa. Considering the context of queen Phuleśvarī Kunvarī's sectarian zeal for Śaktism, and the conflict between Śaktism which was receiving royal patronage from the Āhom court under Śiva Simha and Phuleśvarī Kunvarī and neo- Vaiṣṇavism- which was imbibed and followed by a majority of the common and downtrodden people of the Āhom kingdom, the concerned image may be thought of as Devakī, Devaki tactically portrayed as a supreme manifestation of the Śakti, and the one and only cause of existence of Kṛṣṇa (situated as a child on her lap)- the only revered divine principle in neo- Vaisnavism.

The goddess in the image in Fig 4.4 (iii) can also be assumed as a portrayal of Yaśodā carrying Kṛṣṇa in her lap. Yaśodā has been described as the foster mother of Kṛṣṇa and she was the one who brought up Kṛṣṇa according the narratives in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and Viṣṇu Purāṇa. In the verses 63-65 of the 80th Chapter of the 3rd part of Nārada Purāṇa which is on the Tāntric worship of Kṛṣṇa through different Mantras, it is found described that one should also worship the various associates of Kṛṣṇa including his fathers Nandagopa and Vāsudeva and his mothers Devakī and Yaśodā on the tips of the petals of a lotus shaped Yantra. The forms of both Devakī and Yaśodā should be visualized as goddesses, bedecked with divine garments, unguents, ornaments and holding in their hands milk pudding and vessels full of it. It is not clearly said about the number of their hands (Tagare, 1997, 1142).

It can be assumed that the goddess in Fig 4.4 (iii) can be a divine portrayal of Yaśodā or Devakī made by the artisans after getting acquainted with the intricacies of some type of ritual worship of Kṛṣṇa in a Yantra like the above described by the Nārada Purāṇa. In the image in Fig 4.4 (iii) they possibly had made Yaśodā or Devakī to hold milk pudding and a vessel containing it in her upper or back hands—either following the visualization mentioned in the Nārada Purāṇa or a visualization similar to it in another text. Moreover, the figure of the child in her lap and held by her front or lower left hand may be identified as none other than Kṛṣṇa and have been depicted there to ascertain the goddess as none other than Yaśodā or Devakī.

Further assuming the child to be Kṛṣṇa, the goddess in the image in Fig 4.4 (iii) can also be identified or associated with the imagery of *Kṛṣṇamātā* or Durgā / Kālī as the mother and cause of Kṛṣṇa— a concept seen to be popular mainly in Bengal. Representations of *Kṛṣṇamātā* can be extensively found in the early 19th century CE oleographs and lithographs produced in colonial Kolkata / Calcutta [**Appendix D4 : Figure (ix)**]. The concept of *Kṛṣṇamātā* or Durgā / Kālī / Śakti/ Mahāmāyā as the mother and cause of existence of Kṛṣṇa might be rooted in texts like the Kālī Vilāśa Tantra. The Kālī Vilāśa Tantra contains an elaborate description of *Kṛṣṇamātā*'s form in its 23rd chapter (Tarkatirtha, 1917, 54-56).

In the Devī Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa [III. 3. 63-67] Viṣṇu says to Brahmā and Maheśvara/ Śiva that when he, as a baby was licking the left toe of his feet lying on a *Vatapatra* or a banyan leaf floating on the waters of the *Karanasamudra* or the endless cosmic or causal ocean, he was fondled, comforted and rocked to and fro by the Mahādevī or the Great Goddess Mahāmāyā / Kālī / Durgā / Bhuvaneśvarī / Parā Prakṛti singing lullabies like a mother. He goes on to say that She is the sole origin, the supreme Bhagavatī, the mother and the cause of himself, Brahmā and Śiva, and everyone and everything in the creation³. This narrative in the Devī Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa may have some relation with or have served as an inspiration for the concept and iconography of *Kṛṣṇamātā*, of viewing Durgā / Kālī as a mother of Kṛṣṇa/ Viṣṇu or in a way, the Vaiṣṇava principle. Phuleśvarī Kunvarī in her desire to establish the Śākta thought as superior during her reign, and to suppress or pacify the neo-Vaiṣṇava thought or the neo-Vaiṣṇavas with whom she as well the Āhom court was in a serious conflict, might have wanted or demanded a visual or material representation of an imagery or concept to be depicted in the architecture of her

commissioned Gaurīsāgar Devī DouL where the Śakti/ Devī principle is the cause and progenitor of the Viṣṇu principle, and Viṣṇu principle is subservient and subordinate to the Śakti or Devī principle. Obeying to such a demand, the artisans might have gone through the above narrative in the Devī Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa, understood its thought and have depicted it through the image illustrated in Fig 4.4 (iii). If this is so, then the four-handed form of the goddess in the image may be identified with the four-handed form of the supreme primordial goddess Parā Prakṛti/ Mulaprakṛti/ Mahāmāyā described in the verses 11- 16 of the Chapter 3 of the Devī Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa⁴ (Kumar,1983, 11). It has been said that at the beginning of the creation, when there was no existence other than Parā Prakṛti/ Mula Prakṛti who is of the form of Being- Consciousness- Bliss, Parā Prakṛti, of her own accord created a Puruṣa or a male being who by getting blessed with her powers, became threefold as Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva.

It can be also assumed that Phuleśvarī Kunvarī, preoccupied by the desire of placing an image in the architectural body of her commissioned monument which can portray the Devī as supreme to Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa, could have consulted Kṛṣṇarām Bhattāchārya Nyāyavāgiśa regarding what type of iconography or aspect of Devī / Śakti/ Durgā / Mahāmāyā / Kālī as supreme to Viṣṇu / Kṛṣṇa and showing him as a part of her should be placed on the architecture of the Gaurīsāgar Devī DouL. Kṛṣṇarām Bhattāchārya who had been bringing in ideas and codes of worship from Bengal, in response, might have suggested the form of Kṛṣṇamātā or Kālī Kṛṣṇamātā as justifiable. Obeying to it, Phuleśvarī Kunvarī might have ordered the artisans to sculpt an image of Kṛṣṇamātā on the wall of the DouL. The image in Fig 4.4 (iii) can be understood as the manifestation of this demand or order of Phuleśvarī Kunvarī by the artisans. Further, if the involvement of artisans from Bengal is considered, identifying the image in Fig 4.4 (iii) as a form of Kṛṣṇamātā is apt.

The attributes held by the goddess in the image in her back hands, and her right lower or front hand are damaged and are unknown. The presence of the child in her lap cannot be the only criteria for identifying her either as Vaiṣṇavī described in the Matsya Purāṇa, or as Yaśodā / Devakī or as Kṛṣṇamātā, or as a portrayal by the artisans of Devī / Mahādevī / Mahāmāyā, as the mother of Viṣṇu as well as of Brahmā and Maheśa and the whole creation narrated in the Devī Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa. A figure of a child is found to be depicted as held in the laps of Mātṛkās other than

Vaiṣṇavī too, in various traditions of sculptural art in the Indian subcontinent . Considering this, the goddess in the image in Fig 4.4 (iii) can be identified as another Mātṛkā, if not Vaiṣṇavī. In pan- Indian iconography, or iconographic depictions in pan- Indian art, a child or a baby is seen represented as held by not only the goddesses categorized as Mātṛkās, but also seen as held by a large number of goddesses like Manasā, Ṣaṣṭhī, Hāritī and also Yoginīs. Yoginīs are closely related to the Mātṛkās. Ṣaṣṭhī and Hāritī [**Appendix D4 : Figure (x)**] are evolved from ancient goddesses or malevolent spirits and they have evolved to protective mother goddesses and presiding goddesses of childbirth and maternal care, which makes them closely related to Mātṛkās. Considering these, the goddess in the image in Fig 4.4 (iii) can be identified with either Ṣaṣṭhī or Hāritī.

The Assam State Museum at Guwahati has in its collection a miniature bronze image of a two- handed goddess, seated in Lalitāsana on a throne having an aureole around her head , and holding a child on the thigh of her left leg which is folded. This image was found at Hahara in Kamrup district and has been identified as Hāritī. It is dated circa 10th to 11th century CE [**Appendix D4 : Figure (xi)**]. No other image of the Buddhist mother goddess or mother spirit Hāritī in Assam, other than this image from Hahara, has come to light. This particular image is an evidence of a possible prevalence or practice of a cult or worship of Hāritī in Assam much before the Āhom period. The image from Gaurīsāgar Doull illustrated in Fig 4.4 (iii) also features the same attributes as Hāritī- the motif of child on the lap and motherly protection, and it can be assumed that from the 10th to 11th century CE till the Āhom period (late 17th to 18th century CE), the cult and worship of Hāritī was continuing in Assam in some form or other.

Sculpted images of a goddess identified as Pūrṇeśvarī [**Appendix D4 : Figure (xii)**] has been found amongst the extant examples of Pāla sculptural art dating circa 11th to 12th century CE. Though, not much is known about this goddess, her images portray her as four- handed, seated in royal ease and holding a child by one of her hands in her lap. She is said to be revered and worshipped by both Hindus and Buddhists⁵. Her origin, history and evolution is not known, neither there is any evidence of the spread and extent of her worship, particularly within eastern India. The goddess in the image illustrated in Fig 4.4 (iii) can be said as bearing some resemblance with Pūrṇeśvarī. If there is certainly some connection between the two

imageries, it can be said the cult, belief and imagery of Pūrṇeśvarī might have survived till the later medieval period, either in the same form or other form, and was also popular in Assam. Deep insight and exploration is required in this regard.

In Chapter 2, mention has been made of a folk narrative prevalent among the members of the Deurī community residing in Sadiya in easternmost frontier of Assam in which the goddess Kecāikhāitī in the form of a woman or female spirit with grotesque features comes face to face with king Gadādhara Siṃha or Siu-Pāt-Phā. The narrative goes on like this : Some members of a Deurī village in the Sadiya region used to set bamboo traps known as Cepā at night for catching fish. But, when they came to check the traps in the morning for fish, they would find that the caught fish were either missing or half eaten, or their half eaten parts strewn across the place. This continued for several nights, and the people of the village were unable to catch the thief. Even the Deurī chiefs were unable to trace who was behind all this. That time, the Āhom prince Gadāpāṇi Konvar who later became king Gadādhara Siṃha or Siu-Pāt-Phā was spending days as a fugitive escaping from the assassins of the tyrant Āhom general Lāluk Solā Barphukan and the crown Āhom king Ratnadhvaj Siṃha or Siu-Lik-Phā or Lorā Rajā. He happened to be staying in that village and was served by the Deurīs. Unable to catch the fish thief, the Deurī people and the chieftains sought Gadāpāṇi Konvar/ Gadādhara Siṃha's help. Gadādhara Siṃha listened to their pleas, agreed and assured them that he will surely catch the fish thief. He made a plan, he stayed awake one night, went in the vicinity of a water body where the bamboo baits were put up and cleverly hid himself and waited in a safe distance for the thief to come. After some moments, in the darkness of the night, Gadādhara Siṃha saw a tall dark woman or a female spirit with grotesque and fearful bodily features like long dishevelled hairs, protruding eyes and long nails sneaking towards the bamboo traps, taking out the fish trapped in them and devouring them. He further saw a baby/ infant in the woman's lap. Gadādhara Siṃha went out from his hiding and threw a large fruit, a Pomelo or *Rabāb Tengā* at the woman/ spirit and yelled loud at her and asked her who was she and why was she stealing fish at night. The woman introduced herself as Kecāikhāitī- the tutelary goddess of the Cutiyās and she predicted that Gadāpāṇi Konvar will soon become king⁶.

There is one more Deurī folk narrative mentioned by Bipul Chandra Deuri, in his essay *Deurī Borā, Deurī Baruāh* which was published in a souvenir *Kuṇḍil* in the year 1994 (pages 19-20). This narrative too, speaks of Gadādhār Simha being served and revered by the Deurīs when he was spending his life as a fugitive prince Gadāpāṇi Konvar. There were Deurī Āldharās or attendants who were required to daily arrange and serve food for Gadāpāṇi. Fish constituted a major part of his daily diet. The Āldharās had to daily catch and arrange fresh fish for Gadāpāṇi . One day, while getting ready for food, Gadāpāṇi Konvar saw that there was no fish in the platter served to him. He was astonished and enquired about this matter to his Deurī Āldharās. They said that “*Sibidh*” or That Thing ate all the fish trapped in the Cepā or the bamboo baits set up in the rivulet. Upon asking about that thing, the Āldharās said that it was a Piśāch or Piśāca or a malevolent spirit. They further explained that if one mentions the name of that spirit, the spirit gets to know about it, and kills the person who says its name, by breaking his/ her neck. Gadāpāṇi Konvar listened and said to wait for two more days. He then asked the Āldharās to show him the rivulet where the baits or Cepās were set up and where the spirit comes and finish off the fish trapped in them. He then devised a plan, he came back to his residence, he took his meals and before noon, and again went back to that place near the rivulet where the Cepās were set up. He perched up on an elephant apple or Ou Tengā tree near the rivulet and waited. It was a rainy afternoon of the Aṣāḍha or Āhār month. After waiting for some moments, he heard the cries of a child or a baby. Upon seeking the source of the sound, he saw a tall thin woman with hairs so long that they touch her ankles. Her hairs were so thick that they seemed like covering her body in the manner of drapery. She has a child tied to her back by creeper or leaves of some tree. She then put her exceptionally long hands into the Cepās, drew out the fish trapped in them and began to savour them. Seeing this, Gadāpāṇi Konvar/ Gadādhār Simha who was on the Ou Tengā tree, out of anger, threw a Ou Tengā fruit aiming at her. The force of throwing was such that the fruit broke and severed the neck of the child tied to the woman’s back. Angered, the woman turned her face towards Gadādhār Simha. She had long sharp teeth, had red bloodshot eyes, and was of the complexion of soot. She was none other than the spirit mentioned by the Deurī Āldharās. She advanced to attack Gadādhār Simha but stopped seeing the radiance of Gadādhār Simha and at once calming down on listening his divine voice with which he ordered her to go and never to come back again. She, shattered at the loss of her

child, agreed to the order and blessed Gadādhara Siṃha that he has all the Lakṣaṇas required to become a king. She further said that the mankind needs a leader and protector like him, and he will soon be enthroned as a great king.

The woman or the female spirit in the aforesaid narratives, as observed from her fearful, malevolent, yet motherly attributes, may be amongst several of those village or tribal female protector spirits who evolved to Mātṛkās in the mainstream Hindu Purāṇic and Tāntric theogony. She has been called as none other than Kecaīkhāitī, the tutelary and the most important goddess of the Deurīs in the first narrative. She, as only sighted, reached and ‘apprehended’ by Gadapāṇi Konvar or Gadādhara Siṃha, and by none other, not even by the Deurīs, may indicate towards a possible decline of her belief system and importance amongst the Deurīs and the acceptance of her cult by the Āhoms. Moreover, it also connotes towards how the Āhoms, in their first phase of acceptance of the religious culture of Assam were imbibing the practices and beliefs of the Deurīs and Cutiyās which can be categorized as Tantra or Laukika forms of Tantra. It has been said that the Āhoms, in their initial phase of acceptance of Hinduism, accepted the deities and spirits worshipped by the Cutiyās and Deurīs and employed Deurī priests for carrying out worship.

The goddess holding a child featured in the image from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Douḷ illustrated in Fig 4.4 (iii) can be associated with the imagery of the woman or female spirit holding a baby or an infant in the above mentioned narratives. The female spirit featuring in the aforesaid narratives might have been a venerated and feared symbol in the Deurī belief systems, as well as in the diverse folk belief systems centred on the goddess Kecaīkhāitī in eastern Assam. Her conception might have existed in the folk religious culture and belief systems of the Deurīs from a much earlier period, much before the above narratives were shaped. It can’t be said that such a female spirit has no existence or presence apart from the above narratives. Strong ritual or cultic traditions worshipping a myriad of mother spirits having a fearful countenances and carrying a child/ baby might have existed or is still in practice amongst the Deurīs. These traditions prevalent amongst the Deurīs and Cutiyās might also have entered the belief system of the Āhoms as well as got included or incorporated in the conception of Mātṛkās in the regional mainstream Śaktism of Assam and its texts during the late medieval period or even earlier. The image from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Douḷ in Fig 4.4 (iii) may be thought as its proof. It

can be assumed that in this image depicted in the architecture of the Gaurīsāgar Devī DouL, the female spirit holding a baby in her lap described in the aforesaid Deurī folk narratives, has been portrayed either in the form of Māṭṛkā Vaiṣṇavī of the Matsya Purāṇa, or as a distinct Māṭṛkā.

Further in both the above narratives, it has been said that the female spirit blessed prince Gadāpāṇi Konvar to rise and become king Gadādhara Simha, and sit on the Āhom throne. This indicates that the tradition worshipping such a mother spirit or spirits might have been accepted and encouraged by king Gadādhara Simha from whom started the rule of the Tunkhungiā clan of the Āhom royalty. After Gadādhara Simha, under his descendants and succeeding Āhom rulers, who initiated themselves to Śaivism and Śaktism, the female spirit holding a baby might have been gradually incorporated into mainstream Purāṇic and Tāntric conception of Māṭṛkās, and therefore depicted in the form of goddesses like Māṭṛkā Vaiṣṇavī, or, in the form of goddesses like Ṣaṣṭhī, Hāritī or Pūrṇeśvarī in the image from the Gaurīsāgar Devī DouL illustrated in Fig 4.4 (iii).

A mention has been made of an image of a female figure carrying a child on her lap depicted in the relief sculptural art of the Keśavarāi DouL. This female figure does not bear the characteristics of a goddess, rather she seems more human. It may be possible that the image from the Gaurīsāgar Devī DouL illustrated in Fig 4.4 (iii) have some relation with this image, but there is no certainty in it.

(c) Māheśvarī

Māheśvarī is described to be having the same form and features as Śiva. She is also known as Śivā, Śankarī and Rudrāṇī. She, according to Śākta thought is the Laya Śakti or the annihilating or dissolving energy of the supreme Durgā / Caṇḍikā embodied by Mahēśvara/ Śiva/ Rudra. She is sometimes conceived as no different from Gaurī or Pārvatī- the consort of Śiva, in popular or folk belief. The Matsya Purāṇa [II. CCLXI. 24-26] describes her form as such- she has four hands and riding a bull. Her hairs are matted and forehead adorned with a crescent moon mark. Her three hands are armed with a sword, a Triśūla or trident and a *Khaṭvāṅga* (a skull topped staff), and she holds a skull in her fourth hand (Wilson, Singh, 1997, 1131) . The Devī Māhātmyam [8. 16] describes Māheśvarī to be riding a bull, adorned with snakes as her bracelets, wearing a crescent moon on her forehead and holding the

trident (Bhattacharya, D.P., 2016, 149). The *Devī Purāṇa* [50. III. 15] says of *Māheśvarī* as three eyed, riding a bull and wielding a trident in her hand (Tarkaratna, Nyayatirtha, 1993, 303). Coming to the *Viṣṇudharmottara*, *Māheśvarī*, here is described as having five faces like Śiva in his *Pañcavakra* aspect. Each of her five faces have three eyes. She is described to have six arms/ hands. Four of her six arms are carrying *Sūtra* (may be a *Akṣasūtra* or a rosary), *Damaru* (Kettle Drum- a characteristic attribute of Śiva), trident and a bell while her remaining two hands are held respectively in *Abhaya* and *Varada* poses. Her head is adorned with a *Jaṭā Mukuṭa* (crown of matted hair). The crescent moon mark is worn by her on her crown (Rao, 1997, 387). The Śaiva Āgama text *Aṁsumadbhedāgama* describes *Māheśvarī* to be four- handed and holding a *Japa Mālā* or rosary and a *Śūla* or trident in two of her hands. Her remaining two hands are in *Abhaya* and *Varada* poses, and her head is adorned with *Jaṭā Mukuṭa* (Rao, 1997, 387). *Sutradhāra Maṇḍana's Rūpamaṇḍana* [8. 63- 64] has description of the form of *Māheśvarī* as four- handed and riding a bull. she is said to be holding a *Kapāla* (a skull or a skull cup), a *Khaṭvāṅga*, a trident in three of her four arms and her fourth hand is held in *Varada* pose (Sankhyatirtha, 1936, 157).



Fig 4.4 (iv) : Line drawing of the image of *Māheśvarī* from the *Māghnowā Doul* [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 4.4iv (p) in Appendix 4D]

In the image of *Māheśvarī* from the *Māghnowā Doul* illustrated in in Fig 4.4 (iv), the goddess *Māheśvarī* is shown as four handed and riding a bull. The object held in her

upper right hand is not clear. Her lower right hand is seen carrying a trident while her lower left hand may be posed either in Varada or Abhaya pose. Her matted hair is shown loose but not tied as a bun . In the image of Māheśvarī from the Bar Pukhurī Devī Douḷ illustrated below in Fig 4.4 (v), the goddess is shown four handed and riding a bull. Here, she is shown holding a staff/ stick known as *Yoga Daṇḍa* in her lower left hand. Her lower right hand may be posed in Abhaya or Varada. The trident or Triśūla is absent in this image. Instead, her upper right hand is portrayed holding, may be a lance or a spear. Nothing can be said about her upper left hand. It is not clear whether there was any object placed there or, was it placed in some particular gesture.



Fig 4.4 (v) : Line drawing of the image of Māheśvarī from the Bar Pukhurī Devī Douḷ [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 4.4v (p) in Appendix 4D]

Māheśvarī, in the image from the Jagaddhātrī Douḷ illustrated below in Fig 4.4 (vi) is also four- handed but having five faces or heads. She too, holds in her right hands a *Yoga Daṇḍa* and a Triśūla/ trident. Her left hands are posed in Abhaya and Varada. The striking feature in this image is the serpent which portrayed as coiled and twisted around the whole body of Māheśvarī. The hood of the serpent is forming a canopy over the heads of the goddess.



Fig 4.4 (vi) : Line drawing of the image of Māheśvarī from the Jagaddhātrī Doul [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 4.4vi (p) in Appendix 4D]

It can be seen that in all the three images of Māheśvarī or Śivā from the Maghnowa Doul, Bar Pukhurī Devī Doul and the Jagaddhātrī Doul, illustrated in Fig 4.4 (iv), (v) and (vi) respectively, the Yoga Daṇḍa is portrayed as a common attribute. The Yoga Daṇḍa or the wooden armrest used by Yogīs and ascetics is not found depicted as an attribute of Māheśvarī in any known representation of her found in the artistic traditions of the Indian subcontinent. The above conceptions of Maheśvarī as holding a Yoga Daṇḍa is very unique to the Āhom temple relief sculptural art. Possibly, in the images illustrated in Fig 4.4 (v) and (vi), Māheśvarī was conceived none other than Pārvatī or Gaurī, and the Yoga Daṇḍa might be portrayed there by the artisans to convey the narrative of goddess Pārvatī's severe austerities and Yogic practices to get Śiva as her husband. The Yoga Daṇḍa may be thought of as a motif explaining or hinting towards the severe penance and austerities that goddess Pārvatī undertook in order to become one with Śiva. The narrative of Pārvatī's penance to attain Śiva is found mentioned in different Purāṇas, for example, the Śiva Purāṇa. The Śiva Purāṇa has been a very influential and popular Purāṇic text in the culture of Assam. During the Āhom period, Śiva Purāṇa became a very revered text right from the days of reign of king Rudra Siṁha. The Yoga Daṇḍa can be also thought of as reflecting Māheśvarī or Pārvatī's as *Brahmacāriṇī*- she as a divine scholar, ascetic and a seeker

of knowledge. Brahmācāriṇī is mentioned as one of the *Navadurgās* or the nine aspects or emanations of Durgā in the Devī Kavacam (verses 3-5) included in the Devī Māhātmyam or Caṇḍī of the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa (Bhattacharya, D. P., 2016, 23-24).

Māheśvarī is believed to be the one who, after creation, breathes life into a creature⁷. This connotes towards her probable connection with Yogic practice, which is concerned with the science of balance and purification of life breath or *Prāṇa*. A Yoga Daṇḍa or the wooden armrest is usually used in Yogic practice for balancing and easing the flow of this life breath inside the body. Its portrayal as an attribute of Māheśvarī in the above images from the Douls, thus reflects her as the symbol of the subtle energy which keeps the flow of *Prāṇa* balanced and replenished in the body.

The image of Māheśvarī from the Jagaddhātṛī Douls in Fig 4.4 (vi), as mentioned earlier, features her as having five faces or heads which corresponds to the five-faced or Pañcavakra aspect of Śiva. It seems at first that this image is in accordance to Māheśvarī's image or form described in the Viṣṇudharmottara, but except the five face imagery, everything else is different from the Viṣṇudharmottara image. Māheśvarī, here, has only four hands unlike the image described in the Viṣṇudharmottara where the goddess has six hands. Further the presence of the Yoga Daṇḍa as an attribute totally deviates the image from that described in the Viṣṇudharmottara.

The image of Māheśvarī from the Jagaddhātṛī Douls in Fig 4.4 (vi) has another feature that is worth noting. It is the figure of the serpent shown coiled up and twisted around the whole length of the body of Māheśvarī with its hood forming a canopy over her five heads, like in certain images of Viṣṇu mentioned in Chapter 3. The tail end of the serpent is coiled around the legs of the goddess. The manner in which the serpent is shown twisted and coiled around the body of the figure of goddess reminds of the monolithic serpent/snake pillar found at Sadiya which has been often associated as a part of a political treaty between the Āhoms and Mishmīs [**Appendix D4 : Figure (xiii)**]. The serpent in the image of Māheśvarī in Fig 4.4 (vi) may be interpreted as symbolizing the *Kuṇḍaliṇī*- the vital energy conceived as Śakti or feminine which is inherent in every being. It remains coiled up in the region

known as *Mūlādhāra* (near the groin and in the pelvic region) and has to be awakened through Yogic practices. It unwinds and goes upwards until it unites with the Śiva principle in the *Sahasrāra* (in the Hypothalamic cavity)⁸. The figure of Māheśvarī, in the image in Fig 4.4 (vi) may be depicting the process of gradual union of Śiva (symbolized here by the five heads having matted hair locks) and Śakti (symbolized by the feminine body) through the upward spiral movement of the serpentine Kuṇḍaliṇī in the form of the figure of the snake coiled around her. The Triśūla or the trident held by Māheśvarī in her upper right hand may symbolize both the Śaiva and Śākta principles, and the Yoga Daṇḍa symbolizes the Yogic practice which brings about the union of Śiva and Śakti.

In the *Kāmakalā Khandam* of the *Mahākālā Samhitā* [8. 628-631], there is a form of Māheśvarī where she is described to have five heads/ faces and riding a bull. Further, she is described as *Śubhravāsukīnāgendralasadyajñopavitinīm* which means that the king of serpents known as Vāsukī who in white in colour is embracing or ornamenting her body and serving as her Yajñopavīta or sacred thread (Jha, 1986, 151). The figure serpent coiling up around the five-headed Māheśvarī in the image in Fig 4.4 (vi) can be thought of as the artisans' understanding and rendering of the above description of Vāsukī serving as a Yajñopavīta of Māheśvarī mentioned in the *Mahākālā Samhitā*.

In the image from the Jagaddhātṛī Douḷ illustrated in Fig 4.4 (vi), the five-faced, four-handed form of Māheśvarī may be the form of Mahesvara or Siva in his Nīlakaṇṭha aspect found described in the Śāradātilaka (Buhnemann, 2016, 272). Moreover, the form of Śiva presiding as Umānanda in the Bhasmācala in Guwahati is also sometimes meditated as five-faced and having four hands. M.N. Bhattacharya says that there is a Dhyāna Mantra in a text known as *Tīrthapaddhati* which visualizes Umānanda Śiva as five-faced/ headed and having four hands. It can be said there are rarely any representation of Mātṛkā Māheśvarī in the sculptural art of the Indian subcontinent where she is portrayed as having the form of Śiva in his Pañcavakra or five-faced aspect. Moreover, Māheśvarī having a form of five-headed and four-handed Śiva, like in the image in Fig 4.4 (vi) is even rarely found in the extant sculptural art of the Indian subcontinent.

(d) Kaumārī

Kaumārī has the same form as Kārtikeya/ Kumāra/ Subrahmaṇya/ Skanda. The form of Kārtikeya, in most of Purāṇas, Āgamas and Śilpa texts, is described to be either having one faced/ headed or six faced/headed, two handed or having more than two hands. His vehicle or mount is described to be a peacock and his main attribute or weapon as a spear or javelin which is known as Śakti or a Vela. Kaumārī, like Kārtikeya is also sometimes described as having six faces/ heads. In all the descriptions, she is said to ride the peacock and holds the characteristic spear/ javelin of Kārtikeya. The Agni Purāṇa [50. 18-19] describes the form of Kaumārī as having one face and two hands and riding the peacock . She is said to hold spears or javelins in both her hands (Shastri, J.L.,1998, 19) . The Viṣṇudharmottara describes Kaumārī as having six faces and twelve hands. Here, two of her twelve arms are posed in Abhaya and Varada. Rest of the arms are said to be carrying the Śakti, *Dhvaja* (flag), *Daṇḍa* (staff), bow, arrow, bell, lotus, *Pātra* (drinking vessel), *Kukkuṭa* (a rooster) and *Paraśu* (battle axe) (Rao, 1997, 387- 388). The Devī Purāṇa [50. III. 17-18] says about the form of Kaumārī as having one face, two handed and riding a peacock. She is described to be adorned with a garland of red flowers and holding the Śakti in one of her hands and a Tridandi in the other (Tarkaratna, Nyayatirtha, 1993, 303). Sūtradhāra Maṇḍana's Rūpamaṇḍana [8. 65- 67] describes Kaumārī to be riding a peacock. She is six- faced, six handed and holding attributes like the *Patākā*, *Daṇḍa* or *Pāśa* and *Bāṇa* or bow in her right hands and may be a *Paraśu* or axe/ hatchet, lotus and *Kukkuṭa* or rooster in her left hands (Sankhyatirtha, 1936, 157- 158). The Devī Māhātmyam [8. 17] says of Kaumārī as having only one face, riding a peacock and holding a Śakti in one of her hands (Bhattacharya, D.P., 2016, 149). There is also another image of Kaumārī described in the Devī Māhātmyam [11. 15] where she is surrounded by a peacock and a *Kukkuṭa*, and carrying a Śakti in one of her hands (175) . The text Aṁsumadbhedāgama has description of an image of Kaumārī where she is single- faced, four-handed with two of the hands posed in Abhaya and Vara and the other two holding a Śakti and a *Kukkuṭa*. The *Kukkuṭa* also features as the emblem on her *Dhvaja* or flag/ banner (Rao, 1997, 387). The *Kukkuṭa* or rooster also is an attribute of Kārtikeya and it forms the emblem on his banner as well. The Matsya Purāṇa [CCLXI. 27] describes the form of Kaumārī as armed with a trident (the characteristic attribute of Śiva) and a Śakti, riding a peacock and carrying a

Kukkūṭa or cock/rooster in her hands. she is further described to be dressed in red garments and adorned with armlets and garlands (Wilson, Singh, 1997, 1131) .

The image of Kaumārī from the Jagaddhātṛī Douḷ features her as single faced/ headed/ monocephalic, two-handed and riding a peafowl, whereas the image from the Māghnowā Douḷ features her as six-faced/ headed having four hands and also mounted on the back of a peafowl.

In the image from the Jagaddhātṛī Douḷ, Kaumārī [Fig 4.4 (vii)] is holding a Śakti in one of her hands and a mace or club in the other. The image from the Māghnowā Douḷ is a very unique one. In this image, Kaumārī is portrayed as holding a Cakra or a discus. Her upper hands are holding Śaktis . Her left lower hand is without any attribute and may be posed in a gesture of blessing [Fig 4.4 (viii)]. Kaumārī in the image from the Bar Pukhurī Devī Douḷ is also shown as six headed but with only two hands, each holding a Śakti or a spear [Fig 4.4 (ix)] .



Line drawings of the Fig 4.4 (vii) : image of Kaumārī from the Jagaddhātṛī Douḷ (left) and Fig 4.4 (viii) : image of Kaumārī from the Māghnowā Douḷ (right) [refer to the photographs of the same in Fig 4.4vii (p) and 4.4viii (p) in Appendix 4D]

Cakra is not seen to be described as a characteristic attribute of Kaumārī according to the known Purāṇic and Tāntric texts including the ones mentioned in the previous paragraphs. In several texts centred around Kumāra (Kumāra being another name of

Kārtikeya) worship like the *Kumāra Tantra*, Cakra do find mention as an attribute held by Kārtikeya or Kumāra in several of his forms, but almost all of these texts are seen to be prevalent in the southern Indian traditions. We are till now not clear about the history of the tradition of Kumāra or the Kārtikeya worship in Assam, though evidences of living traditions of worship of Kārtikeya are found in the Koch/Rājbanśī, Rābhā and Hājong communities of western Assam. Images of Kārtikeya are found in very less or negligible numbers compared to that of other deities in the sculptural art of Assam, including the sculptural art of the architecture of the Āhom built Douls. Till date, no image of Kārtikeya featuring him as holding a Cakra dating back to the pre- Āhom period has been recovered in Assam. Even in the Purāṇic or regional literature of the region, which includes texts like the Kālikā Purāṇa and several forms of ritual poetry, there is no mention of Kārtikeya holding a Cakra.



Fig 4.4 (ix) : Line drawing of the image of Kaumārī from the Bar Pukhurī Devī Doul [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 4.4ix (p) in Appendix 4D)

(e) Vārāhī

Mātrkā Vārāhī is the inherent Śakti of the boar incarnation of Viṣṇu known as Varāha. In all her images she is described and portrayed as having the face of a wild boar. The Viṣṇudharmottara states that Vārāhī has a big belly and six-

handed/armed, four of which are said to be carrying Daṇḍa (staff), Khadga (sword), Khetaka and Pāśa. Her remaining two hands are said to be held respectively in the Abhaya and Varada poses. Her mount/ vehicle and the symbol on her banner is described to be an elephant (Rao, 1997, 388). The Devī Purāṇa [50. III. 23] describes Vārāhī as *Vaivaśvatī*. She is said to ride a buffalo and is intoxicated by drinking liquor from a skull cup. She is further said to hold a staff in her other hand . It is not clearly mentioned in the Devī Purāṇa whether Vārāhī as Vaivaśvatī has only two hands or more than two hands (Tarkaratna, Nyayatirtha, 1993, 304). The Aṁsumadbhedāgama again describes Vārāhī to be riding an elephant and carrying the banner bearing the symbol of an elephant. She has four hands. Two of them are carrying a *Hala* (plough) and a Śakti or spear. Rest of the hands are described to be posed in Abhaya and Varada . She is further described to be seated under a *Kalpaka* tree (Rao, 1997, 388). Vārāhī, in the text Purvakaraṇāgama, is said to carry in three of her four hands weapons like the Śāranga (the characteristic bow of Viṣṇu), the Hala and Muṣala (a pestle) (388).

Vārāhī is one of the major or supreme goddesses in the Śrī Kula or Śrī Vidyā Śākta tradition. Here, she is known as *Vārāhī / Mahāvārāhī / Daṇḍanāthā/ Daṇḍinī* and as the source of all the Mātṛkās, which also include herself as Unmatta Bhairavī or Laghu Vārāhī. Unmatta Bhairavī or Laghu Vārāhī is the Mātṛkā Vārāhī and is also known as the Anga Vidyā of Mahāvārāhī⁹. According to the *Lalitāstavaratnam* (verse 69), Unmatta Bhairavī is amongst the foremost and the prominent Devīs who surround Mahāvārāhī or Vārāhī¹⁰. According to the texts of the Śākta tradition of Śrī Vidyā or Śrī Kula, Mahāvārāhī or *Daṇḍanāyikā / Daṇḍanāthā / Potrinī* is said to be the defence minister or supreme commander or lieutenant of the supreme goddess Lalitā/ Rājarājeśvarī / Mahā Tripurasundarī. She is the chief commander- in- chief who leads the army of goddess Lalitā. As per the description in the Lalitopākhyana or Lalitā Māhātmya of the Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa [IV. 20. 1-5] , her chariot is known as *Kiri Ratha* or *Kiri Cakra* or the Boar wheeled chariot (Tagare, 1999, 1116). According to some narratives in Sri Vidya traditions, goddess Mahāvārāhī/ Varahi is said to play the role of the father whereas goddess Kurukullā is said to play the role of the mother of Lalitā / Mahā Tripurasundarī during her marriage with Śiva Kāmeśvara. May be due to this reason Vārāhī or Mahāvārāhī is revered as the father of all the followers, practitioners of the Śrī Vidyā Śākta tradition or *Mārga* (path)¹¹.

Since the later part of the Gupta period (or even earlier), there might have been prevalence of a strong distinct Tāntric Śākta tradition of worship centred around the boar headed goddess Vārāhī, particularly in Odisha and southern India. This is evident from both archaeological and literary sources. Numerous temples and shrines dedicated to the Tāntric worship of Vārāhī in her various aspects, conceptions and imageries like *Matsya Vārāhī* [**Appendix D4 : Figure (xiv)**] dating from the 7th to 11th century CE onwards are scattered across the length and breath of Odisha . An example of such a temple is the Vārāhī Deula at Chaurasi [**Appendix D4 : Figure (xv)**] . Few sculpted representations of Vārāhī from the early medieval periods have been recovered in Assam and its adjoining regions. A sculpted image of seated Vārāhī has been found amongst the 11th to 12th century CE temple ruins at Mālinī Thān in Likabali, lying in the region now bordering Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. A stone sculpted female figure or a goddess seated in a squatting posture holding the same attributes as the image of Matsya Vārāhī enshrined inside the Varahi Deula at Chaurasi, has been found at Barpathar in Golaghat district. These attributes are a bowl and a fish [**Appendix D4 : Figure (xvi)**] . This image dates back to may be 7th -8th century CE, but it may not be of Matsya Vārāhī because the goddess is not boar- faced. She has a human- like face. The bowl, held by Matsya Vārāhī and this squatting goddess figure from eastern Assam is a *Pāna* or *Surā Pātra*- a vessel to hold liquor. Both the Pātra and the fish may be symbols of *Matsya* and *Mada* or liquor- two of the five integral or principal elements of Tāntric Vāmācāra worship known as *Pañca 'Ma' Kāra*.

Amongst the Douls considered in this study, images of Vārāhī are seen to be depicted only in the relief sculptural art of the architecture of Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul and the Jagaddhātrī Doul. In both the images, the goddess is shown four-handed and riding a bovine animal, must be a buffalo. The figure of Vārāhī in the image from the Jagaddhātrī Doul is shown to carry in her four hands Gadā, Cakra, Padma and a spear.



Fig 4.4 (x) : Line drawing of the image of Vārāhī from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Douḷ [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 4.4x (p) in Appendix 4D]

The image of Vārāhī from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Douḷ illustrated in Fig 4.4 (x) is seen to be damaged at several places. Her back right hand is completely obliterated and the object held in her back left hand is not discernible. The object held in her front left hand and rested on her left shoulder may be a Hala or plough or a Daṇḍa or staff. The round object held by her front right hand may be identified as a shield. It may also be interpreted as the loop part of a Pāśa or noose wound around her wrist. Noose is also described in certain texts as an iconographic attribute of Vārāhī and it points towards her association with Yama or the god of death and Dharma. The Daṇḍa held by Vārāhī in certain of her images and buffalo as her mount also indicates her association with Yama. It is believed that Vārāhī use to take the food offerings or Piṇḍa offered by people to their dead ancestors, and so she has affinity to Yama¹². In the text *Śilpasamgraha*, it is even said that Vārāhī was born from Yama .

The lifted up face or head of Vārāhī in the image in Fig 4.4 (x) seems as if it is connoting towards an inspiration from the imagery of Bhū Varāha or that aspect of Varāha in which he rescued and lifted up the earth goddess by his snout and tusks from the abyssal depths of the catastrophic waters. According to the different

commentaries on the Śākta texts like Caṇḍī or Devī Māhātmyam, it is not Varāha, but actually the Śakti Vārāhī inherent in Varāha through which he rescued and upheld the earth goddess from getting submerged in the waters. In other words, it is only the Śakti Vārāhī, a part of the *Nārāyaṇī Śakti* or *Stithi Śakti* (the energy of preservation) of the supreme Caṇḍikā / Bhagavatī / Durgā shared by Nārāyaṇa/ Viṣṇu as Varāha who saved the earth goddess or Bhū Devī from getting lost in the waters of the deluge. Further, it is said that Unmatta Bhairavī, the Anga Vidyā of Mahā Vārāhī or the Mātṛkā Vārāhī protected the world/ earth and reinstated it during the great cosmic submersion or deluge by carrying it in her tusks. In the image illustrated in Fig 4.4 (x), the manner in which the face or head of Vārāhī is portrayed seems as if she is engrossed in balancing, keeping in place, or bearing the weight of something placed on her snout or tusks. It might be possible that the artisans had portrayed some image or symbol of the earth goddess as seated or balanced on her snout or tusks keeping in mind the Śākta concept of Vārāhī as the only energy that rescued the earth goddess from sinking into the depths of the waters of the deluge.

The image of Vārāhī from the Jagaddhātṛī Douḷ; as said earlier is shown holding a discus, mace/ club, a spear and a lotus, like in a particular form of Viṣṇu seen to be depicted frequently in the sculptural imagery of the same Douḷ and also the Gaurisāgar Devī Douḷ. In this type of image of Viṣṇu, he is seen to be portrayed always in a standing posture and holding a Cakra, Gadā and a lotus in her three hands but not Sankha in his fourth hand. Instead the Sankha is replaced by a spear or lance in his fourth hand. If Viṣṇu holds such a combination of attributes, he is to be known as *Pāṇḍunātha* as per Kālikā Purāṇa (Shastri, B., 1994, 83). According to the Kālikā Purāṇa [63. 133b- 134], Viṣṇu is to be worshipped as the Bhairava known as Pāṇḍunātha in presence of the goddess Kāmākhyā/ Mahāmāyā/ Durgā (83). King Śiva Simha, his queens and his courtiers, deeply engrossed in practicing and patronizing Śaktism, might have wanted the other deities, mainly Viṣṇu, to be sculpted in the architecture of their commissioned temples to the Devī as portraying those forms or aspects like Pāṇḍunātha where they remain subordinate to or paying allegiance to Śaktī/ Devī or the goddess revered as Durgā, Gaurī and Kāmākhyā. The Pāṇḍunātha Viṣṇu images are met with only in the Gaurisāgar Devī Douḷ and the Jagaddhātṛī Douḷ, the former being commissioned by queen Phuleśvarī Kunvarī/

Pramatheśvarī Devī and the latter by her brother Harināth Barpātra Gohāin, a prime minister of Śiva Simha and Phuleśvari Kunvarī. In no other Āhom built Douls other than the aforesaid Douls, the depiction of images of Viṣṇu as Pāṇḍunātha are seen. Their presence in these two Douls may be thought of as reflecting a desire by the patrons or the patronizing authority, i.e. the Āhom court to convey an idea, either of a negotiation between Śaktism and Vaiṣṇavism, or, of the subjugation or humbling of Vaiṣṇavism by Śaktism, considering the context of the Śākta- neo-Vaiṣṇava conflicts during that period (18th century CE).



Fig 4.4 (xi) : Line drawing of the image of Vārāhī from the Jagaddhātṛī Doul [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 4.4xi (p) in Appendix 4D]

(f) Indrāṇī / Aindrī

Aindrī or Indrāṇī is the Śakti of Indra or Sakra. She is also known as *Sākrī*. The Aṁsumadbhedāgama describes Aindrī or Indrāṇī as having four hands and three eyes. She is said to ride an elephant (like Indra), carrying Śakti (spear/lance) and Vajra or thunderbolt (also characteristic attribute of Indra) in her two of her four hands. The other two hands are said to be posed in Abhaya and Vara. Her banner bears the symbol of an elephant and she is said to reside under a Kalpaka tree (Rao, 1997, 385). The Viṣṇnudharmottara has mention of Indrāṇī as having six hands and having

thousand eyes. Four of her hands are said to be carrying Sūtra (rosary), Vajra, Kalaśa (a pot or a jar) and a Patra (vessel). The remaining two are posed in Abhaya and Vara (Rao, 1997, 385). The Devī Purāṇa [50. II. 11- 12] describes Indrāṅgī/ Aindrī to be riding an elephant and her two hands holding a Vajra and a Ankuśa (goad). Her form is described to very charming, adorned with various ornaments. She is described as surrounded or attended upon by Gandharvas, *Siddhas*, *Caranas* and *Pramathas* (Tarkaratna, Nyayatirtha, 1993, 297) .

Presently three images of Aindrī are seen depicted in the architecture of the Bar Pukhurī Devī Douḷ. In all the images, the goddess is portrayed riding an elephant. One of the image features her as having four hands/ arms whereas the rest of the two features her as two handed. Firstly, details of the image where Aindrī is featured as four handed will be seen.



Fig 4.4 (xii) : Line drawing of the image of four handed Aindrī from the Bar Pukhurī Devī Douḷ [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 4.4xii (p) in Appendix 4D]

In the above image from Bar Pukhurī Devī Douḷ illustrated in Fig 4.4 (xii), the face of the goddess is damaged and the forms of the objects held in her hands are not clear and understandable. May be a club or mace is placed in her upper left hand and her characteristic attribute Vajra is held by her upper right hand.

In each of the other two images of Aindrī or Indrāṇī, she is shown two-handed and carrying a Vajra and a Ankuśa. Both of their forms correspond to the description in the Devī Purāṇa discussed above.



Fig 4.4 (xiii) : Line drawing of the image of two handed Aindrī from the Bar Pukhurī Devī Douḷ [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 4.4xiii (p) in Appendix 4D]

In the above image illustrated in Fig 4.4 (xiii), it can be observed that the face and the torso of Indrani is scattered or adorned with small, faint convex, eye shaped designs or forms worked out in low relief [refer to the photograph of the image in Fig 4.4xiii (p) for a better understanding]. These may be made to represent the imagery of Indra and Indrāṇī as both having thousand or numerous eyes.

One of the images of Aindrī/ Indrāṇī from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Douḷ features her as four handed and riding an elephant. Her two right hands are damaged. The upper left hand too is seen to be damaged and nothing can be said about the object carried by her lower left hand. Is it a remaining part of some larger object or a complete object is not clear [Fig 4.4 (xiv)]. The second image from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Douḷ portrays Aindrī/ Indrāṇī as two handed out of which one is shown carrying a Vajra. Nothing can be said about the object held by her another hand [Fig 4.4 (xv)].



Line drawings of the images of Fig 4.4 (xiv) : Four handed and Fig 4.4 (xv) : Two handed Aindrī/ Indrāṇī from the Gaurīsāgar Devī DouL [refer to the photographs of the same in Fig 4.4xiv (p) and 4.4xv (p) in Appendix 4D]

The image of Aindrī/ Indrāṇī from the Māghnowā DouL features her as having two hands and riding an elephant. A Vajra is held in one of her hands while the other hand is posed in may be Abhaya. The elephant is portrayed here as having four tusks (two on either side of its trunk) and its head is heavily ornamented with straps and belts. This elephant is Airāvata- the vehicle of Indra who is described in the Purāṇic texts to have more than one tusk or trunk.

The reason(s) for the placing three images of Mātṛkā Indrāṇī, two in her two handed aspects and one in her four handed aspect on the walls of the Bar Pukhurī Devī DouL is not clear. The image portraying Indrāṇī as two handed and holding a Vajra and Ankuśa, according to the Devī Purāṇa should be worshipped by the kings. It is further said in the Devī Purāṇa [50. II. 13] that if this image of hers is worshipped with red or blood coloured offerings, she blesses the growth of Kṣatriyas (warriors) or Kṣatriyahood (Tarkaratna, Nyayatirtha, 1993, 297). We cannot be sure of whether the repeated portrayal of this two handed image of Indrāṇī/ Aindrī on the architecture of the DouL was done as a result of a preoccupation of the Hinduized patrons/ patronizing authority (as well as the artisans) by this particular belief elaborated in

the Devī Purāṇa- of Indrani conferring growth and glory to the Kṣatriyas (the kings and warriors).

(g) Cāmuṇḍā

As per the Devī Māhātmyam [7. 27], Cāmuṇḍā is none other than Kālī who came to known as such after crushing and slaying the powerful demons *Caṇḍa* and *Muṇḍa* (Bhattacharya, D.P., 2016, 145). Cāmuṇḍā is none other than Durgā/ Caṇḍikā herself and she is the destructive energy of Śakti/ Devī. The Amsumadbhedāgama describes the form of Cāmuṇḍā as having four hands, having a fearsome appearance and having the colour of her body as red. She is said to have three eyes and have abundant, thick hair that bristles upwards. She is said to carry in her one hand a Kapāla (skull), in other hand a Śūla while her other two hands are posed respectively in Abhaya and Varada. She is further described to wear a garland of skulls in the manner of a Yajñopavīta and is seated upon a Padmāsana or lotus seat. Draped in a garment of tiger skin, her abode is described to be under a fig tree (Rao, 1997, 386). The Viṣṇudharmottara describes Cāmuṇḍā to be seated on a corpse or a dead body of a human being. She is said to have a terrific face having protruding powerful tusks. Her body is described to be emaciated and she has sunken eyes. She is said to have ten hands and a thin belly. She holds or carries in her ten hands the following things : Muṣala (pestle), Kavaca (shield or armour), Bāna (arrow), Ankuśa (goad), Khadga (sword), Khetaka (may be a club or mace), Pāśa (noose), Dhanuṣa (bow), Daṇḍa (staff) and Paraśu (axe) (386). The Purva Karanāgama's description of Cāmuṇḍā almost matches with that elaborated in the Viṣṇudharmottara but there are some differences. Here, it is said that Cāmuṇḍā wears the digit of the moon like Śiva and her mouth is open. Her vehicle or mount, here, is described to be an owl and she carries a banner featuring the eagle as the emblem. She is said to carry in one of her left hands a Kapāla or a skull or a skull cup filled with lumps of flesh. In another left hand, she carries fire. One of her right hands is said to hold a snake (386). According to the description in the Matsya Purāṇa [CCLXI. 33- 37], Cāmuṇḍa appears in three aspects or forms namely- *Jogeśvarī*, *Cāmuṇḍā* and *Kālī*. *Jogeśvarī* or *Yogeśvarī* is said to have (or to be made/ sculpted/ cafted as having) a long tongue and long hair adorned with pieces of bones. She is said to have ferocious teeth, a slender waist and wearing a garland of skulls and heads covered with flesh and blood. Her figure is endowed with two hands, out of which the left

one is described to be holding a head soaked in a fatty liquid whereas the right hand is said to carry a Śakti or a spear/ javelin. Her mount or vehicle is described to be either a crow or a vulture. She is said to have a scanty stomach, a lean body and a ferocious appearance. In the form or aspect of Cāmuṇḍā, the goddess is said to carry a bell in one of her hands and wear a tiger skin as her garment. In her Kālī or Kālikā form, she is said to be holding a skull in one of her hands, naked, adorned with red flowers and riding an ass or a donkey (Wilson, Singh, 1997, 1132).

As hinted out in the *Caṇḍikā Stotram* of the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa, Cāmuṇḍā only is meditated upon as Caṇḍikā and all the seven Māṭṛkā-s are none but different forms of her. In the ritual practice of worshipping nine different medicinal plants or leaves collectively known as *Navapatrikā* forming an intrinsic part of the annual worship of goddess Durgā or Caṇḍikā, mainly in the eastern Indian traditions, Cāmuṇḍā is invoked as residing in the *Mānkacu* or Giant Taro/ Arum plant. The goddesses including Cāmuṇḍā residing in each of the nine plants : *Mānkacu* or Arum/ Giant Taro, *Kacu* or Taro, *Bel/ Bilva* or Wood apple, *Haridra* or Turmeric, *Aśokā*, *Jayantī* or Sesbania Sesban, *Rambhā* or Plantain and *Dhāna* or Paddy, are worshipped as *Nava Durgā* or the nine *Mūrti*-s or forms/ aspects of Durgā. Durgā or *Umā* herself is said to reside in the Turmeric plant. Again, in the rituals of Durgā Pūjā in eastern Indian traditions, Durgā has been worshipped or meditated upon as Cāmuṇḍā during the auspicious hour of *Sandhi Pūjā* performed at the juncture or point of confluence or Sandhi of the *Aṣṭamī* and *Navamī* Tithis of Durgā Pūjā (Rodrigues, 2003, 210). The Sandhi juncture's duration is forty-eight minutes, composed of the last twenty-four minutes or *Daṇḍa* of the *Aṣṭamī* Tithi and the first twenty-four minutes or *Daṇḍa* of the *Navamī* Tithi. Sandhi Pūjā is said to be the most important part of the ritual of Durgā Pūjā and it is believed that during this particular juncture period, Durgā assumed the form of Cāmuṇḍā or Kālī. There has been a tradition of offering 108 lamps and worshipping Kumārīs or girls in their pre- puberty or pre- menarche phase during Sandhi Pūjā (Rodrigues, 2003, 219) and it is said that goddess Durgā in the form of Cāmuṇḍā bestows upon her votaries every boon or merit if invoked with pure mind and either *Paśu* (animal) or *Phala* (fruit) *Bali* (sacrificial offering) during this juncture period. So, it can be said that in the Śākta traditions in eastern India, Cāmuṇḍā has been conceived as the supreme Durgā or Caṇḍikā who destroyed Mahiṣāsura. Cāmuṇḍā has been venerated as one of the presiding deities of the

Kāmākhyā Pīthā and in her *Praṇāma Mantra* she is invoked as Mahiṣāghni or the vanquisher of Mahiṣāsura¹³ (Barpujari, 1949, 52).

In the Śākta traditions of Assam, Cāmuṇḍā is understood none other than Kālī, Kecāikhāitī, Ugratārā, Tārā and Kāmākhyā. Cāmuṇḍā is better known as Kālī, *Bar Kālikā*, *Ugratārā*, *Āi*, *Kecāikhāitī* and Tara in the culture of the region. The Kālikā Purāṇa, too, points out the inseparability of Kālī, Tārā and Cāmuṇḍā and says that Cāmuṇḍā is none other than Tārā who emanated from *Ugratārā* who has been identified with *Kecāikhāitī* worshipped by the Deurīs and Cutiyās and later, the Āhoms in eastern Assam. There are different folk mythical narratives prevalent in eastern Assam elaborating how the worship of Kecāikhāitī passed from the Cutiyās to the Āhoms. One of such narratives has been mentioned by Chetia (2017, 5-6). It narrates how king Siu Kā Phā, the founder of the Āhom kingdom/ dynasty encountered Kecāikhāitī in the form of a dark skinned, long haired woman busy stealing the fish stuck in the bamboo baits and consuming them at night. It is seen that in the folk, tribal and sylvan beliefs prevalent in certain pockets of Assam, any goddess portraying fearful dreaded morphological and iconographic features and bearing symbols of death, war, calamity and killing is identified as Kecāikhāitī or Kālikā or even Āi- the goddess of smallpox and epidemics. The use of the name Cāmuṇḍā is very rare. Even an image of Cāmuṇḍā is not known or worshipped as Cāmuṇḍā by the local people, instead she is worshipped and identified as Kecāikhāitī or Kālikā/ Bar Kālikā.

Cāmuṇḍā was worshipped as an independent goddess and like Varāhī and Nārasimhī/ Pratyangīrā, had a flourishing tradition of worship and ritual practices centred around her as evident from the different sculpted images/ icons of her. Most of these images of her different iconographic aspects like Dānturā and Carcikā etc. are found in eastern India. All these icons belong to the time period between 8th to 12th century CE. There are two exquisite stone sculpted images of Cāmuṇḍā, probably in her aspect as Carcikā dating back to the 9th- 11th century CE, and kept at the complex of the temple of Kedāreśvara Śiva near the Kāmākhyā temple in Nīlācala, Guwahati. In both the images, the goddess is portrayed four-handed and seated in Padmāsana on a Preta/ Śava or corpse lying upon possibly a Padmapītha or lotus pedestal [**Appendix D4 : Figure (xvii) and Figure (xviii)**]. She is shown as bearing her characteristic terrific and dreadful appearance with sunken fiery eyes and an

emaciated body with prominent ribs and nerves. In one of the images, the front hands of Cāmuṇḍā are shown to be carrying a skull bowl or a bowl made of the Cranium of the human skull known as *Kharpara*, and a *Triśūla* or trident (damaged in one of the images). The back hands are seen to be holding a severed human head and a *Kartrikā* the design of which resembles a *Gri Gug* - an important ritual crescent shaped flaying knife used in the Tāntric ceremonies of Tibetan Lāmāism and Vajrayāna Buddhism. The other image too, portrays her as holding a *Kharpara* in one of her front hands and a *Kartrikā* and a severed human head in her back hands. The object held in her other front hand is damaged. It may be identified either as a *Triśūla* or a *Khaṭvāṅga*. The goddess, in the two images, is shown as having matted hair tied to a bun or chignon bound by a garland of skulls or heads and snakes.

Apart from the above two images from the Kedāreśvara temple, there is one more imposing stone sculpted image of Cāmuṇḍā at Na Bhangā in Nagaon district. Worshipped as the main Vighraha at a temple, this image, stylistically, may date back to the time period from 10th to 11th century CE, or pre- Āhom/ early medieval period. Here, the goddess is featured as having ten hands (?) and seated on a corpse or a Preta/ Śava. The attributes held in her hands are not clear and several parts are seen to be damaged. She is shown as having an emaciated body but with a big belly. She has a fearsome and grotesque appearance. The style of her coiffure somewhat matches with that featured in the images from the Kedāreśvara temple.

No image or conception of Cāmuṇḍā similar to the above types from the early medieval periods are featured in the late medieval style stone relief sculptural art of the Āhom built Douls. Intact and recognizable images of Cāmuṇḍā are only seen in the relief sculptural art of the Māghnowā Doul, Jagaddhātī Doul and Gaurisāgar Devī Doul.

In the architecture of Māghnowā Doul, Cāmuṇḍā is featured as four handed and riding a vulture. Her right hands are seen holding a bowl and a sword or *Khadga*. Her lower left hand is shown holding a severed human head. The object held in the upper left hand is not clear. She is shown as wearing garlands or wreaths of human heads and her exceptionally long tongue is portrayed as sticking out from her mouth. Its tip almost touches her chest. She may be wearing a crown made of human skulls, heads and bones [Fig 4.4 (xvi)].



Fig 4.4 (xvi) : Line drawing of the image of Cāmuṇḍā from the Māghnowā Doul [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 4.4xvi (p) in Appendix 4D]

From the features like vulture as the mount of the goddess, the long tongue sticking out of her mouth, the severed human head held in one of her hands and the garlands of human heads adorning her neck and chest, it can be said that somewhere her form in the image from Māghnowā Doul in Fig 4.4 (xvi) had been made by the artisans inspired by that of Yogeśvarī described in the Matsya Purāṇa (discussed above). But, unlike Yogeśvarī, she is shown holding a Khadga or a scimitar/sword and a bowl.

The images of Cāmuṇḍā depicted in the Gaurisāgar Devī Doul and Jagaddhātrī Doul are shown as having four hands and standing in a Samabhanga Sthānaka pose on a Preta or a ghost/ corpse. The image in the Jagaddhātrī Doul illustrated in Fig 4.4 (xvii), in particular, features Cāmuṇḍā as holding a sword in her upper right hand and a spear in her lower right hand. She is shown to be further carrying a bowl or Kharpara or Kapāla full of lumps of flesh in her upper left hand and a severed human head in her lower left hand. She is shown to wear a garland of human heads and have a long tongue sticking out from her fiercely open mouth with protruding teeth. Her hair is shown to be arranged in matted locks or dishevelled and matted.

The goddess is shown as wearing only a short lower garment which may also be thought of as an animal skin or hide.

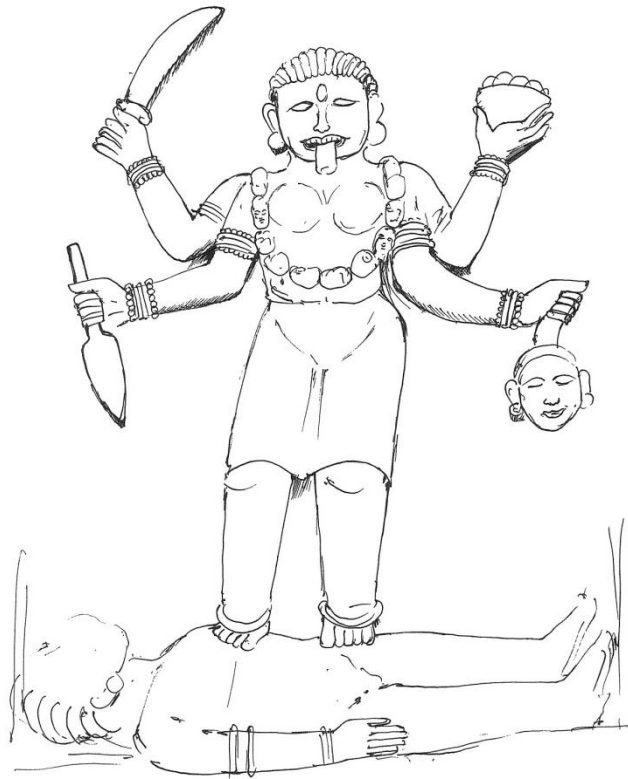


Fig 4.4 (xvii) : Line drawing of the image of Cāmuṇḍā from the Jagaddhātrī Doul [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 4.4xvii (p) in Appendix 4D]

Cāmuṇḍā, in the image from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul illustrated in Fig 4.4 (xviii) is shown holding a spear and a Khadga but the remaining two objects or attributes are not clear and are damaged. Whether she is portrayed wearing a lower garment or not is unclear. She is shown wearing a garland of human heads. Her coiffure may be or may not be same as that in her image from the Jagaddhātrī Doul. Portions of her matted hair can be seen. She might had been shown as wearing some kind of crown or headgear but it is not clear.



**Fig 4.4 (xviii) : Line drawing of the image of Cāmuṇḍā from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul
[refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 4.4xviii (p) in Appendix 4D]**

In the available sculpted images of Cāmuṇḍā dating from 8th to 12th century CE found in different regions of Assam, two of which have been discussed in the previous paragraphs, the goddess is seen portrayed in either a seated or squatting posture. There are few such images in Assam as well as in other parts of the Indian subcontinent, dating back to the above time periods where Cāmuṇḍā is portrayed in a Samabhanga Sthānaka posture. Also, in the images of Cāmuṇḍā produced during the early medieval period, she is mostly shown with a gaping mouth full of sharp fangs. The tongue is not prominently shown or sticking/protruding out of her mouth unlike in the images from the Gaurisāgar Devī Doul, Jagaddhātrī Doul and also Māghnowā Doul. Also, in the image from the Jagaddhātrī Doul, in particular, Cāmuṇḍā is not shown as having an emaciated body with prominent depiction of ribs unlike in the conceptions of her that have appeared in the sculptural art of the early medieval periods. Rather, in the above image, she is shown as having a fleshy or youthful body.

The protruding tongue, the depiction of a non- emaciated body of Cāmuṇḍā in the image from the Jagaddhātṛī Douḷ in Fig 4.4 (xvii) possibly indicates that the artisans had to some extent followed the description of Cāmuṇḍā as Tārā elaborated in the 61st chapter of the Kālikā Purāṇa in conceiving and visualizing it. As per Kālikā Purāṇa [61. 89a- 95], Cāmuṇḍā is described to have emerged from the forehead of goddess Ugratārā who is none but Mahācīna Tāra (Shastri, 1994, 65-67). Here, she is addressed as Kālī and also Tārā.

The form of Cāmuṇḍā featured in the sculptural imagery of the Jagaddhātṛī Douḷ exhibits a combination of hand- held attributes that is totally different from that described to held by Cāmuṇḍā in the Kālikā Purāṇa. The combination of attributes held by the hands of Cāmuṇḍā in this image somewhat resemble to that carried by Cāmuṇḍā described in the Saradātilaka [6. 25] (Shastri, P.,2011, 160). This form is also known as *Rakta Cāmuṇḍā*.

Notes :

Section 4.1 : Lakṣmī

¹Information provided to the researcher by Mihir Shah, 2022.

²**Pāśākṣamalikāmbōjasṛṇibhiryamyasaumyayoh, Padmasanasthām Dhyāyecca Śrīyam Trailokyamātāram |**

[Meaning : I meditate upon Śrī or Lakṣmī who is the mother of the three worlds as seated on a lotus, having a pleasing and benign form, and holding Pāśa (noose), Akṣamālikā (rosary), Amboja (lotus) and a Sṛṇi or Ankuśa (goad) in her four hands]

**Gauravarṇam Surupaṅca Sarvalankārabhusitam Raukyapadmyagrakarām
Varadām Dakṣiṇena Tu ||**

[Meaning : The goddess Sri is Gauravarṇa (of a brilliant white complexion), is serene and beautiful, and is bedecked with all kinds of ornaments. Her hands are like red lotuses, and she bestows all merits and boons.]

~ the Dhyāna of Lakṣmī from the Mayukha Tantra and its explanation, provided to the researcher by Prantik Gupta, Guwahati, 2020.

³Information provided to the author by Prantik Gupta, Guwahati, 2020.

⁴Information provided to the author by Prantik Gupta, Guwahati, 2020.

⁵**Śyāmam Śubhrāmśubhālām Trikalanayanām Ratnasimhāsanastham**

Bhaktabhiṣṭapradātrīm Suranikarakarāsevyakañjāṅghriyugmām |

Nilāmbhojāmsukāntim Niścāranikarāṇyadāvāgnirūpām

Pāśam Khadgam Caturbhirvarakamalakaraih Khetakam Cā ankusam Ca ||

Mātangīmāvahantīmabhimataphaladām Modinīm Cintayāmi

~ the Dhyāna of Mātangī as Modinī in the *Mātangīhṛdayastotram* of the Dakṣinamurti Saṁhitā, retrieved from

https://sanskritdocuments.org/doc_devii/mAtangIhRidayam.pdf

⁶Information provided to the author by Kabindra Prasad Sarma Doloi, Kamakhya, 2019.

⁷**Padmabane Padmalakṣmī Nāme Thākā Sukhe** (verse 14),

~ Meaning : Lakhimī/ Lakṣmī reside blissfully in a Padmabana or garden of lotus in her aspect as Padmalakṣmī.

The above verse retrieved from *Ananta Kandalī Bhaṇita Lakṣmī Carit*, edited by Ambikapad Choudhury, published by Bani Prakash, Pathsala]

⁸Information provided to the researcher by Alkesh Zaveri, New Jersey, USA, 2019.

Section 4.2 : Sarasvatī

¹Information provided to the author by Dr. Madhurima Goswami, Tezpur, 2021.

²Information provided to the author by Joysurya Saha, Kolkata, 2021.

³Information provided to the author by Amphu Terangpi, Diphu, 2022.

Section 4.3 : Durgā

¹Information provided to the author by Prantik Gupta, Guwahati, 2020.

²Information provided to the author by Prantik Gupta, Guwahati, 2020.

³Information provided to the author by Arghya Dipta Kar, Kolkata, 2022.

⁴Information provided to the author by Arghya Dipta Kar, Kolkata, 2022.

⁵Information provided to the author by Arghya Dipta Kar, Kolkata, 2022.

⁶Information provided to the author by Arghya Dipta Kar, Kolkata, 2022.

⁷Information provided to the author by Arghya Dipta Kar, Kolkata, 2022.

⁸Information provided to the author by Prasad Das, Cooch Behar, 2021.

⁹Information provided to the author by Arghya Dipta Kar, Kolkata, 2022.

¹⁰Information provided to the author by Arghya Dipta Kar, Kolkata, 2022.

¹¹Information provided to the author by Arghya Dipta Kar, Kolkata, 2022.

¹²Information provided to the author by Arghya Dipta Kar, Kolkata, 2022.

¹³Information provided to the author by Swagnik Bhattacharjee, Kolkata, 2022.

¹⁴**Biṣṇurūpe Nārāyaṇī Garuṇḍa Bāhini**

Sankha Cakra Gadā Dhari Rākhā Thakurānī

Nārāyaṇī Kātyāyanī Śakti Sanātani

[Meaning : O Mother Goddess ! You are of the form of Biṣṇu/ Viṣṇu, holding Sankha (conch), Cakra (discus) and Gadā (mace/ club) and riding the bird Garuṇḍa or Garuḍa. You are Nārāyaṇī, Kātyāyanī and the Supreme Śakti who is Infinite and Endless]

~ An excerpt from a Assamese Durgā or Gosānī Nām describing Durgā as Nārāyaṇī, retrieved from : Sarma, H.K. (2006). Asamiya Lokagiti Sanchayan. Bina Library, Guwahati, 4th edition. page 4.

¹⁵**Om Dhyeyah Sadā Savitramaṇḍalamadhyavartī, Nārāyaṇah Sarasijāsana Sannivistah**

Keyuravān Kanakakuṇḍalavān Kirīṭhāri Hiraṇmayavapurdhṛta Sankhacakra

~ the Dhyana describing two-handed form of Visnu, holding a Sankha and a Cakra and seated in midst of the solar orb.

The above information provided to the author by Swagnik Bhattacharjee, Kolkata, 2022.

Section 4.4 : Saptamātrkās

¹Information provided to the author by Arghya Dipta Kar, Kolkata, 2022.

²Information provided to the author by Hrishikesh Deb, Silchar, 2022.

³Information provided to the author by Arghya Dipta Kar, Kolkata, 2022.

⁴The Supreme Prakṛti, moved by Her own resolve, assumed a form, though She is formless in essence. Her complexion became that of crushed collyrium, She had a beautiful face resembling a fully bloomed lotus. She had four arms, blood red eyes, dishevelled hair and was unclad. Her breasts were fully grown, pin pointed and upwardly projected. Terrible looking, She was seated on a lion.

~ Translation of the verses 16-17 of the 3rd chapter of the Devī Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa provided to the author by Arghya Dipta Kar, Kolkata, 2022.

⁵Information provided to the author by Ravichandran KP, 2022.

⁶Information provided to the author by an informant (name not to be disclosed) from Tinisukia, 2022.

⁷*The Saptamātrkās* [Iconography : Meaning and Myths of Icons- Assignment 3] by Aditi Trivedi, page 6.

⁸Information provided to the author by Arghya Dipta Kar, Kolkata, 2022.

⁹Information provided to the author by Karthik Sacchidanandam, Klang, Malaysia, 2021.

¹⁰**Tasyāh Parito Devīh Svapneśyunmattabhairavī Mukhyāh |**

Praṇamata Jambhinyādyāh Bhairava- Vargaṅsca Hetukah Pramukhān ||69||

Meaning : Salute all Devīs surrounding Her (Vārāhi/ Daṇḍinī), the foremost and prominent being Svapneśī, Unmatta Bhairavī, and Jambhinī. Amongst the Bhairava groups surrounding her, the Hetukas are the foremost and prominent.

~Verse 69, *Lalitāstavaratnam* or *Āryā Dviśatī* by Maḥarṣi Durvāsā

¹¹ Information provided to the author by Arghya Dipta Kar, Kolkata, 2023.

¹² *The Saptamātrkās* [Iconography : Meaning and Myths of Icons- Assignment 3] by Aditi Trivedi (p. 10).

¹³ **Mahiṣāghni Mahāmāye Cāmuṇḍe Muṇḍamālīnī |**

Āyurārogyamaiśvaram Dehi Devī Namahstute ||

~ Praṇāma Mantra used to invoke Cāmuṇḍa in the Tīrtha Krama of Kāmākhyā

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