

## Oronymy in *Yogini Tantra*: An Onomastic Study with Special Reference to Kamrup District of Assam

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### ABSTRACT

Onomastics is an interdisciplinary field of studies that examines all types of proper names, such as personal names (Anthroponyms) and placenames (Toponyms). By studying names, Onomastics provides insights into culture, history, social practices, and even cognitive processes. Study of placenames is undoubtedly an essential practice for human kind. Oronymy is another branch of Onomastic study that deals basically with a specific type of toponym that refers to name of a mountain or a hill (known as Oronym). As these refer to interdisciplinary fields of research, students of language and literature also do research on it. References to various oronyms, that is names of such hills or geographical landscapes are found extensively in *Yogini Tantra*, a sixteenth or seventeenth century anonymous literary and religious text dealing especially with Kingdom of Kamrupa (old Kingdom of Assam, India). The present paper is an attempt to locate some such oronyms and to trace their historical and mythological roots found especially in *Yogini Tantra* and to study them from onomastic point of view. The present paper considers the names of hills that are in the current district of Kamrup in Assam.

**Keywords:** *Onomastics, Toponyms, Oronyms, Yogini Tantra, Kamrupa Kingdom, Kamrup District.*

### Introduction

*Yogini Tantra* is an anonymous tantric text written between sixteenth and seventeenth century in Assam (then Kamrupa Kingdom). It was dedicated to the worship of Hindu Goddess *Kali* and *Kamakhyā*. This text contains numerous historical information along with religious and philosophical themes. The text contains geographical locations, historical facts, and various placenames of the kingdom of Kamrupa. *Yogini Tantra* also refers to certain oronyms, specific type of toponyms that refer to name of a mountain or a hill. The present paper, therefore is an attempt to conduct an onomastic study of some names of hills found in *Yogini Tantra* with special reference to the present district of Kamrup in Assam.

Sarat Kumar Phukan in his book *Toponymy of Assam* defines 'Onomastics' as the scientific study of names. It deals with the history and origin of proper names. To connect it with Toponymy he adds:

So, the study of place names also comes under the umbrella of Onomastics which is known as Toponymy. Toponymy is the combination of the Greek words '*Topos*' (place) and '*onoma*' (name). This branch of Onomastics deals with the names of villages, cities, streets, walls, fields, forests, mountains, rivers, ponds, lakes, etc. (Phukan, p. 4)

'Toponymy' is therefore associated closely with Onomastics. It emphasises on study of geographical location, linguistic analysis of formation of the naming word and meanings, historical importance of placenames, influences of place names in folklore, determination of ethnic groups, cultural elements in place names etc. Toponymy also studies the meaning, location, geography, etymology, history and archaeology related to placenames in terms of contemporary resources and time. Phukan writes, "A set of place names is called 'Toponymy' and their study is called 'Toponomastics'." (*Toponymy of Assam*, p. 4)

'Oronymy', in the same way is also a branch of such study that deals basically with a specific type of toponym that refers to name of a mountain or a hill. As it refers to an interdisciplinary field of research, students of language and literature also undergo research on it. Such hills or land forms are found extensively in *Yogini Tantra*, sixteenth or seventeenth century anonymous literary and religious text dealing especially with

Kingdom of Kamrupa (old Kingdom of Assam, India). The present paper is an attempt to locate some such oronyms and to trace historical and mythological roots found especially in *Yogini Tantra* and to study them from onomastic point of view.

The current research “Oronymy in *Yogini Tantra*: An Onomastic Study with Special Reference to Kamrup District of Assam” is comparatively a novel effort. This study, therefore, may create multiple opportunities for those interested in this field of research.

### Objectives of the Study

The prime objectives of this research are:

- To locate the names of hills currently situated in Kamrup District of Assam referred in *Yogini Tantra*.
- To study etymological and morphological structures of the names of hills found in *Yogini Tantra*.
- To find out possible historical and mythical reasons behind naming the hills.

### Methodologies

The current study adopts three methods to analyse the collected data from the primary text *Yogini Tantra*:

- Etymological Method
- Analytical Method
- Descriptive Method

### Discussion

The present paper entitled “Oronymy in *Yogini Tantra*: An Onomastic Study with Special Reference to Kamrup District of Assam” analyses the names of the hills referred in *Yogini Tantra* that come under the Kamrup district of Assam only. Though the paper’s primary focus is on historical and mythological elements embedded in the names of the hills it also deals with etymological and morphological structures to some extent. Some of such names are discussed below:

#### 1. Aswakranta

It is a name of a hill mentioned in *Yogini Tantra* multiple times along with a few other hills of Kamarupa. It appears that the hill is situated in North Guwahati, now under jurisdiction of present Kamrup district, near the *Aswakranta* temple from where a land grant of 1611 Saka (1789 A.D.) in copper plate has been discovered. (Neog, *Prachya Sasanavali*, p. 31)

It is believed that Sri Krishna’s wife Rukmini was from Bhismaknagar of the Kingdom of Kamrupa (now in Arunachal Pradesh). As per mythology, Sri Krishna allowed his horse (*Aswa* in Assamese and Sanskrit) to take rest at the hill *Aswakranta* for some time while he was returning from Bhismaknagar with Rukmini. This hilly place is now situated in Kamrup district of Assam. The hill got its name from the horse (*Aswa*) of Sri Krishna. In *Yogini Tantra* the hill *Aswakranta* has been mentioned as follows:

*Mahdavaschandrakute tu Godante cha jotadhara, Ksanmukhascha jayantascha Aswakrante janardana. Papi bhavati Godante Aswakrante tu muktidah, Chandrasoilashya purve tu kinchidagnayagochare. Daksine Aswakrantashya kinchidayagneyagochare, Dhaurbak pramanena Aswakrantahbaya shabab. Bhadrapi the cha dibyoso Aswakrante janardana.*” (Part II, Patala III, vs. 4-5, 29, 29 and Part II, Patala IV, vs. 27-28, 86-89)

#### 2. Bhasmachala

*Bhasma* (ashes) + suffix *-Achala*

The ‘Bhasmachala’ has been referred in *Yogini Tantra* as “**Bhasmachale**habhayanandascha chandrakute cha Madhabah”. (Part II, Patala IV, vs. 3-32)

According to *Yogini Tantra*, Lord Siva dwells here in the form of **Bhayananda**. It is believed that Siva was in meditation on this hillock, **Kamdeva** interrupted his yoga and was, therefore, burnt to ashes (*bhasma*) by the fire of Siva’s anger hence the hillock got the name of ‘Bhasmachala’. (Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam*, p. 19) The hill ‘Bhasmachala’ has also been mentioned in *Kamarupar Buranji* as one of the Ksetra parvata of Guwahati. (Bhuyan, p. 109)

#### 3. Bhuvaneswara

*Bhuvan* (the earth) + suffix *-Iswara* (the God); meaning a place where the God resides.

*Yogini Tantra* (Part II, Patala VII, vs. 81-82) describes the efficacy of worshipping Bhuvanesvara (*linga*) on this hill. In the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of *Yogini Tantra*, the residence of Buvaneswari is depicted as “*Siddhi-Kali Brahmarupa Devota Bhuvaneswari, Nibosshetratra Ya Kali Ghoraadaitvyabinashini.*” In the *Kalika Purana* (Ch. 62, v. 121) Bhuvaneswar is stated to be a sacred Pitha. The latter text further describes that the peak of the Bhuvanesvara is known as Bhuvananda. This hill is called to be an offshoot of the Nilachala hill. (Barua, p. 20)

#### 4. **Brahmakuta**

*Brahma* (the God) + suffix *-kuta*. It is mentioned in the *Yogini Tantra* as

**Brahmakutashya** dhanade srikundong nama boi sharah, Dhanuryugmapramanen tatra snata sriyong lovet. **Brahmakutashya** dhanade silapanchakamadhyegang, Durgakupong mahakupong sarvato dvarameba hi. (Part II, Patala VI, vs. 51; Part II, Patala VI vs. 75-77)

According to the text, a sacred lake named Srikunda is situated at the north of it. It appears to be a hill in the region of Kamrup district around Guwahati city.

#### 5. **Chandrasaila**

It is mentioned in the *Yogini Tantra* as

*Indrasoilasya madhye tu kinchiddaksinagochare, Uttare Chandrasoilasya tyajet shorah dhaanurbba dhah. Chandrasoiling* sparsa dhara Jahnabi sha prakrittita, Aswatirthong sprirsa dhara marjane swargamapnuyat. (Part II, Patala III, vs. 63-64)

The hill comes to the notice in connection with the description of the stream of the Asvatirtha, which is stated to have been extended up to this mountain and known as Ganga. According to some, it is on the north of the Umananda hill and situated in the Sindhurigopha mauza of Assam. (Barua, p. 21)

#### 6. **Godanta**

The hill 'Godanta' occurs in the *Yogini Tantra* as

*Mahdavaschandrakute tu Godante cha jotadhara, Ksanmukhascha jayantascha Aswakranthe janardana. Papi bhavati Godante* Aswakranthe tu muktidah, Chandrasoilashtya purve tu kinchidagneyagochare. (Part II, Patala III, vs. 6-8)

It has been described as an abode of the God Jatadhara (Siva). It may be identified with the hill of same name mentioned in *Kamrupar Buranji*. (p. 107) The hill thus appears to be situated near Guwahati.

#### 7. **Govardhana**

A mountain known as 'Govardhana' is mentioned in *Yogini Tantra* as

*Ato Govarddhanang nam parvataya dadou bidhi, Yatha yathasnati goscha tadagrashong sarvatottramong..., Tatha tatha kshayong yati patakong brahmanah sive, Tabtro nishkritiarddhatoryyabadegobarddhano girih.* (Part I, Patala XV, vs. 27-30)

According to a myth, this hill was created out of the ashes of the demon king Kesi. It is also a well-known pasture ground. Hence, it was named as 'Govardhana'. In *Kamrupar Buranji*, the hill Govardhana is stated to be a peak of the mountain Govinda. (p. 108) Kakati has identified the mountain with the Nilachal. (Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya*, pp. 37-38) It is situated in Guwahati, capital city of Assam.

#### 8. **Govinda**

It is said that there is a white stone on the peak of the hill which is known as Govinda. According to *Kamrupar Buranji* the hill has two peaks, named 'Govardhana' and 'Jnana'. (p. 108) The hill appears to be located near Guwahati. The Govinda hill occurs in *Yogini Tantra*. (Part II, Patala VIII, vs. 47-48)

#### 9. **Hastiparvata**

*Hasti* (elephant) + *Parvata* (hill or mountain); a hill or mountain resembling an elephant.

The name is derived from the form of an elephant situated in Kamrup district. This hill is referred in *Yogini Tantra* as "*Dvarabatyantu bagadebo Nataka Natakeswarh, Nilachale cha kamesa Pigalo Hastiparvate.*" In *Kamrupar Buranji* the Sukreswar parvat is referred as Hastiparvat. It is generally believed that a temple was founded by Daitya Guru Sukracharyya on this hill. The temple has 1250 bighas Lakheraj (revenue free) land granted by the Ahom king Pramattasimha in A.D. 1720.

#### 10. **Hastachala**

A hill known as 'Hastachala' appears in *Yogini Tantra* as "*Hastachalashya purve kinchidoisanyagochare, Bhasmachalong sthirong bhutva shamiksat kammucharana.*" (Part II, Patala VI, vs. 86-89). According to Barua, it is situated in Pati Darrang mauza of the Kamarup district of Assam. (Barua, p.31)

#### 11. **Indrasaila**

The name is connected with Lord Indra, that is lord of the Heaven. The hill occurs in *Yogini Tantra* as

*Lauhityamadhye debesi dhanustringsat pramanat, Indrasoila iti khyatstatra bame mahaphalong. Indrasoilasya* madhye tu kinchiddaksinagochare, Uttare Chandrasoilasya tyajet shorah dhaanurbba dhah. **Indrasoila** sparsa dhara sha bidheya Saraswati, Tatro jo majjati bidvananatyang phalamasnute. (Part II, Patala VI, vs. 82-85, Part II, Patala III, vs. 10-11)

*Kamrupar Buranji* (pp. 106, 110) also mentions this hill as the Indra or Indrachala as one of the Ksetra-parvatas around Guwahati.

#### 12. **Kola**

The Kola has been mentioned in *Yogini Tantra* as

*Lauhityadaksinang gatva bayabye Kolaparvat, Tashya paschimadigbhage Pandunatho mahabalih. Kolascha* vishnusoilanscha paramesi cha sankara, Isascha parijatascha kumarscha ganeswara, Nilah svetahatha bhunit uttare shangsthitachola, Madhye vishnustatha parvatohth balastotha, Kamalascha sikha choiba kopato Murotachala. (Part II, Patala VI, vs. 2)

It appears that the hill is situated near the *Lauhitya* (the Brahmaputra). The hill is yet to be identified.

### 13. Mandara

The hill 'Mandara' finds mention in *Yogini Tantra* as

*Ujjayinang Dasahena Mashen Mandarachale, Abasyang Mantarsiddhiah Shajjyaponaat Pujanachibe. Manikute Hayagribo Boraho Binduparvate, Jatadhara Godante Gomante jangaleswarah, Paramesthi Brahmaputre Viswasoile tu gahbarah, Chitrasoile tu chitraso devikayanchaturbhujah,...Mandare* cha mahaboddhih gorpindro Hanuparvate.... Dhabalayang pinaki cha Picchalayang tribikrama, Janjagarbhastu agasthye Urvasyang madhusudana...Triporarinandasoile Pandusoile trilochana...Gokarne cha bikarnakhyo Mandare madhusudana. (Part II, Patala IX, vs. 89)

It is stated that one may get rid of all sins after a visit to the Mandara. This hill also occurs in the rock inscription of the Phalgutsava temple at Nilachala, 1672 Saka (Neog, *Prachya Sasanavali*, p. 40), and in the land grant inscription of Kamakhya, Pandunath and Ugratara temples. (Ibid., p. 9) The hill appears to be near Guwahati, the district of Kamrup.

### 14. Matanga

This has been mentioned as situated on the east of the Ksetra-parvata Natakachala mentioned in *Yogini Tantra* as "*Bhashkarashya mahaksetrong yata Matanga Bhashkara, Yatra Someswarong lingamadipithong tathaparong.*" (Part II, Patala V, vs. 43) It has been regarded as an abode of Siva and is located near Guwahati.

### 15. Nila or Nilachala or Nilakuta

*Yogini Tantra* mentions a mountain named 'Nila' (Part II, Patala VI, vs. 82), which may be identified with the present mountain Nilachal. Nilachal is referred in *Yogini Tantra* in the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter as follows:

*Tanmadhye cha Mahadevi Giri Nilachaloujjala, Brahma Vishnu Sivakarah Sarvasaktimayah Punah. Brahmano maanasha putro Vasithaahatiba sadayati, Taramayadhayamasha toda Nilachale* Muni. *Tatraibakadine Devi Pujayutung Sureswaring, Kamakhyamandale Tarang Puradvare Samagamah, Tatra tong barayamassha Narako Brahmasambhabong. Dvarabatyanttu bagadebo Nataka Natakeshwarh, Nilachale* cha kamesa Pigalo Hastiparvate.

The Nilachal is also perhaps mentioned as one of the Ksetra-parvatas situated near Guwahati. (*Kamrupar Buranji*, p. 109)

There is a legend that when Sati died of vexation at the discourtesy shown to her husband Siva by her father king Daksa. Siva out of grief and anger, wandered about carrying the body of Sati to put a stop to his penance, Visnu followed and lopped away the body piecemeal with his discus. It fell to earth in fifty-one different pieces and wherever each piece fell, the ground was held to be sacred. Her organs of generation fell on Kamagiri, i.e., the Nilachal hill near Guwahati and the place was thenceforth held sacred as Kamakhya, the goddess of sexual desire. (Gait, *History of Assam*, pp.11-13, 49, 57, 58, 182, 183)

### 16. Pandunath

*Yogini Tantra* also mentions the sacredness of the mountain 'Pandunatha' as

*Lauhityadaksinang gatva bayabye Kolaparvat, Tashya paschimadigbhage Pandunatho mahabalih. Tato brajet Pandusoilang gandhatoyen snapoyet, Pujayet kamaloi sveto karabiroi sveto subhoi. Lohite bidhibata snatva Pandunath* prapujayet, *Sarvapapabinimukto vishnuloke mahiyate.* (Part II, Patala V, vs. 26-27)

The hill also finds mention in a medieval Rock Inscription of Pandunatha -Hari Temple, 1507 Saka. (*Prachya Sasanavali*, p. 4) It is identified with Pandu hill, located about five miles from the modern Guwahati. (Barua, p. 47)

### 17. Udayachala hill @ Udaygiri

Udayachal is a hill in Kamrup district and gets mention in *Yogini Tantra* as

*Sha To Udayachalang* purvang tapastepehatidushkarang, *Bhutvoarddha charao devi barshanang niyutadvayang.....Uttare Brahmaksetrancha daksine sagarabadhih, Purvate Udayakutanacha paschat Sriparvatong priye.*

### 18. Vayukuta

Vayu (God of air) + suffix -Kuta; means a hill of Vayu. The mountain Vayukuta is mentioned in *Yogini Tantra* as

*Vayukutashya* charame dhanurhashtapramanatah, *Vayurupah sthitastatra stasmannihsritya marutah. Purvong Vayugireh soilaschandrakutaiti smritah, Madhyataschaiba Godantah krantasto dakhine subhah.* (Part II, Patala I, vs. 39-40)

The hill is also described as 'Vayugiri', where *giri* means hill or mountain. (*Yogini Tantra*, Part II, Patala V; Part II Patala VI. vs. 86-89)

A hill named 'Vayu' occurs in the *Kamrupar Buranji* (p. 107) and it is likely to be similar with the present one. Thus, the hill or mountain appears to be located in Guwahati as referred in *Kamrupar Buranji*. The latter text further states that the mountain has three peaks namely the Lakshmi, the Saraswati and the other Vishnu.

### Findings and Conclusion

The present research work has several findings as follows:

- Most of the hills bear mythological roots while naming them.
- In naming the hills, influences of linguistic elements of old Assamese and Sanskrit are found.
- A good number of names of Hills of Kamrup district of Assam are found to be based on names of Gods, Goddesses and other Hindu mythological characters.
- Various toponyms are formed by combining two or more free forms. In some exceptional cases, a bound form also follows a free form.
- Moreover, formation of place names is seen through addition of suffixes such as '-kuta', '-achala' with nouns.

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