

ANCIENT SCULPTURES OF ASSAM

(Pre-Ahom period)

Nishipada Deva Choudhury

“Indian sculpture is rarely found alone, it had to serve architecture chiefly as ornament of the latter”.¹ Dr. Sankalias observation is quite correct. The sculptures of Assam, serve as the decorative parts of temples, namely walls, ceilings, pediments, doorways and lintels etc. The majority of the sculptures that have been found in this region represent various gods, goddesses and other semi-divine figures. The sculptures of Assam may be classified according to the following groups :—

1. Human figures
2. Animal figures
3. Ornamental figures

1. **Human figures** :—Representation of human figures other than those of deities is limited to a few examples. The earliest instances are found in some terracotta plaques from Da-parbatia.² One of these plaques containing human figures and illustrated by R. D. Banerji, is shown seated crossed-legged, having a broad chest, proportionately then waist and well-formed hands and legs. The head of this figure is broken and missing. This may be dated to 6th cy. A. D.³

This may be well compared with the medieval art of Assam and Bengal. Figures of similar type have also been found at Birat in the Rongpur district and Paharpur in the Rajshahi district.⁴

Another human figure from Gachtal, now preserved in the Negaon park, is shown seated in *Sukhāsana* (easy posture). He wears a full *tunic* and *dhoti*, the waist covered by a piece of cloth (*kattbandha*). He wears turban on the head.⁵

A stone slab, containing a male human figure with good physique, is preserved in the Assam state Museum.

Three terracotta plaques, representing human figures, have been found, one from Na-Nath-than (Jugijan) and other two from Mayang area.⁶

A few terracotta sculptures collected from Bhismak-nagar, Sadiya, are preserved in the Assam state Museum. The first one shows a male figure in standing posture keeping the legs apart. It appears that he tries to keep the grip of its left hand on the waist. The face is mutilated. The second terracotta plaque shows a male human figure in walking posture. Both the hands of the figure are held upward. The objects in his hands are not clear. The third terracotta plaque represents a warrior. He holds a shield and a sword. The fourth also represents a soldier, holding a shield and sword. He wears a conical cap on his head. The fifth one, badly mutilated, represents a couple standing in an amorous posture. The head of the male figure is missing. The most interesting sculpture, depicted as rowing a boat, is in terracotta. A female figure is shown standing on a boat, with a male figure rowing the boat with an oar.⁷

Of the terracotta plaques discovered from Kundilangar (sadiya), one represents a soldier. A man with a conical cap on his head, holding a spear in his right hand and with a dagger fastened on his right girdle, is shown in a running posture in this plaque. This may be well compared with one from Bhismaknagar.⁸

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The terracotta sculptures from Bhismaknagar and Kundilnagar were produced by the artists in one and the same method. The figures of the plaques are shown in low relief and the alignments are shown carved with the help of a pointed object.

A beautiful terracotta plaque, collected from Kukurmutta, Guwahati, is now preserved in the Assam State Museum. The sculptures is in high relief. In the first plaque, three female figures are shown standing in *tribhanga* posture. The middle one is taller. They have two arms & wear usual dresses and ornaments. The middle one, is shown as fixing her hairknot by her hands. The

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found on stone slab fixed on the walls, panels, door jambs, lintels etc. They formed an integral part of the temple decoration. Some of the poses described in the *Nāṭya Śāstra* are depicted in the sculptures of Assam. The earliest dancing figure in Assam is noticed in the doorjambs of Da-Parbatia, dated 6th cy. A. D. On the left doorjamb, a miniature female figure holding a *Vina* and above it a miniature male figure (*gana*) is shown in dancing posture. A large stone slab, representing a very interesting dance scene has come from Cole park, Tezpur. The slab is divided into seven panels by circular pilasters, and each panel contains two figures either of males or of females or both. The first one shows a man fighting with a lion; the second a male playing on a flute and a female dancing by his side; the third, a male playing on a pipe and the female in dance pose; the fourth, a male playing on a drum and a female dancing. The fifth, a male playing on a pair of cymbals and the female dancing; sixth a female playing to on a lyre and another dancing to her left; and the seventh, a male playing on a drum, another dancing to his right.¹⁴

Another dance scene is noticed on a doorjamb, lying near the D.Cs residence, Tezpur. The central vertical band is divided into three panels. The bottom one is occupied by a female dancer, the middle one by a male drummer, and the top one by a dancing female figure.

Another pillar lying near the residence of the D. C. Tezpur has four sunken panels which depict a music party, one in each panel, shown playing and dancing.¹⁵

A door-sill from Barganga depicts two lions flanking a *ghata* in the centre; and on both the sides of the sill, there are four panels, each divided by pilasters. All the panels are occupied by music parties, on the rightside, the first one playing on cymbals, the second one also playing cymbals; the third a dancing female figure, the fourth a male playing on a drum; on the left side, the first and the second are broken, the third, a male playing on drum; and the fourth a male playing on cymbals. Another scene on a frieze from Deopahar contains the figure of a horseman, a woman shown seated and singing, and another figure playing on flute.¹⁶

Besides group-scenes, individual figures in different dancing postures are also known. A door-jamb from Mathajhar thows a female

dancer on the bottom. A stone slab from Paschim Tatabasa contains a female dancer, and she wears gamkharu (Assamese type of bracelets), necklace, *mala*, *kundala*, and anklet.

In the ruins of Bamuni hill many faces of the square bracket (*Pattikas*) bear oblong panels with vase relief. One of them bears the figures of a male and a female dancing side by side. In the Singri ruins, some figures of maids, damsels in dancing pose and the like are to be seen. A large door-sill (*silali*) from Hanh-chara, Sibsagar, is now preserved in the state Museum, Guwahati, is made of two pieces. Two running lions are shown on both the parts of the *silali* and two dancing scenes are depicted in the usual way the dancing female figure in the middle panel (*Khattaka*), to the right of this figure a female figure beating on a kettle-drum and to the left a bearded male figure beating on a drum.

An octagonal stone pillar is preserved in the Assam State Museum whereon a beautiful dancing scene is carved. It depicts, in each alternate facets, altogether four human figures, two males and two females, playing on instruments and dancing. The first female figure is shown in dancing posture, which is followed by a male playing on a flute. The third one is a female playing on a *Vina*, and the last is a male playing on a Kettle-drum. This type of dancing scene is uncommon. This is one of the most interesting scenes depicted on sculpture of Assam.

An interesting dancing scene depicted on terracotta plaque from Kukurmuta, is now preserved in the Assam State Museum. A male figure is shown playing a drum, a female figure is dancing and a male sitting and coaching the dancer. Here it represents the *guru* or the Music teacher imparting lessons to the girl who is dancing in his front. Dance coaching scene in sculpture is rare. This may be dated 10-11th centuries. A. D.¹⁷

Three terracotta plaques bearing dancing figurines are found at Kundilnagar. The first plaque bears a human couple in dancing posture. The left hands of the couple are show resting on their hips and holding a stick. The right hands are uplifted holding *damara* (?), Their ears are perforated, the eyes and the mouths are wide open. They have snub noses. Their hair style is arranged as ending in spirals. They wear short draperies.

In the Deopahar ruins, an interesting dancing figure is noticed.

Here is shown a *sikhara* of foliage with *amalaka* and *padmakosa* final, flanked by a male and a female figure, both dancing with their legs resting on elephants supported on *padmas*. They have four arms, carrying *dhanu*, *bana*, *akshamala* and *khadga* or *danda*. They wear *patra kundala* and *kirita mukuta*. This kind of sculpture is rare.

ii) **Amorous Figures** : Amorous figures are generally found on the panels of the *Saiva* and *Sakta* shrines. The occurrence of this type of figures, as suggested by Sir William Rothenstein, was "a part of the Tantric attitude which was characteristic of Indian religious philosophy between the 10th and 12th centuries A.D."¹⁸ The erotic sculptures have the support of the traditional practices of centuries of temple building, and have been enjoined by the sacred texts such as *Kamasutra*¹⁹. The *Agni Purana* enjoins that the doorway of temples should be decorated with Mithunas.²⁰

An erotic scene is noticed in a stone slab from Singri ruins. Two niches are divided by circular pilasters, each of the niches contains four figures. From the right, two seated female figures raising their hands to their eyes shown as though avoiding witnessing the erotic scenes on their right side. A male and a female are shown seated; the female is shown with her left leg raised horizontally, keeping her left hand vertically on the ground for support, the male is shown in the act fondling of the left breast of the female. The male figure is seen in a copulating pose over the female, the body of the male lying between the raised legs of the female. The second niche contains a male and a female in a similar pose. The two female attendants, one on each side, are apparently trying to shut out the scene by keeping their hands over their eyes.²¹

The second scene is depicted in another frieze; the male is copulating with the female in the same posture as described above. Here, only one female attendant is shown.

Another interesting scene is depicted on a slab from Chanchaki (Kampur), wherein the male and the female figure are seated on an easy chair. The right leg of the male is spread horizontally and the left leg is bent and spread to the opposite direction and parallel to his right leg; his body is supported on this left leg; his right hand as vertically spread over the chair for support, and

his left one is embracing the female. The male is seated on the right thigh of the female. The female has kept her right leg in such a way that the male can sit on the thigh, and her left leg is kept on the chair for support; with her left hand she has embraced the shoulder of the male. Both wear various ornaments.²³

Five stone blocks containing erotic sculptures are now preserved in the Assam State Museum. The first block bears two erotic scenes. The first one is that of a male forward horizontally on the seat with a female seated her lap of in the same direction of the male. The male is fondling the breasts of the female with both his hands. They are shown in copulating posture. The scene is almost in profile and shown in relief²⁴

The second one of the same block shows a male figure seated cross-legged, with the female seated on his lap. They are facing each other. The female is keeping her legs apart. The legs are raised over the hands of the male and the male is shown as drawing the hips of the female by both his hands, towards him. The female embraces the neck of the male by both her hands.²⁵

One stone slab depicts a lady engaged in sexual union with a bull. The lady is shown kneeling, and the bull mounting her from her back side. The bull raises his tail and seems to be full of passion.²⁶

The sexual union between man and animal is also noticed in Madankamdev. Where a man is engaged in sexual union with a she deer.²⁶

A great number of erotic sculptures have been noticed at Madan Kamdeva and Pingalesvar.

Besides human figures, animals and birds are noticed in copulating posture. Such a scene from Na-Nath Than is depicted on a pillar; male deer is seated upon the back of the female deer, in the act of coition. A frieze from Deoparbat shows a royal archer shooting a deer couple when in coition. Another frieze from Madan-Kamdeva shows a boar couple engaged in coition.²⁷

Erotic sculptures are also noticed at Singri ruins, Hayagriva Madhava temple, Hajo, Kamakhya, Kharghuli Namghar, Deoparbat, Dolgovinda and other places.

iii) **Scenes from epics** :—Friezes (*Rupapattika*) are by far the most interesting feature of the edifice inasmuch as they show

in a series of panels scenes either drawn from Hindu mythology or domestic life, including a few of an erotic character.

A frieze from Deopahar having five panels, shows Rama and Lakshmana seated, while Sugriva is kneeling before Rama in supplication, and Hanuman and another monkey are watching the scene with reverence. The scene portrayed evidently relates to the scene from the Ramayana in which Hanuman succeeded in the friendship of Rama for the protection of Sugriva. Another frieze represents the *Mahabharata* story of Pandu, who shot a deer couple in coition. The third frieze represents a scene from the *Mahabharata* namely, the *Garuda Garvabhangha* or the extermination of *Garudas* pride.¹⁹

iv) **Scenes from contemporary life.** :—The depiction of scenes from contemporary life on the temple walls, gives us some idea regarding the social and domestic life of these days. Scenes depicting the social life are numerous, and a few of them are described here. A frieze from Singri shows six women seated with folded hands, three in each of the two panels. Another scene from Deopahar, depicted in a panel, shows two ladies, grinding corn in a *ural* (grinding mill), and the third female figure is shown talking to one of them.²⁰

A frieze (*Rupapattika*) from Deopahar, consists of three panels; the first one shows a woman in her toilette; the second a man dragging a woman from a scene where another is about to thrash her, while a second woman is dissuading him; and the third, a man advancing with a raised mace. The second frieze having four panels, depicts, from left to right, an ascetic pushing a goat before him, another ascetic dancing with *sūla* and *dhakkā* in his hands and *kamandalu* hanging from his right arm; and a seated woman in an ecstatic mood. The third frieze having four panels, depicts worshippers sitting with hands held in *anjali mudra*. The fourth frieze, divided into two big panels, illustrates a combat between two warriors. The actual combat is shown in one panel; while in the other, one of the warriors marches off in triumph with the severed head of the other held in his hand, the headless trunk staggering behind. Another shows a man protecting his family seated on an elephant's back against a man attacking.²¹

A frieze from Cole Park, having three panels, depicts a duel. From left to right, the first one shows two men fighting bare-handed;

the second one shows them lying on the ground with one overpowering the other ; and the third one represents both lying straight in opposite directions, the right one holding the legs of the other, who seems to have surrendered.³³

Some beautiful sculptures are noticed at *Kamakhya*. To the right of the western *torana* on a *Prakara*, two sculptures are to be found, carved on two stone slabs and fitted into the *prakara* of late construction. The first depicts a scene of worship. Here the house-holder is seen doing his daily worship. He is seated in *utkatikasana* and doing *japa*.³³

The second slab contains a beautiful scene of mother and child. Here the female figure is seated putting her left leg vertically, and the right leg spread horizontally on the seat, and holding a baby on the lap. The baby is seen sucking the right breast of the mother who leans her head on the right shoulder out of affection for the baby. The baby raises his legs up out of joy. The mother holds the baby with the hands. The scene is a very realistic one. A similiar sculpture is noticed in the same place. Indeed, such realistic sculpture of mother and child is very rare.³⁴

At Tarabasa a figure of weight carrier on a piece of pillar of sand stone is noticed. The man is shown carrying a loaded basket on his head, and while just lifting up from the ground such a heavy weight, his legs become bent and wide apart. But he gathers strength by pressing his right hand on his right knee cap. On another face of the same block is shown a figure of a female carrying a pot in her left hand and a stick in the right one. A part of a door jumb, from D. C's residence, Tezpur, now preserved in the Assam State Museum, depicts a female figure with a basket on the head and some monkeys trying to catch the basket. Sculptures depicting secular theme are found throughout Assam, though not in great numbers.³⁵

Animal figures :—In the art of Assam, sculptures showing animals are quite numerous. These adorn the walls, ceilings, pillars, door frames etc. of the temples.

Elephants are very common in the ancient art of Assam, and the elephant bust was used as the royal insignia in early times. A row of elephants, *gajathara* appears as the moulding of the

adhithana (base) of some temples. Elephants busts in the attitude of supporting the superstructures of a temple are also found in the ruins of Deoparbat. Two friezes of the plinth from Deoparbat, containing elephants heads, are preserved in the State Museum, Guwahati. A frieze from *Gachtal* shows two elephants with their trunks raised to pluck leaves from both sides of the tree. Depiction of row of elephants on friezes (*Gajathana*) are also noticed in the ruins of Pingaleswar.³⁶

On a moulding in the Hayagriva Madhava temple at Hajo, a row of caparisoned elephants i.e. *gajathana* motif encircles the *Vimana* and support the edifice. Here the trunks, tusks and the forelegs of the elephants are nicely shown. The *gajathana* motif was quite commonly employed in the temples of Assam in the pre-Ahom period and was treated as a sacred animal.

The lion is frequently found in the art of Assam. The conventional representation of the lion shows that the inhabitants of the Assam Valley were not very familiar with the king of beasts. The lions are mostly found in lintels, doorsills, and friezes of the walls. A doorsill from Singri contains two lions; and they are in two different panels depicted in different directions. A doorsill from Akasiganga contains a ghata (vase), flanked by two lions standing with raised tails. This motif is noticed in a lintel from Barganga, and in another from Gachtal. The representation of a pair of lions shown running from each other with their heads bent towards the *mangala kalasa* (auspicious jar) are a very common decorative motif in early Assamese art. In some cases, lions are also carved on the capitals of pillars. An example is found in the ruins of Baman pahar.³⁸

Sculptures depicting a lion on a elephant, sometimes two lions on two elephants (*Gajasimha* or *gajasardula*) are commonly found in the ruins of Assam. A *gaja-simha* motif, the biggest so far found in the region, is found in the ruins of *Sankha* Devi's temple in Jogijan. In this motif, the elephant is depicted as smaller size than the standing lion who keeps its rear legs on the back of the elephant and the other two legs along with the body rising up. A *Gajasimha* motif from Kawaimari shows that the trunks of the elephants are bound by chains or ropes.³⁹

Representations on bulls (*Nandi*) are frequently found in the

ruins of *Siva* temples of Assam. Figures of bulls were sculptured specially in Saiva shrines, and as *vahana* of Siva, *Nandi* is noticed with the Siva images. A seated *Nandi* showing *astaraka* on the back is seen at *Buḍa Gosainthan*. Another bull from *Akasiganga* has an *astaraka* on the back and with the bell hanging from the neck. The bull noticed from Numaligarh, adorned with *astaraka* on the back and wearing bell-garlands, is found in a seated posture. Two bulls from Gachtal, now preserved in Nagaon park, wearing *astaraka* are seen.⁴⁰

The elephant, the lion and the bull were treated as important animals in the past and those found places in icons and arts of Assam. The lion is shown as the *vahana* of goddess Durga or *Mahisamardini*. The elephants is shown normally as the *vahana* of *Indra*. However, this animal is shown as the *Vahana* of Manasa also in an image of the deity from Silghat, and also *Nagaraja* image, both are now preserved in the Assam State Museum. The figure of the seated bull are generally supposed to be the representation of *Nandi*, the vehicle of *Siva*.

Besides the animals mentioned above, other animals, such as horse, deer, bear, pig, tiger, goat, and monkey are also found in Assam. At *Akasiganga*, cows and bull are found sculptured on stone slabs. Carved horse, deer and tiger are noticed on the pillars and on the friezes from Na-Nath than, Gachtal and Madan Kamdeva. Carving of a bear on the capital of a pillar occurs in Kawaimari. Sculptures of horse and pig are found in Mahamaya- than. Figures of horse are found in the images of Surya in Assam, as in other regions. A terracotta plaque from Kundilnagar shows a horse with the saddle and the bridle. At Deoparbat a slat is seen, bearing the scene of the shooting of a deer couple by a royal archer. Again, a scene shows an ascetic pushing a goat.⁴¹

Birds are also depicted as decorative motif in the ancient art of Assam. Among the birds, geese, peacocks and owls are noticed. Flying geese with long necks occurring on the door jambs of Daparbatia are remarkable. Independent sculptures of birds are met with in the terracotta plaques from Kundilnagar. One plaque shows a pair of peacocks with their bodies twisted around each other in a loving embrace. The second plaque shows a falcon carrying a heron. Another terracotta plaque shows a wolf with

flying posture. In addition to the independent representation of these animals and birds, we notice them with different deities as their *Vahanas*.⁴²

Among the Grotesque or mythical figures the *Kirttimukha* (lit. glory face) is the most common throughout the region of Assam; the motif occurs in Indian art, as a sacred symbol, than as a mere artistic device and lastly as an architectural ornament.⁴³ As an important motif in Indian art and architecture, this has received popular recognition in the Indian Sculpture. Almost all the Chalukyan monuments exhibit this trait.⁴⁴ In Assam, it occurs either on the front pediment or throughout the walls and on the pillars and their shafts. It is found on the capitals of the pillars from Tezpur, now preserved in Colepark.

The antiquity of this motif in India goes back to the Gupta period where it looks more realistic and which later attains stylization.⁴⁵ This is particularly evident from the specimens belonging to the temples of Assam. The ruins from Tezpur (Bamuni pahar, Cole park) depict the motif comparatively more elaborate than that of the Gupta period, but the later temple of Deopahar represents the figure more in the ferocious lion and in a stylized form.

In Assam, the motif had undergone various types of stylization with a profusion of decorative elements. In most of the figures, the lower jaw is absent. The *Kirttimukhas* occurring on the coping piece of Deopahar are remarkably akin to the Javanese figures and are provided, like the latter, with eyes having hora-like sockets.⁴⁶

In the images of the mediaeval period, *Kirttimukha* is an invariable motif, which is depicted at the top of the stave (*silapatta*) flanked by two figures of *Vidyadharas*. The figures of *Kirttimukha* were commonly used in temple decoration in the early mediaeval period in Assam.

Snakes are generally represented with the icons of *Manasa*, *Siva*, *Chamunda*, and *Anantasaya Visnu* in Assam. Representation of the snake is also found in architecture as decorative motif in Assam.

In the doorjambs from Gachtal; coiling snakes are seen as decorative motif. At Daparbati, Majgaon, Deevasthan and other places, *dvāra* shows *sarpa-sakhas* or *nāga-sakhas*.⁴⁷

Among the composite animal figures, the *makara*, whose mouth is that of an alligator or crocodile with a tail resembling that of an animal; *kinnara*, the mythical deity half man and half bird, and *Garuda* are found in the art of Assam. *Garuda* is the *Vahana* of *Visnu*; *makara* and *kurma* (tortoise) are the *vahanas* of the river goddesses, *Ganga* and *Yamuna* respectively. The figures of *Makara*, *kurma* and *Garuda* are noticed in the doorframe of Daparbatia. *Makara* and *kurma* are also found in the doorjambs of Majgaon, Kurma is also found as the incarnation of *Visnu* in the *Dasavatara* pillars from Colepark, *Visnupurithan* (Kawaimari) and Assam State Museum.⁴⁸

Vyala (lion) is generally depicted as grotesque in the art of ancient Assam. In addition to these figures, we notice some other grotesque motifs, such as hybrid form of woman and horse, the face of horse (?) and the body that of woman. Such figures are known as *kinnaras* (centaurs). We also notice the hybrid form of human being and snake, or human being and fish; the upper portion is human and lower portion is that of a snake or fish, in the doorjambs from Daparbatia and the lintel from Sankha Devi temple ruins, and chang-choki (kawaimari). Another is a massive capital with huge kirttimukhas facing the four cardinal points with a *Nāgi* with folded hands (hybrid form of woman and snake) shown on all the four corners of the capital.⁴⁹

The depiction of dwarfs was not a common feature in the art and architecture of Assam. The stunted pot-bellied figure, noticed in a Terra-cotta plaque from Ganesh pahar and Mayang wears a lower garment, Chhannavira and heavy kundalas.⁵⁰ The dwarfs are also noticed in a frieze from Deopahar, and a good number from Madan Kamdeva ruins.

Ornamental designs : These are divided into three classes :

- i) Architectural designs.
- ii) Geometrical designs.
- iii) Floral designs.

i) **Architectural designs :** The *caitya*-window (*Candrasala*) motif occurring almost invariably at all periods of Indian monuments may be called an architectural designs.⁵¹ The early form of this ornament imitates the window-like hollow portion on the facade of the *caitya*-caves at Bhaja, Kondane, Bedse, Karle, Junar, Nasik, Pitalkhora

and Ajanta". *Caitya* window (*candrasala*) ornament is generally marked by the hollow portion of a temple wall and the imitated designs marked on the lintels etc. Two different types of caitya-windows are seen on the lintel of Daparbatia. One is a trefoile where the three arches are depicted in equal size; and in the second variety, the upper arch is larger than the two arches on the sides. The interior of the sunken panels is entirely covered with geometrical patterns with a half rosette in the centre. The *gavāska* design (circular window), perforated (*surisa*) window, ornamental shrine design and replica *sikhara* designs are the most common, depicted in the ancient art of the region. The dome-like stupa and pyramidal roof are other architectural motifs.⁵³

Geometrical designs are mostly found on the ceilings of shrines and also on pillars. Purely geometric designs are the concentric circles of decreasing diameters placed in an octagon. First, three circles from below are cut deep and decorated with a tooth like thing. The next four circles illustrate the geometric design of arch-like cusp and circle. The inner most circle and the cusp look like a half opened flower. This type of geometrical design is not found in Assam. The geometrical design noticed in the region has a different appearance. Geometrical designs are noticed on ceiling slabs, containing floral designs on the outer circles while the inner circle is covered with a fullbloomed lotus in three courses. On the pillars of Kachamari and Dimapur, various geometrical designs are seen.⁵⁴

Floral designs comprising leaf and flower, creeper and purely leaf decorations, are commonly found. Of the floral designs, lotus was the most favourite, which was carved in various forms, i.e. bud, half blown and full-blown flowers. The pedestals (*asana*) of the deities are mostly found in the shape of full-blown multi-petalled lotuses. The ceilings of the shrines contain a full-blown lotus carved on them, quite large and circular in size, which is called *visvapadma*. The ceilings bearing *visvapadma* designs are noticed at Colepark Mathajhar, Baman pahar, Changchoki, Pashim Tarabasa, Deopahar, Madan Kamdeva and other places. Lotuses are also carved on lintel, and such lintel is noticed from Dewal khanda. Most of the images of deities belonging to 10th-12th centuries have lotus-bud (*padmakosa*) design below the *asana* of the deity.⁵⁴

The pot-and-foilage (*ghata-pallava*) motif is also to be found in this region. The vase from which spring out flowers with leaves

falling downwards, decorates usually the lower part of the pillar of the Gupta temples, known as the *puṇakalasa* the bowl of plenty, typifying a renewed faith, the water nourishing the plant trailing from its brim, an allegory which had produced the vase and flower motif, one of the most graceful forms in the whole range of Indian architecture.⁵⁵ According to Sankalia, this motif has come from the floral motif on the medallions on the railings of Bharhut and Sanchi stupas.⁵⁶ The first instance of this motif in Assam is noticed on the doorjambs of Daparbatia and another from Deopahar. The flowers are more luxuriant in the Deopahar than the former.

Another design, which is named 'string course' scroll or creeper is essentially floral.⁵⁷ This floral design is commonly met with in the doorjambs, lintels, pillars and other architectural features of this region. Most of these are winding and undulating scrolls containing flowers and foliage of various kinds, and cover the leading bands of lintels and doorjambs. A splendid floral example is in the trefoil are on black schist from Bamunipahar. Kirtimukha is depicted at the top, a rosette is in the centre, and it contains meandering creepers of different styles.⁵⁸

A frieze containing spirited human figures in fast motion is one of the interesting designs noticed in Deopapar. Another interesting design is found in a door lintik from Domukhi jaljuri (Howraghat) the scroll, in its loops formed by the creeper enclosing bull and flower one by one. One doorjamb from Colepark contains three vertical bands, and the extreme right band in its loop formed by the creeper animals and birds such as, horse, hog and swan.⁵⁹

Trees are depicted in the door-lintel as a decorative motif. A *Kalpabriksha* motif is found on a stone slab from Deopahar. The twisted serpents are seen as decorative motifs in doorjambs and lintels, which run vertically from the bottom of the jamb and sometimes continue in the door lintel; and in some of the door frames, it starts from the lintel continues to the bottom of the door jambs. Examples are found in the doorframes of Gachtal, Sankha Devi, Daparbatia and other places.

The sculptures in Assam exhibit various regional characteristics. The monuments of this region belong at the earliest to 6th century A.D.; and it is noticed that several decorative motifs, architectural designs and temple sculptures are imitated from Bengal, Orissa and central India.

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