

RESEARCH PAPER

Archaeological Remains of Rajaduar Area in North Guwahati, Assam

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Guwahati, identified with the ancient Pragjyotishapura, has been a major centre of cultural development in Assam since ages. The present day Guwahati is well known for the temple of Kamakhya, the early medieval sites like Pandunath, Vishnu-Janardhan in the southern bank; Umananda and Urvashi Islands in middle of the river and Dirgheswari, Daul Govinda, Kurma-Janardan, Aswaktanta, Rudreswar and Manikarneswar in the northern bank of Brahmaputra river. The famous archaeological site of Ambari in Guwahati has provided ample evidence for understanding the cultural growth of the area since the beginning of Common Era. Considering the archaeological and historical significance of Guwahati, a detailed documentation and in-depth study has been taken up by the authors in various areas of the city and this paper is an attempt to document the archaeological remains in the Rajaduar area in North Guwahati.

Introduction

The archaeological remains of Guwahati in Assam indicate a continuation of human habitation from a distance past. Guwahati, the biggest urban centre of Northeast India has been recognised as the ancient Pragjyotishapura, the capital of ancient Pragjyotisha kingdom. The ancient Pragjyotishapura has been identified with the present day city of Guwahati based on inscriptional evidences. The Nagaon and Hawraghat inscriptions of Balavarman of Kamarupa, refers to the large number of areca nut trees entwined with beetle vines. The Sanskrit word for areca nut is *guwa*, hence Guwahati was a market or place of areca nuts (Das 2007: 10). *Prag* means eastern whereas *jyotisha* denotes 'shining' or 'astrology' (Gait 1926). So the word Pragjyotisha indicates 'The city of Eastern Astrology'. The Kalika Purana, compiled around the 10th century CE also states that it was the city where Brahma sat and gave life to stars. The text also compares the city of the first light with city of Indra (Das 2007: 9).

Significance of Guwahati area in the history and civilisation of the Brahmaputra valley and the development of art, architecture and sculpture has been discussed in several notable publications (Barpujari 1990; Barua 1933; Bhattacharjee 1978; Choudhury, P.C. 1959; Choudhury, R.D. 1985; Choudhury, N.D. 1985; Das 2007; Dhavalikar 1973; Dutta 1990; Kauli 2012; Sarma 1988; Singh and Sengupta 1991). The earliest reference to the city as Guwahati is found inscribed on a cannon belonging to the Ahom king Gadadhara Singha (Das 2007: 10).

The city of Guwahati is located on the south bank of the river Brahmaputra falling in the Kamrup Metropolitan

district. The town on the northern bank is known as North Guwahati falling in the Kamrup Rural district. North Guwahati is well known for its historical background and archaeological vestiges like temples, sculptural remains, inscriptions, roads, embankments, bridges, forts and Satras (Vaishnavite monasteries). The major temple sites are Dirgheswari, Daul Govinda, Kurma-Janardan, Aswaktanta, Rudreswar and Manikarneswar. One of the prominent regions in terms of archaeological remains is Rajaduar area which literary means 'king's gate'. Rajaduar falls in the eastern part of North Guwahati close to the river bank of Brahmaputra. The area has four important localities namely Manikarneswar, Kanai Barasi Bowa, Rajaduar Chowk and Daul Govinda. Apart from these localities, there are a few sculptures lying scattered in different households and smaller shrines. Potsherds in low quantity have been observed on the surface as well as in the exposed sections and road cuttings in Manikarneswar hills and the low-lying areas. Based on the typology and surface treatment and decoration, the potsherds can be equated with the remains at Ambari (Sharma *et al.* 2006) and other early mediaeval sites of greater Guwahati region.

This paper is an attempt to document all the significant archaeological features and art pieces which were once part of the historical landscape of ancient Pragjyotishapura, particularly in the Rajaduar area in northern part of Guwahati. All the major findings are narrated below.

Manikarneswar

The archaeological site of Manikarneswar is located right on the northern bank of Brahmaputra (26°12'26.4" N, 91°44'52.4" E) (**Figure 1**). The name of the area must have come from the Shivalinga known as Manikarneswar and a pond known as Manikarna which must have merged with the river Brahmaputra as recorded by Neog (1960) in his celebrated work "*Pabitra Assam*". Neog (1960) further

mentions about a stone inscription (1677 Saka Era) by Ahom king Rajeswar Singha on the wall of the temple suggesting the construction of the Ahom temple.

A river named as Mangala which is presently known as Barnadi flows in its northeast corner connecting with the Brahmaputra. Local legends associate this sacred place of Manikarneswar with lord Shiva taking rest aftermath the self-immolation of Sati and subsequent dismembering of Sati's body by lord Vishnu through his Sudarshana chakra. It is believed that some portions of neck and shoulder of Sati have fallen in the nearby sacred place of Dirgheswari. Lord Shiva took rests under a Bhilwa (*Bel* in Assamese) tree at the confluence of Barnadi and Brahmaputra rivers known as Manisila (Kakati Das 2009: 45–46). These legends signify the importance of the site with the narratives of self-immolation of Sati and associated Kalabhairava

form of Shiva. Interestingly these legends are also identical with the ones related to Manikarnika *ghat* of Varanasi or Kashi in Uttar Pradesh.

Ahom Temple and Pre-Ahom Structural Remains at Manikarneswar

The Ahom temple (**Figure 2**) of 18th century at Manikarneswar hill is protected by the Directorate of Archaeology, Govt. of Assam. As per the cultural notice board displayed in the temple premise, this brick built temple was raised in the reign of Rajeswar Singha in 1755 CE upon a star shaped ground plan of a stone temple of 10th–11th century CE. P.C. Sarma (1988) describes that "... the complete scheming of the Manikarnesvara temple is based on a triangle. The plinth which is made of block-stone and retains its early medieval features is designed in



Figure 1: Map of Rajaduar area in North Guwahati showing the localities of archaeological significance: **1)** Manikarneswar temple, **2)** Rock-cut sculptures at Manikarneswar, **3)** Sri Sri Sesa Dharmiya Kristi Samaj Namghar, **4)** Doul Gobinda temple, **5)** Kanai Barasi Bowa and **6)** Rajaduar Chowk.



Figure 2: The Ahom temple of Manikarneswar and early mediaeval sculpture of Uma-Maheswar and architectural members at the entrance of the temple premise.

the form of a star with six projections and it developed out of two concentric triangles. The plan of the super structure is twelve sided and is devised out of four concentric triangles placed proportionately so as to develop an equilateral polygon by joining the vertices of the triangles" (Sarma 1988: 41).

However, it has been observed that though the early medieval temple remains of 9th–11th century CE were used for the foundation of this 18th century temple, there is no genuine indication about the authentic temple plan of earlier temple which once stood at this area. Clamp marks, sockets and designs on the outer surface of the architectural members which are used in the base of Ahom temple indicates these members are from different parts of the previous stone temple. So the whole plan of this present temple is of Ahom period. Unlike Asvakranta/Asvklanta temple which is an extraordinary example of Ahom architecture and iconography in Guwahati, this temple is simple and void of any Ahom period sculptures. However, it is interesting to note that some art pieces of 9th–11th century CE are used in beatification of the Ahom temple. For examples, three female dancing figures, two *vidyadhara* (garland bearers), a *vyala* (mythical animal) image and a sculpture of an unidentified deity holding a club are embedded into the outer wall. All these images contain the early medieval artistic features.

Countless early medieval sculptures and architectural members are lying scattered all around the Rajaduar area indicating the magnanimity of structural remains of a pre-Ahom temple. Pre-Ahom is a term first used by Lahiri (1991) indicating the time period prior to the advent of Ahoms (1228 CE) in Assam. As mentioned earlier, the stone foundation of the presently existing brick-built Ahom temple of 18th century was constructed by using the stones of the early medieval temple. In the premise of the temple, a

pre-Ahom Uma-Maheswar image can be seen just at the entrance. This image is broken, abraded and lost its major features and only an outline can be seen. In this image, Shiva is shown sitting on *vamalalitasana* where he is sitting on a high lotus pedestal with his left leg folded while the right leg hangs down. Meanwhile, Devi is depicted sitting on the lap of Lord Shiva in *savyalalitasana* where her right leg is folded and the left leg is hanging. Though this image has undergone severe erosion, some major features like tridents on both sides of the image, *keertimukha* on the top of the image, two *vidhyadaras* carrying garlands on both sides can still be clearly seen. This particular image closely resembles with that of the main deity of Madan Kamdev temple of Kamrup district of Assam which is approximately 25 km north from Manikarneswar temple.

Beside this sculpture, a vertical frieze of early medieval doorjamb is kept. This *dvara sakha* is decorated with two geometrical and one floral (*patra-saka*) friezes. At the bottom, there is a panel depicting a Dwarapala holding a bow and an arrow. Beside this there are a few more decorated architectural members lying around the Uma-Maheswar image (Figure 2).

Rock-cut sculptures at Manikarneswar

Besides the architectural temple remains, Rajaduar area has some interesting rock-cut images of Hindu deities. There are four major rock-cut images sculpted on low relief lying just on the foothill of Manikarneswar hill on the northern bank of river Brahmaputra. On the right side of the steps leading to the Manikarneswar temple, a rock-cut image of Ganesha (Figure 4) can be observed. The image has been painted with red colour due to which it has lost its natural aesthetics. The rest of the images of Nagaraja (Figures 3 and 5), Kalabhairava (Figures 3 and 6), Bhogasanamurti of Vishnu (Figure 7) are in natural state, however in constant threat of flood and abrasion.



Figure 3: The rock cut sculptures of Nagaraja and Kalabhairava in the north bank of Brahmaputra.



Figure 4: Rock-cult Sculpture of Ganesha.



Figure 5: Nagaraja sculpture.

It is interesting to note that the Kalabhairava and Bhogasanamurti of Vishnu sculptures are presently found in inverted condition (Figures 6 and 7), probably as a result of some tectonic activities. Earthquakes can be considered as the most determinant cause for the mass destruction of the structures constructed from the beginning of the first millennium AD in the Brahmaputra valley.

Assam falls under seismically active zone which must have been the reason for this upside down context of the image. Paleoliquefaction data and historical records suggest damage of monuments and structures of the Brahmaputra valley (Rajendran *et al.* 2004). Notable historian Gait (1926) also mentions several major earthquakes in Assam damaging historical monuments.

Rock-cult Sculpture of Ganesha

The Ganesha image (Figure 4) is sculpted on a shrine like image (Figure 4) which is approximately of one meter high and of same width. This four-handed Ganesha sculpture is shown sitting in *savyalalitasana* on a lotus, holding a *parasu* (axe) on the upper right hand and *ankusha* (bull-hook or elephant goad) on the upper left hand whereas both the lower hands are broken. *Keertimukha* along with two lotus flowers are shown on the top of the image. Two female attendants are shown on the either side of the image. Artistically this image appears to be of Pre-Ahom period.

Rock-cult Sculpture of Nagaraja (Serpent King)

Key features of this image are lost due to erosion and only an outline has survived. With the existing evidence, this can be identified as seated Nagaraja figure (26°12'383" N, 91°44'857" E) (Figures 3 and 5). This image is shown with *namaskara mudra* and sitting in *savyalalitasana*. An outline of seven snake hood like canopy over the head and two zoomorphic snake forms are shown coming out of hands on both the sides can still be observed. The Nagaraja image is shown sitting on what appears to be a throne of snake tail.

The Naga worship in India is an age old tradition. Anthropomorphic Naga hooded figure is termed as Nagaraja (Vogel 1926). The earliest evidence of Nagaraja image can be observed from Bharhut, Sanchi, Amravati



Figure 6: Kalabhairava sculpture in inverted position due to tectonic activities.



Figure 7: Bhogasanamurti of Vishnu (photo taken on 04.03.2018).

and Mathura respectively (Midhun 2015). Naga images became fairly common in around 7th–8th century CE in northern and eastern part of India. Though Naga cult can be observed all over India, it is mainly concentrated in Nalanda, Mathura, Assam, Bengal, Kashmir, Kerala (Ambily *et al.* 2015) and Uttarakhand (Handa 2002, Jain and Handa 2009). Nagaraja, Naga-Nagini (Naga couple) images are very common in the early medieval sculptural art of Assam. Naga related images have been observed in ancient and early medieval temple sites of Assam like Da-Parvatiya, Deoparbat, and Kamakhya.

Nagas are considered as the protectors of springs, rivers and wells (Ambily *et al.* 2015). As this image of Nagaraja at

Manikarneswar is sculpted on the bank of Brahmaputra, an interesting correlation of Naga with the water bodies can be made. Vasuki (Serpent king) is regarded as the devotee of Lord Shiva. Incidentally, there is a rock-cut sculpture of Kalabhairava form of Shiva (**Figures 3 and 6**) lying next to it at a distance of 15 m.

Rock-cut Sculpture of Kalabhairava

Another important rock-cut image is of Kalabhairava (26°12'381" N, 91°44'870" E), one of the Samharamurtis (destructive form) of Lord Shiva sculpted on a large rock boulder which is presently in inverted position. This figure is shown in nude form (*Digambara*) and in dancing

posture. As per the Shivapurana, the Bhairava is the dreadful appearance of Lord Shiva. The name Bhairava indicates protector of the universe (*bharana*) and his terrific form (*bhishana*). This four handed Bhairava carries *sula* in right lower hand, *damaru* in right upper hand, *trisula* in upper left hand and *naramunda* (human skull) in lower left hand. The Vishnudharmottara Purana of 5th century CE and Kalabhairava Ashtakam composed by Adi Shankaracharya in 8th century CE describe the iconography of Bhairava differently. The Vishnudharmottara Purana describes Bhairava as a figure having yellow-eye and flabby belly, ornamented with snake. The image should have tusks and wide nostrils. The colour of the body is as dark as cloud. Trident, bow and arrow, axe, *khattvanga*, noose and sword are the implements. The god is dressed by the elephant's or tiger's skin. Very little of this description matches with the present sculpture at Manikarneswar. Only features which are matching here are the *sarpa* (snake) as *yajnopavita* (sacred thread) and the projecting teeth of the deity. From the above attributes only trident can be observed here.

However, the description of Kalabhairava provided by Adi Shankaracharya matches well with the present sculpture. Adi Shankaracharya is well-known for his contribution to the unification and resurgence of Hinduism and to the Sanskrit literature. Among his works, a series of *Stotras* (poetic works) are of much significance. These *stotras* provide vivid descriptions about the iconography of the deities as well. Among them, Kalabhairava Ashtakam is an excellent example. *Ashtaka* means poetry with eight stanzas. Here Adi Shankaracharya describes the qualities and appearance of Bhairava form of Shiva.

The matching descriptions are that of the Bhairava wearing a snake as his sacred thread and moon on the *jata*. He is shown nude (*Digambara*), as mentioned in this *stotra*. We can also observe him holding a trident and dancing vigorously (*tandava* dance), as said in the 4th stanza. He has shining golden bells around his waist. Depiction of his feet with sandals studded with gems is accurately sculpted here. The smile of Bhairava and his fangs are also depicted beautifully. As elaborated in this *stotra*, the image has the garland of skulls around the deity.

Besides, the deity is also adorned with *jatamukuta*, *hara*, girdle, *keyura* (armlets) and *makara kundala*. His right side upper and lower hands are holding the *damaru* and *sula* respectively, whereas the left side upper hand is holding a *kapala* and lower hand is holding a skull. Skull studded trident is resting on his left side shoulder. We can also observe two female deities in dancing posture. The left side female deity is holding a *kapala* like utensil to collect the blood drops from the skull which Bhairava is holding.

Interestingly Adi Shankara called Kalabhairava as the *Kahsikapuradhinatha* (lord of Kashi) in his Kalabhairava Ashtakam. Apparently the present temple of Kalabhairava in Kashi is adjacent to the Manikarnika ghat, one of the popular and considered to be holiest among the sacred riverfronts. So it is important to note the relationship between the deity Kalabhairava and the name Manikarnika and Manikarneshwar. The etymology of Manikarnika is linked with Sati mythology. Manikarna in Sanskrit means ear rings. It is believed that Sati Devi's ear rings have fallen

here. Similarly the legends regarding Manikarneshwar of Rajaduar also concerning with self-immolation of Sati and subsequent falling of Sati's body parts in the region. So iconographic matching of present image with the description in Adi Shankaracharya's Kalabhairava Ashtakam suggests some linkages of Adi Shankaracharya with ancient Pragjyotishpura. It is essential to remember that the Kamakhya temple which is one among the Ashtadasha Shakti pithas (eighteen Shakti centres) advocated by Adi Shankara in his Ashtadasha Shakti pitha Stotra is in close proximity to Rajaduar area, just on the other side of the river Brahmaputra. Fascinatingly we can observe evidences of Bhairava forms as a corresponding consort to the Shaktis in all these Shakti pithas.

It seems that Bhairava was a popular deity of early medieval Assam in general and Kamarupa in particular. Bhairava images are reported from Kamakhya, Madan Kamdev, Hengerabari, Bamuni hills and Kanai Barasi Bowa (N.D. Choudhury 1996: 70).

Rock-cut Sculpture of Bhogasanamurti of Vishnu

This Vishnu image (26°12'383" N, 91°44'876" E) is another excellent masterpiece of early medieval sculptural art of Brahmaputra valley. Just like the Kalabhairava image, this sculpture is also in reverted position due to the seismic activities. It is located very close to the river bank and most part of the year, the rock stays underwater. Iconographically this form of Vishnu is called as Bhogasanamurti (**Figures 7 and 8**). In this form, Vishnu is seated in *savya lalitasana* posture on Vasuki lying horizontally. Here, Vasuki is shown near feet of Vishnu in *namaskara mudra* and Garuda (vehicle of Vishnu) is also depicted in *namaskara mudra* below in his right. Seven hooded snake canopy can be seen over the head of Vishnu. The deity carries *gada* (mace) in right upper hand. The lower right hand is lost due to the erosion and difficult to identify the attribute, which might be of *abhaya mudra* or holding a *padma* (lotus). In his left upper hand *chakra* (disc) and in left lower hand *sankha* (conch) can be seen. A Brahma image is sculpted on the right upper side of Vishnu and he is seated on a lotus pedestal, the stalk of which is coming out from the navel of Vishnu. Most of Brahma image is lost but a beautiful depiction of *sruk* or *sruva* can be seen here. *Sruk* is kind of spoon used to take out *ghee* from the *ghee* pot to pour on the sacred fire in sacrifices. It is very rare to find the Brahma image carrying *sruk* as the attribute. Another standing image is depicted below Brahma but it is unidentifiable due to erosion. Still it might be an image of Shiva as most of the Bhogasanamurti's around the country contain a depiction of Shiva in them (Gopinatha Rao 1914).

This image is beautified using vivid kinds of jewellery like *hara* (necklace), *kaustubha* (a gem worn on chest by Vishnu), *graveyaka* (broad necklace), *niska* (necklace of coins), *kanthabhusana* (necklace with a broad medallion) and popular *vaijayanti* (a necklace with five gems) and a *vanamala* (a simple flower garland without gems). Vishnu is shown wearing a *kirita mukuta* (beautifully decorated conical headgear), *karnavalis* (earrings), *keyura* (armlet) and *angada* (wrist ornament). Here we can also observe

a beautifully depicted *mekhala* (girdle with decorations) and lower drapery.

Other sculptural remains at Manikarneswar

At the foothill of Manikarneswar and on the banks of the Brahmaputra, a series of rock boulders are present which sporadically contain diverse remains of art and sculptural activities including masonry marks. Presently these boulders are haphazardly oriented, probably due to seismic reasons. A few of them containing sculptures are in upside down condition and fallen one another which prevents in easy observation of the image and practically makes it impossible to identify the deities (Figure 9a). Most likely

this boulder contains three to four rock-cut images, one of which is of Ganesha. About 50 m east from this boulder, a colossal rock-cut canvas which was prepared for an image but abandoned for unknown reasons (Figure 9b). This canvas is approximately 3.5 m in height and 2 m in width.

Just ten meters away from this boulder with images (Figure 9a) there is another boulder having six rock cut postholes (Figure 9c) on the surface. The pattern of the postholes suggests a rectangular plan which was probably used for construction of a small shrine using wooden logs fitted into the postholes. Inside this rectangular plan, a beautifully carved flower and floral design (Figure 9d) can be noticed.



Figure 8: Bhogasanamurti Vishnu (photo turned upright for clear visuals).



Figure 9: Colossal rock-cut canvas, boulder containing rock-cut images, circular rock-cut posthole, floral design inside the rectangular plan.

It is very much evident from the wedge marks (**Figure 10**) and masonry marks on these rocks that the stones were quarried from these boulders for the construction of early medieval temple of Manikarneswar. Between these boulders, we can also witness scattered architectural members which were once a part of the early medieval temple.

Environmental implications on the Sculptures

We have previously referred to the effect of earthquakes on these rock-cut boulders and how they were uprooted and presently found in upside down state. Along with seismic activities frequent floods are also a risk to these images. As we have seen in case of the sculpture of Nagaraja (**Figure 4**), the image is completely eroded and very difficult to identify the attributes. The sculpture of Bhogasanamurti of Vishnu also stays under the water for most part of the year in the rainy season and we can observe the deterioration taking place on the image (**Figure 11**). The image is peeling off and getting several cracks resulting in falling out of broken pieces. The snake hood canopy of Vishnu, the image of Brahma and the standing figure close to the right

leg of Bhogasanamurti Vishnu are completely lost. Fortunately the sculpture of Kalabhairava which is located in a bit higher elevation than the other images has survived from erosion, deterioration and breakages.

Scattered architectural members and loose sculptures of Rajaduar area

Architectural members and loose sculptures which once formed part of the early medieval temple can be seen scattered all around the Rajaduar area. Architectural members includes pieces of plinth, ceiling fragments, pillars fragments, pillar bases, door jambs, *amalakas*, columns and beams, decorative architectural pieces with floral and geometrical designs, dressed stones with sockets and iron clamp marks.

These pieces are more in number in the vicinity of Manikarneswar temple than the surrounding. Around the temple compound and all along the hill slopes, architectural members of different sizes, shapes and designs can be seen, among which the dressed stones with socket marks are common. There are two designed pieces, one outside the temple gate (**Figure 12c**) and another near the



Figure 10: Traces of ancient stone quarry and wedge marks on the boulders at Rajaduar area.



Figure 11: Boulder containing Bhogasanamurti of Vishnu under water in rainy season (photo taken on 28.04.2018) and after flood (photo taken on 18.01.2019).

rock-cut Ganesha image (**Figure 12d**). It is likely that the architectural pieces are even used for the building of these modern construction of steps which is apparent in other temples of Guwahati too like Kamakhya and Aswaklanta.

Almost every house, street and new shrines of Rajaduar area (**Figure 12e**) contain architectural members which are part of some early medieval temples. Even at the Doulu Gobinda temple premises, we can observe a few interesting members like pillar bases with *mithuna* depictions,

ceiling portions, *amalakas* and deity pedestal. A few of the important loose sculptures scattered in Rajaduar area are described below.

Fertility Goddess

A unique piece of sculpture is observed in the veranda of a house near Manikarneswar temple (**Figure 13**). This loose sculpture has a depiction of fertility goddess in *uttana-pada* (squatting) posture with legs open as in during



Figure 12: Scattered architectural members and loose sculptures of Rajaduar area.



Figure 13: Fertility goddess in squatting posture.

childbirth. Fertility aspect of this image is highlighted by symbolic representation of the child head coming out of *yoni* or the womb. This figure is depicted inside a one feet sized sqarish canvas like design. Similar image can be seen in Kamakhya as well.

Sculptural pieces at the premises of Sri Sri Sesa Dharmiya Kristi Samaj Namghar

Three distinctive sculptural pieces (**Figure 14**) have been observed in the premises of Sri Sri Sesa Dharmiya Kristi Samaj Namghar (26°12'390" N, 91°44'653" E) in Rajaduar area. Every piece contains two sculptures making a total of six. All these images are sculpted within a frame as bracket figures. Sculpture which is lying on the road side near the Namgarh contains two *dwarapalaks* shown holding *parasu* (axe) in the right hand and resting left hand on the waist. Feet of these images are not visible as this sculpture is fixed on ground and worshipped by the locals. These images are decorated using the jewellery designs like *hara* (necklace), *karnakundalas* (earrings), *kankan* (anklets), amulets, *karanda mukutas* (conical headgear) and *kati bandhana* (waistband) with designed drapery.

A set of two such members having bracket figures are installed on both sides of Namgarh's sanctum. Here the right side member has two *Risi* (sage) depictions and on left side has two *devakanya* (celestial female) depictions. Both the images are painted with silver colour. Just like the *dwarapalaka* images these two are also sculpted

inside a shrine like design. *Risi* figures are shown standing in *samabhanga* (erect) posture. They are depicted with simple *hara* and drapery. Right hand is shown holding a rosary in *jnana mudra* whereas the left hand is in *dhyana mudra*.

The *devakanya* figures are shown standing in *dwibhanga* posture. One of the figures is depicted holding a *sula* like attribute in right hand whereas another *devakanya* is holding a rosary in the right and *trisul* (trident) in the left hand. Both the images are wearing *karanda mukutas* (conical headgear). These images are further beautified by using necklaces like *kanthabhusana*, *karnavalis* (ear rings), bangles and *mekhala* (girdle). These three sculptures indicate *Saivaite* features so they might have been a part of either a Shiva or Shakti temple.

Sculptures at the premise of DouL Gobinda temple, Rajaduar

Doul Gobinda (26°12'431" N, 91°44'496" E) is a 19th century temple dedicated to Lord Krishna situated on the foothills of Chandra Bharati hills. This temple was renovated in 1996. In the temple premise, there are a few interesting sculptures. In one piece of sculpture, two archers are depicted. This might have been a part of a narrative scene. Near the temple gate, a few appealing sculptures can be seen but they are all painted and lost their natural beauty.

A beautifully sculpted Shiva image (**Figure 15a**) in *dhyanamudra* is kept in the entrance of the temple. This



Figure 14: Sculptures in front of Sri Sri Sesa Dharmiya Kristi Samaj Namghar, Rajaduar.



Figure 15: Sculptures at the premise of the DouL Gobinda temple: (a) Dhyanamudra Shiva, (b) Kartikeya and (c) Andhakasuravadamurti of Shiva.

figure has four hands where the lower hands are in *dhyanamudra* or *chinmudra* and upper right hand is holding a trident. Due to erosion, attribute of upper left hand and face of the deity are lost. Next to this image, depiction of a *Brahmakamal* or divine lotus is seen.

Moreover, in the entrance of the temple, there are two important images kept in both the sides, one of Ganesha and the other of Kartikeya (**Figure 15b**). The Ganesha is shown with four hands, sitting in *savya lalitan* and wearing a snake as *yajnopavita* which is a frequent iconographic feature of Ganesha images of Assam. As this image is broken and applied with vermilion, it is difficult to identify the attributes and detailed features. The Kartikeya image is shown sitting in *savya lalitan* posture on a peacock. His lower right and left hands are depicted in *varada* and *abhaya mudras* respectively, whereas the upper right hand is holding his *velayudh* or *shaktayudh*. Upper left hand is broken and attribute is unrecognisable.

Another unique sculpture found at DouL Gobinda is of Andhakasuravadamurti (slayer of demon Andhaka) of Shiva (**Figure 15c**). In this image, Shiva has four arms, of which the upper two carries a *trisula* pinned with the body of Andhakasura at the end and from it blood drops down. Shiva bears the *kapala* (skull) in his lower left hand to collect in it the blood flowing down from the body of Andhakasura. In lower right hand he is holding a *katwanga*. Shiva is also shown wearing a *rundamala* (skull garland) here. Such Andhakasuravadamurti panels can be seen at Kailasanatha temple of Ellora and Elephanta, but in both the places, this image is depicted with eight hands.

Moreover, some sculptures are found worshiped in different households in the vicinity of DouL Gobinda temple. A well depicted *Gajavyala* is observed in front of a house near the temple. Here, a *vyala* (mythical composite figure) is shown standing on an elephant which is similar to the one found in Madan Kamdev temple.

Kanai Barasi Bowa

The Kanai Barasi Bowa (26°12'615" N, 91°44'545" E) is an archaeological site protected by the Directorate of Archaeology, Govt. of Assam. The site is basically a rocky outcrop of granitic boulders which contain rock cut images, inscriptions, engravings and wedge and mason marks. One of the four major rock inscriptions mentions the annihilation of the first Muhammadian incursion into the Guwahati area on Saka year of 1127 (1206 CE) by Kamarupa ruler. The other two rock inscriptions indicate the victory of the Ahoms over the Muhammadans in 1667 CE. Another inscription records the victory of Bar Phukan over the invading forces in the same war (Das 2007: 60). Different engravings on the rocks include geometric designs, human figurines, deities, dot marks etc. (Bezbaruah and Devi 2016).

Mason Marks, Wedge Marks and Petroglyphs of Rajaduar Chowk

The early medieval temples of Assam were built by skilled artisans and architects. Large sized stone boulders of Rajaduar Chowk (26°12'461" N, 91°44'546" E) provide some inputs regarding the activities of early medieval architects. Rajaduar Chowk is a site containing three huge rock boulders having rock-cut image of Ganesha, mason marks, and unique petroglyphs. A twin rock boulder containing labyrinths, mason marks and petroglyphs are found on road leading to DouL Gobinda from Manikarneswar temple. The third boulder with rock-cut Ganesha image and rock cut steps is about 200 m away from the twin boulders. This four handed Ganesha image (**Figure 16**) sitting in *savya lalitan* posture is covered in vermilion.

It is interesting to note that there are many engraved marks on the rock boulders and architectural members of the region. Considering the nature of engraving and style, these can be identified as mason marks. Though



Figure 16: Rock cut Ganesha image of Rajaduar Chowk.

certain styles of mason markings are universal, the meaning might vary from region to region. The engraved marks recorded at Rajaduar area (**Figure 17**) are small in size ranging between 2.5 to 5 inches. A total of 24 different types of mason marks have been recorded on the architectural members as well as stone boulders in the study area.

The large boulder in Rajaduar Chowk has three squarish labyrinths (**Figures 18 and 19**) in a line. Such labyrinths are also found at Kanai Barasi Bowa (Devi and Bezbaruah 2016) and Umatumani islands (Bezbaruah 2017) in Assam and tar Lahaut, Pakistan (Kumar 2015: 84–115). According to Kumar (2015: 84–115), squarish labyrinths

have passage from all four sides and each one of them is blocked by a plus design intricately connected with the whole labyrinth design. In Rajaduar Chowk, two among the three labyrinths matches this description but one is more crude and rectangular in shape. Just above these labyrinths, a few more petroglyphs can be observed but they are eroded and lost the shape. A Ganesha face is also engraved on the same boulder but it seems to be fairly recent one.

These boulders also contain few petroglyphs. Among them, a panel containing five engravings (**Figures 20–22**) include sword, mask, dancing image, running image with

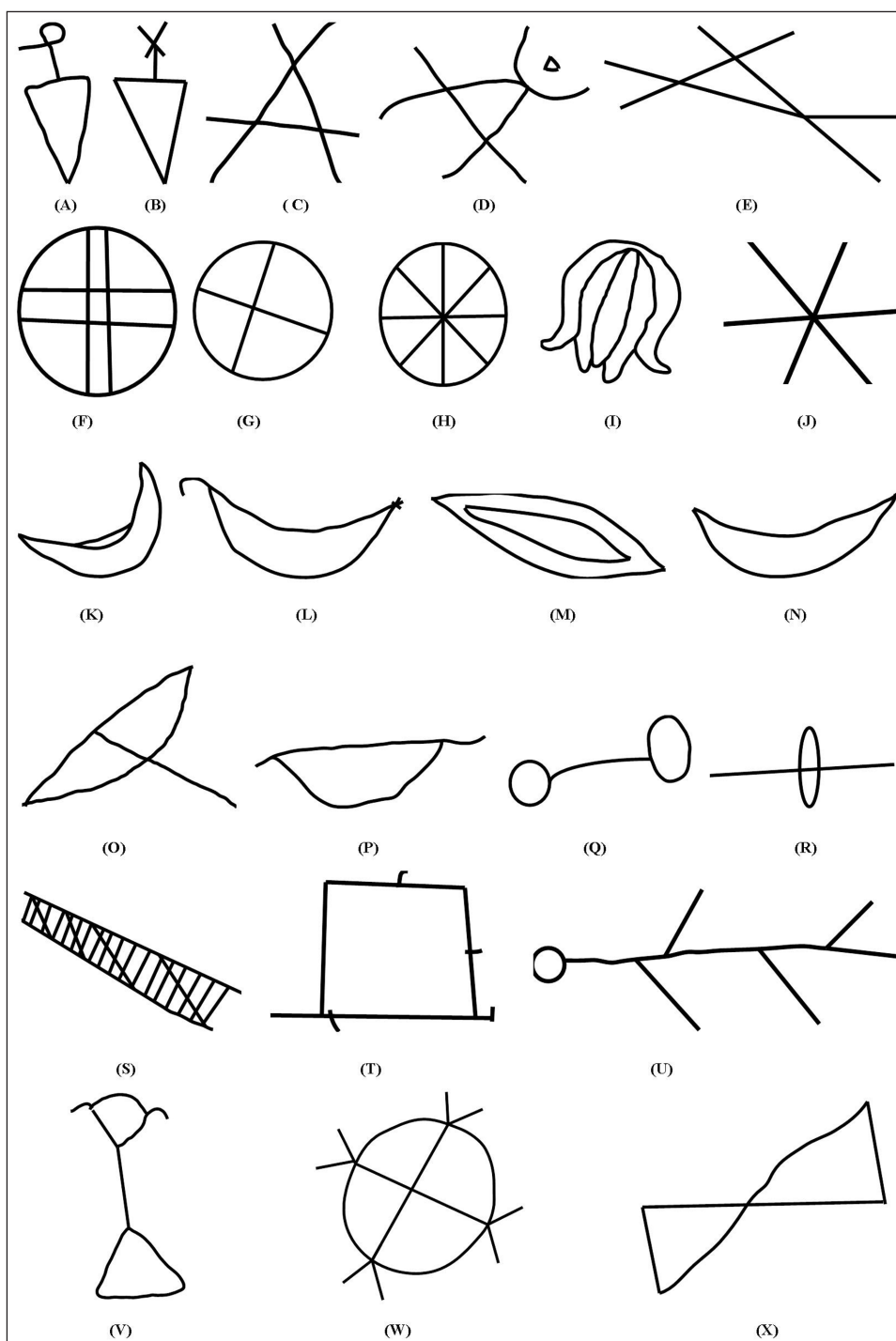


Figure 17: Line drawings of mason marks of Rajaduar area.



Figure 18: Boulder containing labyrinths, petroglyphs and masonry marks in Rajaduar Chowk.

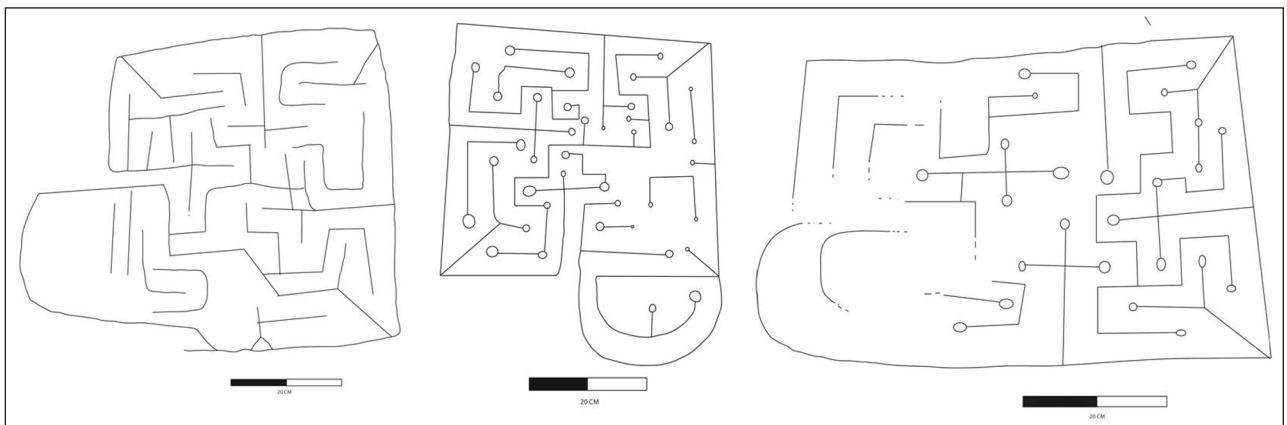


Figure 19: Line drawings of labyrinths.



Figure 20: Depiction of a sword, animal mask and a dancing image.



Figure 21: Boat and human figure with a dagger and shield.

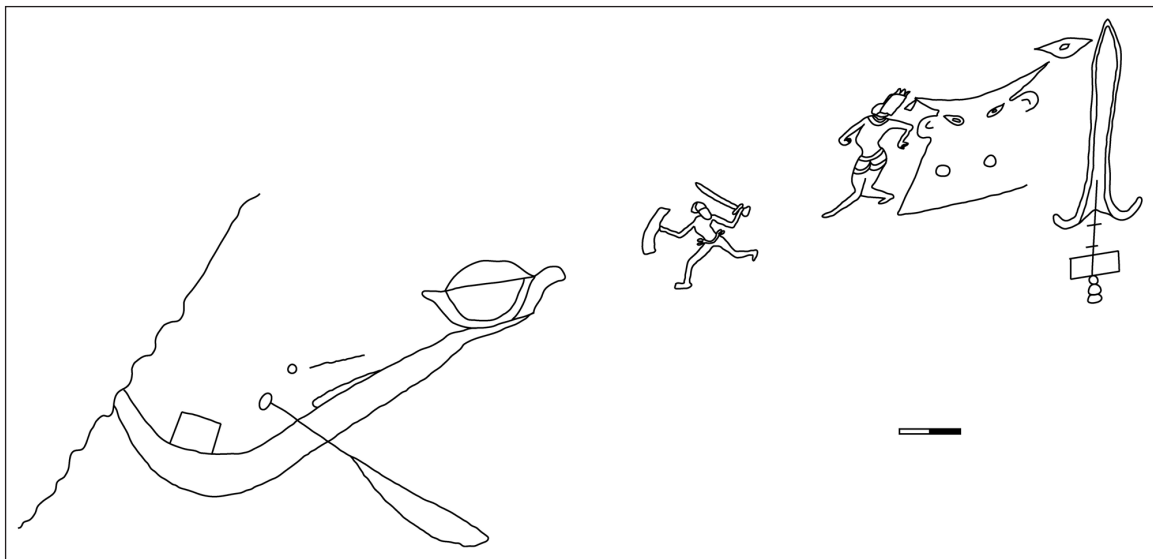


Figure 22: Drawing of the complete panel of the petroglyphs at Rajaduar Chowk.

a shield and a boat. These may be individual engravings as well as part of a composite engraving depicting a story. Below is given the description of the engravings.

Sword: Sword is the first engraving of this panel from the left. This engraved sword is 65 cm in height and 15 cm in width. This engraving is shown with a handle and well depicted double sided blades. Next to it, an eye like design can be seen but it is not clearly visible.

Mask: It is an animal face, which is 40 cm in height and 35 cm in width. Horns, eyes, ears and nostrils are depicted. This figure is on the right side of sword.

Dancing image: This image is shown in dancing posture as both the hands and legs are in various dancing movements. Depiction of necklaces, bunned hair and waist bands can be seen in the engraving. This image is 25 cm in height and 15 cm in width.

Human figure with a dagger and shield: This engraving along with the boat is depicted on the right corner of the panel. This image is 28 cm in height and 20 cm in width. This image appears like a running human being holding a dagger and a shield probably towards the boat which is drawn next to it.

Boat: It is a boat of 80 cm in length. Probably it was much longer than that but the right side corner part of this

rock boulder was queried which is evident from the cut marks. Rowing wood and house like structure can be seen on the boat. On the left corner of the boat, there is a crab which might have used for symbolising water or sailing.

Conclusion

The above description provides a detailed glimpse of archaeological vestiges scattered in a small locality in the northern part of Guwahati which was once an important region of the cultural landscape of the Pragiyotisha-Kamarupa kingdom. Among the notable archaeological sites in the Guwahati region, Manikarneswar stands as unique due to the colossal rock-cut images of some important Brahmanical deities like Kalabhairava and Bhogasanamurti of Vishnu. The artistic features of rock cut sculptures resemble well with ones in Vishnu Janardan rock cut sculptures in the southern bank, Umananda and Urvasi islands in Brahmaputra river. These images and the other remains of a stone temple of early medieval period signify the importance of the region in the bygone days. Along with these, there are mason marks, wedge marks, petroglyphs and evidence of stone quarrying which suggest large scale exploitation of stone for temple construction activities. Some of the petroglyphs are artistic

expressions of the artisans, while some are the symbols used for construction activities.

As mentioned above, the legends associated with and the presence of the huge rock-cut sculpture of Kalabhairava at Manikarneswar testifies the prevalence of Shaivism in the early Medieval Kamarupa. The legends are also identical to the Manikarnika *ghat* of Kashi and apparently Kalabhairava is the principle deity of Kashi. Hence, it can be presumed that the legend at Manikarneswar is a local imitation of Puranic stories to uplift the sacredness of an area. Although we don't get the standing temple of early medieval period in the Manikarneswar site, the huge scattering of architectural members and building materials indicate the construction of a giant stone temple by Kamarupa rulers. The effect of natural causes like earthquake and flood is very much apparent at the sacred landscape of Manikarneswar.

It is important to note that the urbanisation in Guwahati, once confined to the southern bank of Brahmaputra is now rapidly spreading in the northern bank as well. Though urbanisation brings progress, it also jeopardises the existing archaeological remains and historical monuments. Hence, immediate measures should be taken to document the existing archaeological features and protect from further anthropogenic and natural threats.

This kind of small scale site specific documentary research is an apt methodology for archaeological investigation in the Brahmaputra valley which enables in recording the vast repertoire of art and archaeological heritage in a given region. As natural causes and human vandalism are in its own pace, recording each and every trace of historical and archaeological material is the need of the hour.

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Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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