



Socio-Religious Significance of Kamakhya Temple in Guwahati, Assam

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Abstract

India is a multicultural and multi-religious nation. In the multiculturalism of India, there is a continuous interaction between the great and little tradition. The Sanatana Hindu Dharma has two broad philosophies which are Shakta and Shivya. According to Hindu mythology, there are 51 numbers of Shaktipeeth, out of which the Kamakhya of Assam has its own socio-religious and socio-cultural significance. It is a place of cultural interaction as well as believed to be the sacred place to fulfill the divine wishes. The present study is to find out the socio-cultural significance of Kamakhya temple of Assam and co-related ritualistic practices. There are some significant annual festivals related to the temple. The Ambubachi festival and the related mela or fair is globally famous. The present paper is focused to discuss on such issues in detail..

Keywords: Santana Dharma; Rituals; Culture; Tradition; Temples

Introduction

Anthropology of Religion: Anthropological approaches to religion have been influenced by Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Karl Marx. Durkheim and members of his school focused on small-scale societies. They analyzed cosmology embodied in religious ideas and systems. In religion they found the articulation of a coherent worldview that meaningfully ordered human life. They provided detailed analysis of concepts of time, space, and person in the universe embodied in religious thought. They also sought to understand the functions of religious precepts and tenets in structuring social institutions and everyday social transactions. From the Latin *religio* (respect for what is sacred) and *religare* (to bind, in the sense of an obligation),

the term religion describes various systems of belief and practice concerning what people determine to be sacred or spiritual [1,2]. Some form of religion is found in every known culture, and it is usually practised in a public way by a group. The practice of religion can include feasts and festivals, God or gods, marriage and funeral services, music and art, meditation or initiation, sacrifice or service, and other aspects of culture. In studying religion, anthropologists distinguish between what they term the experience, beliefs, and rituals of a religion. Religious experience refers to the conviction or sensation that one is connected to "the divine." This type of communion might be experienced when people are praying or meditating. Religious beliefs are specific ideas that members of a particular faith hold to be true, such as that Jesus Christ was the son of God, or believing in

reincarnation. Another illustration of religious beliefs is that different religions adhere to certain stories of world creation. Religious rituals are behaviours or practices that are either required or expected of the members of a particular group, such as bar mitzvah or confession [3,4].

According to Durkheim E, “rites are rules of conduct that prescribe how man must conduct himself with sacred things”. Geertz C, mentioned that “Ritual is consecrated behavior [in which the] conviction that religious conceptions are veridical and that religious directives are sound is somehow generated. [Ritual is] some sort of ceremonial form [in which] the moods and motivations which sacred symbols induce in men and the general conceptions of the order of existence which they formulate for men meet and reinforce one another” [5].

In essence, all cultures consist of five basic elements: belief (ideas about how the world operates); values (ideas about the meaning of life); norms and sanctions (guidelines for behaviour) expressive symbols (material representations of ideas and values); and language.

Religion in Indian cultural tradition: Indian culture in its traditional form has accorded great importance to religion. The concept of dharma (loosely translated as duty borrowing from its Sanskrit meaning) has been a guiding light to culture of the Hindus in India for thousands of years. Although the term dharma is considerably vast and expansive in its territory compared to the term religion, religious dictums have played vital role in shaping up all forms of cultural practices. Often it is pointed out that *vrutti dharma* (occupational duty), *raja dharma* (ruler's duty), *manava dharma* (duty as a human being), *samanya dharma* (general obligations) and the like are not strictly part of the ritualistic function of religion as described earlier. In the Indian context, dharma describes the order of the world and not necessarily to some act referring to supernatural power. For instance, when Upanishads say: ‘*satyam vada dharmanchara*’ (speak truth, follow your duty) the individual is advised to act according to the high values of the cultural system rather than being directed to perform some religious act. In other words, dharma is talked about in fulfilling the daily chores and is not always associated with religious acts and performances. Before we go further into this aspect of religion, let us be clear on the sociological concept of religion in its general sense. India is the homeland for all major world religions. Sanatan dharma later known as Hinduism is the major religion of the country. Hinduism may best be treated from four different points of view.

1. The lower popular cults and beliefs and practices which centre around the worship of local godlings or village deities.
2. The religious sects on the middle and higher levels which worship deities of a more cosmic character.

3. The higher theology or philosophy which makes a synthesis of these various deities and tends to think of this unity as impersonal.
4. The basic social dharma which underlies all of these and finds its expression in the caste system.

The study of pilgrimage forms an important dimension of Indian civilization. Continuous interactions between great and little traditions are noticed in such pilgrimages. Such places have developed as a “sacred complex”, with the presence of sacred geography, sacred performance and sacred specialists [6]. In Hindu religion Shakta, Shaiva and Viashnav are three major philosophical traditions.

Present Study, Objective and Methodology

The present study: Among the ancient most *shaktipithas* (‘goddess centres’), Kamakhya is the most venerable. Therefore, it is called *adipitha* (‘the primordial seat’) where represented the integration of the notion of *purusha* (masculine force), *prakriti* (feminine force), which together converges into *prana* (life-force) where the feminine spirit always predominates into the creation force that regulate the cosmic rhythm [7]. Of course, scholars differ on the issue whether the ancient most series of such *pithas* comprised three or four centres [8]. However, its importance among the major goddess-seats is doubtless. As it would be clear from the description in the sequence, Kamakhya assumed significance in the *Kamarupa Desh* (the older name of Assam region) as the religious cultural as well as political centre. No wonder, both are frequently referred together as ‘Kamarupa-Kamakhya’ and thus reflect mutual closer and deeper association. The sacred shrine of Kamakhya and the land of Kamarupa are popularly known as the centre of mystical (*tantric*) territory to get magical powers and the land of black magic and witchcraft, respectively [9]. Among the Mahavidyas, Kali’s position is prominent, and she is usually considered the first Mahavidya – again emphasising her mystical and black form [7]. The sacred complex of Kamakhya consists of several shrines and it functions as the venue of various festivities throughout the year. Significance of *Kamarupa Kshetra* is found mainly in the *Kalika Purana*, and *The Yogini Tantra* [10].

Objectives: The main objective of the study is-

1. To know about the mythology and history associated with Kamakhya Temple.
2. To know about the socio-religious and socio-cultural perspective as associated with the Kamakhya Temple.
3. To analyse the symbolism and sacred complex as associated with the Kamakhya Temple.

Methodology: The methodology adopted in the present study can be broadly divided into following two parts:

Collection of Data

The present study is based on both secondary as well as primary data. All these data are collected from different sources to extract different kinds of information.

Secondary Data: The secondary data have been collected from different sources to get information about the historical and geographical background of the study area, the history of construction of the temples and legends behind the rise of these shrines, daily activities and annual festivals observed in these temples, etc. This information is collected from various books, journals, reports, theses, published and unpublished documents, etc.

Primary Data: The present study is mainly based on the primary data. In this regard field work in the Kamakhya temple and its surrounding has been conducted from April 2022 to March 2025. Primary data are collected directly from the Kamakhya temple by preparing self-designed survey schedules and questionnaire among the priests and different other workers of the temples and among the people engaged in various businesses around the temples serving the visitors. These data are related to the socio-economic life and characteristics of the aforesaid people.

For this purpose, information from the majority of the temple serving people and those involved indirectly with the temple activities has been collected covering all categories of servers in a representative manner. In this connection, the priests and the other people engaged in different activities relating to the temples have been grouped into the following four categories -

1. Category I (the Priests)
2. Category II (the people engaged in religious activities other than the priests, i.e. the *athapariya*, the *bhograndhani*, the *balikata*, etc.)
3. Category III (the people engaged in other than religious activities, i.e., the receptionists, office bearers, security guards, etc.)
4. Category IV (the people engaged indirectly in the temples, i.e., the people involved in different business activities in the temple premises and surrounding areas).

In case of the people engaged indirectly in these temples, the data have been collected from the temple premises of Kamakhya, where the business activities relating to the temples are distinct.

Besides this, information has also been collected about the socio-economic characteristics of the pilgrims visiting these temples through survey schedules. Information about different activities performed there, different categories of workers engaged in maintaining the regular activities of the

temples, number of such workers, etc. are collected through the interviews and discussions with the secretaries and members of the Managing Committees and the *Doloi* (the person responsible the management of the temple) of the temples. On the other hand, the total number of business establishments and their different types have been found out through field observation.

Culture History of the Studied Area

Guwahati has a rich historical background, and its mention is found in different epics and *Puranas*. In ancient periods it was known as *Pragjyotisha* or *Pragjyotishpura* [11]. In the early medieval inscriptions of Assam, the reference of *Pragjyotisha* is found as the city ruled by King *Naraka* and his successors. It is said that "the city was situated at the site or in the vicinity of modern Guwahati, and the temple of Kamakhya was quite close to it" [12].

The name *Pragjyotisha* or *Pragjyotishpur* is said to be derived from the two words *prag* and *jyotisha*. Here *prag* means former or eastern and *jyotisha* means star or astrology or shining [13]. Thus, the meaning of the name of the city or the country may be explained as the land of eastern lights. *Kalika Puran*, a work of 10th century A. D. describes that "formerly *Brahma* staying here created the stars; so, the city is called *Pragjyotishpura* a city equal to the city of *Indra*" [14]. *Pragjyotishpura* was known as *Kamrup* during the days of *Puranas* and *Tantras*. In *Kalika Purana* and *Vishnu Purana* this land is described as *Kamrupa*. *Naraka* is described as the early king of *Pragjyotish*. He was one of the most dominant rulers and his name is associated with the construction of the Kamakhya Temple. It is situated on the Nilachal Hill at a height of about 240 meters. This is a world-famous temple which was reconstructed by Koch king *Naranarayan* in 1565 A.D. This is a *Shakti Peeth* and all kinds of *Shakti Puja* like *Durga Puja*, *Kali Puja*, etc., are done here. Besides these regular activities, marriages and other auspicious ceremonies are also performed here. 'Ambubachi Mela', as mentioned above, takes place in this temple every year in the month of *Aahar* (June-July). In this festival pilgrims come not only from inside the country but from foreign countries as well. Here live sacrifices like goat, pigeons and ducks and occasionally buffalo sacrifices are done in different occasions. A good number of persons such as priests, assistants and others are involved with the religious activities. A market is also growing near the temple to meet the various kinds of need of the pilgrims and inhabitants of the temple premises. *Ugratara Devalaya*, another *Shakti Peeth* of the city is situated near *Latashil* - *Ambari* area. Here also all kinds of *Devi Puja* (goddess worship), *Shiva Puja*, etc., are observed. Various kinds of religious ceremonies also take place in its premises.

Findings and Discussion

Mythology Behind the Origin: In the *Kalika Puran* (KaP), the famous mythology of Daksha's *Vrihaspati* sacrifice, Shiva's insult by him, Sati's suicide, Shiva's rage, etc. is repeated. However, the author of the KaP gives a new twist the mountain, on which Sati's genitals fell, represented the body of Shiva, turned blue ('*Nilachala*') when the said parts fell on it. At a different place, the goddess's amorous image is presented.

The Yogini Tantra handles the issue differently emphasising the symbolic creativeness of *Yoni* and suggests relatively later origin of Kamakhya as *Devi*, the Great Goddess Herself did not know and asked Shiva, 'Who Shewas?' Shiva told the story of Kamakhya's origin, re-told briefly as the following.

After having created the universe, Brahma became arrogant. The goddess did not like his arrogance and created Keshi, a demon out of her body. As soon as being created, Keshi rushed to Brahma (to kill him). The sacred Brahma fled to Vishnu and started living in his company. Meanwhile, Keshi established his city by the name of Keshipura wherefrom he began harassing the three worlds.

The terrified Brahma shaded off his assumed vanity and prayed to Kali, in Vishnu's company, and requested to relieve the three worlds from Keshi's cruel oppressions. Kali was satisfied. She accepted Keshi being her own creation to punish Brahma for his ignorance and arrogance. By spelling *hum* she burnt down the demon into ashes and directed Brahma to do certain things to get away from his sins. She also told, "at the spot wherefrom she was prayed to destruct Keshi, a Yoni-circle out of her own creative energy will spring up in their presence, be regarded as the source of origin of everything and *Brahma* should create after having contemplated the Yoni, in future. Brahma followed the instructions and accordingly created a mountain (of Keshi's ashes) and planted edible grasses, etc. along with a *tulasi*, holy basil (*Sanctum basilica*). The author of *Kalika Purana* takes view of both of these suggestive conceptions—amorous and dreaded, and attempts to present a concordant version. She is called *Kamarupini*, assuming one form or the other as She wishes; accordingly three forms of the goddess are threaded and the amorous image having amorousness in her mood symbolized by standing on a red lotus atop a white corpse and holding a garland of yellow flowers in hand, (2) the amorous-less image, standing on a bare white corpse and holding up a sword, and (3) the benevolent image: mounted upon a lion.

Situated on the south bank of the Brahmaputra, Guwahati city is dotted with many ancient temples of different times and

different deities. These temples consist of three major cults, i.e. *Shaiva*, *Shakti* and *Vaisnava*. Among these, the Kamakhya Devalaya is very famous worldwide. Here, seven other temples are found known as *Dasamahabidya* having different forms of *Shakti* around the Nilachal Hill along with the main temple of Kamakhya. Kamakhya Devalaya, the famous temple of Goddess in the form of *Shakti* is located on a hill named Nilachala in the Northwestern part of the Guwahati. In the main temple of Kamakhya three forms of *Dasamahabidya* are worshipped. It has four chambers namely, the *nritya-mandap*, the *pancharatna*, the *chalanta griha* and the *garbhagriha*, the first or outermost chamber is the *nritya-mandap* and inside the wall of it there are stone inscriptions of two Ahom kings Rajeswarsingha and Gaurinathsingha of 1831 A.D. and 1860 A.D. respectively. The second chamber is the *pancharatna* and it is rectangular shaped. Adjacent to the *pancharatna*, is the *chalantagriha*. It is square shaped and here a small moveable idol of the Goddess is found. On its walls images of Koch king Naranarayana and different deities, etc. are sculptured and some stone inscriptions are attached. The innermost part or the *garbhagriha* is next to the *chalanta griha* and it is lower than the other chambers of the temple. Here the *Angapeeth* of the Goddess attached with a *Shivalinga*. The *Angapeeth* or *Yonipeeth* is a square shaped stone and always remains wet by the water of the natural spring that flows below it. It is said that the length of the *Yonipeeth* is about 1.5 feet in length and 1 foot in breadth (*Eka bahu dvadasa anguli*) [15]. About half of the *Yonipeeth* is covered by cloth and flowers, etc. and remaining part is worshipped by the pilgrims. On the eastern side of it Matangi (who is also considered as Saraswati) and Kamala (Lakshmi), two forms (*rupa*) of the *dashamahabidya* are exist side by side.

Origin of Worship in the Temple: - the word Kamarupa (Kamakhya) symbolises a new Cult and in exaltation of it the land itself was rechristened. The very names Kamarupa-Kamakhya therefore, suggest that the Cult is derived from some Austric divinity. The belief that Kamakhya is also a goddess of sex and beauty is an unwarranted fact. As stated by Dr. B.K. Kakati, Kamakhya is a goddess named Kama i.e. of sexual desire.

The Yogini Tantra furnishes certain facts in this regard. In the Yogini Tantra there are few slokas of the Kamesvari stuti which proves this. In the sloka as Kamesvari is referred to as origin a tree in Kamarupa (Kamarupa samudbhute) and she is the light of Kamarupa and living in Nilaparvata at the same time she is called the wife of Siva (Harapriya), Holder of the world (Visvedharini) and slayer of sumbha and Nisumbha (Nisumbha-sumbha-Mathan uniting with the great mother Devi Bhagavati. In the Kamesvari stuti two things come out prominently. Here she is called Kamarupas the living in *Kamarupa*. Secondly, '*Kamarupe-samudbhute* originated at Kamarupa. No doubt Kamesvari is Kamakhya and Kamesa

is her husband Lord Siva or Umananda. The Kamesvari Devi or Kamadevi is so called because she fulfils desires of her devotees both worldly and otherwise. In this sloka it is prayed that she might grant desire to the devotees. It is quite contrary to the vedantic or Buddhists religion which try to minimize human wants. To them the one of the goals of life is to minimise wants. Secondly, the word may refer to one deity who can change her appearance at her own will. Thirdly, the word 'Kama' in Sanskrit also signifies blue. Along with the fall of the genital organ of Sati the hillock turned into blue. So, she may be a blue-eyed goddess on a blue mountain. Further, time immemorial, this province is known for obscure rites and magic. Here people could change their shapes as desired, so they are known as Kamarupis. As stated earlier Kamarupini may mean a beautiful goddess, blue goddess, Sex goddess or a goddess who can change her shape. Regarding change of shape reference may be made to '*Ai Nam*' (songs sung in praise of mother goddess) virgin at the dawn, at noon and during evening she becomes Parvati.

Socio-religious significance: The image and presentation of Goddess Kamakhya is full of symbolic meanings.

- **Yoni:** It is a Sanskrit word literally means 'source/womb/female genital' and also 'birth, rebirth, reincarnation'. It is a symbol of feminine power of sex, and of creation. Following the latter set of meanings, *yon*i became the goddess' (re)birth or reincarnation. Going by the mythological story, narrated by Shiva to the *Devi*, as contained in the *Yogini Tantra*, *yon*i(-circle) symbolized the Goddess and Her own procreative energy, source of origin of everything. According to the *Yogini Tantra*, it is the manifestation of *Devi*. It is said to be the abode of Goddess and all deities, symbol of all sacred power, and has been equated with sacred *tirth*yas.
- **Oozing of Yoni:** To a simple understanding, oozing represents sexually aroused (and hence moist) active female organ. Going by the narration contained in the *Kalika Purana*, the *yon*i-circle (at Kamakhya) is supplied 'nectar' daily, it is easy to infer symbolically that the fluidoozing out of the *yon*i is nothing but the 'nectar' and that is why the *yon*i remains wet ever. This theme is detailed out in the *Kamakhya Tantra*, of course a late work from eastern India where the 'sacred fluid' itself represents the force of the Goddess that a guru initiates [16]. Since Kamakhya represents the genitals of the goddess, referred to as the *yon*i-pitha or *yon*i-mandala, it is partly covered with cloth and garlands of flowers [15]. It is evidently remarked that "The goddess Kamakhya, represented simply by her *yon*i (vagina), expresses the creative aspect of the power and energy that is an integral element of *shakti* [15]. Additionally, it could also be explained as symbol of menstruating,

as it is popularly understood to be, representing the (female's) fertility. We can compare here this aspect of the goddess with the Harappan seal bearing a female figurine which is undisputed symbol of fertility. Since female fertility is regarded equally sacred by the cultivators concerned with the Earth's fertility (more precisely speaking the farms' fertility) and the pastoral communities, etc. wet-yoni symbol fits well in the local cultural context [16]. According to the Kailika purana along with the worship of Kamakhya worship sixty-four Yoginis are to be worshipped. We now proceed to the discussion of fairs and festivals held along with the worship of the deity.

- **Nitya Puja:** is regular and routine worship of the goddess. It begins with the bathing of the *pithasthana*. The first proper *puja* starts early in the morning (around 0600 hrs). It is conducted by a *dikshadhari* priest and the *puja* lasts almost for an hour during which the goddess is offered *naivedya* and a he-goat. Then, the temple is opened to devotees. Around 1300 hrs, the temple is closed and the goddess is offered *bhoga* ('cooked offerings'). The temple remains closed till 1500 hrs and during this period, the devotees believe, the goddess goes on afternoon siesta. The temple is again opened to devotees till the (evening) *arati* the concluding ritual of daily worship after which she is offered her evening dinner. Kameshvara and Kameshvari too are worshipped by the priest of Kamakhya temple following the rituals discussed above in daily worship on five days a month (2 *chaturdashis* +2 *ashtamis* +1 *samkranti*); and on four other occasions (*Uttarayana*, *Mahavisuva*, *Dakshinayana*, and *Jalavisuva*) also.
- 1. **Naimittika Pujas** ('special worships') are performed on special festival days, viz. Durga Puja, Pohan Bia, Durgadeul, Vasanti Puja, Madandeul, and Ambuvaci, in a calendar year in the Kamakhya temple. These festivals are discussed at the end of this section.
- 2. **Kamya Puja** ('purposive worship') is not held on any specific and fixed day. Actually, every *puja* performed by visiting devotees belongs to this category.
- **Annual Festivals:** A number of immensely important annual festivals are associated with this holy pilgrimage, like-
 1. **Ambubachi and the mela:** Ambubachi is the largest annual festival celebrated in Kamakhya temple. This festival lasts for four days and celebrated in the month of *Aahar* (generally from 22nd or 23rd June). It is believed that during this period the mother earth has her menstruation and as in this shrine the genital organ of the Goddess is worshipped, it is regarded very important festival. The temple is closed for three days and the door is opened on the fourth day. After cleaning the shrine,

priests perform worshipping and then the pilgrims are allowed to enter the temple for worshipping. In Ambubachi, the temple premise remains crowded and lakhs of people visit the goddess. Pilgrims from different parts of the country and abroad comes to participate in this festival.

2. **Pusyabhisek or Puhaniya:** It is another important festival celebrated in Kamakhya temple. This festival is performed as the wedding ceremony of the Goddess Kameswari and God Kameswar. Here all the rituals of Hindu marriages are performed. This is a three-day long festival and starts in the second or third day of last moon in the month of *Puh* (December- January). Pilgrims from different places come to attend this festival.
3. **Kali Puja:** Kali Puja is observed in Kamakhya temple and Kali temple. This festival is celebrated fifteen days after the celebration of Lakshmi Puja and generally falls in the month of October or November. On this day *Dewali* or *Dipawita* is also observed in Kamakhya. There is another Kali Puja known as Ratanti Kali Puja observed in Kamakhya temple on the fourteenth day of last moon of the month of *Magh* (January- February). This Puja is celebrated during the night and *balidan* (holy sacrifice) and *bhog* is offered to the deity.
4. **Kumari Puja:** one of the famous religious celebrations of Kamakhya temple is Kumari Puja. It is believed that by performing Kumari Puja in Kamakhya, one can get the fruits or blessing like worshipping all the deities. Kumari Puja is performed in the Panchratna of Kamakhya temple and in the temples of Dasamahabidya as well. Sometimes it is performed in the houses of the priests also. In Kumari Puja, girls who have not yet attained their puberty are worshipped. Kumari Puja is performed during the Durga Puja by the temple authority. Pilgrims can perform this Puja on special occasions or on normal days with the help of priests.
5. **Rajrajeswari Puja:** Rajrajeswari Puja is celebrated in Kamakhya temple for a fortnight starting from the last moon of *Chot* month (March – April) to the next full moon. This Puja is performed from the morning to the night and *balidan*, *bhog*, etc. are offered to the deity. On the last day of this festival that is the full moon, the number of pilgrims increases.

Related to the belief and faith on the temple, a few case studies can be mentioned-

Case study 1: Mr. Manoj Roy, aged 52 years was a serviceman of Siliguri West Bengal. During the last two years during pandemic period they were totally confined and had no scope for any tourism in outside. This time, when the situation got a bit normal, to get mentally out of stress, he came to visit Kamakhya with his spouse, two children and mother, for tourism and offering puja. This was his second visit to the temple. Earlier he came 5 years ago.

Case study 2: Ashok Agarwala aged 47 years was a businessman from Patna. During COVID period and lockdown, he had faced huge loss in business and lost his close relatives also. He was under utter mental pressure, and he was suggested by his “Guruji” (the spiritual guide), to come to Kamakhya for a direct prayer to the Divine Goddess. For that purpose, he had visited during the time of study.

Case study 3: Mayurtrishna Kalita aged 31 years got married around 6 years ago. However due to unknown reason she was facing repeated miscarriage. Even after long medical consultation the problem persisted. Her mother was advised to take her to Divine Pilgrimage and they came in January 2020, to pray for a normal childbirth as blessings. In December 2021, she had given birth to a baby girl, who is normal in condition. According to her, the girl is a direct blessing of Divine Goddess and as her prayer is fulfilled so she had come with her daughter to seek blessings from the Divine Goddess.

Case study 4: Janaki Chauhan aged 53 years had given marriage of her son a couple of years ago. Initially everything was smooth, however since last 10 to 11 months, several problems had grown up in between her son and daughter in law. Even they were thinking for divorce and remarriage. The situation has disturbed the kinship relations of both the families to a great extent. Janaki had come to the sacred place, to solve the problem at the earliest.

Conclusion

Kamakhya *Devi* temple is one among the most popular Hindu temples of India. It has a very special status as the seat of goddess worship. Kamakhya is considered significant also as the centre of culture and the capital of *puranic* period Pragjyotishpur or Kamarupa *Desh*. The identity of Kamarupa owes much to Kamakhya to the extent of becoming incomplete in the absence of the latter. Despite a very long and rich active tradition of visitation, worship and celebration of festivals here; the basic nature and character of this sacred complex have hardly changed over centuries. Though the mythological sources containing the details of Her origin present amorous image of Kamakhya *Devi*, but simultaneously She also has the non-amorous and the benevolent image. Her primary association with *yoni* symbolically makes *her* cult a very powerful one in which motherhood and fertility – the creative force of reproduction is revered and celebrated as well. Ambubachi festival perhaps is the best example of it. The *yoni* association attests the ancient roots of this cult as found in other cultures across the world. The variety of sacred shrines of different divinities around *her* shrine again proves the intensity of *genius loci* and the nature’s manifestive power generated by the unique location of Nilachala by the mighty Brahmaputra. Highly

developed system of rituals, celebration of festivals during a calendar year and functionaries are evidence to the living tradition maintained at this sacred shrine.

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