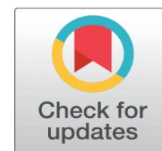


SCULPTURAL EXPRESSIONS AND CULTURAL SYMBOLISM AT MADAN KAMDEV: A HISTORICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Early Kamarupa sculpture is a complex synthesis of socio-cultural worldviews, artistic imagination, and religious symbolism. The Madan Kamdev temple complex is a unique center of artistic exuberance among Assam's many archaeological monuments. It is especially well-known for its intricate carvings, angasikhara themes, floral portrayals, and sensuous representations. The location represents a mix of external aesthetic influences and local artistic vocabulary that influenced early medieval visual culture of Assam (Sharma, 1998, p. 42). These sculptures, which vary in theme and design, show the ideological and symbolic frameworks that influenced the era's artistic activities. The empirical analysis of these sculptures shows that the Madan Kamdev complex functioned as a vibrant cultural center where various artistic traditions interacted in addition to being a place of worship. A vibrant aesthetic continuum spanning from the Pala period to later regional art traditions is suggested by the juxtaposition of architectural elements, iconographic patterns, and narrative panels (Barua, 2005, p. 119). In order to place Madan Kamdev into the larger context of Indian art history, this essay examines these sculptural forms using an empirical interpretive lens.

Keywords: Madan Kamdev, Sculptural Art, Kamarupa, Angasikhara, Iconography, Pala Dynasty, Archaeology, Assam Art History

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1. INTRODUCTION

Early Kamarupa's artistic legacy exhibits a great tradition of sculptural brilliance that developed over centuries as a result of indigenous artistic inventiveness, religious relations, and cultural integration. One of Assam's most important early medieval temple complexes may be found at Madan Kamdev, which is situated in what is now north Guwahati. The site is full of sculpture remnants that demonstrate the highly developed creative vocabulary that was common in the post-9th century CE. It is generally accepted that the architectural and sculptural remnants discovered within the complex were built during the Pala era, which succeeded the Salastambha dynasty in Kamarupa (Dubash, 1979, p. 87). Numerous minor temples devoted to Shiva surround the main temple structure, supporting the hypothesis that the complex formerly functioned as a large religious site with major ritual importance. Numerous motifs, such as floral patterns, mythological characters, sensual imagery, nature-based symbols, and angasikhara designs, may be seen in the sculptural panels that were recovered from the site. These sculptures imply cultural and creative interactions between Kamarupa and nearby areas like Odisha and Bengal, and they are in line with artistic traditions that were prevalent Bengal, and they are in line with artistic traditions that Bengal, and

they are in line with artistic traditions that were prevalent throughout eastern India in the early medieval era. The incorporation of pan-Indian symbolic idioms into Madan Kamdev's architectural language is further demonstrated by the inclusion of motifs like purna-kumbha, kalpavriksha, and astapadma (Chandra, 1996, p.134) These symbols have profound esoteric meaning and disclose the intricate philosophical and ritualistic concepts that influenced the area's creative heritage.

Therefore, Madan Kamdev's significance stems from both its artistic accomplishments and its capacity to capture the various social, cultural, and religious tales of medieval Kamarupa. Shaiva, Vaishnava, Shakta, and even Buddhist elements are mixed together in its sculpture repertory, making the place an artistic melting pot (Choudhury, 1998, p. 201) Through an empirical analysis of sculptural remnants, this study seeks to analyze this cultural and artistic synthesis, placing Madan Kamdev within larger historical and archeological frameworks.

2. Statement of the Problem

Despite Madan Kamdev's widespread recognition as one of the most important early archaeological sites of Assam, there are still few thorough empirical examinations of its sculpture. Understanding the stylistic development, cultural influences, and symbolic interpretations of its sculptural themes is lacking due to the dispersed nature of its architectural components, inadequate documentation, and a lack of systematic comparative examination. By performing an analytical examination of the sculptural remains to assess their artistic, cultural, and historical significance, this study aims to close these gaps.

3. Review of Literature

1. Saraswati, D. (1975), 'Odishan Temple Architecture', examines the sculptures and architectural elements of the temples in Odisha. He talks about the ritual significance of shapes like the pancatirtha. Comparative analysis makes it easier to connect Kamarupa's artwork to Odishan influences. The book is useful for comprehending eastern Indian style exchanges.
2. Neog, M. (1977), 'Early History of Kamarupa', A thorough socio-cultural history of ancient Kamarupa is provided by Neog. Political changes, theological advancements, and artistic sponsorship are all included in his perspective. The piece aids in placing the genesis of distinctive regional art styles in perspective. It offers context that is crucial for understanding temple and sculpture traditions.
3. Chandra, S. (1996), 'Symbolism in Indian Temple Art', focuses on symbolic motifs found across Indian temple architecture. Motifs such as the kalpavriksha, purna-kumbha, and astapadma are explored in depth. He explains their spiritual significance and visual representation. The text aids in interpreting symbolic elements found at Madan Kamdev.
4. Sharma, R. (1998), 'Art Traditions of Ancient Assam', gives a summary of Assam's art's stylistic development from the prehistoric to the medieval eras. He highlights the regional uniqueness and metaphorical richness of sculptural forms. The piece demonstrates how local customs merged with outside artistic trends. It serves as a fundamental resource for comprehending visual culture of Assam.
5. Choudhury, P.C. (1998), 'Archaeological Studies of Assam', Choudhury has thorough archaeological records of important temple locations.

Typologies, sculptural evaluations, and structural descriptions are all included in the book. He places it in the context of Assam's larger archaeological legacy and makes reference to Madan Kamdev. The study is crucial to comprehending tangible evidence from the area.

6. Sen, S. (2001), 'Cultural Interactions in Eastern India', investigates cross-cultural interactions between Assam, Bengal, Odisha, and other areas. He follows the spread of art via commerce, political connections, and religious movements. The study demonstrates the various creative influences Assam received. It clarifies Madan Kamdev's hybrid aesthetic.
7. Barua, P. (2005), 'Cultural Heritage of Early Kamarupa', investigates early Kamarupa's theological, political, and cultural underpinnings. He describes how artistic growth was influenced by dynastic control and official support. The article provides information on iconographic decisions and temple building techniques. It places Kamarupa's artwork in the context of larger cultural networks in eastern India.
8. Goswami, K. (2010), 'Art and Iconography of North-East India', The iconographic richness of northeastern Indian temple painting is highlighted by Goswami. He records regional variances in style, narrative themes, and deities. The piece illuminates unique Assamese sculpture customs. In order to understand Madan Kamdev's iconography, it provides comparative perspectives.
9. Singh, J. (2012), 'Eroticism in Indian Sculpture', looks at how Indian creative traditions use sensual and erotic themes. He analyzes erotic themes in terms of cultural, symbolic, and theological contexts. The book talks on erotic characters at Madan Kamdev and representations that resemble mithuna. It improves comprehension of fertility-related and tantric symbology.
10. Baruah, B. (2015), 'Sculptural Heritage of Assam', offers a thorough analysis of the styles and methods used in Assamese sculpture. He emphasizes subject diversity, regional handicraft, and motifs inspired by nature. The paper records stylistic indicators seen in places such as Madan Kamdev. It makes a substantial contribution to the study of regional art history.
11. Kalita, D. (2018), 'Temple Art of Assam', provides thorough descriptions of Assam's architectural and sculptural remnants. He includes careful analyses of pieces discovered at Madan Kamdev and associated locations. The book examines historical layers, motifs, and artistic trends. It is a significant new addition to the study of temples of Assam.

4. Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study are-

1. To analyse the stylistic features and motifs of the sculptural art found at Madan Kamdev.
2. To examine cultural, religious, and artistic influences embedded in the sculptural representations.
3. To interpret the symbolic and iconographic meanings of the sculptural motifs.

5. Research Questions

1. What are the defining stylistic traits of the sculptural art of Madan Kamdev?
2. How did cultural interactions influence the artistic vocabulary of the site?
3. What symbolic meanings do the recurring motifs represent?

6. Research Methodology

The research methodology used in the study is both qualitative and empirical. Direct observation of sculpture fragments, site visits, photographic documentation, and analysis of artifacts kept in nearby museums are examples of primary sources. Published publications, research papers, archeological studies, and comparisons of artwork from Assam and Northeast India are examples of secondary sources. In order to create links between art, culture, and religious symbolism, the data are interpreted using iconographic, stylistic, and historical techniques.

7. Significance of the Study

The work is important because it places Madan Kamdev in the larger historical and cultural context of early medieval India and advances our understanding of the development of early art of Assam. By offering methodical analytical insights into the sculptural forms, motifs, and influences that molded the region's creative identity, it closes current gaps in scholarly documentation.

8. Results and Discussion

Angasikhara Motifs and Architectural Symbolism

One of the most notable aspects of the sculpture at Madan Kamdev is the angasikhara or small sikhara themes. These motifs mimic miniature temple towers and may show architectural continuity within the greater temple construction. They are frequently grouped horizontally in panels (Saraswati, 1975, p. 93). Their existence implies symbolic connections to temple cosmology and sacred landscape. Five angasikharas arranged on a single panel could symbolize cosmological or ritual ideas associated with the pancatirtha tradition, which is well-known in Odishan temple building.

These motifs' prevalence at the location suggests both decorative uses and perhaps allusions to nearby shrines. Additionally, these motifs show outside stylistic influence, especially from areas with similar architectural patterns (Singh, 2012, p. 57). The idea for a common architectural vocabulary throughout eastern India during the Pala period is strengthened by the recurrence of these features.

Erotic Imagery and Symbolic Interpretations

A key element of Madan Kamdev's sculptural identity is its sensual imagery. The portrayals of couples in sensual poses are consistent with traditional Indian aesthetic traditions, where sensuality stands for both metaphysical meaning and material yearning. (Singh, 2012, p. 102). Tantric influences that were common in early medieval Assam especially in Shaiva-Shakta traditions, may be reflected in the sensual sculptures.

As a component of religious symbolism, these depictions also show how society is accepting of sexuality. The creative approach indicates the sculptors' acute awareness of the human form and shows proficiency in anatomical representation (Choudhury, 1998, p. 222) These images functioned as visual metaphors for creation, fertility, and cosmic equilibrium in addition to being decorative.

Nature-Based Motifs and Their Cultural Significance

Indian art frequently features nature, and Madan Kamdev is no different. The area's cultural connection to nature is reinforced with floral themes, creepers, trees, lotus patterns, and animal forms. For example, the astapadma and kalpavriksha motifs represent spiritual transformation, abundance, and purity (Chandra, 1996, p. 145) Additionally, these themes act as transitional elements between temple sculptures' narrative and ornamental zones.

Their pervasiveness suggests that Kamarupa's religious traditions valued nature both aesthetically and symbolically. These themes are part of an artistic vocabulary that is pan-Indian with regional variations (Goswami, 2010, p. 68) They show how indigenous, Buddhist, and Puranic traditions have come together.

Influence of Multiple Religious Traditions

Shaiva, Shakta, Vaishnava, and Buddhist components are synthesized in Madan Kamdev's sculptures. Buddhist and Brahmanical traditions share some themes, such as the lotus and purna-kumbha (Neog, 1977, p. 188) The prevalence of Shiva temples also demonstrates how dominant Shaivism was at the time.

The mingling of religious symbols was further influenced by the region's connections with Bengal and Odisha. Therefore, Kamarupa's art depicts a rich tapestry in which several belief systems coexisted peacefully and impacted artistic creations (Sen, 2001, p. 154)

Artistic Techniques and Craftsmanship

The sculptures at Madan Kamdev exhibit excellent craftsmanship, as evidenced by their precise details, rounded modeling, and deep incision. Artists were able to create complex patterns, especially in jewelry, draperies, and facial expressions, by using fine-grained stone (Baruah, 2015, p. 75). A developed artistic heritage is suggested by the skill with which muscular structure, positions, and anatomical balance are shown.

The artisans were probably members of specialized guilds who were acquainted with the customs of pan-Indian sculpture. Technical uniformity between panels suggests coordinated workshop participation as opposed to solitary individual effort (Kalita, 2018, p. 121)

Socio-Cultural Context Reflected in Sculptures

The sculptures depict a vibrant sociocultural milieu characterized by artistic openness, religious tolerance, and symbolic richness. Early medieval Assamese social life, rituals, and cultural imagination are all revealed through the portrayal of home scenes, dancers, gods, and mythological creatures (Goswami, 2010, p. 112)

While sensual iconography implies acceptance of sexuality inside religious areas, symbols like the purna-kumbha indicate societal ambitions toward affluence. The location probably functioned as a cultural center where customs, celebrations, and creative endeavors interacted with daily life.



Plate 1 The Ancient Stones and sculptures of Madan Kamdev Temple

Source <https://diversityassam.com/destinations/guwahati/madan-kamdev-temple/>

The stones of Madan Kamdev Temple show remnants of an ancient artistic world, weathered by centuries but full of vitality. The temple's once-vibrant celebration of mythology, devotion, and sexuality is hinted at by the intricately carved celestial beings, floral themes, and elegant human figures that emerge from the ruins. The site is transformed into a living museum of Assam's cultural legacy since each sculpture, whether it is broken, softened, or partially buried, contains remnants of a time when artistry and spiritual expression coexisted harmoniously (Plate 1).



Plate 2 The Motif of Angasikhara

Source <https://arsartisticadventureofmankind.wordpress.com/tag/anga-shikhara/>

There are many angasikhara motifs used as designs in the Madan Kamdev complex. Small temples, or angasikhara, are prevalent in the region. They represent

the sikhara of the temple and are at least three feet tall. Five angasikharas aligned horizontally are the motif of two distinct panels that have been found (Plate 2).



Plate 3 Madan Kamdev: Elusive Erotica.

Source <https://travellingslacker.com/madan-kamdev-temple/>

The ruins of Madan Kamdev appear against the serene hills of Assam like shards of a long-forgotten legend. A universe where eroticism, divinity, and human desire were once harmoniously entwined is shown through fragmented stone walls and temple carvings. The site feels both private and enigmatic, with figures engaged in elegant, sensual poses that, now worn by time, only provide partial glimpses of their original intensity. This "elusive erotica" represents an ancient philosophy that honored life, fertility, and cosmic union in addition to sensual imagery. The location's beauty is suspended between revelation and secrecy and history and imagination as the shattered sculptures encourage spectators to envision the whole narrative they once conveyed (Plate 3).

Table Symbolic Expressions and Cultural Legacy Reflected in Madan Kamdev Artifacts

Expression in Sculpture	An explanation	Symbolism in Culture and Religion	Historical Importance
Erotic Sculptures (Mithuna)	High relief carvings of passionate couples on pieces of temples.	Symbol of Tantric doctrine,	Shows that early medieval Kamarupa was heavily influenced by Tantric philosophy.
Angasikhara Designs	Architectural elements that have little projections of temple spires.	Cosmic connection, and fecundity.	Suggests a connection to Bengali and Odisha architectural styles.
Figures of Devata	Sculptures of gods such as Surya, Ganesha, Devi, Shiva, and Vishnu.	Symbolizes ritual geometry, holy space, and divine ascent.	Illustrates how several sects coexisted in ancient Assam.
Motifs of Nature (Floral & Faunal)	Kirtimukha patterns, makaras, lions, elephants, lotuses, and creepers.	Demonstrates the diversity of religions (Shaiva, Shakta, Vaishnava).	Demonstrates a powerful naturalistic approach in local art.
Images of Yogini and Shakta	Sculptures portraying feminine deities, sometimes in dynamic poses.	A symbol associated with Shakta and Tantra traditions, it represents purity, protection, fertility, and cosmic energy.	Implies the existence of strong female deity cults in Kamarupa.

Symbols of Shaiva (Lingas, Nandi)	Several lingas and pieces of Nandi were found at the location.	Represents cosmic creation, fertility, and Shiva worship.	Confirms that Shaivism predominated among the early patrons.
Panels of Narration (Fragmented)	Portions of narrative friezes depicting celestial entities or customs.	Reflect ceremonial acts, mythological events, and social life.	Shows that intricate narrative art was once present in the temple complex.
Toranas Makara	Hybrid dragon-crocodile patterns on arches.	A representation of safety and entry into hallowed domains.	Shows the impact of temple customs from eastern India.
Small Shrine Designs	Carvings of small shrines on larger blocks.	Symbolizes the imitation of sacred structures in a hallowed setting.	Reflects the layering of ceremonial and architectural meanings.

9. Major Findings of the Study

The major findings of the study are-

1. The architectural and sculptural forms show how indigenous Assamese customs connect with stylistic currents from Bengal (Pala-Sena idioms), Odisha (Kalinga school), and maybe Mithila. Kamarupa's involvement in wider eastern Indian cultural contacts during the early medieval era is reflected in this combination.
2. Madan Kamdev's sculptural personality is characterized by these motifs taken together. An established design canon is shown by the recurring appearance of angasikhara projections, stylized floral medallions, creeper scrolls, and mithuna figures in various architectural elements.
3. The existence of Buddhist symbols (lotuses, Vajrayana-style motifs), Shaiva (lingas, Nandi), Shakta (Yoginis, Devi forms), and Vaishnava (Garuda, Vishnu characteristics) indicates that Madan Kamdev operated in a multicultural setting where various traditions coexisted and interacted.
4. Expert craftsmanship is demonstrated by symmetrical decoration, intricate high-relief carving, precise stone dressing, and sophisticated anatomical modeling. The craftspeople most likely belonged to formal guilds with defined responsibilities and training programs.
5. Symbolic connotations with fertility, protection, and cosmic energy are highlighted by figurative vines, lotus scrolls, animals (elephants, lions, makaras), and kirtimukhas. The cultural fusion of environment and deity in ancient Kamarupa is also reflected in these decisions.
6. Madan Kamdev was used for community meetings, artistic creations, and ritual performances in addition to religious service. This implies a wider socio-cultural relevance that influenced early medieval artistic identity of Assam.
7. The region's significant Tantric legacy is reflected in erotic sculptures, such as maithuna figures and sensual divinities, which show both aesthetic expression and Tantric symbolism relating to fertility, cosmic creation, and spiritual union.
8. Remains of several angasikharas, carved pillars, friezes, and base mouldings suggest a large temple complex that may have included entrances, ceremonial platforms, and auxiliary shrines that have since fallen or been buried.

9. Differences in ornamentation, iconometric proportions, depth of carving, and artistic treatment indicate that the site changed over time with support from artisan communities, priestly networks, and succeeding monarchs.
10. Kirtimukha, lotus medallions, naga figures, and guardian deities are examples of motifs that suggest a multi-layered cosmology that combines esoteric Tantric components, mainstream Hindu imagery, and folk protection symbols.
11. A hybrid Kamarupa style was created by modifying external influences to fit local resources, beliefs, and aesthetics through the use of local stone and the adaption of pan-Indian iconographic templates into local forms.
12. Madan Kamdev is one of Kamarupa's most important archaeological and artistic sites, exhibiting the height of local inventiveness and temple-building activity, thanks to the richness and complexity of the sculptures that have survived.

10. Relevance to Historical and Archaeological Research

By shedding light on stylistic development, socio-religious symbolism, and networks of cultural exchange, the study enhances archeological knowledge of early medieval Assam. It helps rebuild the aesthetic and theological scene of the area and reinforces historical views of the Pala-period creative milieu. The empirical study advances more general studies of early Indian history's temple art, iconography, and cultural synthesis.

11. Conclusion

Madan Kamdev is evidence of early Kamarupa's artistic and cultural vigor. Its sculptures, which are varied in shape and meaning, show how religious, social, and artistic traditions have interacted for centuries (Barua, 2005, p. 223). In addition to decorating the temple walls, the motifs convey philosophical, ceremonial, and cosmological concepts that shaped local identity. Madan Kamdev's significance in influencing the creative development of the area is highlighted by its impact on subsequent temple customs in Assam. Elements of this complex can be found in buildings like the temples of Dirgheswari and Pingaleswar (Baruah, 2015, p. 143). Its function in maintaining artistic conventions throughout centuries is highlighted by this continuity. In the end, Madan Kamdev's sculptures show how nature, art, symbolism, and religious ideas came together to create a unique visual culture. Its study strengthens the need for ongoing archaeological preservation and investigation and makes a substantial contribution to our understanding of the larger patterns of creative growth in eastern India.

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