

The Development of the Kamakhya Temple as a Historical Landmark in the Present State of Assam, India

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Abstract : The Kamakhya Temple in Assam plays a very important role in the development of Assam as not only a historical place but also as an archaeologically important site. Temple building activity on the site began in 5th century AD when a cave temple dedicated to Lord Balabhadraswami was constructed here by King Maharajadhiraja Sri Surendra Varman. In the history of Assam, the name of this king is not found and neither the name of this form of Vishnu is known in this region. But this inscription sanctified the place as it recorded the first ever temple building activity in this region. The fifteen hundred years habitation history of the Kamakhya temple sites shows a gradual progression of the site from a religious site to an archaeological site and finally as a historical landmark. Here, in this paper, our main objective is to understand the evolution of Kamakhya temple site as a historical landscape and as an important landmark in the history of Assam. The central theme of the paper is the gradual development of the religious site to a historical landmark. From epigraphical records, it is known that the site received patronage from all ruling dynasties of Assam and its adjoining regions. Royal households of Kashmir, Nepal, Bengal, Orissa, Bihar, etc. have left their footprints on the site. According to records they donated wealth, constructed or renovated temples and participated in the overall maintenance of the deity. This made Kamakhya temple a ground of interaction of faiths, communities, and royalties of the region. Since the 5th century AD, there was a continuous struggle between different beliefs, faiths, and power on the site to become the dominant authority of the site. In the process, powerful beliefs system subsumed minor ones into a larger doctrine of beliefs. This can be seen in the case of the evolution of the Kamakhya temple site as one of the important Shakta temples in India. Today, it is cultural identity marker of the state of Assam within which it is located. Its diverse faiths and beliefs have been appropriated by powerful legends to the dominant faith of the land. The temple has evolved from a cave temple to a complex of seventeen temples. The faith has evolved from the worship of water, an element of nature to the worship of the ten different forms of the goddess with their five male consorts or Bhairavas. Today, it represents and symbolizes the relationship of power and control out of which it has emerged. During different periods of occupation certain architectural and iconographical characters developed which indicated diffusion and cultural adaptation. Using this as sources and the epigraphical records this paper will analyze the interactive and dynamic processes which operated in the building of this cultural marker, the archaeological site of Kamakhya.

Keywords : cultural adaptation and diffusion, cultural and historical landscape, Kamakhya, Saktism, temple art and architecture, historiography

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