



# A Comparative Study On The Changing Forms Of Art In Doiyang Dhansiri Valley

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## 1. Introduction:

The study of 'Doiyang Dhansiri Valley' opens up new opportunities to unveil a few glimpses from the history of ancient Assam. Developed in the Banks of Doiyang and Dhansiri River along with their respective tributaries this region has great essence of historical developments. In present days, the study area consisted regions of Golaghat district bordering the Naga Hills and Shilong. Archaeological remains, especially inscriptions of Ancient Assam provided enormous information regarding the position of this Valley in the Ancient pyridine. Among those essential features of the Doiyang Dhansiri valley the changing forms of art is one of the most prominent. The changes in the contemporary art forms reflected through the sculptures and other archaeological remains. Such changing tendency was analysed and evaluated from different perspectives by various historians and scholars so far. In this paper, we basically tried to revisit the Doiyang Dhansiri Valley civilization with utter importance towards the changes in art forms. Some of the popular schools of art in association with the gradual development of this region are herewith discussed in a comparative manner. To make the comparison more effective the chief features of some of the sculptures in Doiyang Dhansiri Valley are discussed briefly. Apart from that, an end to end comparison is being made with some of the essential elements. As a result, along with our own understanding, we structured the comparison and followed the same till the Medieval period.

## 2. Objectives:

- To have an overall idea about the Doiyang Dhansiri Valley.
- Trace the changing forms of art in Doiyang Dhansiri Valley.
- Make a comparative analysis of the changing forms of art.

## 3. Methodology:

This paper is prepared in descriptive method from a historical perspective. It is primarily based on secondary resources like – books, thesis ,articles, magazines, journals etc. After critically analysing and evaluating the secondary sources from a historical perspective the overall write-up has been prepared in an objective manner. All resources used in this paper are thoroughly cited and referred in the last portion of this paper. Pictorial descriptions are used wherever found necessary for better understanding.

#### 4. Scope and Limitations:

This research has covered the whole region of Doiyang Dhansiri Valley along with its historical importance. An overall idea of the Valley is presented here for ease of understanding. The art forms of Doiyang Dhansiri Valley are the main focal point of this paper. The changing forms of art and views of different researchers on the same are presented in a comparative manner. Our own understandings and typical assessment has been prepared after all of the study.

The holistic study of the Doiyang Dhansiri Valley in such a limited portion is near to impossible to achieve. Thus, only the idea of Doiyang Dhansiri Valley along with its historical significance has presented here. Similarly, in terms of art, a microscopic study with regional variations needs more to the point approach and deep analysis. Demanding hundred percent objectivity without a field visit in such a topic is challenging as well. Still, this paper will give a rudimentary comparison among the changes in Doiyang Dhansiri art forms.

#### 5. An overview of Doiyang Dhansiri Valley:

The Doiyang Dhansiri valley comprises of the basins of Doiyang and Dhansiri river, bordering the Karbi anglong Hills and the Shillong plateau. Geographically, the Barail Hills separates the Valley from Barak Hills and joins the Naga Hills. This region of Doiyang Dhansiri valley was primarily described as of sedimentary origin by scholars like H. N. Dutta through their writings. As per the lithostratographic (the study of Earth's crust rocks and their organization into named units based on their physical and petrographic features) structure areas has been identified according to the formative features. *Bihora, Hatighuli, Kaziranga* and *Dhansiri* are such formations. (Dutta, 2021a, p. 6) The whole region of this Valley has a flood prone region into it. The oxidised sand and sediments of those flood plains shows resemblance to yellowish mud. Despite of the soil variations, the Doiyang Dhansiri Valley is also known for its Hot-springs. Along with the forest prone regions the Western banks of Dhansiri River also has reverence of Salt-springs.

Specifically, talking about the Reverie plains the Doiyang Dhansiri Valley had prospered into the alluvial soils of the Rivers including – Brahmaputra, Dhansiri, Doiyang etc along with the tributaries like – *Diphu, Chungajan, Chathu, Doirung, Nambar, Kaliyani, Deopani, Difalu, Dhiladhari, Kakodonga, Gelabil* etc. The mighty Brahmaputra River originated from the Chemayung glacier (Tibet) floats through Arunachal Pradesh and enters the political boundary of Assam up to 725 Km. Naturally, the Brahmaputra river nourished the Valley along with sluggish structures in its course. Through the Bangladesh region this river finally submersed into the Bay of Bengal. In historical terms, Brahmaputra had served its role as one of the key trade routes in Ancient and Medieval period. The River ports (*ghats*) following the course of the river served as transit points between the water ways. Multiple archaeological sites including the Doiyang Dhansiri region in the river banks sustain the importance. The Doiyang and Dhansiri Rivers are two of the most important one in relation with the topic mentioned above. H. N. Dutta in his studies mentioned the origin of the term “Dhansiri” as a part of Sanskritised form of any local term. Here ‘*Dhan*’ means ‘Wealth’ and ‘*Siri*’ resembles ‘fertility’. Native Kachari people called the river as ‘*Dima*’ (Di – ‘water’ & Ma – ‘great’ or ‘mother’) meaning ‘Mother River’. Dhansiri floats in the Southern region of Brahmaputra forming a natural boundary between Assam and Nagaland. Similarly, Doiyang is one of the key tributary of Dhansiri.

Originates in the Naga Hills the Dhansiri river enters Assam through the *Sarupani* area of Golaghat district. Looking at the vastness of the river, it is expected that in ancient times this river was possibly feed by multiple tributary streams. The swelling of the rivers mentioned above caused for natural calamities like flood and often tended to change the course. Other natural tremulous like earthquakes also resulted to the swelling of river banks and deposit of alluvium sediments in the Valley.

A number of passes connected the Doiyang Dhansiri to the rest of India and south East Asia. As well described by Dutta again Pemberton reported about a route from Monipur to Jorhat through Doiyang Dhansiri Valley. (Dutta, 2021b, p. 11) The *Moohhong* Village of North Cachar Hills was one of the transit points of the road connectivity. Beereme and Rengma rivers connected the Valley with Barak Valley as well. During Ahom rule, the Dhodar Ali (A strategic path) connected Doiyang Dhansiri Valley with *Garhgaon*, the Ahom capital. Another important route stretched from present day Golaghat to Dimapur via Negheriting. The Dhansiri and the Kapili route were two of the most crucial routes stretched from the Valley. Both Dhansiri and Kapili routes leading to *Mibong* were under the control of Ahoms in Medieval period. (Dutta, 2021c, p. 12) Ahom kings supposedly mobilised the military troops along these routes in need. The presence of different passes extended the possibility of migration from the Ancient period into the Valley. H. N. Dutta eventually traced a connection with the Chinese territory via Doiyang Dhansiri Valley as well. During the colonial rule the Assam Bengal Railway Company introduced railway connectivity to this region via *Jamuguri* station.

Speaking about the climatic conditions, the Doiyang Dhansiri Valley was part of south East Asiatic Monsoon land. Generally, this region has a moderate temperature with humid conditions. H. N. Dutta confined the seasons of the Valley into three main classifications, i.e. – the Spring-Summer, the Rainy Season and the winter. Amidst those, the Rainy season lasts longest. The geographical location and topography of this area is primarily responsible for the concerning climate changes mentioned earlier. The population of Doiyang Dhansiri Valley was predominantly of Tibeto-Burmese origin. The Kacharis were the dominant demographic clout of this region in now a day. Remnants of Mongoloid origin tribes along with other people of Indo-Aryan origin could also be spotted in the area of the Valley. At present, a mixture of plural demographic structure along with regional variations prevailed in the area.

## 6. Historical prominence:

Historically the Doiyang Dhansiri valley had ties with the south-East Asiatic region. Use of words, such as *don*, *dong*, *donga* etc proposed as Austric connection in the primitive stage in this region. On the other hand, use of the suffix like '*Sri*' to connect religion with Rivers (Dhana-sri to Dhansiri) depicted contact with Aryans. (Dutta, 2021d, p. 22) Stone plates discovered in areas like Dubarani traced till the primitive stages. After the decline of the Roman trade Doiyang Dhansiri Valley developed trade relations with China. The area of *Rohdhola Pukhuri* (Golaghat) was depicted as Ancient location in relation with Iron extracting and smelting. In terms of architecture, the state of Dubarani has evidence of extensive use of iron. Fortified brick structure with brick walls and watch towers discovered in the Dubarani area represents proper town planning and civilization discourse. The fortifications of Dubarani are compared to water fort (*jladurga*, surrounded by ditches) by H. N. Dutta in his writings. The *Alichinga Tengani* region, 5 Km. away from

Barpathar had well protected water canal connected directly to the Dhansiri River. Dutta traces some short of commercial connection in this area with business activities. To trace the genealogical records of the ruling powers of that region the inscriptions are the primary sources, viz: *Nagajari Khanikargaon* Stone inscription, *Alichinga Tengani* inscription, the *Sankara Narayan* Stone Inscription, *Pathalipahar* inscription etc. The findings of those inscriptions even challenge the actual diameter of Ancient *Kamrupa* kingdom. Citing the explanations of scholars like M. M. Sarma and Dharmeswar Chutia Mr. Dutta refereed the position of 'Uparipattana' inside the Doiyang Dhansiri Valley. The term, *Uparipattana* (present day Upper Assam) the region connecting Upper Assam and *Pattan* together. The genealogical records refereed by Dutta in Doiyang Dhansiri valley includes – *Sri Ratnavarman* (CE 400-500), *Sri Vasundharavarman* (CE 400-500), *Maharajadhiraja Dieghlekhavarman* (CE 700-800), *Maharajadhiraja Jivaraja* or *Sri Jivara* (CE 800-900), *Sri Mahendra* (CE 800-900). Although the actual span of the Valley is still in a debatable stage, still it is considered to be expanded till the Lakhimpur and Vishwanath district in the North, following Naga Hills in the South and *Dihing* River as the natural boundary with *Ahoms*. The discovery of epigraphic records naming *Sri Ratnavarman* and *Sri Vasundharavarman* sheds light on an independent line of rulers, distinct from the *Varmanas* of *Kamarupa*. This revelation suggests that the Doiyang Dhansiri Valley, with its fortified capital at *Dubarani* and a *Setubandhaharbor* (*Pattana*) along the Dhansiri River, may have been the ancient *Uparipattana* of Assam. This region, which possibly extended up to Tinsukia, likely served as the administrative center of the Kingdom of *Davaka*, distinct from the larger *Kamarupa* kingdom. The discovery of *Alichinga Tengani* Stone Inscription and *Alichinga Tengani* Clay Seal suggests that this area functioned as a prosperous commercial harbour. This leads to the conclusion that *Uparipattana* was part of the Kingdom of *Davaka*, ruled by a collateral branch of the *Varmana* dynasty, separate from *Pusyavarmana's* lineage of *Kamarupa*. Epigraphic references to rulers such as *Maharajadhiraja Dieghlekhavarman*, *Jivaraja* (or *Jivara*), and *Sri Mahendra* further support this idea. The fortified capital at *Dubarani*, connected to *Alichinga-Tengani* via fortifications and the Dhansiri, likely marked *Davaka's* political and economic center. The kingdom's influence appears to have extended over a broad area of North-Eastern India. The early contact between the Guptas and the Doiyang-Dhansiri Valley is suggested through the Indo-Burma Trade Route, which linked the region to Pataliputra and Burma. As a tributary of the Gupta Empire, the Kingdom of *Davaka* relied heavily on trade, with *Alichinga-Tengani's pattana* serving as a crucial commercial hub. This might also explain why the region was historically known as *Uparipattana*. Thus, the socio-political and cultural developments in the Doiyang-Dhansiri Valley can be attributed to the region's ancient connections with the Gupta Empire, which played a significant role in shaping the area's history. (Dutta, 2021, p. 157) Following the decline of the Gupta Empire, more regional features had grown in this Valley making it a regional kingdom in nature. Heterogeneous groups of native and ethnic elements foster the region. The diverse art forms posed greater religious influence into it, which is discussed in the last portion of this paper. After the annexation of *Dimapur*, the *Kacharai* capital *Ahom* administration was established in that region under the supervision of 'Morongikhowa Gohain' (a provincial officer in *Ahom* period). Later on the 'Paik' and 'Khel' systems were introduced accordingly.

## 7. Changing forms of art in Doyang Dhansiri valley:

Art, through its diverse forms such as painting, sculpture, architecture, and illustrated manuscripts, serves as a channel for expressing human creativity and imagination, capturing ideas and emotions. Among these, sculpture stands out as a vital expression of human effort and also serves as a valuable resource for archaeological study. In the context of Assam, no evidence of sculptural art, either in metal or stone, has been discovered that predates the 5th century A.D. The available remnants suggest that the practice of sculptural art in Assam likely commenced with the expansion of the Gupta Empire (Dutta, 2021e, p. 35). The *Umachal* Rock Inscription and the *Nagajari-Khanikargaon* fragmentary stone inscription, dating back to the early 5th century A.D., confirm that Brahmanical religion had made its way into early Assam from an early period (Sharma, 1978, pp. 303-305). The cultural and religious impact of northern India on Assam, particularly in *Kamarupa* and *Davaka*, is evidenced by the Allahabad Pillar inscription of *Samudragupta*.

The tender modelling of the figure, elongated torso, single necklace, the transparent drapery, and the subtle movement in the treatment of the body, heavy naturalistic breasts are defining features of the artistic style that flourished under the patronage of the Gupta Empire. The sculptural remains from sites such as *Da-Parvatiya*, *Mikir-Ati*, *Barganga*, *Kamakhya*, and *Dudhnoi*, dating to the late 5th and 6th centuries A.D., exhibit features of this school of art. It indicates the influences of Gupta School of art in Assam. In these sculptures, local influences were hard to find. After the 6th century A.D, a new art form developed, known as the Linging art. The supernatural quality of the classical sculptures lost its prominence in this art form. However, the sculptures represent the classical idiom and style. More slender and sinuous, fleshier face with full lips broad shoulders and Negroid type features are the special characteristics of this art group. In the art form, classical dynamism is notably absent. This transition is particularly evident in the sculptural remains from *Suryapahar*, *Goalpara*, and various sites in the *Kapili-Jamuna* valley, including *Na-Nath* and *Devasthan*.

From the 8th century A.D. onwards, the area of Assam began to develop its own regional artistic style, influenced by classical Indian traditions. In the Doyang Dhansiri Valley, similar to other parts of Assam, this artistic evolution was notably influenced by the classical idealism of Gupta art. The socio-cultural and political landscape of the Valley fostered a distinct sense of regionalism, which played a crucial role in shaping a unique regional school of art. H.N. Dutta highlights that one of the earliest examples of stone art in the valley is an isolated carving of a fish at *Dubarani*, dating to around CE 200. Between CE 600 and 900, the valley's sculptures displayed stylistic uniformity, reflecting shared regional traits. *Dubarani* in *Barpathar*, believed to have been a fortified capital, serves as the focal point of this early artistic activity. Stone sculptures discovered here, dating from CE 600, along with numerous Vishnu, Saivite, and Tantric forms, suggest a thriving artistic community by CE 700-800. In particular, a wooden figure of Vishnu, along with these sculptural pieces, underscores the area's significance as an artistic hub. Epigraphic and architectural evidence points to the presence of skilled artisans in *Dubarani* from at least CE 400-500. A significant find at *Dubarani* is an *ekamukhalinga*, discovered in the *garbhagriha* of a square brick temple, indicating that by the early medieval period, the region had reached a sophisticated stage in both art and architecture. This flourishing local art movement can be aptly termed the "Dubarani School of Regional Art"

or even the "Eastern Indian Version of the Dugarani School of Early Medieval Regional Art," marking Dugarani as the birthplace of a distinct artistic tradition within the Valley (Dutta, 2021f, p.125s). Earlier scholars like Manuranjan Dutta referred to the artistic development as the "Deopani School" due to the distinct group of sculptures was discovered at *Deopani* in Golaghat district, Assam. This School of art, primarily supported by royal patronage during feudal times, flourished under the reigns of kings such as *Jivara*, *Diglekhavarman*, and *Kakhya*, along with his son. These rulers encouraged the craft of stone carving at *Deopani*. The *Deopani* sculptures, made from black stone, are distinguished by their fine polish and unique features, setting them apart from other schools of art of India. The human figure is the pivot of this school of art. Notable facial characteristics include round faces, thick lips, broad but pointed noses, long ears, square-shaped crowns (*kiriṭa-mukuta*), broad foreheads, long hair, and thick eyebrows wide-open eyes with lack of spiritual expression. The sculptures have pot belly, broad shoulders, a sturdy, thick-set body, and a slightly bulging abdomen. These sculptures are typically front-facing and carved from a single block of stone. In some sculptures, the stela behind the figure is also carved. The *Deopani* sculptures primarily reflect the art of the people, emphasizing physical strength and vigor rather than spiritual calmness, bodily elegance, or sensual beauty. The sculptors focused almost exclusively on human figures, with animal representations being quite rare. Additionally, the naturalistic elements that are prominent in classical art do not appear to have influenced the *Deopani* sculptures. Some sculptures from *Deopani* contain inscriptions which paleographical date back to the 8th century A.D., suggesting that the Deopani School of art can be dated to this period. Moreover, the presence of the lingering traits of the Classical idiom indicates that stylistically, this Deopani School may also be placed in the late 7th and 8th centuries A.D. (Dutta, 1990, p. 55). The decline of these art practices remains somewhat mysterious. Manuranjan Dutta notes that the influence of this school of art reached as far as Tinisukiyā in Upper Assam. However, it may have waned due to a lack of royal patronage and the rising influence of the East Indian School of Medieval Art. Art historian H.N. Dutta also observed that around CE 800, the unique regional art that had developed in the Doyang-Dhansiri Valley gradually faded, making way for the East Indian School of Medieval Art.

By the 8th century A.D., North India experienced a significant shift in both political and cultural landscapes. Following the death of *Harshavardhana*, the centralization of power gave way to the rise of regional states, which fostered the growth of distinct regional identities and schools of art (Barpujari, 2004, p. 460). This period of decentralization was particularly evident in Eastern India, where the Palas established themselves as a dominant force in Bengal and Bihar. They were later succeeded by the Senas, both of whom were eventually replaced by Muslim rulers in the early 13th century CE. Following the broader trend of regionalism, a distinct artistic tradition emerged under the Palas in Bengal and Bihar, known as the Pala School of Art. Renowned historian Rakhāl Das Banerji, after an in-depth study of the medieval sculptures of Eastern India, referred to this artistic tradition as the 'Eastern Indian School of Medieval Art.' Early Assam was significantly influenced by this artistic style. Inscriptions reveal that the rulers of *Kamarupa* in the Brahmaputra Valley extended their dominion by conquering Bengal and other nearby regions. After the 8th century A.D., two dynasties, the *Salastambhas* and the Palas, ruled the Brahmaputra Valley. Inscriptions show that these dynasties produced powerful rulers who managed to conquer important North Indian territories. Some notable rulers, such as *Sriharsa*, *Hajaravarman*, *Vanamalavarman*, and *Ratnapala*, are

mentioned in inscriptions from Assam, highlighting their ability to expand their control into neighboring areas. The *Pasupati* inscription of the Nepalese king *Jayadeva* II, for instance, records that *Sriharsadeva* conquered regions like Gauda, Odra, Kalinga, Kosala, and others. This inscription reflects the strong connections that early Brahmaputra Valley rulers had with other regions in Northern India. As these rulers expanded their influence, they also developed trade and diplomatic relationships, which significantly contributed to the region's artistic and cultural evolution. These interactions with new territories and regional cultures introduced art styles and brought new artistic groups into the Brahmaputra Valley, enriching its cultural landscape. Historian Manuranjan Dutta refers to this emerging group of sculptures as the East Indian School of Medieval Art, highlighting its significance in the region's artistic development. The East Indian School of Medieval Art is characterized by various stylistic features that have evolved over time. Notably, it includes the depiction of both slender and fleshy body forms, often accompanied by gracious facial expressions. Heavy ornamentation is a common element, typically seen alongside attendants. The art also prominently features stela, which display intricate designs. Additionally, decorative motifs, such as *Kritimukha* at the top of the stela and the inclusion of *Vidyadharas*, further enrich the artistic style of this period. However, after the 8th century, the Brahmaputra Valley experienced political changes, during which various territorial region of the Doiyang-Dhansiri Valley, came into contact with the Brahmaputra Valley. This interaction significantly influenced the local art style, contributing to the region's artistic evolution. (Baruah, 2018, p. 96) Consequently, the influences of the East Indian School of Medieval Art also emerged in the Doiyang Dhansiri Valley.

## 8. Significant examples:

The sculptures discovered from the Doiyang-Dhansiri Valley predominantly depict deities from the Brahmanical pantheon. These sculptures are made from a variety of materials, including stone, terracotta, wood, and others.

**Stone Sculptures:** The stone sculptures of the Doiyang Dhansiri Valley represent a range of Brahmanical deities, including *Vishnu*, *Siva*, *Surya*, *Chamunda*, *Daksha*, *Durga*, *Ganesha*, and *Harihara* etc.

**a) The figures of Vishnu** - (Fig. 1) Several stone images of Vishnu have been found in the Doyang-Dhansiri Valley, one of which was uncovered in the ruins of *Deopani* and is now kept in the Assam State Museum. This particular four-armed figure holds a *sankhain* its front left hand, while a *gada* is placed upright on the pedestal with its back left hand. The two right hands are damaged. The deity is adorned with a crown (*kirīṭamukūṭa*), earrings (*kundalas*), armlets (*karikaṇas*), a sacred thread (*upavīta*), a garland (*vaijayanti*), and wears a *dhoti*. The sculpture is quite short with a noticeable pot belly. It is depicted in a standing posture, with the body showing no sense of movement or dynamism. Based on these characteristics, it is likely that this sculpture dates back to the 7th-8th century.

Another Vishnu figure (Fig. 2) was discovered in Telisal, Kasomaripathar, measuring 30 x 18 cm. In this depiction, the deity holds the *chakra* in the upper right hand and the *gada* in the upper left. The sculpture is flat in design, with a circular stele, and the rear part remains uncared. Additionally, the figure has an expressionless or deadpan face and disproportionately short legs. (Dutta, 2021g, p. 147)

**b) The figure of Siva** - (Fig. 3) Several stone sculptures of *Siva* have been discovered in the Doiyang Dhansiri Valley, including one figure found at *Borpathar*. This statue is depicted in the *maharajalilasana* pose, holding a *damaru* in its left hand, while the right hand is positioned in the *varada mudra*, with a *padma* (lotus). The figure is decorated with two lotus flowers on its right and left sides. The lock of hair is flowing on the shoulders. The elongated ears, adorned with *kundalas*. The expression on the figure's face are serene and pleasant. This sculpture is estimated to date back to around A.D. 800.

**c) The figure of Surya** - (Fig. 4) The figure of *Surya* found at *Alichiga-Tengani* in *Borpathar* is depicted riding a fast-moving chariot drawn by seven horses. The sculpture, measuring 1.09 m x 53 cm. *Surya* is shown in the *varadamudra* pose. He is adorned with a *mukuta* (crown). Ear ornaments are also depicted on the figure's ears. The sculpture features a mutilated stela (back slab), and stylistically, it appears to date to the late A.D. 800.

**d) The figure of Durga** - (Fig. 5) Several stone sculptures of *Durga* have been discovered in the Doiyang Dhansiri Valley, including notable figures found at *Deopani Durgathan*. The figure, depicted in *samapada sthanaka* posture, features stela and is accompanied by independent figures on both side. These stylistic elements suggest that the sculptures date back to around A.D. 900. (Dutta, 2021h, p. 152)

**e) The Figure of Ardhanarisvara** - (Fig. 6) The figure of *Ardhanarisvara*, measuring 0.52m x 0.23m, was found at *Dubarani*. It is depicted in *samapada-sthanaka* posture, carved in the round with *jata* (matted hair) tied overhead. Although weathered, some details remain, such as ear ornaments and *nipura* on the left leg. Both hands of the figure are shown in *varadamudra*. At the base of the sculpture, it is flanked by a *vyaghra*, symbolizing *Parvati*, on the left, and *Nandi*, representing *Shiva*, on the right.

**f) The figure of Harihara** - (Fig. 7) The *Harihara* image, measuring 65 x 31 cm, was discovered in *Deopani* and is now housed at the Assam State Museum in Guwahati. The sculpture has circular stela. Although the figure is recognized as *Harihara* (a fusion of *Vishnu* and *Shiva*), it is referred to as *Sankara-Narayana* due to the occurrence of this name in an inscription associated with the image. This figure exhibits a stiff and rigid posture, with a round contour that retains its stela in the background. This stylistic rigidity indicates signs of decadence in the artistic approach, a trend that likely persisted in the valley for a time before merging with the stronger tradition of the Eastern Indian School of Medieval Art (EISMA). This particular *Harihara* figure appears to represent the fusion of the Duboroni School of Regional Art with the evolving styles of EISMA.

**Stone art at Deoparvat:** At *Deoparvat*, sculptured panels featuring divine, semi-divine, and animal figures, as well as scenes from epic stories, decorative motifs, auspicious symbols, and other reliefs are integral parts of the architecture. One figure at *Deoparvat* (Fig. 8) have flatly rendered eyes, noses, lips, and tapering faces, reflecting a native ethnic style. The figure features a panel of mangoes at the top, and its folded left hand is drawn close to the chest, holding a motif that could represent an elephant, bird, plant, or bowl. The sculpture display a heavy modeling style, featuring slender waists, broad hips, and round breasts that highlight the femininity of the elegantly carved female figures. This suggests a distant influence from the Eastern Indian School of Medieval Art (EISMA).

At *Deoparvat*, there are four types of *kirttimukhas* that possibly represent water as feminine and maternal. These *kirttimukhas* show lotus stalks emerging from the mouths of elephants depicted in a symbolic manner. From the lotus petals, various elements emerge, supporting creatures such as elephants, bulls, or

lions, arranged in two separate branches in a schematic layout. On these animals, *caturbhuja* (four-armed) *nagas* can be seen holding objects like a *trisula* (trident), bird, tree plant, *damaru*, and snake, drawing close to their chests. Stylistically, these *kirttimukhas* appear to be unique creations reflecting a local artistic spirit. (Fig. 9)

**Metallic Art:** The metallic arts of Doiyang Dhansiri Valley represented a continuation of craftsmanship from the Ancient to the early medieval and medieval era. Apart from iron, metals like bronze, ball-metal, brass, silver and gold were used in these art forms. Along with daily useable utensils religious structures and ornaments are part of the metallic art discovered in the Valley. Some of those are mentioned here (Dutta, 2021i, p. 130)

**a) A pair of Plummets** – (Fig. 10) A pair of Baras coated architect's plummets made of iron core was found in *Kharuar gaon* in *Barpathar*. Datable to CE 600, this pair has pointed tips along with floral decoration. Another similar pair with influence of Gupta art was recovered from *Garubandha* (Golaghat district). Both of these are examples of secular metallic art forms.

**b) A Chaturbhuja female figure** – (Fig. 11) Dated CE 800, the female figure founded in Merapani in a straight poster. From the ornamental decorations and mole like '*tilak*', the deity is identified as *Durga*. The eyes in the rounded face with pointed chin are large and lips are open. Structure wise, long extended waist, broad hips and prominent breasts depicts a modulation of young body. This sculpture is supposedly in relation with Yogic or Tantric cult.

**c) Bronze figure of Bhairav** – (Fig. 12) Found in *Negheriting* Siva Temple in Dergaon, this figure has ferocious facial expression. The *jata* (hair) is tied above the head, hand and posture in a upward motion. Four *nagas* (snakes) were placed as ornamentation. The figure is decorated with lower garments up to ankle. The debatable date of this figure was CE 1700.

**d) A figure of Vasudeva** – (Fig. 13) A *Chaturbhuja* (having four hands) figure of *Vasudeva* has been found in the Valley, more specifically in *Dergaon*. All arms of that figure are bent in the elbow and wrist joints. The figure with well built rounded chest and attended waist has round face, open eyes and prominent nose and ears. The whole structure is put above *Garuda* (a bird) structure.

**Terracotta Art:** The easy availability of pottery making clay led to the growth of terracotta art in Doiyang Dhansiri valley. (Dutta, 2021j, p. 133) Since the ancient times, in human civilizations clay was regarded as one of the commonly used medium of art. In the context of the Valley, extensive use of *kumarmati* (potter's clay) could be found in various earthen wares. Again, terracotta art could be classified into both religious and secular forms.

**a) Terracotta female figure** – (Fig. 14) A female figure of 'Parvati' seated in *Yogasana* was founded from No. 2 *Sarupathar Gaon*. This figure depicts a youthful anthropomorphic structure with the hair tied in the top. The ornamental decoration physical features are in a simplistic style. The classical features of 'Doborani School of Art' reflects through this figure dated CE 600.

**b) Terracotta Lion and mythical bird** – (Fig. 15) The lion figure of *Oparlangha* area has a long body with narrow waist may dated CE 800. Similarly, the mythical bird with Owl like face has round strokes down to the eyes.

**Wooden Art:** Naturally wood, as a medium of art don't last long. Still, evidence of wood curving in the Doiyang Dhansiri Valley has been founded from the Medieval period. H. N. Dutta through his research tried to connect the link of wooden art along with the stone art forms of Doborani School of Art.

**a) Chaturbhuja figure of Vishnu** – (Fig. 16) This figure was recovered from *Barpathar* dated CE 700-800. This figure was placed with arms like *gada* and *chakra* in the hands respectively. The figure with round face, elaborated ears has long hair sitting in the shoulder. According to H. N. Dutta this figure mimics the decorative features of the stone sculpture of Vishnu.

**b) A Chaturbhuja figure of Brahma** – (Fig. 17) This figure illustrate an elongated and squarish tendency in the face and feet. For coloring black, green, yellow and red dies were being used. The figure has triangular ornamental presentation with folding hands. Similar figure with physical characteristics were carved for 'Hanuman' and 'Garuda' as well.

**Ivory Art:** There are evidences of ivory workmanship in Doiyang Dhansiri valley. H. N. Dutta traced the period till CE 1100, if not earlier. Abundance elephant population in this region was historically proven through the fact that the Kachari king had sent a sum of five hundred elephants to the Ahom ruler. Items like ivory combs are discovered from the Valley to sustain the examples of ivory craftsmanship. Another specimen of Assamese handloom industry popularly known as 'Makoe' had also been found of that contemporary origin. Paws and sticks of Dice game (*Pasakhel*) were also supposedly crafted in ivory with great ease. A pair of elephant models, stylistically similar but different in size had been founded in the Valley as well. These all represents the versatile forms of art prevailing through the Doiyang Dhansiri valley.

## 8. An end to end Comparison:

From all of the discussions we can trace some end to end comparison in terms of the changes that occurred in the art forms of Doiyang Dhansiri valley. Some of the key points are listed bellow -

**Materials used:** First of all through the study a change in the mediums used for art can be traced. Typically multiple mediums are used in Doiyang Dhansiri art forms. Clay or terracotta, wood, stone, ivory, metal etc. are the prominent once. Based on the nature of these materials the natural life of the art forms and sculptures differed. From a artistic point of view, it also signifies the multiplicity of craftsmanship and represented a gradual development in the field of art.

**Physical features:** The physical features are predominantly noticeable in the anthropomorphic structures and religious art forms. Again, based on the medium used, the physical features had reflected changes. Peticularly speaking, the Deopani School of Art complied on more divine structures including deities. While the Eastern Indian School of Medieval Art (EISMA) had more of semi divine and secular structures including animals. Through the facial appearance and physical features we can derive the influence of outside and regional art forms as well. In this way again the changes became clear through the art forms of Doiyang Dhansiri valley.

**Periodization and abundance:** The actual and concrete periodization of the arts discovered in Doiyang Dhansiri valley is not an easy task. Although scholars like H. N. Dutta and M. Dutta tried to proclaim an accurate dating according to the sculptures, still further developments are expected. The factor in common is that the presence of artefacts in that region depends on respective time frame. For instance although from

7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> Century AD there are abundance of sculptures but prior to that phase has lessen in number. Similarly in the Medieval period the Doiyang Dhansiri Valley art had adopted variations from classical art forms outside. All these led to changing styles of art and developments.

## 10. Findings and Conclusion:

By studying the Doiyang Dhansiri Valley as a whole and specially the art forms several understandings could be made upon it. As per our research, some of those are listed here –

Firstly, from this research we come to know about Doiyang Dhansiri valley a one of the most important territory of Ancient Assam. Apart from the notions of ‘Pragjyotisha’ and ‘Kamrupa’ this area should be seen with equal importance. Not only as a urban civilization, but also as a focal point in Ancient trade routes, this Valley had served its purpose.

Secondly, although this paper is centralised towards the art, the historical presence of the archaeological site and its demographic structure has been catered as well. Typically this region was infiltrated by tribal population from Tibeto-Burmese origin. Later on heterogeneous population has shaped the region. The genealogical records found in the inscriptions of Ancient period in relation with the Valley are also highlighted here.

Thirdly, this paper presented a detailed account on the art forms of Doiyang Dhansiri valley. The key features of the Doyang Dhansiri valley art along with the mediums popularly used are discussed along the discourse. After the study we found that, apart from stylistical importance the art forms of Doiyang Dhansiri Valley has unveiled tremendous amount of historical testimonials along with ease in periodization.

Fourthly, after comparing the local and external art influence in that area, the Doiyang Dhansiri Valley can be considered as an artistic hub as well. The prominent art forms of Doiyang Dhansiri valley posses both external influences as well as localised imitations reflected in it. Looking from a historical perspective such contradictions paved the way to discover further opportunity relations with other areas with the Valley.

Fifthly, from the changing forms of Doiyang Dhansiri art we can devour multiple informative insights about the socio-cultural and religious pyridine. The depiction of deities and other religious symbolism inside the art forms revels the presence of multiple religious beliefs in Doiyang Dhansiri valley, i.e. – Shaivism, Vaishnavism, Saktism etc. Similarly the structural features of those art forms portrays probable anthropological information of that society.

Lastly, in the end due to comparison and revisiting the technical aspects again and again a simple but concrete idea on Doiyang Dhansiri valley and its art forms could be make out. A comparative aspect always helps in better understanding and holistic knowledge over any given topic. In this case, it is Doiyang Dhansiri valley and its art forms with due changes.

To conclude, it can be said that the Doiyang Dhansiri Valley has a good presence in the context of history of Ancient Assam. The geographical location, Hills and Rivers along with climatic conditions shaped the overall development of this region in its contemporary course. Trading activities and urban development suggests a strong socio-cultural and political dominance of Doiyang Dhansiri Valley over its peripheral region. Notably that, the development of various art forms is one of the salient features of this area.

Historically a chronological development of arts had shaped the cultural and religious values of Doiyang Dhansiri valley. From the comparative study of the changing art forms multiple dynamics of this region can be evaluated simultaneously. Further studies on this topic will certainly open up new theories and understandings presently embedded from history.

Here are the figures cited above in the portion of changing forms of art. Courtesy: The pictures are taken from the research projects of Indrani Chaudhari and H. N. Dutta respectively -

## 11. Illustrations:



Fig. 1: Figure of Vishnu



Fig. 2: Vishnu figure 2



Fig. 3: The figure of Shiva



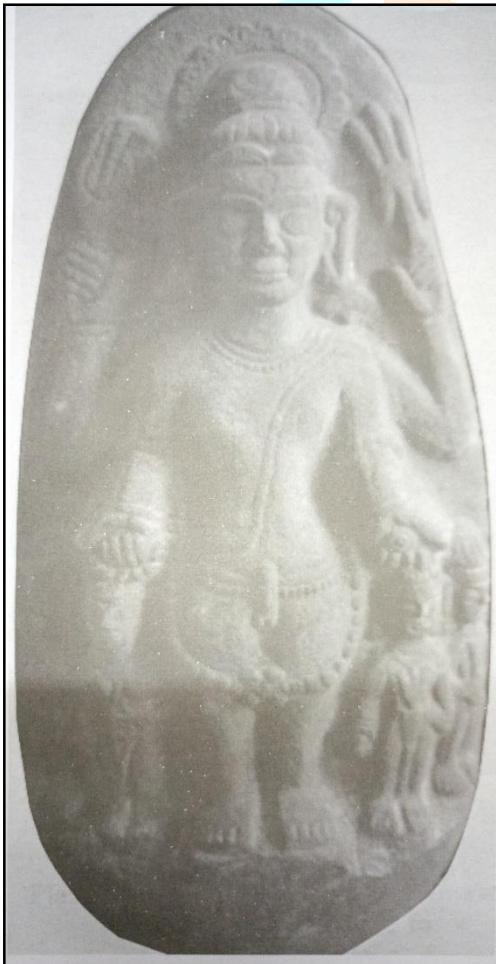
Fig. 4: The figure of Surya



**Fig. 5: The figure of *Durga***



**Fig. 6. Figure of *Ardhanarisvara***



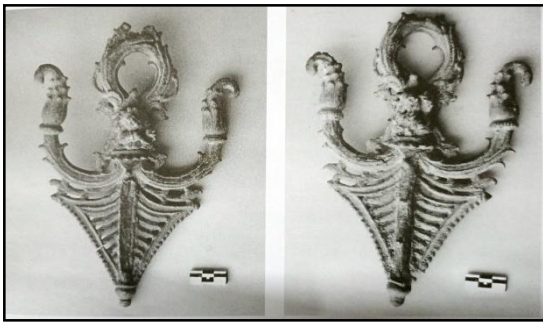
**Fig. 7. The figure of *Harihara***



**Fig. 8: Female figure (*Deoparvat*)**



**Fig. 9: *kirttimukhas***



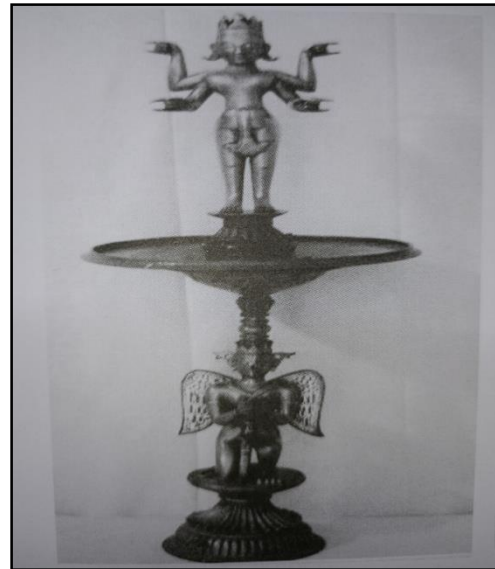
**Fig. 10: Plummets pair**



**Fig. 11: A female figure**



**Fig. 12: Bronze figure of *Bhairav***



**Fig. 13: Figure of *Vasudeva***



**Fig. 14: Terracotta female figure**



**Fig. 15: Terracotta Lion**



**Fig. 16: Chaturbhuja figure of Vishnu**



**Fig. 17: Chaturbhuja figure of Brahma**

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