KINGS AND KAMAKHYA: SAKTAPITHA, STATE SYSTEMS, KINGS AND POWER IN ANCIENT KAMARUPA

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Abstract: In this paper, an attempt shall be made to contextually study and delineate the ways and means by which rulers attempted to utilise temples for their political ends, and the functions and actions through which the temple of Goddess Kāmākhyā cemented political power of ambitious Kāmarūpa Kings. This paper attempts to put temples in analytical tradition beyond their architectural significance, and highlights the confabulation of matrices of power and divine devotion, and how a complex amalgamation of the two related but different terms crafted variegated relations between rulers, their states, their deities and their subjects, where the chief mediator was the temple, a centre of piety and power.

Keywords: Śākta-pīṭha, Kāmākhyā, Power, State-systems, Kāmarūpa

Introduction

Temples in the *ancien régimes* of Ancient and Early Medieval India have played a critical, crucial, central and climacteric role in the politics of the Kings and the times. The myriad interconnections and cross-connections of temples with innumerable facets of society and economy is a factual empirical observation still acknowledged. Temples were not just simple edifices of propitiation and prayer, but icons of the overlord, exhibited and brought into conception through the resources and retinues of the immediate representative of the divine among mortals: the King (Hardy: 2010: 44). Therein lies the complementary relationship between religious establishments and imperial politics (Gautam and Thakur: 2019: 02).

This complementary and symbiotic association religious temples and royal towers also extended to the courts and corridors of power, carrying considerable might and formidable

weight, in not just legitimating the reign of any monarch, but also cementing his control over the different levers of control over his nobles, couriers, administrators, and above all, his subjects. This segmented affiliation possessed unfathomable complexity, and manifested itself either in errant fealty, or utter disloyalty. To keep some semblance of normalcy within the variegated imperial machinery, the king or ruling authority needed not just legal sanctity or noble promises, but operational command over ritual polity (Heitzman: 1981: 24), a political structure commanding immensity of ritualised notions and intensity due to the divine ordination of the ruler.

The depth and ingenuity of temple events and activities in consolidating the prevalent conditions and circumstances as the indomitable and ultimate status quo, by strategically manoeuvring public perception, or by categorically bringing subjected social-groups and communities under imperial aegis has warranted scant attention of scholars (Kanaka Durga and Reddy: 1992: 145-166). The economic prowess and revenue-extraction through land leasing and rent activities has also been noted (Thakur: 1981: 146). However, what awaits analysis is the systemic placement of temples in public-policy of empires in early India.

This paper shall argue that temples acquired a prominent and pronounced role and responsibility, of making the reins and reach of imperial authority more comprehensive and immersive, in the socio-cultural and ritual-political fabric of the period. While the state authority cautiously curated policies and plans, it was the temple that aided and advanced the imperial ambitions to commanding heights, by effectively affecting psychological frames and normative conventions - important constituents of policy-making enterprise. Here, such a process and contextual positioning of the temple shall be illustrated through the history of the famous Kāmākhyā temple, housing the mysteriously revered Goddess (Sarma: 2021). Through citing epigraphical-textual references, anthropological surveys, historical discourses and analytical inferences, this paper will attempt to highlight the integration of Imperial Politics, public policy, cultic assertions and structure of Empires in Kāmarūpa.

State-Systems: *A Résumé*

A state is commonly defined as a centralised organisation or political association which imposes or enforces rules over a population in a specific territory, exercises right of monopoly of legitimate coercion, governs socio-economic activities, and is distinguishable from other social-groups by its purpose, establishment of order of laws, methods of law enforcement, and finally by its sovereignty (Cudworth: 2007). On the other hand, a system is an organised set of ideas, doctrines or principles, intended to explain the arrangement or working of a systematic whole, consisting of parts which function in harmony together to achieve a common purpose. Together, we get an outlook regarding the functionality and nature of a state-system. Every state-system is technically and practically capacitated by two different elements – fiscal and legal

First, every state extracts revenue either by social-contract or coercion, to defray expenses incurred in common interest, public expediency, military complex, administrative machinery or imperial extravagance. It is measured by the efficiency of collection, effectiveness of utilisation, retention of circular cross-links and appropriation potential (Kaldor: 1963). This empowers the economic policy-domain of the State, but also creates a definitive tryst between the state and the governed, based on a general expectations of resource-flow pattern, and subsequent provisioning of public-goods-security, justice, law and order etc., leading gradually to the development of a specific and contextual mode of interaction, for which a well-defined Legitimacy mode is essential.

Secondly, the state underwrites the degree of effective and jurisdictional legitimacy enjoined by the state-apparatus, sphere of its influence, effectiveness of action, and decisional potential (Bayern: 2021). It refers to the method and depth

of jurisdiction commanded by state-officials, and extends to the political and cultural prerogatives of the state as well, reflected in the devices of action carefully selected and selectively purported in different circumstances. It is usually an aggregation of legal practices of different social-groups living in close proximity to and with each other.

Every state has some existential and essential characteristics, which give form and shape to the complete arrangement of the political machinery. From Aristotle to Lord Acton, innumerable luminaries have highlighted such features, which are discussed below.

Population

In sociology and population geography, population is commonly defined as a group of individuals living together on the basis of a common criteria pertaining to location, ethnicity, religion, race and nationality, constituting a nearly homogenous residential set in constant interaction, exchanging goods and ideas in a specific time-space context (Hartl: 2007).

The quantitative limits of population for any State can be fixed anywhere between spatial sufficiency and carrying capacity, based on land-area, resource-availability. It provides a recruitment-base for a polity, and also utilisation of state-goods. Their conventions and norms exert considerable influence on the mode of legitimisation of the elected, while its subsequent reinforcement is dependent upon popular public-reception. A population also includes interest groups, defined as a small, elite-centred, strongly interconnected group of people possessing the ability to affect policy-design and outcome (Faderman: 2019). Such groups may compete with each other for attention and resources, and thus form small fixtures of power-concentration, in case of absence of federal centralisation or elicit behaviour in favour of the small elite, to gain favour (Salisbury:1969). Intermittent external disturbances in society and government may cause change in their status quo (Truman: 2014). They

exist in the realm of labour, business, agriculture, military etc. Such a group also existed in the vicinity of Kāmākhyā temple, belonging to an indigenous tribal populace brought into the world of Brāhmaṇic praxis and practices. The absence of total Brāhmaṇisation of Kāmākhyā, unlike that of local deity-figures in Odisha (Kulke: 1995), suggests the predominance of such groups in the socio-cultural realm, and their necessity to the states ruling with Brāhmaṇic ritual anointment.

Territory

It is defined as an area of land, space or air connected to a political entity, which possesses jurisdictional rights over it. Policy-domains of the state differ in relation to the territory considered, which then depends upon the population-type and functional-status of the regional economy. In considering affixture of legitimisation, territorial claims play a pivotal role, as mythological narrations and folk traditions are often used to gain political clout and popular favour and fervour. Here too, a general pattern visible throughout India during the Early Medieval Period was evident. As Elgood (2002: 36) purports, rulers connected their lineage-affinity and dynastic effulgence to a local Mother Goddess figure, who ensured the continuous prosperity and continuity of their hold and control over the region.

Governance

It is the process of making decisions and enforcing them within an organisation and society. It involves decision-making, rule-setting and enforcement mechanisms to guide the functioning of the group concerned. Effective governance is a *sine qua non* for maintaining law and order, achieving goals and retaining stability and sanctity in societal structure, which deeply effects public-perception. A firm, determined, and stable governance gives a strong leeway to experiment with existent socio-economic structures. A state maintains governance either solely or through associate power or management Groups, which may include Guilds and firms (Trautmann: 2016),

and in case of India, never excludes temples, for want of better partners. Due to their network-connection, population-proximity, established procedures, conventionalised socio-cultural mores and heavy public involvement temples give rulers venues of interaction with the public, a link of critical significance when the ruling family hails from a different region, as for instance, the Tai-Ahoms from Maulung (Upper Myanmar and Yunnan in Southern China).

Sovereignty

Spruyt (1994: 86) defined sovereignty as a normative position of being a supreme authority in a hierarchical set-up, or a legitimate authority to exercise power and control over a geo-political entity. Sovereignty possesses some essential features-absoluteness or singular command in geo-polity; exclusivity or jurisdictional acceptance and obeisance; externality or representative power in inter-state relations and internality or public-perception of legitimacy. When coupled with phenomenal power and unmatched might in relevant contexts, it renders the state supreme in the realm. However, the uncontested attribution and relatively stable access to utilise and exploit such manoeuvring through legitimacy-nodes require a complex and calculated factorial deliberation, which is made possible by the complex emergent social realities in the quotidian interactions of public and power figures. It can be rightly averred that temples are the extended corridors of power.

Velichko (2016: 5) used the aforementioned components of a regular state-system to highlight some policy-domains in which every state must act decisively. In context of *ancien regimes*, these domains become the arenas of a king, where definitive and authoritative control is sought in order to infuse subordination and structure into the system, to prevent erosion or loss of power. They are as follows-

Political - This domain is connected with the method of exercising and retaining superiority of prowess and legitimacy of its utilization on the public under administration at various levels of governance. It includes agenda-setting, aspirational-accounting, rhetorical analysis, societal command, adjudication etc. It functions to keep the myriad levels and levers of power in their proper shape and form. Temples were the prime locations to put theory into practice. It is not strange to observe that most pompous narratives of battles and war-sagas are often found inscribed in numerous copper-plate/stone inscriptions placed on temple-walls throughout the country (Kanisetti:2021). The Kāmākhyā temple also carries inscriptions from the time of the Koch dynasty to that of the Tai-Ahoms (Sarma: 2021).

Security- This domain is concerned with policy-setting, targeting possible expeditious campaigns, neutralising hostile neighbours, defending sovereign lands, integrating relevant functional systems to play in accord with general and favourable expectations. It includes the use of intelligentsia, information-gathering, troop-deployment, military-training, border-security, and monitoring of people networks. Thakur (1981: 42) illustrates some epigraphic instances from Kumaon-Garhwal region. Temples immensely aided in Internal Security, by creating platforms of interaction.

Socio-Religious-This domain concerns itself with formulation of state-symbolism and ritual-political admixture of royal administration with the social norms and religious beliefs finding maximum favour and fervour among the public, and which also ensure the maintenance of state-supremacy. Temples mobilised this stream of imperial command into an effective force of social engineering, and provided outlays to penetrate the minds of worshippers and devotees. Counter-intuitive social movements or religious beliefs that found a natural animosity in this domain, as they influenced directly the stability of the state, were either moulded with the stately choice of divine, or straightaway suppressed. Even during the heydays of the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement in Assam, Kāmākhyā retained its privileged position, due to its role in the formative layers of the Kāmarūpa state itself (Sharma:1988).

Economical- This domain is connected to the efficient and effective management of revenue-streams, tax-collection, business-administration, guild-monitoring, and other relevant economic pursuits in the realm. A pre-modern state did not possess the apparatus to regulate minutely and vigilantly monitor every transaction, and its economic veracity thereof. Temples not only received donation from wealthy patrons, but were central lifelines of many city-markets, where traders and craftsmen assembled to sell wares and seek employment opportunities (Chavda: 2016). An absence of warranted or imperially sanctioned coinage currency in pre-16th century CE Assam tacitly furthers such a role for the Kāmākhyā temple.

The Kāmarūpa Kingdom: A Contested Territory

The ancient kingdom of Kāmarūpa, with its power and administrative centre located in the city of Prāgyajyotiṣpura, was situated in the southern bank of Brahmaputra River, in the western division of the region (Lahiri: 1991: 10).The earliest history of Kāmarūpa begins with the reign of King Naraka, a controvertial and contested figure in the tales of both *Mahābhārata* and *Kālikāpurāṇa* (Sircar: 1973). The latter narrates how Naraka was born from the ritually impure union between Varāha Avatāra of Viṣṇu and Mother Earth, which made the neonate an *Asura.* He was reared by King Janaka of Mithilā, and met Goddess Kāmākhyā in the city of *Prāgyajyotiṣpura*. However, when he came to the throne, he removed and banished all tribal Kirātas from the mainland settlements, but continued to worship the Goddess (Kakati:1949). Later, a complex tale of associations and betrayals lead to the downfall of Naraka, and his eventual end by Kṛṣṇa. Scholars doubt the exactitude of this narration, whilst comparing it to the earliest strands of such a story in *Mahābhārata*, where Naraka and his son Bhagadatta are explicitly mentioned as Lords of the *Kirātas* and *Chīnas,* but praised as great warriors. While Naraka is decried as a tyrannical authority of past, Bhagadatta is

described as a friend of Indra, which points to gradual Āryanisation at an incipient stage (Das: 2005). Also, symbolic associations of Naraka with *Kapāla* (skull), blood sacrifices, his audacity in challenging the *Devas*, his Tantric conflation with Bāṇāsura, his suppression of Mithilā state, and his attempts to induce pioneer Sanskritization into the Valley pointedly paint him as hailing from an indigenous, tribal background, who managed to unite and suppress multitude of tribes, and mobilised them into a military and political force to reckon with (Rosati: 2017).

Next, we enter the historical epoch, when we get epigraphic references about Puṣyavarmana, progenitor of the line of Bhauma-Varmana Dynasty, around circa fourth century CE, in rough contemporaneity with Samudragupta (325-375 CE), as the latter mentions the surrendering of sovereignty by the ruler Kāmarūpa in the Allahabad Inscription, while Puṣyavarmana named his son and daughter-in-law in imitation of the reigning Imperial Gupta couple, thus establishing their simultaneous regimes (Sircar: 1990). To this illustrious line belonged Bhāskara-Varmana, who issued the richly informed Nidhanpur copper-plate inscription, which acts as our primary source of information, along with the Dubi copper-plates. He was the younger contemporary of Harṣa of the Puṣyabhuti Dynasty of Kannauj. The description of Kāmarūpa and Bhāskara-Varmana by Hsieun-Tsang naturally invites both attention and interest. The Chinese 'Master' recounts that the people of this region are either cultivators or soldiers, and speak a dialect somewhat different from mainland India, while the King is from the Brāhmaṇa class. In light of his mysterious and unspecified origin, and description of Puṣya-Varmana as from the same lineage as that of Naraka, i.e. Bhauma-Varāha dynasty, thereby bestowing the King with both legitimacy and Viṣṇu-Śakti (Sharma1978: 16). While it surely seems as a discrepancy of the Chinese traveller, it somewhat shows the Vedic-Brāhmaṇical inclinations of the ruler. The absence of mention of Kāmākhyā denotes either it's non-integration into mainstream Brāhmaṇical

ritual, or the absence of royal patronage, since the cult of Mother Goddess in this region finds mention in *Mahābhārata*, also supported by the semi-historical delineation in *Kālikāpurāṇa*. After Bhāskara-Varmana, we witness the arrival of a new dynasty on the horizon- the *Mlecchas*.

Śālasthamba, a tribal warlord and son of an allegedly and mythically mysterious Yoginī named Revatī, probably first constructed the temple of Kāmākhyā into a mainstream and cross-culturally integrated place of propitiation, as evinced from the Parbatiya copper-plates Inscription of Vanamālavarma-deva, belonging to second half of c.eight century CE (Sharma 1978: 62). A ninth century CE grant of Ratnapāla refers to Śālasthambha as *Mlecchādhināth* (paramount Lord of the Mlecchas), which signally indicates his tribal origins, as scholars generally take the *Mleccha* in this context as indicating non-Vedic, Bodo-Kachari genesis (Sircar: 1990). Inscriptional testimony and the *Hevjara Tantra* recounts how the insincerity and infidelity of Revatī with Śiva led to her being cursed to live among the *Mlecchas*. While this mythical tale gave the Mlecchas a Śaivite connection par excellence, or also reiterated the Cursed King narrative profusely and intimately connected with Kingship and Kāmākhyā (Urban:2008). Plainly, it explicates the accidental tribal affiliation of a tribal king, who aspired to achieve ascendance in the emergent Sanskrit ritual-cultural Metropolis of Early Medieval Period in India.

Kāmākhyā received unbroken patronage and kingly propitiation from the Pālas of Kāmarūpa, and the Tai-Ahoms as well (Sarma: 2021). On account of their incessant and intricate contests with regional powers, such as the Jaintias, Chutiyas, Kacharis, Koch and Garos, the power centre of the Ahoms lay mainly in Eastern Assam, with the western portion under the segmented command of indigenous power-groups, whose fealty was not beyond suspicion (Hazarika:2017). Thence, Medieval Assam witnessed the voluminous quantum of royal patronage to Kāmākhyā originating in the courts of the Kamata

Kingdom, with the re-discovery of the desecrated temple being made by Viśva Singh (1515-1540 CE), who inaugurated the Koch dynasty, with whom another cursed king narrative finds reiteration, where the dream of a Brāhmaṇa priest distanced the Goddess from the King. However, it did not lead to the proscription of the reverence of theGoddess by Naranārāyaṇa (1554-1587 CE), who propitiated the Goddess with Vedic rituals and praxis, while the indigenous elements of his army did with the Tantric mode of blood sacrifices and wine consumption (Urban: 2008: 512). The cycle continued when the Western Sector of Southern Brahmaputra Valley came under the Ahoms, during the reign of Sukhrungpha, alias Rudra Singh (1665-1714 CE), who invited Kṛṣṇarāma Bhaṭṭāchāryā, a Vaiṣnavite priest from Nabadwip, Bengal for getting initiated into the mystical sect of Śāktism. By time of the arrival of the priest, the King had already departed the realm of mortals,, forcing his Queen to become an initiate (Shin: 2009).

An interesting empirical anecdote derived from this lengthy exposition is the continuity of patronage, coupled with the equally continuous assertion of the demonic *Asura* lineage of the king, a feat also common with the neighbouring Chutiya and Dimasa rulers in Assam (Shin: 2008). While Shin (2009: 54) highlighted that this special mode of legitimation probably sanctified the tribal, non-orthodox background of the Kings, which simultaneously underlined their matrilineal traditions and occupation of a lower hierarchy in Brāhmaṇical socio-cultural cosmology, Urban (2008: 508) assigned to it the ambivalent position of the king, quite common in Epics and Purāṇas, due to his necessary and sustained connection with warfare-bloodshed, and pompous divine worship, which made the king a befitting worshipper and cultic partner and benefactor of the power stemming from the chthonic, earthly and primeval power present in the abode of Kāmākhyā (Rosati:2017).The ambivalence of the Goddess shall be explored in the next section.

The Ferocious Goddess: The Intertwined Sacred-Complex of Kāmākhyā

Scholars generally accept the *Kirāta*-background of her genesis and gradual progression and absorption, and ultimate formation and consolidation into a regional extension of the Śākta-sect of Purāṇic affiliation (Sarma: 2021:94-97). The shrine houses an aniconic representation of theMother Goddess, with the divine, natural altar, having the shape of a *yonī* (vulva), housed in a dimly lit, claustrophobic *garbha-gṛha* (womb), from which ferrous-heavy red fluid flows during the famous *Ambubācī Melā*. One aspect of her legends connects her to the supra-natural fluid, vivifying Nature, which comprises powers beyond a mortal's reckoning, while another is related to the death aspect, as scholars suspect that probably, in its initial stage of reverence, the sacred-complex of Kāmākhyā was the centre of practitioners of Tantric practices, activities related to which were mostly done in either secretive places or in cremation grounds (Bagchi: 1988: 21.3b), and were mostly Female-led and female-oriented. The reason for this has been highlighted by Shin (2013: 217), who in his excellent study of the erotic iconography of the *Mahāvidyās*, highlighted the fact that a cremation ground lies on the crossroads of non-category: a liminal world both within and outside a society, an area of immense traffic of spirits, unknown and invisible and immense powers that were targeted by Tantra practitioners (Avalon: 1949). The dichotomy between *Vana* (forest) and *Kṣetra* (settled land) was eliminated in the horrific and terrifying but resolving midway of the cremation grounds. The further association of Goddess Kāmākhyā with *Kāma-deva* suggests a deity-figure associated not only with secretive and magical Tantra, but also with procreativity and fertility, along with sexuality and fecundity, a narrative feat also bolstered by the cultic connection of the presiding deity with menstrual fluid, which suggests an equanimity with both life (maturation of girls) and death (decimation of potential foetus). This duality/ambivalence naturally extends to the ruling Kings, who were both givers of life (through security/protection), and brutal takers of it too (in bloodshed, penalty).

The existence of such practices in matrilineal Khāsi social-groups hardly elicits any surprise (Snellgrov: 1959: 68). Thus, even though the *śāktapīṭhas* mostly had aniconic deity-forms, they were incorporated into Śākta sub-sects (Sircar: 1948:03). In Early Medieval and Medieval Assam, kingship models perfectly seized upon the opportunity to base the sanctity of their kingship and kingdom upon the Kāmākhyā shrine, and thereby became its natural, well poised, hereditary and ritually oriented guardian-protector (Rosati: 2016), whilst attempting earnestly to balance the two separate cross-currents of Vedic *Cosmopolis* and Tribal Society (Rosati: 2017b: 249-50). This was a general feature of the era, where many royal dynasties conceptualised the local/regional deity as the *Iṣṭa-devatā*, and formalised their imperial sway and swagger around the deity (Elgood: 2000: 22) thus not only consolidating the core of their empire, but also provided them a thematically and contextually relevant deity-figure to resort to inform moments of victorious campaigns, when the structural contours of a polity were most counted upon, and where temples acted as the chief associates of the rulers of the day.

Kāmākhyā and Kings: Functions and Roles of An Imperial Temple

In this final section, we shall discuss the ways and means through which Kāmākhyā and her temple and rituals consolidated the domain of a king on a metaphysical, sub-structural and actual level of phenomena manifestation. Here, it will be befitting and of benefit to discuss the conceptual formulation advanced by Urban (2009: 508-510), tentatively but poignantly called as 'The Matrices of Power', wherein it was postulated and furthered that, the prowess of the king and the kingdom itself was rooted in a capillary network of relations, interactions, negotiations and transactions, (Urban:2009: 510), symbolised and expressed in the blood flowing from the war-slain

enemies, sacrificed victims (goats, buffaloes), menstruating women, and the menstrual blood of the Goddess. The mythical category of Śākta locations of worship make the power gendered and performative (Urban: 2009: 518), which was of much significance in explicating the metaphysical construct of imperial force and might (Shin: 2010). It allows us to have an alternate perspective regarding the degrees and nature of flow of power, which is not the conventional top-bottom approach, but an evolving, adapting, and ever transforming capillary power, one finding its eternal base in the feet of Goddess Kāmākhyā.

It will be prudent herein to unveil the multifarious and multifaceted functions served by Goddess Kāmākhyā and her divine abode in an imperial setting, since the plane of propitiation of the Mother Goddess was open to both public reverence and political manipulation, with the latter influencing the former through interstices of power in the garb of religious fervour. R S. Sharma (1965: 18) noted the influence of feudal power-dynamics on temple architecture, while Sharma and Deshpande (2017: 309-320) highlighted some architectural stratagems, which increased the degree of asymmetrical power exertion in Hindu temples. However, what the two studies lack, is a study of actions and functions of temples, where they enhanced the spatial domain of the divine, but also exponentially increased the might of kings who acted as their patrons. The following categorical exposition seeks to fill this void.

Power Concentration- In terms of network studies, power concentration refers to the deliberated condensation of all operational routes and functional modes of power exchange and interaction within a well-defined and delimited orbit, which then assumes a superior positional status, and directly or indirectly handles or adjusts various levers of a political system (Mahajan: 2010: 230).When an imperial state is regionally limited, the degree of power concentration correlates positively with burgeoning population, since a surplus position provides greater control through policing/security, helps in simultaneous

emergence in differentiated sectors of life, and provide opportunities through revenue-supply and labour-provisions (Gerring *et al*: 2016: 6). But, as any imperial command widens on accord of inclusion of new areas and multi-ethnic populace, it demands complexity in structural administrative arrangements, which results in region-based specialisation of political command*,* mostly comprising either local elite-recruits (ex-commanders, relatives, converted etc.), or clansmen (brothers, nephews etc.) who are either sentimentally trusted, or solemnly hated.
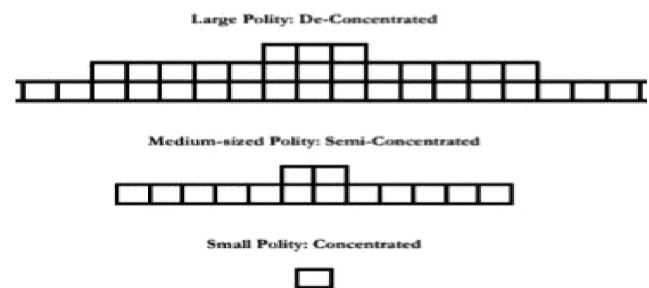
To counteract this possible erosion of power, it is necessary that either ritual hegemony is obtained, or deep socio-cultural networks are curbed, achieved through regular attendance in royal courts, or by either creating administrational impermanence (transfers, shifts, command-turns), or tweaking ritual activities to suit self-interests. Festive occasions fulfilled both conditions, when imperial officers were required or expected to showcase and exhume their accumulated wealth-based prowess through *Potlatch* (Lahiri 1991: 75), by donating massive land-tracts, by taking ritual oath of loyalty, or self-sacrifice (Kakati: 1949). As a resource-heavy demand centre, with popular base, Kāmākhyā fulfilled all ambitions of aspiring kings adequately.

Power Stability- Here, we refer only to political power and its stability in a political set-up. Ake (1975: 272) defines political as any event or act which effectually changes or affects distribution of power to make decision in a polity or society. In an organised social set-up, regular interaction produces a conventionalised custom or norms, where every individual fits with his/

her roles (congeries of standardised and delimited behavioural demeanour legitimately expected in a given situation)*;* the normal, regular flow of such roles in a system permeated by regulative channels or obstacles is called a Political Structure (Ake: 1975: 274). Any deviance from this ideal meta-political set-up results in political instability. However, this instability may be of two varieties: non-adaptive (can occur singularly, not systematised) and adaptive (becomes part of system, later expands surreptitiously). Temples, as behavioural and normative regulators, afforded yet another opportunity to kings, as any malfeasance or deviation in abiding by its norms (that closely serve royal interests), gives swiftly an indication of want of subservience to vigilant monarchs, especially during festive, ceremonial occasions. The sacrifice of criminal humans at Kāmākhyā (Gait: 1928: 55-58) frightened not only his co-conspirators, but also warned future aspirants in this regard.

Strength Expansion- MacMillan (1978: 206) devised four pathways of exhibition of power - the muscle (penalty, threat, extortion, command), the pitch (pronouncements, inducement judicial hauling), the code (norms, values, ethics, temple propriety), the reward (incentives, gifts, redistribution). Combined, every ruler attempts to use a complex and enmeshed amalgamation of these four cardinal pathways to self-interestedly enhance and expand his power over others in two ways- first*,* by increasing his power-utilizing potential, and secondly*,* by reducing that of his rivals. The Kāmākhyā temple played a critical role in cementing the utility of such provisions, especially during re-distribution ceremonies, when war-booties were dispatched to differing communities (Chaudhary: 1966: 20). Additionally, temple rituals also took into confidence and account social-groups as per requisite of the times, in a way which made them connected and subservient to the Goddess, and in practicality, to the King as well.

Public Legitimisation- Max Weber (1949) once averred- *"power commands the badge and label of authority once it is legitimate, and considered so by those upon whom it is acted, a phenomenon which further bolsters the capacity to act violent and self-serving legitimately."* We have highlighted the different forms and tenets of legitimisation. Keeping in mind the persistent continuity of royal patronage to Kāmākhyā by all succeeding dynasties, its strong linkage with public legitimisation becomes evident itself, especially for the concepts of ritual alignment (*internal*), trust and public rapport/support (*vertical*), ritualised involvement of potent social-groups (*horizontal*), and inclusion of diverse opposed ethnicities by appealing to their mores and methods (*external*), the last of which was sought by the Ahoms against their protracted struggle with the Chutiyas (Barua: 1923: 108).

Communal Nudging-Temples, in practicality, were situated at the mid-point of multiple tangential currents of communal affinities and allegiances, where the interaction and service of numerous social-groups were required time and again for various segregated and specialised responsibilities (Kramisch: 1946: 172). The cultural inclusion of tribal communities like Boyas into the ritual realm of Drākṣārāma Temple (Andhra Pradesh) occurred through the mutually inclusive and beneficial communion of caste and tribal society, where the temple cushioned the *acculturation process,* and paved way for the inclusion and utilisation of Boyas for their military valour and forestry expertise.
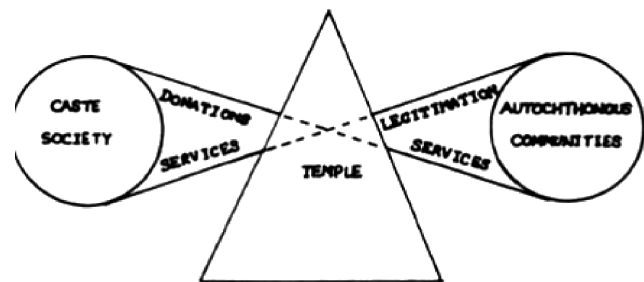
In case of Kāmākhyā too, we get to hear about numerous autochthonous clans such as Kacharis, Mishing, Dimasis and Khāsis chiefly getting merged into mainstream Brāhmaṇical

ritual-cultural order (Chaudhary: 1966: 102-110), and with their indigenously revered deities being conflated with established Purāṇic Gods and Goddesses. In this tributary-overlordship model, kings of sedentary states, where war became a readily employed medium to gain more cultivable lands and refurnish exhausted exchequers, created a *constellation of alliances* between the Great (*Sanskritic*), and little (*Tribal*) traditions (Hasnain 2015 [1998]), which absorbed tribal bands into Imperial societies. As Kanak Durga and Sudhakar Reddy (1996: 145-166) write-

The Temple gave autochthonous communities legitimacy of service and participation in Brāhmaṇic rituals, while it also opened viable opportunities for Caste Society to render donations and yield services of the now employed tribal brethren, thereby hinging two different worlds into a complex and delicate social equilibrium."

Inevitably, such historical forces brought both the interest groups of power and the general autochthonous Khāsi population in close contact and control of the King.

Transactional Network- Managing and maintaining the quotidian requirements of a temple was a task cautiously monitored by vigilant kings, for any manoeuvre by aspirational feudal lords to win hearts of the public necessarily commenced with temple donations (e.g. Rajgor

grant of Mathanadeva of c. 946-48 CE). Temples stood at the centre of innumerable harmoniously functioning economic networks, ranging from supply of camphor to capital interests and loans, from oil-supply to regular transactional transfers. The formidable ubiquitous nature of temples made them secure lockers and storage-units of public/royal assets. Besides, the role of temples in redistribution of royal treasury and accumulated wealth, along with its multi-modal integration, has been noted in case of Brihadeshvara Temple, Thanjavur (see diagram below).

The *Buranjis* (chronicles) of Assam note how Ahom Kings gave a huge amount of donations to Kāmākhyā, in order to safeguard their imperial position and spiritual status (Sharma:1981). Furthermore, most Kings of Kāmarūpa donated the wealth acquired as war-booty to the temple, further infusing liquidity-constrained networks, since token currency in Brahmaputra Valley saw its heyday only after c.17th century CE (Das:2005). Besides, such economic networks, based on their differing transactional intensity, were intentionally associated with Kāmākhyā temple to serve a valuable purpose: increasing the hold of the king on economic resources, assets and property, which could be theoretically used and rendered in service of the Goddess anytime, and especially during the Spring Festival
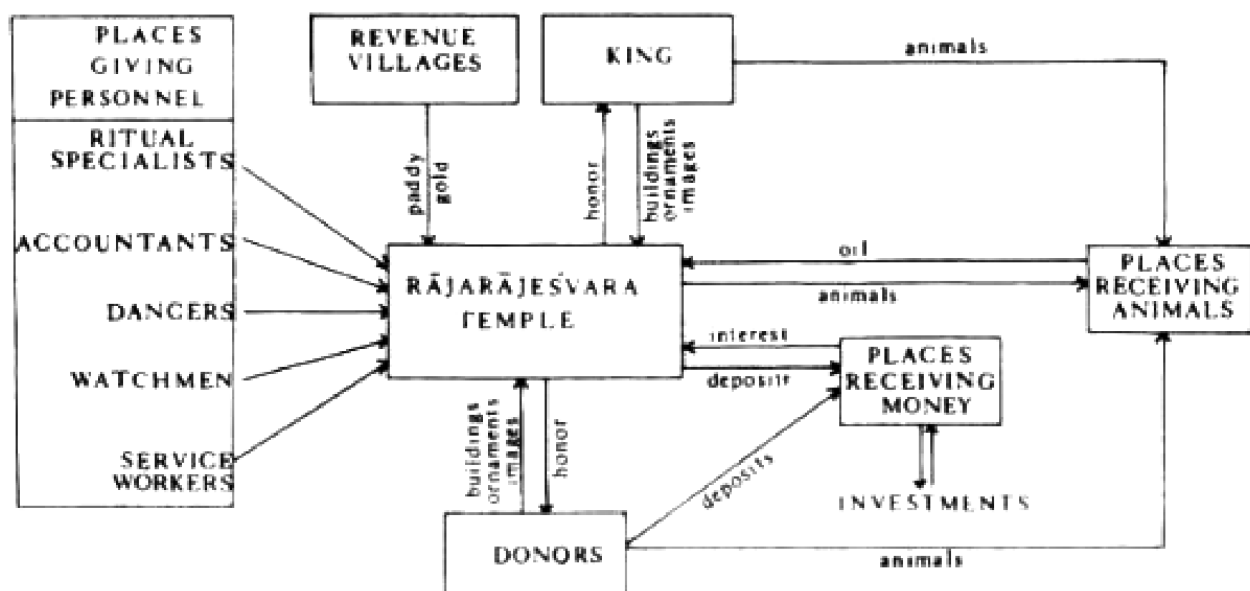
and secretive initiation. The participation of differentiated social-groups gave the king an opportunity to tweak and tackle insubordination and insincerity too, as noted in the case of *paik* (servitors) system of administration of the Ahoms (Guha: 1983), whence the temple connected landed estates with king, and ritualised political power gave the king the divine right and legal prowess to make land-grant contingent upon ritual fealty, and by that, made loyalty to the king imperative.

Conclusion

The association of Kings and Temples are well known and frequently attested. However, besides the symbolic conflation of God-Kings and assertion of superiority through gargantuan architectural constructions, temples of the ancient age performed many important and varying functions and actions which not only ritually and psychologically enhanced the position of kings from a mere mortal, but also gave him crucial conjectures to control, constrain, manipulate and manoeuvre, through political contrivances, economic incentives, communal calls, cultural processes, and imperial commands. Thus, while the temples house the divine power on earth, they also acted as construed machineries to unleash the un-manifested prowess of the kings throughout his realm, in ways tacit, implicit and surreptitious. This study was contextually delimited to Kāmākhyā, but more studies in this direction will surely unveil the variegated and variety with which Temples consolidated imperial politics and kings.

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