

Chapter 5

Finding Interpretations for some Selected Goddess forms in the Imagery of the relief sculptural art of the Douls which are Unidentified and are One of Their Kind in the Extant Sculptural Art of Assam

5.1 Image of a four handed goddess riding a horse from the Gaurisāgar Devī Doul-

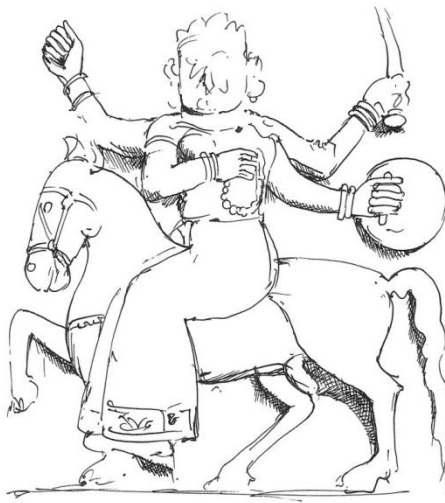


Fig 5 (i) : Line drawing of the image of a four handed goddess riding a horse from the Gaurisāgar Devī Doul [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 5i (p) in Appendix 5]

Images of the above type illustrated in Fig 5 (i), featuring a four handed goddess armed with weapons and riding a horse are not only a part of the relief sculptural art of the Gaurisāgar Devī Doul, such images are seen to have appeared in the relief sculptural art of the Bar Pukhurī Devī Doul too. The iconographic form or conception of a Devī as mounted or riding a horse and holding several kinds of weapons/ attributes in her four hands featured in these images, is a very unique one in the context of the religious sculptural art found till now in Assam. Only in the late medieval style of relief sculptural art of the Āhoms, representations or images portraying such an iconographic arrangement are seen. The in-depth and interpretative

studies of the image in 5 (i) as well as all other images taken up in this chapter are not being focussed upon by archaeologists and art historians. Therefore, till now, there is no significant literature or documentation regarding these images. In the succeeding paragraphs, an attempt will be made to decipher or more appropriately to find interpretations or explanations for the image in 5 (i) as well as all other such unidentified images that have been taken up in this chapter.

The image of the goddess mounted on horse from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul illustrated in Fig 5 (i) and an image of a goddess mounted on a horse drawn chariot from the Māghnowā Doul illustrated in Fig 5 (ii) which will be discussed in the upcoming section 5.2, can be said as conceptions unique to the religious sculptural art of the Āhoms. Moreover, amongst the sculptural art of the Āhoms, images of these two conceptions only are found as relief sculptures infused as a part of the architecture of the Douls. No free standing images of these two conceptions are found till now, neither images featuring these two iconographic forms are seen to be worshipped as Vigrahas in the Garbhagrha of any Doul built by the Āhoms or any other temple across Assam. Though horses and horse drawn chariots are seen to have featured in the miniature paintings produced in the ateliers of the Āhom court and neo- Vaiṣṇava institutions during the 17th to 18th century CE, they are not associated in any way with Devīs or goddesses, even as their mounts or conveyances. In these paintings, the only deity shown with horses and horse drawn chariots as his mount is Sūrya. Horses and horse drawn chariots are also depicted in these paintings as royal conveyances.

The total absence of representations of goddesses having a horse or horse drawn vehicle as their conveyances, and also absence of any goddess associated with the horse or equine motif in these paintings does not mean that such imageries were unknown. There are still many illustrated manuscripts, particularly in Assam, dealing with esoteric Tāntric subjects, lesser known ritual and iconographic subjects, and subjects on cosmogony and ritual practices of the ancestral Āhom religion which are undiscovered and unexplored, and which may contain references or descriptions or conceptions of goddesses with equine/ horse symbolisms. Moreover, there are several other cultural texts in the form of ritual practices and other performances, particularly in Assam that can contain clues or may be helpful in deciphering the images in Fig 5 (i) and 5 (ii) that are one of their kind in the visual art tradition of Assam, and

may be in the known range of religious or temple architectural sculpture of the Indian subcontinent.

Religious texts of the ancestral Āhom religion may contain mention of horses as significant and sacred symbols. Siu- Kā- Phā sacrificed a white horse at Carāideo before setting up his capital there, according to the narratives mentioned in some Burañjis (Gogoi, L., 1994, 178). This may be thought of as a hint towards a belief of horses as sacred symbols or sacrifice of horses as a sacrament in the ancestral Āhom religious tradition. According to Lila Gogoi, the supreme being or principle in the Ahom religion *Phurā* is conceived to be of the form of a horse. There can be a possibility that in the context of a conflict and a state of negotiation between Śaktism and the original Āhom religion, during the last phase of reign of king Rudra Simha and during the rule of Śiva Simha jointly with his queen Phuleśvari Kunvarī as Bar Rajā, the sacred symbolism of horse in Āhom religion, as evident, and assumed from the above types of narratives and conceptions had been made assimilated with the symbolisms and imageries of some goddesses in Śaktism, and thus images like the ones featured in Fig 5 (i) and (ii) have been crafted in the relief sculptural art of the architecture of the Douls built by the Āhoms during the late 17th to 18th century CE. Such a possibility can be justifiable, but there can be further different interpretations for both the images which will be given in the upcoming paragraphs.

Horses as mounts or vehicle of Devīs are seen to have never appeared in the imagery of religious artistic traditions of Assam dating back to the early medieval periods. It has only appeared as a vehicle or a symbol of Sūrya. But, in Sukannāni Ojā Pāli which is one of the ancient regional performing art traditions, still kept preserved and practiced in several regions of central and western Assam, Durgā in an aspect known as Ranacaṇḍī or the fiery martial goddess is conveyed or portrayed. It has been presented in the narratives and through the hand and body gestures in Sukannāni Ojā Pāli performances that goddess Durgā assumes the Ranacaṇḍī form, and advance towards the destruction of Asuras with a vigorous speed of a horse (*Aśvagati*)¹. Here, she may be visualized or thought of as either- moving by herself towards the enemies with the immense speed of a horse, or, riding a horse in place of the lion, her generally understood vehicle/ mount, or, riding a vehicle yoked by fast galloping horses.

If it is assumed that the artisans who sculpted all the images in the architecture of the concerned five Douls taken up in this study were well acquainted with and had internalized the meanings and imageries processed by such traditions like Śukannāni Ojā Pāli, the image in Figure 5 (i) can be somewhat thought of an attempt by them to visualize and materialize the narratives and conceptions of Durgā as Ranacaṇḍī advancing with the speed of a horse in their own way. In other words, the goddess in the image illustrated in Fig 5 (i) can be identified as Durgā in her Ranacaṇḍī aspect as conceived in the tradition of Sukannāni Ojā Pāli.

Images featuring Durgā, either riding astride a horse, as said, are not found amongst the available evidences of sculptural art found in Assam dating back to the early medieval periods or in any other artistic traditions contemporary to the Āhoms. The horse portrayed as a mount or vehicle of Durgā may also be thought of as an acquaintance of the artisans with above types of narratives and imageries elaborated in the indigenous/ regional performing art traditions like Ojā Pāli, or, it might again be a preoccupation with beliefs regarding the astrological associations and symbolisms of different Vāhanas or vehicles of goddess Durgā said to be described in the ritual texts concerning with the intricacies of the worship of goddess Durgā.

The image of the goddess riding a horse from the Gaurisāgar Devī Doul in Fig 5 (i) can also be related to the form of *Puṣṭi* who is again amongst the 64 Yoginīs or 64 forms of Durgā mentioned in the Devī Purāṇa (Misra, 2001, 206). Puṣṭi is described to ride a horse and carry a sword, shield made of Carma or animal hide and a Mudgara or club in her hands (206). In the image in 5 (i) too, the goddess riding a horse holds a shield and a sword in her left hands. But, nothing can be said about what she is holding in her right hands. The lower right hand seems to be holding a rosary or garland but there is no certainty about it. No depiction of the Mudgara or club is seen. Hence, the goddess in the image cannot be certainly identified as Puṣṭi described in the Devī Purāṇa.

Rao (1997, 371) mentions of a goddess known as *Aśvarudhādevī* who is seated upon a horse, and two-handed, with one hand carrying a golden cane and the other holding the reins of the horse. The *Lalitā Māhātmyam* or *Lalitopākhyāna* of the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* [IV. 16. 14-30] describes a goddess *Atitvaritavikrānti* who was born from the noose of the goddess Lalita Mahātripurasundarī or Lalitāmbikā. She

rides a horse known as *Aparājitā* and leads an army of horses. She is also said as having four hands holding a noose, goad, cane and the bridle of the horse (Tagare, 1999, 1098- 1100).

The goddess in the image type illustrated in Fig 5 (i), though riding the horse cannot be identified as *Atitvaritavikrānti*. *Atitvaritavikrānti* is a goddess of the Śrī Vidyā or Śrī Kula tradition centred around worship of Devī as Lalitā Mahātripurasundarī or Mahātripurasundarī or Ṣodaśī. She is a part of the worship of Mahātripurasundarī mainly in the Śrī Vidyā Śākta and the Śankara Samayācara tradition of southern India which accepts the Lalitopākhyāna of the Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa as well as the Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa as one of its major canonical texts. The Śrī Vidyā Śākta tradition of eastern India including Assam, does not have the Lalitopākhyāna as well as the Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa in its system². The pantheon of goddesses described by the Lalitopākhyāna of the Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa as well as the concept and narrative of goddess Mahātripurasundarī according to it has not been accepted or acknowledged here, in the eastern Indian Śrī Vidyā tradition³. Therefore, there is no question of a goddess like *Atitvaritavikrānti* to be worshipped or known of here, let alone her depiction in the sculptural art of the region.

The Vāmana Purāṇa [49. 18- 30] speaks of four Lakṣmīs created by Hari or Viṣṇu , one of them who went to or was given to Indra, Manu and his compeers is described to be of red complexion and riding a red horse. Amongst the humans, this red complexioned Lakṣmī riding a red horse, and bearing the Rājasa quality was taken up to be revered by Kṣatriyas as *Jayaśrī* or *Jayalakṣmī* (Gupta, A.S., 1967, 420-421).

The Āhom royalty also identified themselves as descendants of Indra and also absorbed themselves into the Kṣatriya fold. They might have come across or got acquainted with the above conception of *Jayaśrī* or *Jayalakṣmī* form of Lakṣmī in the Vāmana Purāṇa and her association with Indra and the Kṣatriyas. If such a context is considered, the goddess riding a horse in the image in Fig 5 (i) can be associated with the Rājasa *Jayalakṣmī* or *Jayaśrī* as mentioned in the Vāmana Purāṇa. But, there is no certainty in it. The form of Lakṣmī as *Jayaśrī* in the Vāmana Purāṇa is just mentioned to be red complexioned, draped in a red garment, adorned with red anointments and riding a red horse. Nothing has been said about the number of her

hands, and what type of attributes she carries or hold in her hands. In the image from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Douḷ in Fig 5 (i), the goddess is shown with four hands and holding a sword and shield in two of her hands. If the goddess is surely Jayalakṣmī or Jayaśrī, then the number of hands and the weapons like sword and shield might be endowed by the artisans either by their own knowledge, or liberty, or keeping in mind the likes of the patron or patronizing culture, i.e. the Āhom court, or they might have followed some text or compendium which has in it supposedly elaborate and distinct descriptions of Lakṣmī as Jayaśrī or Jayalakṣmī holding weapons and riding a horse.

There is also a form of Lakṣmī known as *Aśvaruḍhā Rājalakṣmī*. Here Lakṣmī rides a horse and she is the presiding Lakṣmī of kingship and royalty⁴, hence the name Rājalakṣmī. This form may be similar to Jayalakṣmī from the Vāmana Purāṇa but Aśvaruḍhā Rājalakṣmī is described to of a golden complexion. The goddess in the image from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Douḷ illustrated in Fig 5 (i) can also be related to Aśvaruḍhā Rājalakṣmī.

The narrative in the Vāmana Purāṇa describes that the Rājasika Jayaśrī or Jayalakṣmī went to or was taken by Indra and came to be revered in his realm. Phuleśvarī, an accomplished temple dancer, blessed with both beauty and wit like a goddess (according to local lore) was taken as the queen by king Śīva Simha, a Āhom king who was through the Hindu Purāṇic interpretation, a descendant of Indra and she rose to become the revered Kunvarī and Bar Rajā in the Āhom kingdom- the kingdom ruled by the descendants of Indra. If carefully observed, both the narratives have an interesting similarity and a connection between them. Can it be said that this interesting connection between the above two narratives was attempted to be reflected by the image in Fig 5 (i) ? As the Gaurisāgar Devī Douḷ was commissioned by Bar Rajā Phuleśvari Kunvari, and she has been called as a highly spirited and ambitious ruler in the historical literature , this thought about the image may seem justifiable.

It has been already pointed out in Chapter 3 that the artisans sculpting images in the late medieval style possibly turned to different texts and conceptions of Hindu deities in the diverse folk and tribal/ Laukika traditions of Hinduism in the region. In the context of this knowledge, the form of the goddess in the image illustrated in Fig 5 (i) will be having more affinity or related more with the visualization of Durgā as

Ranacaṇḍī found in the lore of regional traditions like Sukannāni Oja Pali where she is associated with the motif of a horse or with the attributes of a horse. Moreover, there is also a context of the profound encouragement and liberal patronage given to the different indigenous and regional forms of music, narrative singing and dance including Ojā Pāli by the Āhom rulers from Rudra Siṁha onwards. So identifying or understanding the visualization of the goddess in the image shown in Fig 5 (i) as inspired or derived from an imagery of Durgā as Ranacaṇḍī in the texts of Sukannāni Ojā Pāli seems more convincing.

It has been also tried to explain and relate the form of the goddess in the image in 5 (i) with the form of Puṣṭi- one of the 64 Yoginīs or 64 forms of Durgā described in the Devī Purāṇa. The 64 forms of Durgā or 64 Yoginīs including Puṣṭi described in the Devī Purāṇa and their conception is seen adopted and included by the Smārta scholars or Nibandhakāras like Raghunandana and Vidyāpati as an integral part of the procedure and principles of the worship of Durgā in their composed Durgā Pūjā Paddhatis. As the Raghunandana Smārta ritual system of worshipping Durgā and in Śaktism became very much prominent and widespread in Assam mainly by the encouragement of the Āhom royal court of Śiva Siṁha and Phuleśvarī Kunvarī, identifying or putting forward an explanation of the goddess riding a horse in the image in Fig 5 (i) as bearing affinity with or none other than Puṣṭi can also to be to an extent justifiable.

Traditionally, astrological calculations are done on the advent of the autumnal or Śāradya Durgā Pūjā every year, to predict or to know that by riding which animal or vehicle, the goddess Durgā will arrive to the world of humans, and what will be the resulting *Phala* or influence. It is said that when goddess Durgā arrives to the world of humans riding a horse, the result is *Catrabhanga* or kings or rulers losing their sovereignty, or a danger to the royal parasol or authority⁵. According to the Āhom Burañjīs, and other historical writings, queen Phuleśvarī Kunvarī who took on the name of Pramathesvarī- another name of Durgā, was made the queen regnant or Bar Rajā by her husband king Śiva Siṁha after he came under the influence of an astrological prediction that he have to lose his kingship and authority, in other words- *Catrabhanga*. Coming to the image illustrated in Fig 5 (i), first of all, it is a part of the relief sculptural art of a Doul which was built under the commission of Phuleśvarī Kunvarī as a Bar Rajā. Secondly, the goddess riding a horse in the image

somehow relates it to the belief system that goddess sometimes descend to the world of humans riding a horse during Durgā Pūjā, and it symbolizes or is an indication of Catrabhanga. If it is assumed that the image is certainly a portrayal of Durgā riding a horse and bringing in Catrabhanga, then why such a symbolism was depicted on the architecture of the Gaurisāgar Devī Doul ? Can the image be made related to the Catrabhanga of king Śiva Simha, which paved the way for queen Phuleśvarī Kunvarī to be enthroned as or to rise in power as a Bar Rajā ? Can it be possible that this image was placed as a symbol of Catrabhanga but having positive implications, in the architecture of the Doul by the wishes of the patron queen Phuleśvarī Kunvarī who after becoming Bar Raja, took on a name of Durgā by the blessings of Kṛṣṇarām Bhattachārya Nyāyavāgiśa ? Both these thoughts on the image, though requiring a deep inquiry, cannot be termed as baseless.

5.2 Image of a Four- handed Devī riding a horse drawn chariot tended by a charioteer, from the architecture of the Māghnowā Doul



Fig 5 (ii) : Line drawing of the image of a four handed goddess riding a horse drawn chariot tended by a charioteer from the Māghnowā Doul [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 5ii (p) of Appendix 5]

The image in Fig 5 (ii) consists of a figure of a four-handed goddess seated in Padmāsana or Bhadrāsana on a chariot drawn by four horses, tended to by a charioteer. The chariot is shown as having one wheel. Chariots or carriages of such a design are also met with in the Rājput and Mughal miniature paintings of the

contemporary period. Her four hands are shown to be holding different attributes or weapons. Her upper right hand holds a *Aṅkuśa* or an elephant goad, which is clearly discernible. The lower right hand holds an unidentified object. Her upper left hand holds an object which seems like a *Khetaka/ Mudgara*- a type of club. The object in her lower left hand is broken and almost out of recognition. The features of the charioteer are damaged and are not clear. He may be wearing a headgear almost like that of the Mughal style turban the depiction of which became popular in the sculptural imagery in the architecture of the Āhom temples or Douls. The Mughal style turban is seen to be extensively depicted as a headgear of the male figures in the miniature paintings produced under the patronage of the Vaiṣṇava Sattras and the Āhom court [**Appendix E : Figure (i) and (ii)**].

The chariot drawn by horses and having a single wheel in the image illustrated in Fig 5 (i) has enabled several scholars or historians to identify it as featuring Sūrya (Dutta, M., 1990, 118). But, it features a goddess and she holds attributes in her hands like Ankuśa which is not understood as a typical attribute of Sūrya. A goddess having all the essential attributes of Sūrya named *Saurī Caturākṣarī* is found described in the text *Śilparatna* [42. 73] (Sastri, K.S., 1929, 146). In a way, it can be said that Saurī Caturākṣarī is a female form of Surya. This particular form hints towards a synthesis and a confluence of the cults of Devī and Sūrya. No cult, temple, or ritualistic practice centred on this syncretic iconographic form or concept is known. Moreover, no region within the Indian subcontinent is known in which the cult of Saurī Caturākṣarī might have been practiced or flourished. The text *Śilparatna* has been said to be composed circa 16th century CE in Kerala (Śāstrī, K.S., 1929, 1). But no sculpted or painted image of her in Kerala or any part of southern India tallying with the description in the *Śilparatna* has come to light till now, let alone other parts of the Indian subcontinent. Therefore, there is no clarity about the history of its cult. There is a probability that it might have evolved, changed or merged into some other iconographic form whose worship is still continuing or have become obscure or unknown in the passage of time. The image in the Māghnowā Doul in Fig 5 (ii) can be assumed as featuring one of those supposed evolved iconographic forms.

In the Śākta tradition of Assam, particularly the one centred around worship of goddess Kāmākhyā, Sūrya or the Sun or Saura principle is associated with goddess

Bhūvaneśvarī as hinted through her Praṇāma Mantra. In the Praṇāma Mantra, Bhūvaneśvarī have been called as *Sūryamaṇḍalarūpinī*, or the one who has the form of the Sūryamaṇḍala or the solar orb or disc⁶ (Bardaloi, 2007, 167). Bhūvaneśvarī has been mentioned as one of the eight Yoginīs of Kāmākhyā in the Kālikā Purāṇa [62. 95- 96]. The eight Yoginīs are Guptakāmā, Śrīkāmā, Vindhyaśinī, Kotīśvarī, Vanasthā, Pādadurgā, Dirgheśvarī and Bhūvaneśvarī. The Śrī Vidyārṇava Tantra in its *Ekādaśa* or 11th *Svāsa*, mentions of a Caturārṇa or four syllable Mantra of Sūrya where he is to be meditated upon as *Viśvesika Bhūvaneśvarī*. During the Nyāsa of the Mantra in the heart, Sūrya is to be invoked as *Sūryarūpiṇye Bhūvaneśvarī Devatā* or Bhūvaneśvarī as having the form of Sūrya (Kak, Shastri, 1932, 254). The Caturārṇa Mantra which visualizes and invokes Sūrya as Viśvesika Bhūvaneśvarī and Bhūvaneśvarī as having the form of Sūrya in the Śrī Vidyārṇava Tantra may have some association with the Praṇāma Mantra of Bhūvaneśvarī as Sūryamaṇḍalarūpinī prevalent in the Śākta tradition of Assam, in the tradition of worship of Kāmākhyā. Bardaloi (2007, 166- 167) further says that Bhūvaneśvarī Sūryamaṇḍalarūpinī may have another connotation if seen from the Tāntric viewpoint. The Pīṭha or shrine of Bhūvaneśvarī at the tip of the Nīlācala hill which is known as the *Brahma Parvat* was a centre of a form of esoteric Sādhana known as Bhairavī Cakra. This Bhairavī Cakra has been symbolized as circular like the disc of the sun. The conception of Bhūvaneśvarī as Sūryamaṇḍalarūpinī can be a possible connotation of her as associated with the Bhairavī Cakra. Bhūvaneśvarī is further said to be *Ghōra Daityanāśinī*, which may mean she as a slayer or vanquisher of either a single Daitya named *Ghōra* (?) or fearful Daityas (as *Ghōra* also means fearful), *Brahmarūpā*, *Siddhikālī* and one of the *Upavidyās* of goddess Kāmākhyā according to the 11th Patala or chapter of the Yoginī Tantra (Bardaloi, 2007, 166) . The Māghnowā Doul has also been called as a shrine to Kāmākhyā in several historical narratives including Burañjīs and also in folklore, and it has been also said that the site where the Doul stands was an important site for Tāntric Sādhanas during the rule of the Bhuyāns. In the image illustrated in Fig 5 (ii), the goddess may be thought of as Bhūvaneśvarī, having a form possibly bearing a combination of her generally understood form : as four handed, holding a Pāśa, Ankuśa and displaying Vara and Abhaya, and her aspect as a vanquisher of Daityas : suggested by the club like weapon in her upper left hand described by the Yoginī Tantra. The one- wheeled chariot in the model of Sūrya's chariot may be thought of as a connotation towards the association of

Bhūvaneśvarī with the sun made in the Praṇāma Mantra, as Sūryamaṇḍalarūpinī. If, in the image, the one-wheeled chariot hints towards Sūrya's chariot and the male charioteer placed on the right side of the figure of the goddess assumed as Bhūvaneśvarī is Aruna, Sūrya's charioteer, then why four horses, not seven, are being shown as yoked to the chariot? It may be possible that the artisans had depicted seven horses in the image, tactfully through a technique of linear perspective. The figures of distant three horses may be shown as indistinct or may have got damaged or flattened due to unplanned restoration or retouching. Possibility is also there that the artisans had actually depicted four horses as yoked to the chariot, but still, the chariot can be assumed to be Sūrya's chariot. There are evidences of several sculpted images dating back to the Kusano-Sassanian and Sunga periods where Sūrya's chariot is portrayed as drawn by four or even two horses [**Appendix E : Figure (iii) and (iv)**].

The goddess as well as the whole image in Fig 5 (ii) can also be related to Uṣās—the Ṛg Vedic goddess of dawn, light who is described by the Ṛgveda to be drawn in a hundred chariots, or who rides a chariot drawn by steeds/horses and traverses the skies. She is further described to the foe of chaotic forces that threaten the world, the remover of evil, the life breath of all creatures and giver of wealth (Kinsley, 2005, 5). No multi-handed anthropomorphic or zoomorphic iconographic form of Uṣās is described by the Ṛgveda and there is nothing mentioned regarding how to make her image for worship. Uṣās, in the course of history, evolved to or merged into the identities of Purāṇic and Tāntric goddesses like Durgā and the Buddhist *Māricī* (Bhattacharya, A., 2014, 66). the image in Fig 5 (ii) can also be assumed as reflecting this evolution and amalgamation, as a stage in this process.

If now, it is assumed that in the image in Fig 5 (ii), the chariot has no association with the motif or symbolism of Sūrya or the sun god, there will be other interpretations for it.

The *Vāmakeśvara Tantra* mentions of *Ṣoḍaśa* (sixteen) Yātrās to be performed for the pleasure of the goddess or Devī (any manifestation/aspect or form) during different times or seasons of the year⁷. One of these Yātrās is the Ratha or chariot Yātrā⁸. All these sixteen Yātrās are to be performed by the Śākta Upāsakas or Śākta practitioners according to the prescribed procedures, for attaining different kinds of merits,

knowledge, virtues and powers. Ratha Yātrā of Devī/ Śakti as Durgā is also found mentioned in the Devī Purāṇa [31. 2- 7] where the icon of a manifestation or form of the Devī should be established on an immensely decorated chariot, offered oblations and paraded (Tarkaratna, Nyayatirtha, 1993, 172) . A ritual of establishing an icon of the goddess or Devī/ Śakti/ Ambikā/ Śivā on a chariot, offering oblations and parading it is also spoken about in the *Umāsamhitā* section of the Śiva Purāṇa. The *Umāsamhitā* [51. 63- 66] instructs that one should perform the festival of chariot for the pleasure of the goddess who is the Śakti or consort of Śiva on the third day of the bright half of the month of Āṣāḍha (Shastri, J.L., 2002, 1671) . The image in Fig 5 (ii), in a way, can also be assumed or understood as a visualization by the artisans of either of the above mentioned ritual imageries.

As discussed earlier, it has been presented through the narratives and through the hand and body gestures in Sukannāni Ojā Pāli performances that goddess Durgā assumes the Ranacaṇḍī form, and advance towards the destruction of Asuras with a vigorous speed of a horse. She may either be- moving by herself towards the enemies with the immense speed of a horse, or, riding a horse in place of the lion, or, riding a vehicle yoked to fast galloping horses/ steeds. If it is assumed that the artisans who sculpted all the images in the architecture of the Māghnowā Doul were well acquainted with the tradition of Sukannāni Ojā Pāli, the image of Devī riding the horse drawn chariot in Fig 5 (ii) can be somewhat thought of an attempt by them to visualize and materialize the narratives and conceptions of Durgā as Ranacaṇḍī advancing with a vigorous speed of a horse in their own way. They might have preferred a chariot drawn by multiple horses rather than a single horse as a vehicle of the goddess either to instil more energy and to bring out more expressiveness and effect.

In Sukannāni Ojā Pāli which is centred on the worship of Śakti and also in Vyāhgowā Ojā Pāli- another form of Ojā Pāli associated with the tradition of worship of Vāsudeva, the form of goddess Durgā is always found to be conceived as ten handed, as per evidences⁹. If the image in Fig 5 (ii) is assumed to be a visualization by the artisans of the conception of Durgā as Ranacaṇḍī advancing with the speed of a horse elaborated in the narratives of Sukannāni Ojā Pāli performances, then why she has been depicted four handed ? Can it be because of some constraint or paucity

of the pictorial space that the artisans did not sculpt her ten-handed form ? There is no certainty about it.

References of a four-handed form of Durgā riding a chariot is found in the Devī Purāṇa [50. II. 24]. This form is known as Mānasī and is described to be Syandanārūḍhā or riding a Syandana which usually refers to or is a synonym for a chariot in Sanskrit. Mānasī, included amongst the 64 forms of Durgā is said to be holding Ghaṇṭā, Mudgara or a pestle/ type of club, Vajra and a Ankuśa in her four hands (Tarkaratna, Nyayatirtha, 1993, 298). Now, if the remaining fragments of the damaged attribute held in the lower right hand of the goddess in the image from the Māghnowā Doul in Fig 5 (ii) is observed, its form may be bilobed at both ends, and somewhat approaching close to a Vajra- Vajra as seen to be stylistically depicted in the art of Assam, particularly in miniature paintings in manuscripts produced from 16th century CE onwards [**Appendix E : Figure (v)**]. The weapon held in the upper left hand of the goddess can also be assumed as a Mudgara or a club. If it is said with certainty that the attributes held by the goddess [in the image in Fig 5 (ii)] in her lower right hand and her upper left hand are Vajra and Mudgara respectively, and the unknown attribute held in the lower left hand of the goddess is a Ghaṇṭā, then along with the Ankuśa held in upper right hand, the whole combination of attributes will resemble that held by Mānasī. Also, the chariot mount or vehicle of the goddess will somewhat equate her with the form of Mānasī.

Out of all the above explanations, the explanation of the image in Fig 5 (ii) as associated with or a portrayal of i) the conception of Bhūvaneśvarī as Sūryamaṇḍalarūpinī, as associated with Sūrya or the Saura principle and at the same time, as a destroyer of Daityas, in accordance to the texts like Yoginī Tantra and the various other texts in the worship of Kāmākhyā, ii) the conception of Ranacaṇḍī in Ojā Pālī, iii) the chariot ritual of the goddess described in the Vāmakeśvara Tantra and texts like Devī Purāṇa , and iv) the imagery of goddess Mānasī in the Devī Purāṇa, seem more convincing. The explanations for putting forward the identification of the image with the imagery of Ranacaṇḍī and with the form of a goddess (Manasi) amongst the 64 Yoginīs described the Devī Purāṇa as justifying will be same as that given for the previous image from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul discussed in 5.1 and illustrated in Fig 5 (i) . A possible relation of the image or thinking of it as reflecting the chariot ritual of the goddess or Devī described in the Vāmakeśvara

Tantra and Devī Purāṇa may not be so unjustifiable. The chariot ritual in the Vāmakeśvara Tantra, as said earlier, is amongst the sixteen important obligatory ritual ceremonies to be performed by Śāktas. There are certain other practices amongst the rest fifteen which are still vibrant living traditions and elaborate cultural observances in several regions of eastern India which was and has been for a long period remained a seat of Śākta and Śaiva culture. One of this is the *Nil Pūjā* or the *Carak Pūjā* annually celebrated in the culture of Bengal and regions having a significant Bengali population. A chariot ritual in honour of Devī Virajā is annually held elaborately in the culture of Odisha. This chariot festival may be same as that described in the Vāmakeśvara Tantra. Presently, there is no known chariot ritual held in honour of the Devī in the culture of Assam. But there are ritual observances in the Śākta culture of different regions within Assam where consecrated images or symbols of Devīs are brought out in ceremonial processions from their respective temples or shrines on ornate palanquins and paraded across the towns and villages surrounding the temples. One of such a living tradition is from the *Dipteśvarī* temple at Rangia in Kamrup district of Assam. The Kāmākhyā temple at Guwahati has been annually observing several rituals/ festivals, e.g. *Durgā Dol* and *Pohan/ Puhān Biyā* where the consecrated Vighras or icons or other representations of Kāmākhyā are brought out from the temple in ornate palanquins, served through elaborate rituals and paraded amidst beating of drums and cymbals in the region around the temple. These Śākta ritual practices have survived the onslaughts of foreign invaders and the changes in religious, sectarian and cultural situations in the region and are still kept alive to the present day. Though presently, no chariot ritual is practiced in the culture of the Śākta temples and Śākta culture of the region, it cannot be concluded that they were never practiced in the time periods preceding the modern era. May be, the chariots in some of these rituals have been gradually replaced by palanquins. The temples like the *Dipteśvarī* temple and of course, the Kāmākhyā temple started receiving elaborate patronage and grants by the Āhom royalty, especially from Rudra Simha, Śiva Simha and his queens onwards. There are records of several ritual observances and festivals held in these temples during their rule, and under their aegis and encouragement, many of which have either become extinct, discontinued, acquired a miniscule form or are gradually altered to suit to the changing cultural environment. One of such a supposedly extinct ritual presided over and conducted by the Āhom king, and documented by an European officer will be mentioned in the

succeeding section. The ritual observance of parading a representation or icon of Devī on a chariot might have been conducted in certain Śākta temples in Assam under the aegis of the Āhom court which started to lavishly and passionately accept and patronize Śaktism during the 17th to 18th century CE. The image in the Māghnowā Doul illustrated in Fig 5 (ii) may be thought of as reflecting this possibility. It may be thought of as the artisans possibly trying to portray a Śākta ritual service of parading Devī on a chariot, which might have been already in practice in the Śākta culture of the region during that time, or newly introduced in the Sakta culture of the region under the patronage and encouragement of the Āhom royalty.

It may be possible that a tradition of chariot festival or ritual service of parading an icon of Devī on a decorated chariot was introduced for a brief period of time in the Śākta culture of region during the rule of Rudra Simha. Possibly, such a practice, by the orders and wants of Rudra Simha was brought in from neighbouring cultures like that of Odisha which has a rich living tradition of temple chariot festivals. Rudra Simha is said to have created a rank of officers or emissaries known as *Bairāgis* whose duty was to travel to different regions and lands within the Indian subcontinent or outside its boundary, stay there with their identity concealed, document and study the different cultural practices, customs and visual traditions of these lands (Basu, 1970, 111) and then send these information to the Āhom court, back in Assam. The king Rudra Simha evaluated these information, chose particular cultural practices and then introduced it in the culture of Assam. Chariot festival held in honour of deities might have been one of such cultural practices which was introduced under the aegis of Rudra Simha. The image depicted in the sculptural art of the architecture of Māghnowā Doul in Fig 5 (ii) may be thought of as a proof of it. The artisans engaged in making the sculptural art of the Māghnowā Doul might have been fascinated by the visual aspects of such a new tradition or practice and they could not restrict themselves from depicting it.

In Chapter 4, it has been said that the Māghnowā Doul is associated with the belief system of Āi or Āi Sakal and the image illustrated in Fig 5 (ii) may be an illustration of the belief of sojourn of Āi or Āi Sakal told about in the Āi Nāms.

The Āi Nāms often speak about a sojourn that Āi or Āi Sakal undertakes to the world of humans to sow seeds or flowers of pox amongst them. These flowers are actually symbolizing the pustules or blisters which characterize the epidemic of pox. The Māghnowā Doul and the Picalā river near it are often spoken about in the Āi Nāms as significant point or landmarks in the sojourn of Āi or Āi Sakal. Some Āi Nāms speak of Āi washing her long flowing hair in the waters of the Picalā river : *Picalāre Ghātate Āi Gā Dhowe Lāhar Sulitārī Meli*. The journey of the Āi or Āi Sakal means the advent of epidemics like pox in the world of humans.

There is one more astrological prediction done on the advent of Durgā Pūjā that when goddess Durgā comes to the world of humans riding a Aśvayāna or a horse drawn chariot or vehicle, it means the advent of epidemics, famine, and death⁹.

The sojourn of goddess Durgā riding a horse drawn chariot brings epidemics to the world of humans, and so the sojourn of Āi or Āi Sakal. There is also a belief system that Āi or Āi Sakal are none other than Durgā and her numerous aspects. Taking into account these affinities, and the prevalence of belief of Māghnowā Doul and the nearby Picalā river as significantly related to the sojourn of Āi and Āi Sakal, also during the 18th century CE, it can be interpreted that the description of the journey made by Āi or Āi Sakal to the earthly realm to spread epidemics found elaborated in the Āi Nāms was materialized through an imagery of Durgā journeying to the earthly realm riding a horse drawn vehicle in the image in Fig 5 (ii). Such an interpretation needs further insight.

A belief of horses as sacred or revered symbols might have existed or still exist in the culture of the Āhoms as well as in the ancestral religion of the Āhoms. It is said that the Ngī- Ngāo- Khām (discussed in Chapter 4) is a composite of five animals, one of them being horse. Narratives which hint at horses being sacred symbols or offerings in Āhom religious and ritual practices have already been mentioned in the previous paragraphs. The images in Fig 5 (i) and Fig 5 (ii), may also be interpreted as actually bearing no connection to any Hindu Śākta tradition prevalent in Assam, they may be some clan or tutelary goddesses of the Āhoms who are lesser known, and their representations came to be placed under some circumstances in the architecture of the Douls patronized by them . As these images or iconographic conceptions have appeared for the first time in the sculptural art of Assam only

during the Āhom rule and only in the material culture that developed under the aegis of the Āhom royalty, they must be concepts either exclusively brought by the Āhoms.

Certain type of written texts dealing with descriptions of types of horses, their morphological and behavioural traits, their uses, their diseases and the remedies for curing these diseases are seen to have appeared in Assam, particularly during the 16th to 19th century CE. These types of texts are generally known as *Ghorā Nidāna* or Nidāna or remedies for horses. A large number of these texts were composed under the aegis of the Āhom court and for use in the processes of selecting, managing and curing horses in the Āhom royal stables. Horses, like elephants had held a significant place in the warfare and military prowess of the Āhoms. Considering these contexts, the images from Gaurisāgar Devī DouL and Māghnowā DouL illustrated in Fig 5 (i) and 5 (ii) respectively, can be understood as symbols related to protection of horses the references of which may be found in the *Ghorā Nidāna* texts which were frequently composed during the Āhom period.

5.3 Image of a two-handed Devī holding a book and a sharp weapon, from the architecture of the Jagaddhātrī DouL.



Fig 5 (iii) : Line drawing of the image of a two handed goddess holding a book and a sharp weapon from the Jagaddhātrī DouL [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 5iii (p) in Appendix 5]

The face and the head of the goddess featured in the image in Fig 5 (iii) is totally damaged and chipped off. The goddess holds in her right hand a sharp weapon shaped like a spear or a sabre. In her left hand, she holds a book/ manuscript. She stands on a lotus. Such a form is very unique.

Adhikari (2017, 30-34) mentions of the accounts of the Kāmākhyā temple at Nīlacāla in Guwahati by Jean Baptiste Chavalier, an official of the French East India Company who came to the Āhom court during the year 1757 CE and accompanied the then ruling Āhom king to Guwahati as a guest. According to the accounts of Chavalier, an elaborate festival was held in the temple over which the Āhom king presided. The festival was held in the honour of a goddess whose gigantic gold image/ icon was placed inside the temple. Mass sacrifice of different animals for nine consecutive days were offered to this icon and the Āhom king acted as the main priest who conducted all the necessary rituals. The form of this goddess described by Chavalier, somewhat tend to resemble with the form of the goddess featured in the image from the Jagaddhātrī Doul illustrated in Fig 5 (iii). According to his description, the form of the goddess enshrined inside the Kāmākhyā temple was two handed, holding a sharp weapon like a sabre in one hand and a book in the other. She is said to be placing her feet (or foot) upon the heads of different Daityas . Icons of several other deities are said to be placed around her icon . It is not known whether this particular golden icon described by Chavalier is still present or enshrined inside the Kāmākhyā temple. The iconography of this goddess is even not clear. Except the objects held in her two hands, no other bodily feature or attribute of her is clearly pointed out by Chavalier.

The form of the goddess featured in the image from the Jagaddhātrī Doul in Fig 5 (iii) comes to resemble the form of the goddess in the image from the Kāmākhyā temple described by Chavalier only in respect of the similar attributes they hold in their hands. The goddess in the image from the Jagaddhātrī Doul stands on a lotus whereas the goddess in the image from the Kāmākhyā temple, according to Chavalier keeps her one foot or feet on heads of Daitya-s. The hand held attributes may be similar but whether they are separate goddesses or different iconographic forms of a single goddess is not clear. Such an iconography described by Chavalier is not even found described in any known texts associated with the rituals, worship and the tradition of goddess Kāmākhyā including the Kālikā Purāṇa and Yoginī Tantra.

5.4 Image of a four handed goddess seated on the mouth of a pot or pitcher like object from the Bar Pukhurī Devī Dou-



Fig 5 (iv) : Line drawing of the image of a four handed goddess seated on the mouth of a pot or pitcher like object from the Bar Pukhurī Devī Dou- [refer to the photograph of the same in Fig 5iv (p) in Appendix 5]

In the image illustrated in Fig 5 (iv), it is not clear whether the pitcher or pot shaped object over which the goddess is shown to be seated is surely a pot, jar or pitcher or not. A possibility is also there that the pot shaped object may be a remaining fragment of some larger object serving as the seat of the goddess. It may also be thought of as a pot. It seems that figure of the goddess in a Padmāsana pose is directly seated over the mouth of the pot shaped object. The goddess or the Devī in her upper left hand is holding an object, shaped somewhat like a spear. Her lower left hand is damaged. The upper right hand of the goddess may be holding a Nāga Pāśa or a serpentine noose but its not distinct. The attribute or weapon in her lower right hand is not clear. It seems like a sword or club.

A pot/ pitcher or *Ghaṭa* is a motif symbolizing abundance, riches and life giving nectarine waters. It is amongst the eight auspicious symbols or *Aṣṭamangala* in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism [**Appendix E : Figure (vi)**]. In Hindu rituals, a Ghaṭa full of water and adorned with mango leaves, and a tender coconut is conceived and worshipped as the representation of the whole cosmos as well as the body of the deity. A Ghaṭa or pot of treasures, abundance, and water or nectar/ Amṛta is usually associated with goddesses Śrī/ Lakṣmī and Bhu/ Pṛthivī. In the

Lalitāsahasranāma Stotram, goddess Lalitā is described to be of a red hue resembling that of vermillion. She carries a vessel full of honey in her one hand and a red lotus in the other. Further, she is said to place her feet on a *Ratna Ghaṭa* or a pitcher or pot full of valuable gems¹⁰. The Kāmakalākhaṇḍam of the Mahākāla Samhitā [8. 241-242] mentions the same form as that of Bhuvaneśvarī (Jha, 1986, 116). This form is also known as *Saubhāgya Bhuvaneśvarī* [**Appendix E : Figure (vii)**]. The Chausath Yoginī temple at Hirapur in Odisha features a partially damaged sculpted image of a Yoginī named as *Nārāyaṇī* who has a pitcher or pot as her vehicle or mount [**Appendix E : Figure (viii)**] Sculpted and painted representations of Devī-s like Lakṣmī having a pot as their mount or conveyance are have not come to our knowledge till now. But, there are evidences of sculpted representations of Gaja Lakṣmī from the Stupa-s at Sanchi and Bharhut which show two handed Lakṣmī/ Śrī seated or standing on lotuses issuing out from a Pūrṇa Ghaṭa or a pitcher of abundance.

Now, if the structure on which the goddess in the image illustrated in Fig 5 (iv) is seated, is surely a pot/ pitcher or Ghaṭa/ Kalaśa, then the goddess may also be identified as either *Tuṣṭi* or *Vṛddhi*. They are two goddesses who are described as among the 64 forms of Durgā or 64 Yoginis in the Devī Purāṇa. Both of them are described as having a Kalaśa or Ghaṭa as their mount. Vṛddhi is said to hold a Bījapuraka or a Citron fruit and a *Ratnamayi Mālā* or a jewelled garland or rosary made of crystal or gemstones in her hands (Misra, 2001,207). Tuṣṭi is described as holding a Pāśa, Ankuśa, lotus and a *Swāstika* in her hands (205).

In the image from Bar Pukhurī Devī Doul illustrated in Fig 5 (iv), the lower left hand of the goddess is completely damaged. The upper left hand is seen holding an object which somewhat resembles a closed lotus blossom or a spear. The attributes held in her left hands are not at all understandable. Though the goddess approaches close to the goddesses Vṛddhi and Tuṣṭi because of the assumption of the structure below her figure as a pot or pitcher, the unclear forms of her hand held attributes causes a problem in conclusively identifying her with either of the above two goddesses described in the Devī Purāṇa.

If the shape or design of the mount of the goddess in the image is again closely observed, it somewhat resembles a *Khāloi*- a bamboo fishing implement frequently

used in the folk culture of Assam [**Appendix E : Figure (ix)**] . The Khāloi is used jointly with Jākoi- another bamboo fishing implement mentioned earlier. The Jākoi [**Appendix E : Figure (x)**] is used to gather or catch fish and crustaceans in the murky waters of swamps and wetlands whereas the Khāloi is used to store the choicest portions of fish gathered by the Jākoi. The design of Khāloi-s, according to Hakacham (2014, 72), varies with the geographical setting of their users, for example- persons dwelling in plains use Khāloi-s shaped like a pot whereas persons dwelling in hills or hilly tracts use Khāloi-s which are shaped like a *Dowāt* (an inkpot) having a flat base. The mount of the goddess in the above image at a glance, resembles a Khāloi with a flat base used by hill dwellers, but, its shape also comes near to the pot shaped Khāloi used by plain dwellers.

Jākoi and Khāloi, apart from being used as fishing implements, are also objects having ritual and magical significance in the cultures of the ethnic communities of Assam including the Āhoms. These two implements have been an integral part in the ritual of Lakhimī Sabāh or the worship of goddess Lakhimī or Lakṣmī amongst the Āhoms. Now, if the pot shaped object in the image in Fig 5 (iv) is surely a Khāloi, then the goddess seated on its mouth can be identified as Lakṣmī or Lakhimī, taking in consideration the cultural association of Khāloi and Jākoi with the belief of Lakhimī or Lakṣmī. So, it can be assumed that the artisans, through the image might have intended to thoughtfully and creatively portray the folk belief regarding the association of Jākoi and Khāloi with Lakhimī or Lakṣmī. They might have chosen to depict the form of Lakhimī or Lakṣmī in accordance to her descriptions in the mainstream Hindu texts. Hakacham (2014, 74) has further said of use of the Jākoi and Khāloi in the traditional medicinal and healing practices and occult practices of the region. These two implements are being traditionally used in several regions in Assam for they are believed to cure or drive away diseases, afflictions and also destroy the influence of ghosts and evil spirits. If the context of the folk belief regarding Jākoi and Khāloi as nullifiers of diseases and evil influences and as magical charms, and also, the context of the extreme belief the Āhom royalty had in occult medicine, and magic are considered, then the pot shaped mount of the goddess in the image from the Bar Pukhurī Devī Doul illustrated in Fig 5 (iv) which have been already assumed as a Khāloi might be portrayed as a charm or as a symbol of protection. Now, if the goddess seated atop the (supposed) Khāloi - which is an

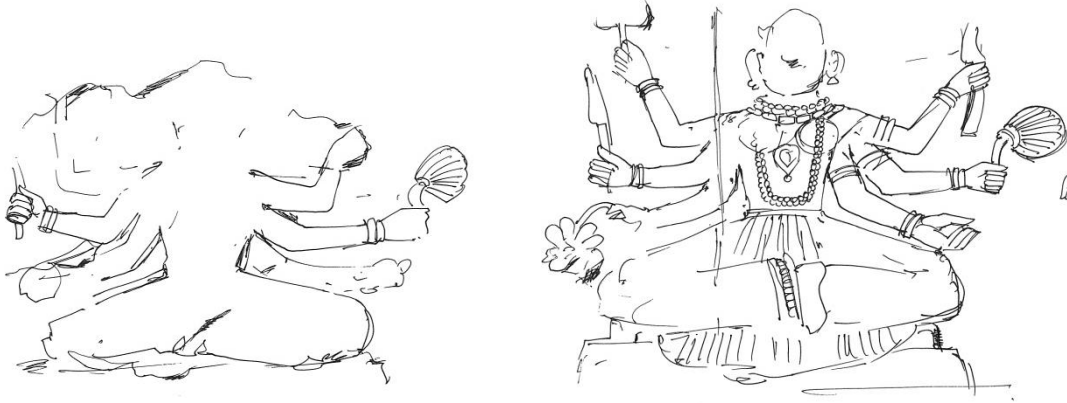
object used in folk ritual healing practices, is derived from some mainstream Purāṇic or Tāntric tradition of Hinduism and she is also associated with protection, remedy and welfare , then the whole image will be interpreted as a thoughtful amalgamation between conceptions or belief systems of mainstream and folk traditions of Hinduism.

5.5 Images of six handed goddesses from the Gaurīsāgar Devī DouL-



Images of three of the five seated six handed goddesses from the Gaurīsāgar Devī DouL : Fig 5 (v)- (middle and the topmost image), Fig 5 (vi)- (image on the left) and Fig 5 (vii)- (image on the right) [refer to the photographs of the images in Fig 5v (p), 5vi (p) and 5vii (p) in Appendix 5]

In the sculptural imagery of the architecture of Gaurīsāgar Devī DouL, there can be observed seven images which feature six handed goddess forms. Though these images are seen to be in a pathetic state, certain iconographic features of them can be identified. Five of these images [illustrated in Fig 5 (v), (vi), (vii), (viii) and (ix)] feature almost similar six- handed goddesses seated in Padmāsana on some uncertain seat whereas the sixth and seventh ones, each, feature a six handed goddess riding quadruped animals [Fig 5 (x) and (xi)].



Two remaining of the five images of seated six handed goddesses from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Douḷ : Fig 5 (viii)- (Image on the left) and Fig 5 (ix)- (Image on the right) [Refer to the photographs of the images in Fig 5viii (p) and Fig 5ix (p) in Appendix 5]

Images of six-handed forms of Maḥiṣāsuraṃardinī dating back to the 1st to 3rd century CE are found in the sculpture of Kuśana Mathurā school or tradition of art [refer to Figure (iv) in Appendix D3]. The earliest sculpted images of Maḥiṣāsuraṃardinī Durgā found in the Indian subcontinent are seen to feature her as six-handed and four-handed and without the lion as her mount. A six-handed stone sculpted image of Kotravai or Visnu Durga has been found at Pazhayarai in Tamil Nadu. It may be dating back to the the Chola period [**Appendix E : Figure (xi)**]. There is also a Dhyāna describing a six-handed form of goddess Śāradā which has been traditionally followed by Kaśmirī Paṇḍitas or Kaśmirī Hindus in the Parāyana of Śāradā Saahasranāma and goddess Śāradā's Pūjā. The Dhyāna describes the six-handed form of Śāradā as holding a Śakti or javelin/ spear, Cāpa or bow, Ghaṇṭikā or bell, a Sudhāpātra or a bowl of nectar and a Ratnakalaśa or a bejewelled pot. She is said to be none other than Pārvatī/ Durgā and gracing the Śrīśaila as her abode. She is said to sit on a Simhāsana or a lion throne [**Appendix E : Figure (xii)**]. There is also a six-handed form of an aspect of Durgā known as Āsuri Durgā [**Appendix E : Figure (xiii)**]. Āsurī Durgā has her origins in the Atharvaveda and her worship is mainly performed for the aim of inflicting pain, destruction and suffering to enemies. Six-handed forms of Buddhist goddesses are commonly met with in literature as well as in the art of sculpture and painting.

Images of six- handed forms of Devīs- may it be Durgā, Lakṣmī or Sarasvatī or any other, are totally unknown of amongst the extant examples of sculptural art traditions of Assam, before or other than the tradition of the late medieval architectural stone relief sculptural art patronized by the Āhoms.

The five images which feature six-handed goddesses seated in a Padmāsana pose in the architecture of the Gaurīsāgar Devī Douḷ are almost in a state of mutilation and getting eroded. It is not at all clear whether the images feature a single six- handed goddess form or different six handed goddess forms. In one of the images, illustrated in Fig 5 (v), which is in a comparatively good state, the goddess is seen holding several attributes out of which only a parasol/ umbrella , a flower, must be a lotus or lily and an object designed like a hand fan made of *Tālavṛnta* or a leaf or branch of the Tāla or Palm tree are identifiable. Hand fans made of *Tālavṛnta* are seen to be popular in the cultures of eastern India.

Apart from the six handed goddess in the image illustrated in Fig 5 (v), objects similar to a hand fan made of *Tālavṛnta* are also seen held by the six handed goddesses illustrated in Fig 5 (vii), (viii) and (ix). In all the images in Fig 5 (v), (vii), (viii) and (ix), the palm leaf or *Tālavṛnta* hand fan like object/ attribute is seen to be held by the second left hand (from the top) of the goddesses. Further, a flower assumed to be a lotus or a lily is also seen to be held by each of the goddesses in the images illustrated in Fig 5 (vii) and (ix). Like the image in Fig 5(v), the flower is seen to be held by the goddesses in the images in Fig 5 (vii) and (ix) in their lowermost right hands. From these commonalities seen in the hand held attributes and their arrangements, the goddesses featured in the images illustrated in Fig 5 (v), (vii), (viii) and (ix) can be assumed as either different aspects of a single goddess, but having the same form (same in respect of the types and arrangements of hand held attributes), or a single iconographic form depicted more than one time, or the images depict different iconographic forms, but the *Tālavṛnta* hand fan like object and the lotus like flower and their arrangements are same in them.

The Nārada Purāṇa [84. 20- 40] describes the worship of Durgā in a diagram or Yantra. In the different parts of the diagram, different Śakti-s or energies of Durgā and their attendants should be conceived as residing and offered worshipped. The names of the attending eight Śakti goddesses are given as such : *Anangarūpā*,

Anangamadanā, Madanāturā, Bhuvanavegā, Bhuvanapālikā, Sarvasisirā, Anangavedanā and *Anangamekhalā*. All of them are described to carry similar attributes in their hands. The attributes are bowl, fan (probably a hand fan), shining umbrella or parasol, chowries/ fly whisks, silken garments and flowers (Tagare, 1952, 1215- 1217). The goddess in the image illustrated in Fig 5 (v) is seen to hold an object similar to a parasol in her uppermost right hand, a flower and an object shaped like a palm leaf (Tālavṛnta) hand fan which may lead to the assumption that she is one of the above eight Sakti goddesses described by the Nārada Purāṇa. But what about the remaining four images of the six handed goddesses [Fig 5 (vi), (vii), (viii) and (ix)] placed side by side the image in Fig 5 (v) ? No parasol is seen held by the goddesses in these images, but due to their placement close to the image in Fig 5 (v), the presence of the same palm leaf hand fan like object and flower in the same mode of arrangements in their hands, and supposing a presence of a parasol in their topmost right hands, it can be assumed that the goddesses in the images in Fig 5 (vi), (vii), (viii) and (ix) are also amongst the above Śakti goddesses described in the Nārada Purāṇa. There can be a possibility that the all the above eight Śakti goddesses having the same forms as found described in the Nārada Purāṇa were depicted by the artisans on the architecture of the Gaurīsāgar Devī Douḷ, but, in the course of time, only five of them were left.

Focusing on the six handed goddess in Fig 5 (v), the presence of the parasol or royal umbrella in her topmost right hand may associate her with the Buddhist goddess *Sitātapatrā*, who has six- handed and multi- handed iconographic forms. In both these forms, *Sitātapatrā* holds a parasol along with other typical attributes like Dharmacakra or the wheel of Dharma, Vajra, bow, arrow, sword, noose and elephant goad or Ankuśa (Shaw, 2006, 280). Though the goddess in the image in Fig 5 (v) is with six hands and is holding a parasol, she may not be identified as *Sitātapatrā*. It is because, she holds a lotus like flower and a palm leaf hand fan like object which do not come within the typical iconographic attributes of *Sitātapatrā*.

Parasol or Catra has been a symbol of royalty and sovereignty. As mentioned in chapter 2, king Siva Simha obeying an astrological prediction, established his queen Phuleśvarī Kunvarī/ Pramatheśvarī Devī as Bar Rajā or the queen regnant. The Tungkhungīā Burañjī says that he also gave her the royal umbrella or parasol and permitted her to ride on elephants (Bhuyan, 2012, 40) which was otherwise the

privilege of only the king in the Āhom royal tradition. The Gaurīsāgar Devī Douḷ is known as the prominent and perhaps the first temple whom Phuleśvarī Kunvarī commissioned after becoming the Bar Rajā. Considering these contexts, the image of the six-handed goddess holding a parasol in Fig 5 (v) depicted on its architecture can also be interpreted as a tactful statement by queen Phuleśvarī Kunvarī that she as a Bar Rajā has the royal parasol of the Āhom dynasty in her hands, that she has risen to a sovereign ruler. It may be possible that the six handed goddess in the image is a deified portrayal of Phuleśvarī Kunvarī.

Shaw (2006, 280), in her explanation of the evolution of the Buddhist goddess of the white parasol- Sitātapatrā, says by bringing in references from Buddhist Jātaka stories that there is a genre of goddesses who inhabit or preside in royal umbrellas or parasols, and goddess Sitātapatrā might have evolved from such goddesses. A goddess residing in a royal umbrella is associated with sovereignty and she protect and preserve the possessor of the honorary umbrella, and safeguards his/ her reign. The six-handed goddess in the image in Fig 5 (v) can be understood as a goddess presiding in a parasol or a royal umbrella. She may be interpreted as some six-handed iconographic form of Sitātapatrā, or possibly a type of royal parasol goddess, either inspired by Sitātapatrā, or, related to her in some stage of her evolution. If it is assumed as so, then she might have been chosen or her representation might have been wanted by the patron Bar Rajā Phuleśvarī Kunvarī to be depicted in the sculptural imagery of her commissioned Douḷ- the Gaurīsāgar Devī Douḷ as a symbol of protection of her reign.

The Mantra of Sitātapatrā is known as the Queen of Magical Spells and the Invincible Incantation or *Aparājitā Dharani*. The practice of Sitātapatrā Mantra renders one undefeatable and invincible (Shaw, 2006, 277). Śaktism amalgamated with Tāntric Buddhism/ Bauddhacāra and Tāntric Buddhists expert in magical spells and incantations held sway in different regions of Assam during the late medieval period, as described by several writings, mainly the neo-Vaiṣṇava Carita Puthis. There are several historical accounts which say of the encounter and conflict of Bauddha Tāntrikas or *Baudhamatiya Tatakiyas* (Buddhist magicians) with Śankardeva and the several other preachers of neo-Vaiṣṇavism (Basu, 1970, 229) in the Āhom kingdom. It can be assumed that Queen Phuleśvarī Kunvarī too, in the pursuit of fulfilling her ambition (as presented by the Burañjīs), might have consulted Bauddha Tāntrikas

expert in several Dharanis or incantations and thus came across and got attracted to the Mantra of Sitātapatrā which is an incantation to become invincible. The goddess in the image in Fig 5 (v) may be understood as featuring a form of Sitātapatrā conceived at some level of her incantation and it was caused to be portrayed and materialized by Phuleśvarī Kunvarī supposedly attracted to the incantation. Further thought is needed to be given to it.

If the image illustrated in Fig 5 (i), is thought to be certainly portraying Aśvavāhinī (horse mounted) Durgā bringing in of Catrabhanga or breaking or dismantling of the royal parasol, then along with the image of the six- handed goddess holding a parasol illustrated in Fig 5 (v), it must have been a part of an interconnected narrative portrayed in the relief sculptural art of the Gaurīsāgar Devī Dou- a narrative of how a prediction of Catrabhanga of king Śiva Simha (pictorially connoted by a supposed Aśvavāhinī Durga) made him to establish his queen as Bar Rajā and hand give her the custody of the Āhom royal parasol (connoted pictorially by the six handed goddess holding a parasol) . If such a portrayal was certainly been done, then it will have to be a part of a continued practice or trend in pan- Indian temple art, of portraying or connoting the life events, desires, policies and achievements of a patron ruler or a dynasty through certain already known and invented iconographic forms and symbolisms of their revered deities.



Fig 5 (x) [left] and (xi) [right] : Images of six handed goddesses riding unidentified animals [refer to the photographs of the same in Fig 5x (p) and Fig 5xi (p) in Appendix 5]

Coming to the images of six handed goddesses in Fig 5 (x) and (xi), the forms of the animals in both of them are unrecognizable. In the image illustrated in Fig 5 (x), it seems from the shape of the remaining fragments in the image that the animal featured is either a horse, or some kind of bovine animal like antelope. Antelope/ deer is seen portrayed as vehicles and mounts in several representations of Durgā and Pārvatī/ Gaurī. Sculpted images of Durgā or Kotravai having an antelope/ stag or Mṛga as her vehicle or mount are found in southern India, particularly in Tamil Nadu [**Appendix E : Figure (xiv) and (xv)**]. The seventh verse of the *Ādyā Stotram* from the *Brahmayāmala* describes Devi/ Durga to be presiding in her form as *Mṛgavāhinī* in the quarter known as *Vāyūkoṇa*¹¹. *Mṛgavāhinī* means Devī as a rider of Mṛga or antelope or deer. A form of goddess Durgā known as *Mṛgavāhinī* is also described as residing in the *Vāyūkoṇa* in the 18th verse of the *Devī Kavaca* section of the *Devī Māhātmyam* or *Candī* (Bhattacharya, D. P., 2016, 27).

If the animal in the image in Fig 5 (x) is assumed as surely a Mṛga or an antelope/ deer, the goddess riding it may either be a visualization of Durgā as *Mṛgavāhinī* mentioned in the *Brahmayāmala* and *Devī Māhātmyam*, or she may be a lesser known or obscure goddess having some remote association with the *Mṛgavāhinī* Kotravai or the Kotravai having an antelope as her mount or vehicle.

In the image from the Gaurīsāgar Devī Doul illustrated in Fig 5 (xi), the six-handed goddess is seen to be riding a quadruped animal which does not seem to resemble the figure of lions as portrayed in the previous images as well as in the temple sculptural art of the Āhoms. The animal presents a confused morphology.

The *Devī Purāṇa* mentions of a goddess Jayantī who is described as bearing a Kunta or a type of Bāna or arrow, a Śūla, a Khadga, a Khetaka, Vara and Abhaya Mudrā-s in her hands (Misra, 2001, 208). The number of attributes clearly point out that the number of hands of the goddess is six. Further the goddess is described seated on a *Nakula* which means a mongoose. Jayantī is again included amongst the sixty four Yoginī-s or manifestations of Durgā (208).

One of the six hands of the goddess in the image [Fig 5 (xi)] is seen holding a shield which is sometimes known as a Khetaka. The weapon in her lowermost right hand is damaged, but it can be observed that a part of it has remained and it is seen just below the wrist of the hand. The pattern of closely spaced slightly convex

parallel grooved lines in the structure somewhat reminds of the feathered part of an arrow. The damaged attribute may be assumed as an arrow. Assuming the damaged weapon to be arrow and considering the presence of the Khetaka or the shield, the goddess in the image in Fig 5 (xi) can be said as somewhat coming near to the form of Jayantī described in the Devī Purāṇa. But, the totally damaged and faded forms of the attributes in the rest of her hands and the uncertain identity of the animal vehicle cause a hindrance in identifying the goddess as Jayantī.

It is important to note that the above types of images of six-handed goddesses are found to be featured only in the sculptural imagery of the architecture of the Gaurīsāgar Devī Douḷ, and not any other Āhom built Douḷ taken up in this study. No fixed identities for these goddesses could be found out. The difficulty in discerning the forms of certain attributes held by them and the deplorable condition of the images can be held responsible for it.

Notes:

¹Information provided to the author by Drona Bhuyan Oja, Sipajhar, 2021.

²Information provided to the author by Arghya Dipta Kar, Kolkata, 2021.

³Information provided to the author by Arghya Dipta Kar, Kolkata, 2021.

⁴**Caturangabalopetām Dhanadhānyasukheśvarīm |**

Aśvaruḍhāmahaṁ Vande Rājalakṣmīm Hiraṇmayīm ||

~ The Dhyāna form of Aśvaruḍhā Rājalakṣmī, where Lakṣmi is described to be riding a horse and having a golden complexion.

The aforesaid Dhyāna of Aśvaruḍhā Rājalakṣmī is retrieved from :

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

⁵Information provided to the author by Swagnik Bhattacharjee, Kolkata, 2022.

⁶**Bhūvaneśīm Mahāmāyām Sūryamaṇḍalarūpinīm |**

Namāmi Varadām Śuddhām Kāmākhyārūpiṇīm Śīvām ||

~ Praṇāma Mantra to invoke Bhūvaneśvarī in the Tīrtha Krama of Kāmākhyā.

⁷ Information provided to the author by Swagnik Bhattacharjee, Kolkata, 2022.

⁸ Information provided to the author by Swagnik Bhattacharjee, Kolkata, 2022.

⁹ Information provided to the author by Swagnik Bhattacharjee, Kolkata, 2022.

¹⁰ **Sindurārunavighrahām Trinayanām Māṇikyamaulisphurat**

Tārānāyakaśekharaṁ Smitamukhīmapīnavakṣoruhām |

Pāṇibhyāmalipurṇaratnacaṣakaṁ Raktotpalaṁ Vibhratīm

Saumyām Ratnaghaṭastharaktacaraṇām Dhyāyetparāmambikām ||

~ Dhyāna of Lalitā in Lalitāsahasranāmastotram

The above information is provided to the author by Arghya Dipta Kar, 2022.

¹¹ **Mahanandāgnikone Ca Vāyavyam Mṛgavāhinī |**

Nairṭtyam Raktadantā Ca Aiśānyam Śūladhāriṇi ||

~verse 6 of Ādyā Stotram of Brahmayāmala

Meaning : The Devī resides in the quarter known as Agnikoṇa in the form of Mahānandā, in the quarter Vāyukoṇa as Mṛgavāhinī, in Nairṭtakona as Raktadantā, and in the quarter Ishanakoṇa as Śūladhāriṇī.

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