ASPECTS OF EARLY ASSAMESE LITERATURE



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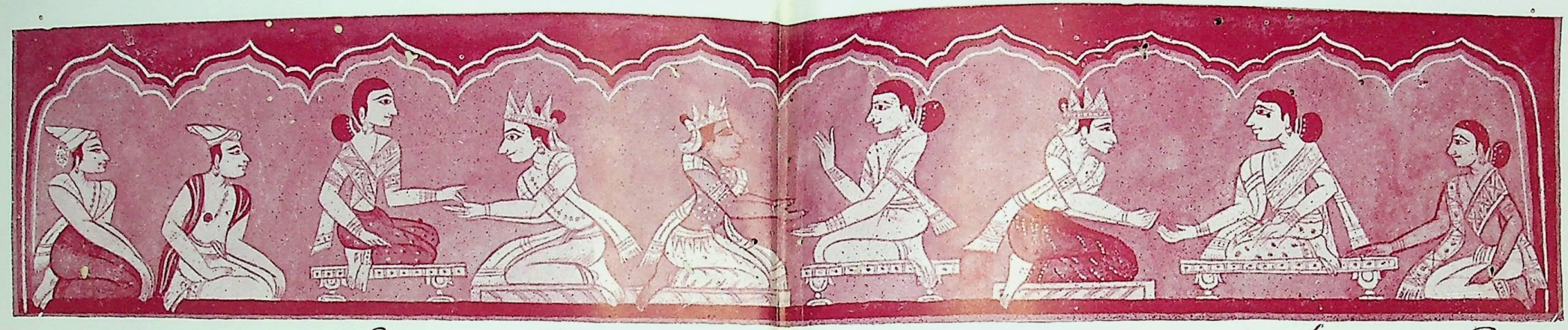
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ASPECTS OF EARLY ASSAMESE LITERATURE

PAINTINGS FROM HARIVARA'S LAVA-KUŚAR YUDDHA



জনা সুমিত্রা লক্ষ্মণ রামচন্দ্র কাসলা ভরত কৈকৈয়ী কাজি



চুলিয়া কাতিয়া নাৰিকল জনক সিতা শ্রীৰামচন্দ্র হোম ৱসিষ্ট বিশ্বামিত্র

REPRODUCTIONS of paintings from Harivara's *Lava-Kuśar Yuddha,* Assam Research Society MS, Gauhati Collection, obtained from Rāṇī Māhendrī Devī of Āhom rāj family, vide Maheswar Neog : 'Assamese Literature before Śaṅkaradeva', footnote 47.

— *Reconstructed by S. Rai Barua*

TOP : Miniature on folio 2B depicting return of Rāma home after killing Rāvaṇa. From left to right : two soldiers, Sumitrā, Lakṣmaṇa, Rāmacandra, Kauśalyā, Bharata, Kaikeyī and Mantharā.

BOTTOM : Miniature on folio 6A depicting performance of *puṁsavana* ceremony of Rāma and Sītā. From left to right : a drummer, a piper, three women making propitiatory sound, Janaka tying up tips of Rāma's and Sītā's hair together, the sacred fire, Vasiṣṭha, and Viśvāmitra preparing food for offering.

ASPECTS OF
EARLY ASSAMESE LITERATURE

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FOREWORD

The present work consisting of Essays on different aspects of old Assamese literature is the first research publication of the University of Gauhati, and our thanks are due to the scholars who have collaborated to produce what I believe is a substantial contribution to the study of the subject. The editing of the work was entrusted to Dr. B. K. Kakati, Head of the Department of Assamese, who revised the manuscript before his lamented death in November 1952. Unfortunately he did not live to see the work through the press in its final form.

A comprehensive history of early Assamese literature is still a desideratum. Meanwhile, it is to be hoped that the present work will stimulate research in a subject which has hardly attracted any attention outside the limits of Assam.

JORHAT,
10th December, 1953.

K. K. HANDIQUI,
Vice-Chancellor,
Gauhati University.

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THE ASSAMESE LANGUAGE*

BY

B. KAKATI

1. *Introductory*

Assamese is the easternmost New Indo-Aryan language spoken in the Brahmaputra Valley comprising at present six districts with Lakhimpur in the extreme east and Goalpara in the west. It is a language of the plains and is surrounded by speeches belonging to families of which the Tibeto-Burman and the Khāsi are the important ones. Assamese occupies an important place in the group of N.I.A. languages. Hiuen-Tsang the celebrated Chinese traveller visited Kāmarūpa in the 7th century and remained for sometime in the court of King Bhāskaravarman. In course of his references to various aspects of the kingdom of Kāmarūpa he spoke of its language as "slightly differing" from that of Mid-India. He perhaps meant by it certain peculiarities of the Kāmarūpī language at the beginning of its evolution. For want of sufficient data we cannot ascertain a definite date of the origin of Assamese as an independent N.I.A. language, though the 10th or 11th century of the Christian era is generally regarded as marking the beginning of the N.I.A. languages. Specimens of Assamese as an independent provincial language have been preserved in the literature from the fourteenth century onwards.

2. *Origin of 'Assam'*

The word 'Assamese' is an English one based on the anglicised form 'Assam' from the native word "Asam", which in its turn is connected with the Shans who invaded the Brahmaputra Valley in the 13th century. Though the Shan invaders called themselves "*Ṭā i*" they came to be referred to as *Āsam, Āsām* and *Ācam* by the indigenous people of the province, Early Assamese chronicles used all these variant forms to mean the new Shan invaders. The modern Assamese word *Āhŏm* by which the Ṭāi people are known goes back to early Assamese *Āsām* (Āsām> Āsam>Āham>Āhŏm). The last syllable of *Āsām* might very well be connected with *Sham* (*Shan, Syam*) as Dr. Grierson has suggested but then the initial vowel '*ā*' would remain unexplained. Sir

* For a detailed history of Assamese language, see the writer's *Assamese, its Formation and Development*.

Edward Gait suggests *Ąsam* (unequalled or peerless) to be the origin of the present word *Āhŏm*, but most probably *Asama* meaning peerless or unequalled is a latter-day Sanskritisation of some earlier form like *Āchām*. In Ṭāi the root *cham* means "to be defeated". With the privative Assamese affix *ā* the whole formation *Āchām* would mean undefeated. The change of *Āchām* into *Āsām* is very natural. The presence of forms like *Āsām* and *Ācām* in early Assamese lends support to the above view. In a still later period the term *Āsām* was further Sanskritised by changing it to *Āsām*.

Thus the word *Āsām* was first applied to the Shan invaders and subsequently to the country they conquered, and finally the whole of the Brahmaputra Valley came to be known by this designation. In earliest times the territory now called Asam was known as Kāmarūpa. It should be noted in this connection that while the name of the country still remains *Āsām*, the name of the tribe to which originally the term was applied undergoes modification and becomes *Ahām, Aham, Āhŏm*. In modern Assamese Shan invaders of the 13th century who subsequently settled in the country are invariably known as *Āhŏms*.

3. *Evolution of Assamese*

Ancient Kāmarūpa, sometimes known as Prāgjyotiṣapura in the epics and Purāṇas, comprised the whole of north Bengal including Cooch-Behar, and the Rangpur and Jalpaiguri districts of Bengal. When Hiuen-Tsang visited the kingdom of Kāmarūpa (Ka-mo-lu-po), its western boundary was the river Karatoyā in north Bengal. According to *Kālikā-purāṇa* (circa 10th century) and *Yoginī-tantra* (circa 16th century) the western and the eastern boundary of Kāmarūpa were marked by the river Karatoyā (in north Bengal) and Dikkaravāsinī (in eastern Assam) respectively. Thus from the time of Hiuen-Tsang in the 7th century down to the Koch kings of the 17th and 18th centuries the river Karatoyā formed the western limit of Kāmarūpa. It was under the patronage of the kings of Kāmarūpa, and Cooch-Behar, in the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries that the earliest Assamese literature originated and developed. Even now the spoken language of north Bengal and wetsern Assam is subsequently the same and seems to form one dialect group. If territorial readjustments were to be made on the basis of linguistic homogeneity north Bengal should have been included with Assam. Dr. Grierson in his *Linguistic Survey of India* also notices this affinity of Assamese with the north Bengal dialect. He says, Māgadhī was the principal dialect which corresponded to the old Eastern Prakrit. East of

Magadha lay the Prācya Apabhraṁśa, the headquarters of which was at Gauḍa in the district of Malda. Gauḍa Apabhraṁśa also spread to the east keeping north of the Ganges and is there represented at the present day by Northern Bengali and in the valley of Assam by Assamese. North Bengal and Assam did not get their language from Bengal proper but directly from the west. Māgadhī Apabhraṁśa may be considered as spreading out eastwards and southwards in three directions. To the north-east it developed into Northern Bengali and Assamese, to the south into Oriya and between the two into Bengali. Each of these three is equally directly connected with the common immediate parent, i.e. Prācya Apabhraṁśa" (*L.S.I.*, Vol. I, part I, pp. 125-126). Dr. S. K. Chatterji also classifies Eastern Apabhraṁśa into (i) Rāḍha (western Bengal), (ii) Varendra (north central Bengal), (iii) Vaṅga (eastern Bengal), (iv) Kāmarūpa (north Bengal and Assam) (*O.D.B.L.*, Vol. I, p. 140).

4. *Difference with Bengali*

In spite of these authoritative judgments there was and is still in some uninformed quarters an erroneous view that Assamese is a *patois* of Bengali. Enumeration of a few outstanding and fundamental points of difference will perhaps help to remove such erroneous views.

(I) Assamese words for *fire* and *water* are from the earliest time *zui* and *pānī* as opposed to Bengali *āgun* and *zal*.

(II) Assamese and Bengali have contrasting systems of accentuation. Assamese follows the system of penultimate stress and Bengali has an initial stress. For instance in Assamese *côtāl* (courtyard), the stress falls on the penultimate syllable, while in Bengali *cātāl*, the stress falls on the first.

(III) The genitive case affix in Bengali *-er*, while in Assamese it is *-ar* e.g., Bengali *Rāmer* (of *Rāma*), Assamese *Rāmar* (of Rāma).

(IV) The locative affix in Assamese is *-t-* from the earliest times while Bengali has *-e-, -te-;* e.g. As *gharata* (in the house), Bg. *ghare* (in the house).

(V) The past conditional in Assamese is expressed by the post-position *-hẽten*, after fully conjugated verbal roots in the past. Bengali expresses the past conditional with the present participle base in *-it-* with personal conjugational affixes, e.g. As. *karilohẽten* (I would have done), Bg. *karitām*.

(VI) The infinitive sense in Assamese is formed by *-ib-*, with its extended form *-ibalai* and in Bengali by forms in *-it-;* e.g. As. *karibalai*, Bg. *karite*.

(VII) Assamese has a complete set of negative conjugations with the negative particle *-na-* placed before the verb root. Bengali has no negative conjugation; e.g. As. *nākhāy* (does not eat), Bg. *khāynā* (does not eat).

(VIII) The plural suffixes in Assamese are entirely different from those of Bengali. The commonly used Assamese plural suffixes are *-bŏr, -bilāk, -hāt.* These are entirely absent in Bengali.

(IX) Assamese pronominal derivatives of time and place, viz. *etiya, tetiyā, ketiyā, ka't, ta't,* etc. seem to have no parallel formations in Bengali.

(X) The type of vowel-harmony where an anterior *-ā-* is shortened under the influence of following *-ā-* in a succeeding syllable is absent in Bengali; e.g. As. *kaṭāri* (knife); *cakā* (circle, wheel); Bg. *kāṭāri, cākā.*

(XI) Assamese devised from earliest times a symbol (ৱ) for *w*-glide. Bengali has none to denote this glide.

The above are only a few of the important differences. There are many other phonological and morphological differences, too numerous to note here.

5. *Assamese specimens of the formative period*

Dr. Haraprasad Sastri discovered in Nepal a book of songs and aphorisms written by Tāntric Buddhists of Sahajayāna doctrine between the 8th and 12th centuries. It has been published under the title *Bauddha Gān O Dŏhā* and Bengali scholars consider it to be the specimen of Bengali of one thousand years ago. But on an examination of the grammatical forms of the Dŏhās, it becomes apparent that its language represents the latest phase of the Magadhan Aphabraṁśa; as such it preserves to a considerable extent the earliest forms of the eastern N.I.A. languages. Certain phonological and morphological peculiarities registered in the Bauddha Dŏhās have come down in unbroken continuity to modern Assamese. The shortening of an anterior *-ā-* under the influence of the succeeding *-ā-* in the next syllable, which is one of the special characteristics of Assamese, is also found in the language of the Dŏhās. Similarly, the dative case-ending in *-lai,* locative ending *-ta,* genitive ending in *-ra;* present participle in *añt;* conjunctive in *-i* and *-ile* are some of the Assamese peculiarities inherited from the language of the *Dŏhās.*

Another important work which has been claimed as a purely Bengali work, but which nevertheless preserves the earliest Assamese formations is *Kṛṣṇa-kīrtana* of Baḍu Caṇḍidāsa. Like the

Dŏhās *Kṛṣṇa-kīrtana* represents the pre-Bengali and pre-Assamese dialect groups which may be designated as Eastern Māgadhān Apabhraṁśa. They represented mixtures of many tongues and many forms and hence we find parallel forms characteristic of different N.I.A. languages of Eastern India. In *Kṛṣṇa-kīrtana,* for instance, the first personal affixes of the present indicative are *-i,* and *-o;* the former is found in Bengali at present and the latter in Assamese. Similarly, the negative particle *na-* assimilated to the initial vowel of the conjugated root, which is characteristic of Assamese, is also found in *Kṛṣṇa-kīrtana.* Modern Bengali places the negative particle after the conjugated root. With the development of linguistic self-consciousness the parallel forms were isolated and each dialect group became clearly demarcated and different parallel forms became leading characteristics of the dialect groups.

6. *Distinctive periods of Assamese language*

The history of the Assamese language as preserved in literature may be divided conveniently into three periods:—

(I) Early Assamese: from the fourteenth to the end of the sixteenth century. It covers the pre-Vaiṣṇavite period, i.e. the period before the advent of Śaṅkaradeva and the Vaiṣṇavite period initiated by his literary activities. The earliest Assamese writers, viz. Hema Saraswatī and Harivara Vipra who composed *Prahlāda-carita* and *Babruvāhanar Yuddha* respectively wrote under the patronage of king Durlabhanārāyaṇa of Kamatāpura who ruled towards the end of the 13th or the earlier part of the 14th century. The next two important poets of the same period are Rudra Kandali and Kaviratna Saraswatī who composed *Droṇa-parva* and *Jayadratha-vadha.* But the towering poet of this period is Mādhava Kandali who is respectfully referred to by Śaṅkaradeva (b. 1449) as his flawless predecessor. Mādhava Kandali flourished towards the end of the fourteenth century and translated the entire *Rāmāyaṇa* under the patronage of Mahāmāṇikya, the then Kachari king of central Assam.

In all these writers the Assamese idioms and expressions seem to have been fully individualised. The personal affixation to nouns of relationship is fully established and so is the anterior *-ā-* shortened under the influence of the succeeding *-ā-.* The addition of personal ending after participal tenses in *-ib-* and *-it-* was not fully established. A good deal of fluctuation is noticeable—the participial suffixes sometimes standing alone without any personal ending and sometimes taking them on. There is in all these writers a curious use of the conjunctive participle, e.g. *hāni-ere* (does

pierce) *kari-era* (do you do). The past participle in *-ib-* is also found in all these writers, e.g. *maribāra prajā* (the slain people), *dibāra astra* (weapons given).

The literature gained a great momentum at the hands of Śaṅkaradeva who brought a Vaiṣṇavite revival by preaching as well as by his writings. The archaism noticeable in the pre-Vaiṣṇavite writers is entirely absent in his writings and the curious use of pleonastic conjunctives wholly disappear. Śaṇkaradeva also for the first time introduced Brajabuli idioms and affixes in his dramas and songs, later on practised by his followers also. This same period also witnesses the use of prose as the vehicle of religious propaganda. Bhaṭṭadeva translated the entire *Bhāgavad-gītā* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* into Assamese prose towards the close of the sixteenth century. His prose was an artificial one, yet it preserves certain grammatical peculiarities. The first personal ending *-m* in the future tense appears for the first time in writing side by side with the conventional *-bo*. The extended forms of personal endings of participal tenses like *-o-hŏ-, -lo-hŏ, -ā-hā-, -lā-hā, li-hi, -bi-hi,* are not used at all. These are mainly used for the exigencies of metre.

(II) The Middle Assamese period covers a period from the beginning of the seventeenth century to the beginning of the 19th century, e.g. up to the conquest of Assam by the British. The special feature of this period from the point of view of language is the historical writings initiated under the inspiration of the Āhŏm court. These historical writings in prose, better known as *Burañjis,* broke away from the style of religious writings. The language of these chronicles is essentially modern with alteration in grammar and orthography. The plural suffixes of nouns *-bor,* and *-hāt,* appear for the first time in these compositions. The pleonastic use of the conjunctive participles, e.g. *-gai* (*dharile-gai, thākile-gai,* etc.) and *-hi* (*pālehi, barilhi,* etc.) is well established. The transfer of plural suffixes from nouns to verbs, e.g. *-hak, -hok, -har,* etc. is first noticed here.

(III) The Modern Assamese period begins with the publication of the Bible in Assamese by the American Baptist Missionaries in the first quarter of the 19th century. In 1846 they started a monthly periodical called *Aruṇodaya.* In 1848 the first Assamese grammar written by N. Brown, a missionary, was published; and in 1867 Rev. M. Bronson brought out for the first time an Assamese-English dictionary. Under the influence of the missionaries, a set of native writers grew up and books and periodicals in the language of eastern Assam were multiplied. Thus the tradition of the Āhŏm court supported by the missionaries, established the language of eastern Assam as the literary speech of the entire province.

Owing to the levelling influence of the Āhŏm court, the language of eastern Assam shews very little dialectical variations. But there is a good deal of local variations in the spoken language of western Assam spoken in different parts of the Kamrup and Goalpara districts of which five local variations are to be found in the Kamrup district alone. The reason for this is not far to seek. A steady central influence that gives homogeneity to manners as to speech was never built up by any ruling power in western Assam.

7. *Assamese Vocabulary*

Assamese vocabulary may conveniently be classified under six divisions:

(1) Words of original Sanskrit or Indo-Aryan origin coming through a process of linguistic evolution through the Prakrit and Apabhraṁśa stages. These are generally known as *tadbhava* words.

(2) Words common to many N.I.A. languages but not traceable to Indo-Aryan source. These are termed as *deśya* words.

(3) Words borrowed at one time or another from other N.I.A. languages.

(4) Words of non-Aryan origin.

(5) A certain number of English and other European words.

(6) Sanskrit words either in original or in modified forms to suit the genius or the phonological peculiarities of Assamese. These two classes of words are designated as *tatsama* and *ardhatatsama* words by N.I.A. grammarians. Let us discuss these sources a bit elaborately.

(1) Of the six groups of words, those that come under the first heading constitute the preponderating element. Most of the words used in everyday life belong to this class. This is mostly due to the fact that the foundation of Assamese literature was laid by Vaiṣṇavite reformers whose chief aim was to appeal to the masses and who composed their books as much as possible in the language of the people. In the modern period also the American Baptist Mission began to publish Assamese books in the beginning of the 19th century in a homely diction using *tadbhava* words in abundance. The *tatsama* or the original Sanskrit words are

sparingly used in the spoken dialect; it is generally used in a limited scale in poetry and other forms of creative literature. Side by side with the above two types of words having their source in Sanskrit there is a fair amount of *ardhatatsama* words. These seem to be later formations and often betray a good deal of semantic variations. A few words having different forms with different meanings are noted below.

Tatsama	Tadbhava	Ardhatatsama (Semi-tatsama)
śasya	*xāh* (kernel)	*xah* (agricultural crops)
		xaic (paddy)
troṭi	*thorā* (pestle of husking)	*ṭhõṭ* (beak of a bird)
gaṇḍa	*gā̃r* (boil)	*gār* (rhino)
sañca	*xā̃c* (impression)	*xāc* (seed for germination).

Thus the semi-tatsamas are modified loan words from Sanskrit and are formed either according to the genius of the spoken language or under the influence of dialectical cross-currents.

(2) There is a fair representation in Assamese of what has been registered as *deśya* elements in N. I. A. lexicons. Such words as *tẽteli* (tamarind), *kadali* (plantain), *tāmola* (arecanut), *ḍimā* (egg) are not Indo-Aryan words but nevertheless derived from Sanskrit. These words were taken into the Sanskrit fold before the N.I.A. languages came into existence.

(3) The chief source for these has been Hindusthānī. From that source has been received also a large number of Persian and Arabic words. Most of the words relating to law, order and revenue and names of certain articles of luxury are of Persian and Arabic origin. Words of Sanskrit origin which preserve the sibilant sound in place of the Sanskrit sibilants which uniformly have an *x* sound in Assamese, are loan words from Hindustānī or other western dialects. To denote such sibilant sounds *c* is used in Assamese spelling. Homely Assamese words often with slight alteration of meaning shew parallel equivalents in Oriyā, Bihārī, Hindusthānī and other western languages. These might have descended from common sources and in some cases might also have been due to migration and inter-provincial contacts. Certain Assamese words have parallel formations in westernmost languages like Mārāthī, which the Northern Indian languages do not seem to possess. A few are noted below by way of illustration:

As.	Mārāṭhī
beji (needle)	*bej* (eye of a needle)
barangaṇi (subscription)	*bargaṇi* (subscription)
tāŋgaraṇ (edition)	*tāŋgaraṇ* (improvement)
jakarā (*bhāt*) (surplus boiled rice kept for the next meal)	*jakerā* (surplus article)
khābhani (a scraper)	*khāvani* (a scraper).

About this class of words it would be more plausible to assume race contact rather than derivation from a common source.

(4) The principal non-Aryan sources contributing loan words to Assamese may be classified under the following heads. (i) Austro-Asiatic, (ii) Tibeto-Burman, (iii) Thāi.

I. *Austro-Asiatic influence*

The Austro-Asiatic influence may be traced to three language groups: (a) Khāsi, (b) Kolarian, (c) Mālayan. While the Khāsi elements may be regarded as loans due to the contact of the Assamese with the Khāsis, the Malayan and the Kolarian elements may be said to be due to the facts of a sub-stratum resulting from the unconscious blending of two systems existing amongst the people. The Austro-Asiatic people are supposed by some to have been the earliest inhabitants of northern India and driven to their present mountain homes by the Tibeto-Burman on the east and by the Dravidian on the west. The Khāsi language in Assam is the sole representative of the Austro-Asiatic family in north-eastern India. The other representative of the Austro-Asiatic stock are the Muṇḍā (Kolārian) languages that occupy the eastern half of Central India. Most of these people who once spoke these Austric dialects have now merged into the Hindu and Muhammedan masses of northern India and have become transformed into the present-day Aryan speaking castes and groups of the country. The absorption of the Austric speaker into the Aryan fold explains the presence in the Indo-Aryan speeches of a considerable number of Austric words. It should be borne in mind that the similarities of Assamese elements with the Austro-Asiatic speeches noted in *Assamese, its Formation and Development* (pp. 33-47) are based on merely sound and meaning, which is not a sure guide in etymology. The influence of the Khāsi language seems to be confined mostly to the vocabulary. A few selected words having similarity with Khāsi are noted below.

(a) *Khāsī correspondences*

As.	Khāsi.
kābau (supplication)	*kabo* (to request)
king-khāp (a kind of silk)	*kem-khap* (a kind of cloth)
√*khāmoc* (grasp)	*kham* (to close fist)
kāmā (wander about aimlessly)	*kma* (wander, roam)
jañjāl (trouble)	*jinjar* (trouble)
methon (a wild bull)	*mythen, mythun* (big and masculer as calf)
cokorā (shell, scab)	*soh-khroh* (having pock marks)
sañjāt (trust, confidence)	*synjat* (a pledge)
bhur (a raft)	*bur* (a raft)
bhurā (a male wild boar)	*bhur* (one of the herd of wild boars).

A few words retained in Khāsi seems to have been absorbed into Sanskrit also, e.g. Skt. *cholanga* = a lemon, As. *soleng*, Khāsi *soh-long;* Skt. *simba* = pod, Khāsi *symbāi* = a seed; etc.

(b) *Kŏlārian correspondences*

The present habitation of Kolārian people in Central Provinces precludes any possibility of its influence upon Assamese. But according to the references in *Vāyu Purāṇa* and *Mahābārata* the Kols originally inhabited eastern India. If it is a fact then the Kōlarian influence becomes easily conceivable. Both the Kolārian dictionaries (the Santālī and Muṇḍāri) contain scores of words that bear striking similarities to Assamese formations of unknown origin. A few Assamese words bearing similarities to Santālī and Muṇḍārī words are noted below

(1) *Muṇḍārī correspondences*

As.	Mṇḍ.
āṭôm-ṭôkāri (frugal, economical)	*āṭom* (brink) + *ṭak* (to be full)
√*uṭe* (float)	*atu* (to float)
√*bilā* (to distribute)	√*bil* (to spread)
ḍaŋguwā (bachelor)	*ḍanguwā* (solitary)
erā (yes)	*elā* (expressing assent)
jũṭi (snare)	√*juṭi* (to seduce)
lāṭum (a spinning top)	√*lāṭum* (to fold up)
mugā (silk cocoon)	*muŋgā* (coral)
√*uburiyā* (to turn upside down)	√*obor* (lie down on the belly)
utaŋgowā (to goad)	*oṭāngāo* (be carried away by wind)
cikarā (a skin louse)	*siku* (louse)
lekhīyā (like, similar)	*lekā, lekhā* (like)

(2) *Santālī correspondences*

ākor-gojā (obstinate)	*akor* (difficult)
āṭhkuriyā (childless, barren)	*atkura* (childless)
bhut-kurā (dwarfish)	*bhutka* (stunted)
caphal (having health and vigour)	*caphel* (smooth)
ḍobolā (a piece of land)	*doblak*
ḍhip (a boundary mark, a hillock)	*dhipi, dhiph* (a mark of boundaries)
ḍhumā (big)	*dhuma* (big, fat)
ḍãk (to expel)	*danka* (to outcast)
gohāri (petition for help)	*guhar* (shout for help)
pāhār (a hill).	Austr. *pâu* + Sant. *hara* (a hill).

(c) *Malayan elements*

In addition to the observations made under the two previous sections (Khāsi and Kolarian), it may be stated that Austric elements seem to constitute an essential substratum of Assamese vocabulary. The vocables that are regarded as indigenous at present, seem to have been mostly taken over from the Austric speakers. The slang words denoting sex life and sex organs, the terms of relationship according to varied grades of life, the names of various descriptions of animals, seem to go back to Austric sources. The influence or the connection of the Austro-Asiatic languages over Sanskrit and N. I. A. languages has been discussed in detail by Przyluski, Levi, Bloch, S. K. Chatterji and other eminent scholars. The following Assamese words having similarity with words of Austric speeches of the Malay Peninsula deserve notice. The list should not be considered as an exhaustive one.

As.	Austric words of Malay Peninsula
āṭā (grandfather)	*ata, atar* (grandfather)
akaṇ, akaṇi (term addressed to young children)	*awa kanit* (young child)
āmai (mother's equal)	*amai* (mother, aunt)
āi (mother)	*ai* (parent)
beṭī (girl)	*betina* (girl, woman)
bāi (elder sister)	*bhai, ibhai* (elder sister)
bilāk (many)	*ba-lu, ba-lut* (many)
bẽt (mouth)	*beto* (face)
celāuri (eye-brow)	*chelāu* (to see)
da'l (temple)	*dol* (house)
gorā (heel)	*gor* (lower part of leg)
hepā, hāpā (wild cat)	*hampet* (flying fox)

As.	Austric words of Malay Peninsula
ja (crest of a cock)	*juo, joa* (cock's crest)
kerketuwā (squirrel)	*ker, kekah, tăbā* (squirrel)
kām, kāyem (a kind of bird)	*ka-ayam* (fowl)
latā-mākari (a leopard)	*lataik* (wild cat)
lāo-pānī (liquor)	*lau* (clean water)
mẽcā (curved, bent)	*menchas* (bent)
maidām (a burial mound)	*midap, maidap* (a hillock)
solā (toothless)	*sola* (bald)
ṭelekā (having prominent eyes)	*telek* (see)
ṭākon (a bamboo stick)	*tokn* (hand)
siju (a kind of plant having thorns)	*siajoi* (a kind of plant)

These and many other words bearing striking similarity with Austric words are to be found in slightly modified forms in other N.I.A. languages also. Some of these have Sanskrit counterparts also. For instance *āmai* (mother's equal) may be a variation of the Sanskrit word *ambā* (mother).

(II) *Tibeto-Burman (Bodo) element*

The Bodos built up a strong kingdom and with varying fortunes and under various tribal names (the Chutiyās, the Kachāris, the Koches) held sway over different parts of north-eastern India during different historical periods. The Bodos live in daily contact with the Aryanized people. It is natural to expect that they should make some contribution to the vocables of the people with whom they have been living in close contact. There are many Assamese words which bear striking resemblance to Bodo words, but it is difficult to ascertain whether those words are borrowed from the Bodos or the latter borrowed them from the Aryan speeches. Nevertheless the correspondences deserve notice. A few selected words are noted below.

As.	Bodo.
ā-gac (to hinder, obstruct)	*gaso* (hinder)
gorā (to season by keeping under water)	*goro* (hatch)
hāphalu (a mound)	*hā-phlāii* (ant-hill)
cereŋgā (streaks of light)	*srāṅ* (light)
joṅ (pointed)	*joṅ* (a spear)
hojā (simpleton)	*hojāi*
heŋgār (fencing to obstruct)	*heṅrā* (obstruction)
hāo-phāo (lungs)	*hām* (breath), *fāi* (to come)
laphā (a vegetable plant)	*laiphang* (a plant)
śilikhā (myrobalam)	*ślikathai*

(III) *Thāi (Āhom) element*

The Āhŏms ruled over Assam for nearly six hundred years. But in spite of that the Āhŏm language leaves very little impression upon Assamese. The Āhoms gave up their language and adopted Assamese as the language of every day life as well as of State business. As a result only a few Āhom words are found to be in use in Assamese.

As.	Āhom.
burañjī (history)	*buranji* (chronicle)
khilañjī (tradition)	*khilanji* (tradition)
raṅ-ghar (a palace)	*raṅ* (a palace)
kāreṅ (a palace)	*kāraṅ* (palace)
ceṅ (hair)	*caṅ* (hair)
māihāng (a plate having a stand)	*māihang* (a king of dish)
bān (a cup having a stand)	*bān* (a kind of cup)
jengā (uneasy situation)	*jeṅ* (feel uneasy)

In the previous sections, lexical correspondences between Assamese and non-Aryan languages have been noted. In the following section other non-Aryan influences that have shaped or coloured Assamese are briefly discussed.

8. *Non-Aryan traces in place-names*

(a) *Austric place-names*

The names of places having *kām* as the first syllable and *ta, ti,* etc. as the last syllable are suspected to be of Austric origin. *Kāmākhyā, Kāmarūpa, Kamatā, Camatā, Bakatā, Dipotā* may be cited by way of illustration. In the Austric speeches, formations like *kom, kam,* are seen invariably to be used in connection with ideas denoting necromancy. The places mentioned above are famous for Tantric practices. Again Austric equivalents for earth, land, place are *ta, te, teh, tik, tyek,* etc. Names of places having these formations, therefore naturally lead one to suspect their Austric origin.

Austric equivalents for water are *ho, hong, ong, taya, tiu, tu, du, diu, lao.* The word indicating water is placed before or after other words. *Lohita,* popularly called *Luit,* the alternative name of the river Brahmaputra is obviously a Sanskritized formation of such forms as *Lao-tu.* Other river names in Assam are *Tihu, Tipām, Tiyak, Dihong, Dibong, Dichāng,* etc. Their very formations clearly betray their Austric origin.

(b) *Bodo place-names*

Hājo, (Bodo *Hājo,* a hill), *Hākāmā,* a village in Goalpara (Bd. *hākāmā,* to conceal), *Bihāmpur,* a village in Kamrup (Bd. *bihām,*

a daughter-in-law), Dispur, a village near Gauhati (Bd. *disai,* to remove to another place) are some of the place-names which are suspected to be of Bodo origin.

The Bodos rechristened the river names of other origins by placing their own equivalents for water before it; e.g. Di-hong, where Bodo *di* was placed before an Austric *hong* (water). Similarly *Dihong, Digaru, Dibru, Dikraṅg, Disāng* are some of the river-names of Bodo origin.

(c) *Āhŏm place-names*

The place-names of Tāi origin are also connected with the term for water. The Āhŏm equivalent for water is *nām,* and it occurs as the first syllable of many place- and river-names, e.g. *Nāmti* (name of a river, and a place near it), *Nāmrūp* (the name of a river and a place), *Nāmdāṅg* (the name of a river).

9. *Assamese sounds and letters*

Assamese does not possess as many sounds as there are letters in use. The letters of the Sanskrit alphabet are used in writing Assamese but their articulations are often different. The palatals *c, ch,* etc. are pronounced as dentals and so also the cerebrals *ṭ, ḍ,* etc. The Sanskrit sibilants have lost their sibilant values in Assamese. In initial positions the Skt. sibilants are articulated as Greek *x* and in non-initial positions they are treated as *h*. A sibilant sound in Assamese is denoted by the palatal *c*.

So far as the vowels are concerned there is no distinction of length in sounds of *i, ī, u, ū*. Their distinction is kept only in writing. Sounds like *ṛ, ḷ* are never present in Assamese.

10. *Stress in Assamese*

There are two different systems of stress sharply differentiated from one another in two different dialectal areas. The stress in the Kāmrūpī dialects in western Assam is dominantly initial, whereas the stress in the standard colloquial seems to fall in a line with the prevailing pan-Indian system in being placed on the penultimate syllable. The dominant initial stress of the Kāmrūpī dialects causes such violent changes in the following syllable as to make words almost unrecognizable. Each particular word carries its own initial stress and when the final syllable is an open one the medial vowels are slurred over, so that medial syllables are always the weakest in a Kāmrūpī dialect.

11. *Probable extent of non-Aryan influences*

Structurally and by origin Assamese is an Indo-Aryan language coming through a process of gradual evolution from O.I.A.

stage. Therefore, phonologically, morphologically, and glossarially Assamese can be traced back through M.I.A. to the O.I.A. period. But being surrounded on all sides by non-Aryan speeches, Assamese has been coloured, though not deeply, but nevertheless not insignificantly, by them. The non-Aryan contribution to Assamese vocabulary has been discussed. But a few more probable influences on phonological and morphological aspects have been noted below.

(a) *Phonological*

(i) The cerebrals and dentals though differentiated in spelling have both acquired values as alveolars. The loss of distinction and the establishment of alveolar pronunciation has been attributed by Dr. Grierson to Tibeto-Burman influence.

(ii) The same influence has been postulated in fronting O.I.A. palatals to dental in Assamese by Dr. S. K. Chatterji.

(iii) Words having no nasal elements in O.I.A. stage develop nasalization in N.I.A. languages. This is called spontaneous nasalization. In Assamese there are many cases of such spontaneous nasallization. Dr. Grierson explains this phenomenon as of non-Aryan origin.

(iv) A certain amount of non-Aryan influence is suspected in matters of aspiration of O.I.A. initial and medial stops. So far as Assamese and the eastern dialects of Bengali are concerned the influence of Bodo in aspirating initial stops is unmistakable. "In the languages of the Bodo group, the great stress that is laid on a consonant when it is at the commencement of a syllable often gives unvoiced stops an aspirated sound" (*L.S.I.,* Vol. III, p. 11).

(b) *Morphological*

(i) Reduplication of a word to produce a jingle is considered to be an extra-Aryan phenomenon. The whole root or its first elements can be doubled and in this way the meaning is intensified. This has been the notable characteristic of Kolarian, Dravidian and of the Khāsi language. In Assamese also this phenomenon could be noticed.

(ii) The origin of enclitic definitives is also extra-Aryan. The enclitics are post-positional affixes and are added to nouns or numerals to define the nature of the object or the article referred to. In Tibeto-Burman languages generic prefixes are commonly used with numerals which follow the nouns. They are many and various according as they qualify "flat" or "globular" things, things standing as trees, persons, animals, parts of body, etc. In

the Austric languages the co-efficient follows the numeral and in the Tibeto-Burman the co-efficient is prefixed to the numeral. In Assamese the infinitive is annexed and not prefixed.

(iii) Extra-Aryan influence seems to be responsible for the use of personal affixes to nouns of relationship. In this respect Assamese seems to stand out alone amongst all N.I.A. languages. Words of relationship take on different personal affixes according to the relationship indicated with the first, the second or the third person. In case of the second person, separate affixes are used to denote honorified or non-honorified relations. This peculiarity of affixing personal affixes is also the characteristic of the Tibeto-Burman and the Austric speeches. In case of the former the personal infinitive is prefixed, but in case of the latter it is suffixed. In Assamese personal affixes are suffixed. Austric influence in this respect seems more probable.

(iv) The use of different words to express distinct aspects of relationship according to the age of the person with whom relationship is conveyed is another characteristic of Assamese which deserves special notice. In Assamese of the two words used to denote a senior or a junior, one is invariably an Aryan word and the other is of non-Aryan origin. Thus *kakāi* (elder brother) is probably a non-Aryan word while *bhāi* (younger brother) is an Aryan word. This characteristic is also probably derived from the Austric.

(v) Non-Aryan origin is suspected of the plural suffixes *bilāk, gilā, nglā, lā,* etc. Similar forms denoting plural are to be found in Austric speeches.

(vi) Amongst the eastern languages, Assamese stands isolated in prefixing the negative particle as an integral part of the conjugated verb-root. Amongst the Tibeto-Burman languages of Assam, there is a twofold use of the negative. In some cases the negative precedes the verb while in others the negative follows the root. In the Bodo language which has influenced Assamese to a certain extent, though the negative generally follows the root it qualifies, the imperative negative precedes the root. This phenomenon of the negative imperative naturally leads one to suspect its influence upon Assamese also.

(vii) The Bodo affixes *ma, sa* which indicate something big and small respectively, with their extended forms exist as derivatives in many Assamese words; *-ma* has its extensions in *-m, -mā* and *-sa* in *-cā, -ciyā.*

ASSAMESE LITERATURE BEFORE ŚANKARADEVA

BY

M. Neog

Introduction

An account of Assamese literature of the period anterior to Śaṅkaradeva is of singular interest to students from the fact that during later ages almost the entire field was covered by Vaiṣṇavism and its ramifications. Even in the matter of this period itself one can, not unreasonably, suspect Vaiṣṇava influence by way of interpolations and revisions on the Vaiṣṇavite line.

It is remarkable that in these predecessors of Śaṅkaradeva the language had already developed, with full-fledged *payāra* and *tripadī* versifications, into a perfect and powerful medium of literary expression. This is a somewhat strange phenomenon as no work of the formative period of the Assamese language and literature just preceding is available.

The literature of the period under review is best studied in two broad divisions: first, translations and adaptations; and secondly, choral songs known as *ojā-pāli.* They form two distinct groups so far as literary forms are concerned. In the matter of time also they can be demarcated from one another. In the latter division we group together the poets Mankara, Durgāvara and Pītāmbara. Of these three, while Mankara's time cannot definitely be fixed, Durgāvara and Pītāmbara are contemporaries of Śaṅkaradeva. They are considered in this account of pre-Śaṅkaradeva literature because they are in a way free from the far-reaching influences of neo-Vaiṣṇavism that had spread in Assam from the latter part of the fifteenth century and their poetry is more secular than religious in tone. The poets in the first division belong to a period of history of which we have no reliable account. On the other hand, for the construction of the political history of the period we have greatly, almost absolutely, to rely on evidences that are afforded by literary works. We find in these the mention of king Durlabhanārāyaṇa, otherwise much spoken of in legendary accounts, of his son Indranārārāyaṇa, of Tāmradhvaja who has also been considered to be a son of Durlabhanārāyaṇa, and of "Varāha-

rājā" Śrī-mahā-māṇikya, the seat of whose capital still remains unascertained. There are no literary accounts of these monarchs in the form of chronicles as of kings of later times or evidence of copper-plate grants as of earlier Kāmarūpa kings (4th-12th century A.D.).

Durlabhanārāyaṇa seems to be the earliest of the kings mentioned in the literature of the age and is considered to have belonged to the latter part of the thirteenth or the middle of the fourteenth century. Indranārāyaṇa and Tāmradhvaja in that case were men of the early or latter part of the fourteenth century. The extent of their kingdom, Kamatā or Kamatā-maṇḍala, remains to be conjectured. The village in which Kaviratna Sarasvati's father lived in Durlabhanārāyaṇa's time is Choṭaśilā, possibly the same as the Śilā village in the present Barpeṭā subdivision. Harivara Vipra says that Durlabhanārāyaṇa became king at Kāmapura. This is possibly a reference to the capital which was Kāmapura, Kāmatāpura or Kamatāpura situated near modern Cooch Behār. Kālirām Medhi supposes that the kingdom of Kamatā-maṇḍala in those days consisted of the present districts of Raṅgpur, Cooch Behār, Goālpārā and Kāmrūp. Nothing is known of the nature of the rule or other activities of these Kamatā kings.

Śrī-mahā-māṇikya, the "Varāha-rājā" is probably a Kachārī king of the fourteenth century and may be the same as Mahāmāṇi-phā of Kachārī chronicles, who established his capital at Pāṭ-heḍamba (Cāchār).[1] About the extent of the Kachārī kingdom at this time Gait remarks: "In the thirteenth century it would seem that the Kachārī kingdom extended along the south bank of the Brahmaputra, from the Dikhu to the Kallang, or beyond, and included also the valley of the Dhansiri and the tract which now forms the North Cachar subdivision. At that time, the country further west, though largely inhabited by Kachāris, appears to have formed part of the Hindu kingdom of Kamatā. Towards the end of this century, it is narrated that the outlying Kachāri settlements east of the Dikhu river withdrew before the advance of the Āhoms. For a hundred years this river appears to have formed the boundary between the two powers, and no hostilities between them are recorded until 1490, when a battle was fought on its banks".[2] Cukāphā led a large body of nine thousand Shāns from Maulung, somewhere in the ancient Shān kingdom of Pong, across

1. *Kachārī Burañjī*, ed. by S. K. Bhuyan, D. H. A. S., 1936, p. 10.
2. *A History of Assam*, 1926, pp. 250-51.

the Pāṭkāi hills and in 1228 A.D., arrived in Khāmjāng and laid the foundation of the Āhom kingdom in Assam. It was only by the end of the fourteenth century that the first stage in the growth of Brāhmaṇical influence amongst the Āhoms was marked at the accession of Cudāngphā to the throne (1397 A.D.). It took a little time more for them to identify themselves culturally with the different peoples of the country and cement all of them into one nation. They brought with them a historic sense, and kept records of all their important activities from the beginning, but this was done, at least during the period under review, in their tribal language. Apart from this no prose work of this age is available, and possibly prose literature was then not born at all.

While the Āhoms rose into power in the east, another political power was growing rapidly and making itself felt in the western part of the land. The Hindu kings of Kamatā held doubtful sway over Kāmarūpa, it would seem, only for short periods of time; and quite a swarm of petty local chiefs called Bhūyās, would often raise their heads and occupy vast tracts of the country. When the Kamatā kings had finally vanished away and a number of Bhūyās were ruling in different parts of the land without any of them attempting at their unification, an adventurous young man of the Koc tribe, Viśu (later Viśvasiṁha) by name, swept like a hurricane over these chiefs and succeeded in establishing a new and powerful kingdom in Kāmarūpa in the early years of the sixteenth century. It was possibly under the shade of his patronage that Durgāvara wrote his poetry. Viśvasiṁha's son Naranārāyaṇa extended the boundaries of the kingdom to a great extent and a learned man himself, he converted his court to a meeting place to poets and scholars.

We have it on the authority of Hiuen Tsiang that the king Bhāskaravarman of Kāmarūpa of the seventh century A.D. was a lover of learning and that his subjects emulated his craving for knowledge. The Kāmarūpa court was visited by scholars of various schools of learning from abroad and they were kindly received by the king and his people alike, as in the case of this Chinese pilgrim. The copper-plate grants of the Hindu kings of the country evidence the culture of Vedic learning, of Smṛti, astrology, Tantras, and music. The only extant literary work, however, of the age, ending in the fourteenth century A.D., is *Kālikā Purāṇa*, a work of about 1100 A.D. unless we consider some of the *Caryāpadas* also as being written in this land of mysticism.

Śaṅkaradeva, whose literary activities fast followed upon this period, was kept at a village school, *ṭol* or *chātra-śāl* by his grandmother for a period of five years. This school was maintained by a Brāhmaṇa ojā or teacher named Mahendra Kandali, where not only Brāhmaṇa pupils but sons of rich and ruling families like the Bhūyās acquired their learning. They studied there Sanskrit grammar and lexicography, the Vedas, the Smṛtis, the *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Purāṇas* and the Kāvyas. Scriptural discourses were held in the courts of kings and in the assembly of scholars, where one scholar or one school of thought came to bid for superiority over another scholar or another school of thought.

The habit of encouraging education and learning became traditional with the Kāmarūpa monarchs and the country continued to have its centres of learning, big or small. Kings like Durlabhanārāyaṇa, Indranārāyaṇa, Tāmradhvaja, Śrī-mahāmāṇikya, Viśvasiṁha and Naranārāyaṇa (with his brother Śukladhvaja or Cilārāya) extended their patronage to poets and learned men. This kind of patronage became the main impulse behind the rendering of Sanskrit works into Assamese so as to bring their sweetness and secret message within easy reach of the common people or composing songs for choric singing as at the time of worship of the serpent deity Manasā.

A great impetus was thus given to learning in general by the patronage and encouragement of the royal court, discussion in scholastic societies, and village schools maintained by local teachers. There was also, it seems, a thirst among the common people, half-educated and uneducated, to know what beautiful things lay hidden in the *śāstras*, especially the story element in them. An impulse had almost an organic growth for the creation of a vernacular literature, which, besides its noble virtues of edification, had inspiring tales of great heroes and religious men and women to tell. The entire *Rāmāyaṇa* had to be rendered into Assamese verse; and episodes, especially of a heroic or romantic nature, from the *Mahābhārata*, *Harivaṁśa* and the Purāṇas had to be retold in the language of the common people. The worship of Manasā also inspired poets to fabricate the story of the godling into an artificial Purāṇa in the local tongue so as to give her an appropriate habitation in the Hindu pantheon. Music of a high order including compositions in classical Indian *rāgas* was also employed for the telling of the sacred tales.

Three metrical varieties are in use throughout the period — *pada* or *payāra*, *dulari* or *duladi*, and *chabi*, all in rhyming couplets.

The couplets are generally closed at the end of either the first line or the second. The metre is *akṣaravṛtta*, that is counted by the number, rather than *mātrikā*, which is counted by length of syllables. A *pada* verse contains two feet of 14 syllables with a pause generally but not always after the eighth syllable. In a *dulari* verse (*laghu tripadī*) the two lines are each divided into three feet of 6, 6 and 8 syllables, the first two rarely rhyming. In *chabi* versification (*dīrgha tripadī*) each line is divided into three feet of 8, 8 and 10 syllables, the first two generally rhyming. In the lyrics of the *gīti-kāvyas* there are apparent irregularities in syllable divisions; but these irregularities were adjusted according to exigencies of musical quantities. Pītāmbara calls all the various metrical patterns of the songs *lācāḍi* (Skt. *rathyākāra*), a name applied to the *bhaṅga tripadī* versification (8, 8, 14) in later ages of poetry. He classifies *lācāḍi chanda* into *lācāḍi chanda, lācāḍi-pada-chanda, lācāḍi nāṭa-chanda, lācāḍi madhya-chanda, lācāḍi dīrgha-chanda*; but the classification is not perfectly clear to us as this sort of nomenclature is found only in one manuscript of this poet's *Uṣā-pariṇaya*. Śaṅkaradeva in places mentions *hrasva-dīrgha chanda*. The word *payāra* occurs in the text of Mādhava Kandali's *Rāmāyaṇa* and sometimes has the general meaning of rhymed couplets of varying length. It is specifically Eastern Magadhan as Dr. S. K. Chatterji has pointed out and has only recently been practised in North-Indian languages like Maithilī. The word *chabi* is found in the text of *Gīti-rāmāyaṇa;* it possibly derives from Skt. *ṣaṭpadī*, Hindī *chappai, chapai*, a metre with six feet. The word *duladi, dulari* or *duladī* can be connected with Hindī *duladī*, 'an ornament worn by women with two rows of beads'.

CARYĀPADAS

Before we enter into a consideration of the Assamese poets preceding the emergence of Vaiṣṇava literature, we have to notice the *Caryās* or *Caryāpadas*, which register certain phonological and morphological peculiarities which "have come down in an unbroken continuity through early to modern Assamese".[3] A post-fourteenth century manuscript called *Caryācarya-viniścaya*, with 47 *Caryās* (one incomplete) out of the original total of 50, was discovered in Nepāl in 1904 by Mm. Haraprasād Śāstrī. The twenty-three poets who composed these mystic lyrics are among the eighty-four *Siddhapuruṣas* (teachers) worshipped by the Mahā-

3. B. Kakati, *Assamese, its Formation and Development*, 1941, § 15.

yāna Buddhists of Tibet and Nepal. Dr. Giuseppe Tucci points out that in the Tibetan works *Grub to'b* and *bKa'babs bdun ldan* the Siddha Mīnanātha is described as a fisherman from Kāmarūpa.[4] Tārānātha also describes Siddha Mīna as a fisherman in the east of India in Kāmarūpa.[5] Two short couplets from the old Kāmarūpa dialect of Mīnanātha are grafted into the Sanskrit commentary on *Caryā* 21 (Bhusukapāda's composition).

kahanti guru paramārthera bāṭa
karmakuraṅga samādhika pāṭa
kamala vikasila kahiha ṇa jamarā
kamalamadhu pibibi dhoke na bhamarā

Kāmarūpa or ancient Assam has been variously connected with latter-day developments of Buddhism like Vajrayāna and Sahajayāna and with some of the Siddhapuruṣas.[6] It is thus likely that at best some of the *Caryās* and the *Caryā* writers were in some way or other had something to do with Kāmarūpa. Dr. S. K. Chatterji terms the dialect of these poems a form of old Bengali in its basis, greatly influenced by Śaurasenī Apabhraṁśa and occasionally by Sanskrit and literary Prākrits.[7] But as Dr. Bloch has said, "We may call it Oriental because it is found in Eastern texts and because there are some Eastern influences, but it is not so if we wish to find in it the base of the modern Eastern languages."[8] Dr. Kakati seeks to conclude that the language of *Bauddha Gān o Dohā* and *Kṛṣṇa-kīrtana* as forming a pre-Bengali and pre-Assamese period with certain dialect groups which may be designated as Eastern Magadhan Apabhraṁśa.[9]

Dr. P. C. Bāgchi considers the 8th-10th centuries A.D. as the date of composition of the *Caryās*. The contents of these poems are of a highly mystic nature centering round esoteric doctrines of Sahajayāna and erotistic practices of the Sahajiyās. In form the *Caryās* may be termed lyric and stand comparison with the songs

4. *J. A. S. B.* (New Series), 1930, p. 133.
5. Dr. Bhupendranath Datta, *Mystic Tales of Lāma Tārānātha*, 1944, p. 56. Also see Grünwedel, Baessler-Archiv, Band V, p. 152, cited in *IHQ.*, Vol. VI, p. 181.
6. M. Neog: "Buddhism in Kāmarūpa". *IHQ.*, Vol. XXVII, No. 2, June, 1951, pp. 144 ff.
7. *The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language*, 1926, Vol. I, § 62.
8. Quoted by Dr. P. C. Bāgchi: "The Sibitants in the Buddhist dohas", *Indian Linguistics*, Vol. V, p. 356.
9. *Assamese, its Formation and Development*, § 21.

of Mankara, Durgāvara, Śaṅkaradeva and other poets of the following ages. The metres employed are of the *mātrāvṛtta* type, being mostly *pādākulaka* or *caupāī*, which originated in the late M.I.A. period. We do not however get the specifically vernacular type of *payāra* of fourteen letters (syllables) that is common with the immediately pre-Śaṅkaradeva poets. But here is the prototype of *payāra* and *tripadī* versifications. Rhyming is a regular feature.

A

TRANSLATIONS AND ADAPTATIONS

MĀDHAVA KANDALI

The Rāmāyaṇa.—By far the most considerable poet of the period under review is Mādhava Kandali. In rendering into Assamese verse the Uttarā-kāṇḍa of the Rāmāyaṇa Śaṅkaradeva, the greatest Assamese poet of all times, pays as warm and high a tribute to this predecessor of his as was paid by Shakespeare to "that noble shepherd", Christopher Marlowe. Śaṅkaradeva calls Kandali an "unerring predecessor poet", and likens him to a mighty elephant, in whose comparison he himself is but a small rabbit.[10] The pre-Śaṅkaradeva poet says that he is called Kavirāja Kandali, that Mādhava Kandali is his other name, and that day and night, whether asleep or awake, he meditates upon Rāma's name.[11] In other places he calls himself Mādhava Kandali Vipra, or Dvijarāja Mādhava Kandali.[12] There is no doubt that he was a Brāhmaṇa of eminence, that *Kavirāja* is his epithet as a great poet, possibly the greatest of his time, and that this title was conferred on him, may be, by some assembly of scholars or, more probably, by his patron monarch, to whom we are presently coming. *Kandali* also is a title, common to several Assamese poets (Rudra Kandali, Ananta Kandali, Śrīdhara Kandali, Rucinātha Kandali), and to Brāhmaṇa

10. *Asamīyā Sātkāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa*, pub. by Prasannalāl Chaudhurī, Barpeta, 1941, Uttara-kāṇḍa, p. 472.

pūrvvakavi apramādī *mādhava kandali ādi*
pade viracilā rāma-kathā
hastīra dekhiyā lāda *śaśā yena phāre mārga*
mora bhaila tehnaya avasthā.

11. *kavirāja kandali ye* *āmākese buliwaya*
mādhava kandali āro nāma
sapone sacite mañi *jñāna kāya vākya mane*
aharniśe cintō rāma rāma.

12. *Ibid.*, pp. 218, 259, etc.

emissaries sent out to different foreign states by the Āhom court (e.g., Ratna Kandali, Mādhava Kandali, Sāgara Kandali, Candra Kandali, all mentioned in old chronicles). The Kandali poets were all reputed as scholars and the royal emissaries also had of necessity to be well-educated people. Ananta Kandali says that he secured that name of his in scholarly disputations (*tarkata labhilā nāma ananta kandali*). It is quite likely that the title *Kandali* means a logician or one expert in scriptural disputation and that it could not be a hereditary one. It cannot be said if this title had anything to do with the locality called Kandali in the Nowgong district, but it is certain that some of the Kandalis named above did belong to this place.

Mādhava Kandali says that he wrote the *Rāmāyaṇa* verses at the request of the Varāha king, Śrī-mahā-māṇikya, for edification of all people :

kavirāja kandali ye āmākese buliwaya
kariloho sarvvajana-bodhe
rāmāyaṇa supayāra śrī-mahā-māṇikya ye
varāha rājāra anurodhe.

It has not so far been possible to place Śri-mahāmaṇikya's time and place beyond doubt. Mādhavachandra Bardalai, who had the credit of bringing out the first printed edition of Kandali's *Rāmāyaṇa*, in his Preface surmised that Śrī-mahā-māṇikya must be one of the three Kachārī kings of Jayantāpura (Jaintias) with the surname of Māṇika, Vijaya-māṇika, Dhana-māṇika and Yaśa-māṇika. The Kachārī kings of Jayantāpura were known as "Varāhīrājās' styled themselves as 'Jayantāpureśvaras' and ruled over a vast territory extending to the modern district of Nowgong, from the twelfth to the fourteenth century A.D. Bardalai further seeks to connect the term *vārāha* in the text with *Boḍo* or *Boro*, the name of the Tibeto-Burmans who settled and ruled in Assam. He concludes that Kandali's *Rāmāyaṇa* belongs to the fourteenth or fifteenth century and that the poet himself was a man of the present Nowgong district.[13] But Sir Edward Gait gives 1564-80 and 1596-1605 as the probable periods of reign of Vijaya-māṇika and Dhana-māṇika respectively.[14] These dates cannot be that of Śrī-mahā-māṇikya, who patronised Kandali, a poet of a date definitely anterior to Śaṅkaradeva (1449-1568 A.D.).

13. *Asamīyā Sāhityar Cāneki* (*Typical Selections from Assamese Literature*), vol. III, pt. I, C. U., 1923, pp. 313ff.
14. *A History of Assam*, 1926, pp. 260f,

Pandit Hemchandra Goswāmī writes, "Mahāmāṇikya was a king of Barāhī Kachārīs and he ruled about the middle of the 14th century at Ḍimāpur. In an old Āhom Burañjī the seventh generation of Barāhī kings, Detsing, the great-great-grandson of Mahāmāṇikya, was the contemporary of the Āhom king Dihiṅgīyā Rajā".[15] In another place he writes, "The Barāhī constiuted a branch of the Hinduised Kachāris. Before the advent of the Āhoms, the Barāhī kings were ruling over the whole of the south bank of the Brahmaputra with their capital at Soṇāpur, somewhere near Sadiyā. His probable date is 1347 A.D."[16] Detsing or Dercoṁ-phā's contemporary Dihiṅgīyā-rājā, king of Asama, reigned from 1495 to 1539 so that Mahā-māṇī-phā's time comes to the middle of the fourteenth century. From the names of places like Nāmacāṁ, Barhāṭ, Soṇāpur, Bāṇpur, etc. in the Kāchāri chronicle, art. 23, on which Goswāmī's statement is based, it would appear that the Kachārī capital was somewhere in the Sibsagar subdivision about the position now occupied by the Bānpherā, Soṇāri, Barāhī and other tea-estates.[17]

Kanaklal Barua agreeing with Goswāmī takes Kandali to be a man of the latter part of the fourteenth century and adds that the Barāhī kings might have at one time ruled over the Kapilī valley.[18] Kālirām Medhi considers Mādhava Kandali to have flourished in the middle of the fourteenth century but calls Śrī-mahā-māṇikya a king of Tripurā.[19] One Mahā-māṇikya reigned in Tripurā, 1396-1406. Some of his ancestors reigned in the Kapilī valley and during the reign of the succeeding king Śrī-dharma-māṇikya two Assamese Brāhmaṇas — Śukreśvara and Vāṇeśvara — composed *Tripurā-rāja-mālā*. Dr. B. Kakati takes Śrī-mahā-māṇikya to be a Kachārī king of Jayantāpura and Kandali to be a native

15. Cf. Hemchandra Goswami's article in the *Bāhī*, Vol. XVIII. The *Burañjī* here referred to has now been published by the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam, as *Kachārī Burañjī*, 1936. The name of the king is really Mahā-māṇi-phā in this chronicle. It is quite probable that this is the actual name of Kandali's patron king, where *-phā* is only an additional particle, attached to names of kings, of Asama, Jayantā and Tripurā. Mādhava Kandali in one place, p. 218, calls the king Mahā-māṇi. Is it also probable that *Śrī-mahā-māṇikya* is a calligraphical error for *Śrī-mahā-māṇi-phā*?
16. *Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts*, C. U., 1930, p. 139.
17. Beṇudhar Sharmā also points it out in a local periodical, *Rāij*, vol. I, no. 2, Śrāvaṇa, 1856 Śaka.
18. *Early History of Kāmarūpa*, 1933, pp. 320f.
19. *Assamese Grammar and Origin of the Assamese Language*, 1936, intro. p. xci.

of central Assam now represented by the district of Nowgong. He further sets the fourteenth century as the lower limit of Kandali's age on linguistic considerations.[20] There is a large number of archaic forms in Kandali's language. Two of the Pāla kings of Kāmarūpa, Indrapāla and Dharmapāla, styled themselves as vārāha or *śrī-vārāhā* in their copper-plate grants, claiming descent from the Boar incaranation of Viṣṇu and the Earth.[21] A branch of the Boḍo race, as has already been seen, is known as Varāhīs or Barāhīs.

In *Kathā-guru-carita*[22] the name of the *guru* of Rāgha' Ācārya who came to inspect the school kept by Śaṅkaradeva's teacher Mahendra Kandali is given as Mādhava Kandali. This Mādhava Kandali may very well be the great *Rāmāyaṇa* poet. It is not stated if Mādhava Kandali of the *carita* was still living when Śaṅkaradeva as a boy read at Mahendra Mandali's school, but he may be calculated to have been living about 1400 A.D.

Thus while Śrī-mahā-māṇikya cannot be identified with any amount of exactitude, the consensus of opinion of scholars is on the side of taking the poet Mādhava Kandali as a man of the fourteenth century at the latest. It is, therefore, apparent that Mādhava Kandali's *Rāmāyaṇa* was the first of its kind in modern Indian languages, the Bengali and Hindī versions of Kṛttivāsa and Tulsīdās being later works. As K. K. Handiqui has pointed it out, this very early version of the *Rāmāyaṇā* in a provincial language may be needful in fixing the reading and considering the history of the original work of Vālmīkī.

Unfortunately for us, the Ādi- and Uttarā-kāṇḍas are missing in all manuscripts of Mādhava Kandali's *Rāmāyaṇa*. It cannot be told if these two cantos were not rendered by the poet at all. He speaks of Śrī-mahā-māṇikya's orders and his writing upon it the seven-cantoed *Rāmāyaṇa* in verse form (*Sātakāṇḍa rāmāyaṇa*[22a] *padabandhe nibandhilo*), at the end of the Laṅkā-kāṇḍa. In the

20. *Assamese, its Formation and Development*, 1941, §§ 23-24.
21. *Kāmarūpa-śāsanāvalī*, pp. 122, 154.
22. ed. by U. C. Lekharu, 1951, p. 26.
22a. It is to be noted that in the Assamese versions of *Rāmāyaṇa* by Mādhava Kandali (14th cent.), Durgāvara Kāyastha and Ananta Kandali (16th cent.), Ananta Kāyastha (17th cent.) and Raghunātha Mahanta (18th cent.) the Bāla- and the Uttara- Kāṇḍas are found wanting. This would certainly draw pointed attention to the view of Orientalists that these initial and final cantoes are later additions to the original 5-cantoed Rāma epic (Farquhar, *Religious Literature of India*, Oxford, 1920, p. 46). Our suspicion also grows over the correctness of reading of the word *sātakanda*.

Kathā-guru-carita,[23] it is stated that as Ananta Kandali tried to outdo Mādhava Kandali's work, Mādhavadeva and Śaṅkaradeva wrote the Ādi- and Uttara-kāṇḍas in verse and gave the old work a new lease of life.

A powerful story-teller as Mādhava Kandali is, he seems to have recited his verses to the king, his patron, and courtiers, indicating change-over from time to time (*mādhava bolanta aita ācho ehimāna*, let me leave this here) and directed the course of the narration as the latter desired. Mādhava Kandali's fidelity to the original *ślokas* is remarkable and he renders them into his own language with wonderful force and brevity. The famous *śloka* in the Laṅkā-kāṇḍa:

deśe deśe kalatrāṇi deśe deśe ca bāndhavāḥ
taṁ tu deśaṁ na paśyāmi yatra bhrātā sahodaraḥ

is rendered with ease into the short but expressive couplet,

bhāryyā puttra bandhu yata pāi yathā tathā
hena natu dekhohõ sodara pāi kathā.[24]

Kandali constantly tries to stick to the original, to make it brief, and to keep away any fabricated material from entering into the texture of his work; but at the words of Māhā-māṇikya he introduces a little *rasa* as if putting a quantity of clarified butter into milk and stirring it:

sātakāṇḍa rāmāyaṇa padabandhe nibandhilõ
lambhā parihari sāroddhṛta
mahā-māṇikyara bole kāvya-rasa kicho dilõ
dugdhaka mathile yena ghṛta.[25]

In sweetness and sublimity, Vālmīki's work is considered by Kandali to be equal to the Vedas (*mahā-ṛṣi vālmīkiye* : *rāmāyaṇa karilanta* : *sākṣāte jānibā yena veda*);[26] but he also makes a responsible statement in this connection :

> O people in the assembly, you have just listened to the story of Rāma, full of various *rasas* and so extremely sacred. Do you be pleased with it and forgive me my faults of omis-

23. p. 119.
24. p. 338.
25. Laṅka-kāṇḍa, p. 448.
26. Laṅka-kāṇḍa, p. 448.

> sion and commission. Vālmīki composed this work in prose and verse (metre). I have considèred it with care and what I have been able to comprehend I have briefly rendered into verse. Who can understand all shades of *rasas*? Birds fly according as they have wings; poets compose their works up to the popular taste (*loka vyavahāre*). They put in something fabricated by them along with the original, because this (what the poets write) is no divine revelation (*deva-vāṇī*) but things of earth (*laukika kathā*).[27]

The poet himself is ever on his guard against *laukika kathā* and, reassuring his fidelity to the original, says this to scholars:

> If you open the (original) book and do not find these things (which I have written), condemn me as you would.[28]

It is remarkable that in Kandali's work in the present form there is a note of propaganda, so common with the Vaiṣṇava poets of later ages, celebrating the miraculous powers of the name of God. This note of propaganda and consideration of Rāma as an incarnation of Viṣṇu are foreign to the original *Rāmāyaṇa* but are evident in a much later work called *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*. Can the presence of these elements in Mādhava Kandali's version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* be taken as an influence of this work ?[29] There is however a more probable explanation afforded by *Kathā-guru-carita*, which says that Mādhavadeva and Śaṅkaradeva completed the *Rāmāyaṇa* by adding the first and last cantos to it and that Mādhavadeva inserted *upadeśa* (teachings of devotion, *bhakti*) where there was only *śubha śubha* (simple benedictory verses).[30] This is tantamount to saying that the *Rāmāyaṇa* was revised, edited and brought on to a line with literary work of the Bhakti school.[31]

In spite of Kandali's attempt at brevity and fidelity to Vālmīki, he does not leave off opportunities to revel in the element of sensuousness, counted as enhancing *kāvyarasa*. Sītā appeals to Rāma

27. Kiṣkindhyā-kāṇḍa, p. 259.
28. Laṅkā-kāṇḍa, p. 448.
29. U. C. Lekharu, *Asamīyā Rāmāyaṇa Sāhitya*, 1948, p. 40.
30. p. 119. It may possibly be said that the absence of elaborate *bhakti upadeśas* or advice to take up devotion to Hari along with the colophons should have been a characteristic feature of pre-Vaiṣṇava literature: but as the great Vaiṣṇava movement and literture have intervened between that period and ourselves, it is difficult for us now to generalise very widely on this point.
31. M. Neog. Śrī-śrī-śaṅkaradeva, ed. 2, 1952, p. 148.

not to leave her behind when going on exile, because it is now that her youth has blossomed fit for enjoyment.[32] In Kiṣkindhyā Rāma's body is sore afflicted with the pangs of desire.[33] He remembers Sītā who must also be so tormented by Ćupid and by the feeling that youth was fast passing away.[34]

Descriptions of action (fights and movements), of places, palaces and natural scenery, of human beauty and hideousness, are lively, swift, elegant and graphic. The Sundarākāṇḍa is particularly rich in respect of such pictures. Mādhava Kandali can, with a few strokes or through mere sound of the phraseology, make beauty charming and hideousness repulsive. In describing life and action, towns and natural scenery he keeps a constant eye on the Assamese way of life and Assam's flora and fauna. The dialogues are often brought to the level of common people's conversation. There is a rare pleasantness in his humour which often comes out with the brilliance of personal observation in the form of an imagery, a simile or an idiomatic turn of speech. Free use of idiomatic, colloquial and homely expressions is a charming and permanent feature of his language. Some expressions would to-day be considered as verging on indecency or low taste but these had a particular appeal at least to some of Kandali's listeners in those days.

Even though Mādhava Kandali's was no original work, we get in it fair glimpses of Assamese society of his time. When the poet constantly refers to the six different methods (*nīti*) of approach to an enemy (*sandhi, vigraha, āsana, dvaidha, sakhya, yāna*), or the duties of a minister or royal messenger,[35] we cannot help thinking, that these had their practice in the politics of Śrī-mahā-māṇikya's reign. The likening of the monkey army to a swarm of locusts covering the firmament[36] seems to be a topical reference. The occurrence of the word *sandhikai*[37] may be a side-influence of the Āhoms who had already established a kingdom in the eastern part of the Brahmaputra valley in the beginning of the thirteenth century.

32. Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, p. 118.
33. Kiṣkindyā-kāṇḍa, pp. 241-42.
34. Sundarā-kāṇḍa, p. 306.
35. Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, p. 100; Sundarā-kāṇḍa, pp. 283, 307.
36. Kiṣkindhyā-kāṇḍa, pp. 246, 247.
37. Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, p. 142. *sandhikai*, mod. *sandikai*, written in English as *handiqui*. A *sandikai* is a person who belong to seven aristocratic noble families among the Āhoms, who could be appointed as Barbaruvā (chief justice) or Barphukan (commander-in-chief and viceroy in the western part of the kingdom).

Varṇāśrama-dharma seems to have been piously obeyed: the four castes (*cāri jāti*) are mentioned in places. Different castes and professions are also referred to: Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya, Kāyaṣṭha, Daivajña, Telī (oilman), Tāṭī (weaver), Soṇāri (goldsmith), Kāhār (bell-metal worker), Śaṅkhāri (workers on ivory or shell), Baṇiyā, Camār (cobbler), Kamār (blacksmith), Sūtār (carpenter, sawyer), and Dhobā. The Hāḍis and Caṇḍālas are considered as impure. In the Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa Kandali provides a small picture of a Yogī (Nāth-panthī), running in the train of people following Rāma to the forest, which would not evoke much respect:

> The Yogī had his ragged wallet hung on his shoulder. He had his *dowādaś kāṭhi* (platter sometimes in the form of a trident) in his hand.....He was tired, and his begging wallet dropped down. He cried 'Śiva! Śiva!' all the time. ..He threw away all his gods of worship (that he was carrying in the form of idols).

Naṭas (dancing class) are slightingly named. In several places the poet exhibits good knowledge of astrology. Although there are references to Vāsudeva and Viṣṇu, who is in a few instances considered as incarnating as Rāma (which, we fear, may be an interpolated idea), Śiva and Śakti cults seem to be more familiar with the poet, and blood (goat) sacrifices provide him with a constantly used simile. Caṇḍī or Raṇa-caṇḍī comes in for reference in many places. The worship of fire with strangulation of a black goat as sacrifice is described.[38] *Mantras* and *rakṣās* and *gaṇapati-ghaṭas,* signifying worship of Gaṇeśa, son of Śivā, are also spoken of. There is the mention of *daulas,* temples, with *ghaṭas,* pot-shaped structures placed at the top. Funeral rites are described including burning of the body with fuel of mango trees (*āma-gāṇḍi*) poked with a large pole (*khocanī dāṇḍi*), *daśa-piṇḍa* (ten offerings of food to the deceased consecutively on ten days following death), *kākabali* (offering to crows) of *rau* fish (*Labeo rohita*) and birds, and *snāna-bali.* Many common customs and popular beliefs are here seen: to touch another's head as indicating assurance; to enquire of a person's caste (*jāti-kula*) on the first meeting; to throw away or wash thoroughly cooking basins and the oven when touched by impure persons or with impure things; to look for omens when setting out on an expedition; and so on. *Strī-ācāras* (rites performed by women on auspicious occasions like marriage, etc.) are alluded to in connection with Rāma's proposed coronation. Different types of children's games are enumerated in the Sundarākāṇḍa.[39]

38. Laṅkā-kāṇḍa, p. 373.

Mādhava Kandali's work on the whole carries the impression of real life, of engaging story-telling and fine poetry. It is in the hands of Kandali that the rather artificial language with occasional betrayals of the colloquial, which was employed in the religious, biographical and even historical literature of Assam till the advent of British rule, was set and standardized. This is a language embellished with a music of its own, with but simple figures of speech like alliteration, simile, and metaphor. There is also an amount of conventionalism in the use of these figures of speech. As Dr. B. K. Barua has said, "It appears that the legacy of rich and beautiful diction which the poet of the Assamese version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* left behind exercised a tremendous influence upon Śaṅkaradeva and his immediate successors". There are other material influences of Mādhava Kandali on his successors. Durgāvara's *Gīti-rāmāyaṇa* (as we shall presently see) and Ananta Kandali's version in many places only plagiarize Mādhava Kandali. The prose version of Raghunātha Mahanta (the late eighteenth century) is also very largely indebted to the same poet. Thus the whole *Rāmāyaṇa* literature in Assamese is pervaded by Mādhava Kandali's personality.

Devajit (?)—This work[40] describing the fights of Arjuna with Indra, accompanied by his heavenly hosts and Mahādeva, as the king of gods refused to invite Kṛṣṇa to a *rājasūya* sacrifice he had proposed to perform, is ascribed to Mādhava Kandali. But it is very much doubtful if this was his composition. All through the printed edition of the work the poet calls himself Mādhava and nowhere Mādhava Kandali. In a manuscript noticed by Paṇḍit Hemchandra Goswāmī in his *Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts,* pp. 44-46, the name Mādhava Kandali is found. This may very well be an interpolation. The book is not worthy of the great 'unerring' poet. Nowhere does the poet introduce himself. The source of the contents itself is doubtful. In the printed edition, verses 576 and 939, the story is said to be taken from the eighteen

39. p. 267.

40. published by Harichandra Dev Goswami and Dharmadatta Lahkar, 1912. In the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies MS (MS 622) the work is alternatively called *Indra-Arjuna-samvāda-kathā,* vv. 1399-1400; it is said to have been retold from the 18 Purāṇas, vv. 1398, 1213; the story is narrated by Vaisampāyana before Janamejaya, v. 1291; and the author is 'Mādhava Kandali' vv. 1200, 1400.

Purāṇas (*aṣṭādaśa purāṇa*) while in the manuscript it is supposed to be found in *Padma Purāṇa*. Some past-participle forms in *-ibā-* are found in it but this alone in an imitative and artificial language could not be taken as a conclusive proof for the work being of pre-Śaṅkaradeva times, the curious use of the conjunctive particle *-er-* in verbs being absent. The work attempts to prove the superiority of *nāma-dharma* over penance, sacrifice and the like and in places points to the futility of human life, youth, relations and wealth. There are two other works *Tāmradhvajar Yuddha* and *Pātāla-kāṇḍa*,[41] both adaptations from *Jaiminīyāśvamedha*, ascribed to Mādhava Kandali. Our conclusion is that both *Devajit* and these two works were composed by some second Mādhava Kandali belonging to the post-Śaṅkaradeva period.

HARIVARA VIPRA[41a]

In his *Vabruvāhanar Yuddha*, Harivara Vipra or Harivara Miśra showers benedictions on his patron king Durlabhanārāyaṇa of Kamatā thus :

jaya jaya narapati durlabhanārāyaṇa rājā
kāmapure bhailā vīravara
saputra-bāndhave yebe sukhe rāja karantoka
jīvantoka sahasra vatsara
tāhāna rājyata thita sādhu-jana-manonīta
aśvamedha viracita sāra
vipra harivara kaṅi gaurīra caraṇa sei
padabandhe karilo pracāra (225).

« Glory be to King Durlabhanārāyaṇa, the master of men, the hero who resides in Kāmarupa. With his sons and friends all around, may he reign in happiness and live for a thousand years. Living in his kingdom, the Brāhmaṇa Harivara bows at the feet of Gaurī, renders the essence of Aśvamedha, so much appreciated by the elite, into verse and makes it public. »

41. *Tāmradhvajar Yuddha*, D.H.A.S. MS 524. See vv. 173-ff., 181-ff., 211-ff; *Pātāla-kāṇḍa* (catalogued as *Uttarā-kāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa*), D.H.A.S. MS.

41a. In the market editions of this poet's *Vabruvāhanar Yuddha* his name is printed as 'Harihara' which I consider to be a misreading for 'Harivara'. In the MSS of both his works here under review it is always spelt as 'Harivara'. Names, with the epithet of some deity forming the first part and the word *vara* (boon) forming the second part, seem to be current at this stage of history (e.g, Caṇḍīvara, Durgāvara); whereas we do not come across any personal name composite of names of two deities.

Details about Durlabhanārāyaṇa, the celebrated patron of literature are even now lacking. Śaṅkaradeva in his *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa-kāvya* says that on his great-great-grandfather Caṇḍīvara or Devīdāsa was conferred land grants in Temunīyābandha (Bardowā in Nowgong) by king Durlabhanārāyaṇa. This is variously repeated in the different biographies of Śaṅkaradeva. Calculating from the date of Śaṅkaradeva's birth, that is 1449 A.D., scholars have arrived at about the second quarter of the fourteenth century (1330-50) or the latter part of the thirteenth century as the date of Durlabhanārāyaṇa's reign.[42] So that becomes about the time when Harivara Vipra composed his *Vabruvāhanar Yuddha* and *Lava-Kuśar Yuddha*. There is quite a few examples of the curious use of the conjunctive particle *-er-* and the past participle in *-ibā-*, which are peculiar to the pre-Śaṅkaradeva language.[43]

pāsaribāra astrā-śastra manata paroka (318)
harāibāra muṇḍagoṭa āsibāra dekhi (569)
khoṇṭa hāni manuṣyata lagāyera biṣa (504)
tomāra cakere yebe ciṇḍiyero gala (554)

— *Vabruvāhanar Yuddha*

śikhibāra śaracaya sāphalibo raṇe (127)
śanāibāra śare tāra māthā nilā kāṭi (302)

—*Lava-Kuśar Yuddha.*

In *Śrī-śrī-Vaṁśīgopāladevar Carita* the name of Vaṁsigopāladeva's grandfather is Harivara Vipra, who was the rich and scholarly head (Bhūyā) of the village Vyāghrapiṇḍā (in North Lakhimpur). He is said to have rendered old Sanskrit works (*bhārata purāṇa*) into Assamese verse, which may seem to be a specific reference to the two works under review. It is however difficult to imagine that the great-great-grandfather of Śaṅkaradeva (born 1371 Śaka) and the grandfather of Vaṁsīgopāla (born 1470 Śaka) were contemporaries.

42. B. Kakati, *AFD.*, § 23 ; Kaliram Medhi, *Prahlāda-Carita*, 1835 Śaka, intro., p. x; B. K. Barua, *Assamese Literature*, P. E. N., 1941, p. 10.

In a MS (D.H.A.S.) entitled *Bhūyā-caritra*, the genealogy of Cidānanda Bhūyā, one of the Kāyasthas brought over by Durlabha to Kāmarūpa, the date of the king is given as 1220 Śaka or 1298 A.D. In old Assamese chronicles (*burañji*) there is reference to a latter-day Durlabhendra of Kamatā a contemporary of Āhom king Suhummung, Dihiṅgīyā Rajā (1947-1539) A.D.).

43. B. Kakati, *AFD.*, §§ 796, 828 f.

The following seems to be an echo of Mādhava Kandali's *Rāmāyaṇa*, which was possibly a fresh production when *Vabruvāhanar Yuddha* was written:

yibā kicho kicho khuji luri pāilā
rāma yena laṅkā yānte.

«Whatever people could catch hold of as at the time of Rāma's expedition against Laṅkā.»

In verse 176 of the same work there is the mention of Ceṭiyās, a clan of aristocratic (*camuwā*) Āhoms who stood above the common people (*kāḍī* or *pāik*) and just below the rank of officers, to which at any time they could be raised. Two classes of spies constantly referred to in the Āhom chronicles are mentioned in *Lava-Kuśar Yuddha*: *cor* (verse 57) and *phurā* (verse 70). This possibly indicates that the poet was acquainted with the administration of the Āhoms or sometime even belonged to the Āhom kingdom.

In *Vabruvāhanar Yuddha* in rendering Jaimini's lines *pañcapātakakartāraṁ kiṁ namnā'sya na tāritā*, etc. (40. 41-42) Harivara writes:

yiṭo punu prāṇī pañcadevatā-yuguta
yebese harika smare śuddha cittaṁane
sakala pātaka hare tāṅka daraśane (596)[44]

In the description of the *puṁsavana* ceremony Rāma is described as worshipping *pañcadevatā*, the five deities (verse 38). When Vabruvāhana set out for the war-field, he mentally bowed at the feet of Vāsudeva (*vāsudeva-pade praṇāmilā mane mana*-verse 150). Kṛṣṇa is generally referred to in *Vabruvāhanar Yuddha* as Vāsudeva, while the name Vāsudeva by itself indicates nothing particular, the mention of the king's bowing down to Vāsudeva read in conjunct with the references to *pañcadevatā* may be a sufficient indication of the prevalence in Assam and here an influence of the cult of Vāsudeva before neo-Vaiṣṇāvism had its growth. Dr. B. Kakati writes of this cult of Vāsudeva worship as propounded in *Kālikā Purāṇa*: "The germ mantra of Vāsudeva consists of twelve syllables *Oṁ namo Bhagavate Vāsudevāya*. Along with him a pentad of complementary deities are to be worshipped: Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, Brahmā, Śambhu, and Gaurī. The two latter are never to be separated in worship".[44a]

44. A variant reading for *devatā* is *pāpata*.
44a. *The Mother Goddess Kāmākhyā*, 1948, p. 74.

The women attribute Citrāṅgadā's having an illustrious son to the worship of Hara and Gaurī (*kona puṇya thāne hara gaurī ārādhilā*, verse 359). In *Kālikā-Purāṇa* the place (*pīṭha*) of Vāsudeva is indicated as being placed in the north-eastern region of Kāmarūpa. There is still a place called Vāsudevar Thān in the North Lakhimpur subdivision which, though shorn of all past glory due to dilapidations caused by Nature and no less by men, attracts a good number of visitors in the dry season. The two works of Harivara thus betray an atmosphere of pre-Śaṅkaradeva times and of the north-eastern region (Lakhimpur), which came early to be overcome by the Āhoms.

Vabruvāhanar Yuddha.—Harivara Vipra takes the story of *Vabruvāhanar Yuddha*[45] the fight between Arjuna and his son by Citrāṅgadā, King Vabhruvāhana of Maṇipura, from chapters XXII-XXIV and XXXVII -XL and by the way narrates the story of King Nīladhvaja and queen Jvālā of Māhiṣmatīpura from chapters XIV-XV, *Jaiminīyāśvamedha*.[46] In general the adapter keeps close to his original except when he feels the necessity of making a long story short or of avoiding abstruse details or where his imagination is warmed by soft sentiments. In the original the seven under-worlds are enumerated and also concisely described (38. 176-87); but this is avoided in the adaptation (verses 447ff.) also the reference to a *Hāṭakeśvara Śiva-liṅga* on the river Bhogavatī in Pātāla possibly because a *liṅgam* of such a description would not be intelligible to the common reader. To describe different situations effectively he, however, utilizes his original observation in the form of homely similes. Arjuna tells Vabruvāhana that even though the latter came to him in a friendly manner, he had only found a foe:

āge yena manuṣẏe laware kharatari
chāga buli bāghar galata āche dhari
manuṣye erante galara nere bāghe

45. *Asamīyā Mahābhārata | Aśvamedha Parvar antargata | Vabruvāhaparva*, pub. by Sivanāth Bhattācharya, first printed at the Radharaman Yantra, Calcutta; second edn. at Assam Commercial Press, Dibrugarh, January, 1925.
Vabruvāhanar Yuddha, Sācipāt MS. copied by one Ramānanda in 1661 Śaka, Nowgong collection, K.A.S., Gauhati.
Vabrhvāhanar Yuddha, ed. by B. K. Barua and M. Neog, compiled from above two (MS).
46. *Jaiminīyāśvamedhagrantha*, printed by Hariprasāda at Gaṇapata-Kṛṣṇa Press, 1960 Saṁbat, 1826 Śakābda.

« If a man runs fast and first catches hold of the neck of a tiger in the thought that it is only a goat and then tries to leave it, the tiger would not let him alone. »

Vabruvāhana retorts by saying that Arjuna had no credit in killing Bhīṣma, Karṇa and Droṇa as only some sly tricks were used in the matter.

kapāsa kāṭiyā śaśā diwaya lawara
lokaka janāwe vṛkṣa pārilohõ vara
sehimate kuru-senā māri bhaila gaha (89)

« Just as a hare might push aside a cotton shrub, run a distance and say to people, "I have felled a big tree", you take pride in killing the Kaurava soldiers. »

Vṛṣaketu, son of Karṇa, by dint of his wonderful missiles, shot Vabruvāhana into the air; the latter, however, dropped down upon Vṛṣaketu, who then attempted to struggle out of his hold. Harivara compares the king to a strong and sinewy woman grinding mustard seeds, and likens Vṛṣaketu to a fish under water trying to slip off from the catcher's hand.

uparata basi rājā duyo hāte āṭe
balavanta nārī yena besārka bāṭe
pānīra māchaka yena hāte āche dhari
erāibāka lāgi kare ājorā-ājuri (263)

Citrāṅgadā derides Vabruvāhana who has killed his own father and is almost killing his mother with mental torments and says that he is far worse than Paraśurāma, who killed only one of his parents at the other's behests and even than crabs eating up their mother but sparing the father (verses 403-f). Descriptions of the several fights are generally faithful to the original; exaggerations are rare. Minor variations as in the number of missiles hurled by each hero are seen; but, for this scribes may very well be held responsible. The horrid scene created in the battlefield by Pradyumna's arrows (*kāma-śara*) as painted in the original is almost revolting and is made much less so by Harivara. Ḍākinīs and Yoginīs are mentioned by the Assamese poet only in one place (verses 138-39), whereas in Jaimini's work there is the foul display of the female Yakṣas, sixtyfour Yoginīs, dry-bodied Betālas, Bhairavas, Yakṣas. Piśācas, Brahmagrahas, and jackals, all struck sore with Pradyumna's amorating missiles (23. 101-119; 24. 1-2). Harivara possibly did not relish this nauseating admixture of the erotic and the horrid or thought he would not be able to rouse his reader's imagination to its appreciation.

In the description of the fight between Vabruvāhana and Vṛṣaketu, the most considerable one in the whole story, there is a bit of deviation from the original; but this consists mainly of the repetition of the same tactics and movements. The action of the fatal arrow, *ardhacandra vāṇa,* hurled by Vabruvāhana on Arjuna is described more elaborately than in Jaimini, which deepens the effect of horror on imagination.

In *Jaiminīyāśvamedha* (37. 31-43) when Arjuna sees that all the big heroes on his side were killed in battle by Vabruvāhaṇa, he expresses apprehension before Vṛṣaketu that he would not be able to associate himself with the various final stages of the *aśvamedha* sacrifice, which has now no prospect of being accomplished. In Harivara's Assamese rendering Arjuna not only puts himself like this but also looks back with lyrical grief at his past achievements, so much contrasted with his present state of deplorability and much cherished connections with Kuntī, Kṛṣṇa, four brothers and Draupadī. These personal touches provide Arjuna's words of woes with a deeply pathetic note. As the poet is thus able on his own account to probe into the depths of woe, he is also capable of jovial moods and can add colour to festive occasions. In the description of the scene of Vabruvāhana's surrender unto Arjuna, Harivara succeeds in creating a festive atmosphere; and a whole band of musical instruments as the following (not mentioned in the original) is invoked: *tāla, ḍhola, bherī, bhemachi, dhumachi, ḍagara, vāṁśī, temachi, khikichi, mādalī, remachi, ṭokārī, kaṁśī, vīnā, karatāla, jhājhāri, dubala.* The victory celebrations in Maṇipura after the war are also described by the poet in his own way. Description of human physiognomy and of cities with grand buildings seems to have been the forte of old Assamese poets and Harivara was no exception to the rule. He broadens the canvas on which Jaimini paints the city of Maṇipura. In place of a few birds in jewels and animals in gold on the walls of the palaces, he gives quite a flock of them in his own way from his own observation. He adds to the number of gods and illustrations of women in the frescoes. Whereas Jaimini says that Arjuna's head shining with earornaments was severed and fell on earth (*tāvadvāṇena tīvreṇa śiro jvalitakuṇḍalaṁ || chinnaṁ pārthasya tarasā nipapāta dharātale,* 38. 61-62) Harivara provides details to show how beautiful the head was.

Lava-Kuśar Yuddha,[47] is another work by Harivara Vipra. The story of Kuśa and Lava's fight with Rāma's army in the outskirts of Vālmīki's hermitage is taken from chapters XXV-XXXVI

of *Jaiminīyāśvamedha*. In the beginning of chapter XXV Jaimini casually compared the fight between Arjuna and Vabhruvāhana to that between Rāma and his son Kuśa :

saṁgrāmastvabhavadrājan vabhruvāhanapārthayoḥ
yathā kuśasya rāmasya vājimedhahaye dhṛte —25. 1.

On further questioning by King Janamejaya the sage was led to tell the tale of the untoward fight between Rāma and his sons. In his *Vabruvāhanar Yuddha* Harivara refers to it (verses 177-f.) but leaves it aside to be told as an independent story, which he does here in *Lava-Kuśar Yuddha* (verse 1). In the nomenclature of this work Lava's name is placed before Kuśa's, although the latter is the elder. In Assamese poetry as in common lore of the people this reversed order is always followed; even the great Śaṅkaradeva went so far as to say, *jyeṣtha bhaila lava kaṇiṣṭhara kuśa nām* (Uttarā-kāṇḍa). In the text of this work however Harivara takes Kuśa and Lava in their proper order. It may be recalled here that this episode of the *Rāmāyaṇa* as retold by Jaimini has been rendered into Assamese verse by a later poet, Gaṅgārāma Dāsa, and into payara interspersed with lyrics by three poets, Gangādāsa, Subuddhirāyā and Bhavānīdāsa. In this adaptation also Harivara closely follows his original source but with a constant eye on chances of reduction. His statement in this connection is very much significant even as far as all translations and adaptations of old Assamese poetry are concerned.

kāhāro hariṣa pade śloka eka gaila
kāhāro hariṣa viśrita lambhā thaila
savāro āniyā sāra vipra harivara
bole aśvamedha-yajña-pada rucikara.

« Some (readers) are glad that a *pada* (a single verse in Assamese) covers a whole *śloka;* and others are happy when they see much extraneous matter added. Vipra Harivara takes the essence of all (many places) and sings these tasteful verses of the *aśvamedha* sacrifice. »

17. *Lava-Kuśar Yuddha,* 'Ejan mahākavir dvārā Asamīyā bhāṣāt racita' (anonymous), Bhattacharyya Agency, Dibrugarh, 1926.

Lava-Kuśar Yuddha, sācipāt MS, obtained from the late Rāṇī Māhendri Devī of Āhom rāj family, Gauhati collection (No. 1), K.A.S.

Lava Kuśar Yuddha compiled and edited by M. Neog from the above, Asam Sahitya Sabha, Jorhat, 1955.

The MS contains folios 1-11 from one copy and folios 26-34 from another, with the 34th folio being simply illustrated and not written upon. Every folio of the MS is illuminated. The illustrations in the second copy are slightly different in detail from and seem to be an improvement on those of the first. The paintings belong to the Rājput-Mogul tradition as all old Assamese paintings do. But this MS deserves to be particularly noted as bearing signs of attempt, at times successful even, at individualisation of human figures in place of conventionalisation and stylisation which is a general trait of old Assamese painting.

Another thing to be noted in the MS is the mark of āñji, at the beginning of the first folio which is then followed by the usual salute to Kṛṣṇa; *Śrī-Kṛṣṇāya namo namaḥ* ||. This particular mark is associated with Tantricism and it is not known if this was transmitted from the original MS of Harivara (which would then be taken as indicating his religion) to later copies of the work.

Gauhati University has acquired a fragmentary manuscript copy of *Tāmradhvajar Yuddha* with Harivara's name in the colophon. This work too is based upon Jaimini.

The abduction of Sītā, the war of Laṅka, Sītā's ordeal by fire, Rama's return to Ayodhyā with Lakṣmaṇa, Hanūmān and others are summarily mentioned. Vasiṣṭha and other sages greet them with utterance of the Vedas (*paṭhanto maṅgalasūktaṁ* — Jaimini, 25. 8). The mothers, Bharata, and others of kith and kin receive them cordially. Rāma reigns in munificence for a thousand and nine years (ten millenia in Jaimini), Sītā conceives and at the end of the fourth month of conception Rāma dreams of banishing Sītā. In the original Rāma directly asks Vasiṣṭha to institute the *puṁsavana* ceremony to avert any dangers of abortion. Harivara's Rāma however asks Vasiṣṭha (as an ordinary custom goes in the country) for *phalitā* or interpretation of the dreams and also to organize *puṁsavana* (As. *puhan-biyā*). Vasiṣṭha utters *susvapna, susvapna,* 'a good dream, a good dream', as the custom is, and prescribes measures for the arrangement of the ceremony. Harivara then describes the ceremony in an independent manner possibly based upon observation of real practice. Unlike Jaimini Harivara makes Rāma give some thought to the monkey-guests (a point of much interest for the common reader), consult Bharata in the matter of erection of a large pandal (which is done by *śilpins* in the original) and summon his father-in-law Janaka specially for the purpose of pouring holy water on his and Sītā's heads. In place of Bharata's playing on a *vīṇā* and singing songs addressed to Sītā, he sings songs improvised on good kings of old (*jorā-nām* as they are called in Assamese). Janaka puts the tips of Rāma's and Sītā's hair together and pours water over them. Harivara gives us an indication of the custom of those days when he explains how to fulfil a woman's *dohada* by offering her all sorts of palatable dishes.

bhāla kari bhuñjāwe ṣuhṛda āche yāra
chai loṇa puṣparāje dei ākhai cirā
dadhi ḍugdha ghṛta madhu lavanu śarkkarā (46)

A *cara* (spy) reports how a washerman has spoken ill of Rāma when driving away his own wife as she returns home with her father after a stay of four days at the latter's place. Harivara gives a popular colour to the whole story and makes the uncouth washerman say such savage words to his father-in-law, "Go home before I kill you with beating. I do not want her. You may keep her to yourself or bestow her on your son."

Rāma's conflicting sentiments when he decides upon relinquishing Sītā are brought out effectively by the poet in a few terse verses. He later makes Rāma shed tears like a child and get almost mad with grief while asking Lakṣmaṇa to put Sītā in the forest. The chariot horses also drop down as if brokenhearted. The poet however avoids the charioteer's words speaking of the horses' unwillingness to gallop on the forest road (*J.*, 27. 64-68). Harivara produces the effect of a whole forest with the enumeration of more than seventy varieties of flowering and fruit-laden trees. The dialogue between Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa after Lakṣmaṇa divulges the secret of Rāma's orders for banishment and the description of Sītā's maddening grief is much reduced; and the sympathetic grief of wild animals, birds and inanimate objects is practically avoided in the Assamese rendering. The fight between Lava, a boy of twelve years, and Śatrughna's army Śatrughna himself, is on the other hand narrated with unabated effect of horror.

When Śatrughna carries away the unconscious Lava in a chariot, the hermit boys report it to Sītā. Their words are much elaborated and Sītā's grief is a bit exaggerated by the Assamese poet. While in Jaimini she is patient and tries to hold back tears, Harivara's Sītā cries sore with grief and goes off into a swoon and when she recovers from it she invokes the sun and the ten gods of directions saying that if she is sinless and chaste, there should be an end to her grief and Lava should live till Kuśa meets him. The dialogue between Sītā and Kuśa after this is made much homely with a deeper touch of motherly concern for one son lying dead and the other having to face the cataclysm. Thus with small deviations from the original Harivara tells the story in a way that would be effective with the common readers and listeners.

Harivara is one of the major poets of the period. His work of translation and adaptation possesses a strong flavour of original

genius and poetry. In use of idiomatic expressions, similies and metaphors he is next only to Mādhava Kandali.

HEMA SARASVATĪ

Prahlāda-caritra.—In this very small narrative of a hundred verses Hema Sarasvatī introduces himself thus :

kamatā maṇḍala durlabhanārāyaṇa
nṛpavara anupāma
tāhāna rājyata rudra sarasvatī
devayānī kanyā nāma
tāhāna tanaya hema sarasvatī
druvara anuja bhāi
padabandhe tehō pracāra karilā
vāmana purāṇa cāi[48]

Hema Sarasvatī is considered a contemporary of Durlabhanārāyaṇa of the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century.[49] There is however a difficulty in rendering the meaning of the second and third feet of the above verses. We think these may reasonably be translated as : "In his kingdom (lived) Rudra Sarasvatī. Devayānī is his (Rudra Sarasvatī's) daughter. Her son is Hema Sarasvatī, who is the younger brother of Dhruva." Here Rudra Sarasvatī may be really Durlabhanārāyaṇa's contemporary or may thus be considered at least by a generation later than king Durlabhanārāyana and the poet Harivara Vipra, in which case he may be a junior contemporary of the poet Kaviratna Sarasvatī, whose father acted as a Śikdār during Durlabhanārāyaṇa's reign.[50] It is further supposed that Hema Sarasvatī is a Brāhmaṇ, which has no particular evidence as Sarasvatī like Bhāratī or Kandali seems to be a general epithet for scholars.[51] In an old Assamese chronicle

48. *Prahlāda-caritra*, ed. by Kaliram Medhi, 1835 Śaka, p. 11.
49. See ante.
50. See ultra.
51. Kaviratna Sarasvatī, for example, was a Kāyastha. The Kāyastha Janārdana, grandfather of Śaṅkaradeva's chief apostle Mādhavadeva, also bears the title of Sarasvatī (Nagendra-nath Vasu. *The Social History of Kamarupa*, vol. II, Calcutta, 1926, appendix 1, p. 17). The occurrence of the suffix 'Sarasvatī' after personal names is remarkable. It is, we may remember, one of the ten titles of the Daśanāmīs or the ten orders of Śaṅkarite *saṁnyāṣīs* : Sarasvatī, Bhāratī, Purī, Giri, Tirtha, etc. (*The Three Great Acharyas*, Madras, 1947, pp. 58 f.). It is interesting to note that Śrīpati Sarasvatī, a Kāyastha Bhūyā of Kāmarūpa, was originally an anchorite attached to the Govardhana-maṭha of Śaṅkarācārya (*Kāyastha Samājar Itivṛtta*, 1941, p. 490). It is not known if Hema Sarasvatī and Kaviratna Sarasvatī or their ancestors had anything to do with any Śaṅkarite monastery.

the king of Kamatā (not named) is mentioned to have sent in 1401 Śaka | 1479 A.D. a messenger, Rāmadeu Bhaṭṭācāryya, who was the son of Rudra Sarasvatī, to Gauḍa.[52] But this Rudra Sarasvatī is apparently a different man from and later than Hema Sarasvatī's father or grandfather, who lived during Durlabhanārāyaṇa's reign, or even earlier. The latter part of the fourteenth century may however be assigned as Hema Sarasvatī's date. His vocables betray only a single Arabic loan (*naphar*). There also is only one instance of a pre-Śaṅkaradeva grammatical form (*-iba*-past participle : *puribāra prabhāve adhike jale kānti*).

Hema Sarasvatī takes the story of Prāhlāda, from the altercations between the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu and his son Prahlāda to the former's death, from *Vāmana Purāṇa* and relates it in his own way.[52a] He is not a powerful story-teller and the treatment of details is not very attractive. His language and style are not of a high order and polish and lack utterly in idiomatic expressions. Rhyming also is not smooth in places. It is to be noted that he calls the scriptures of the Asuras *vāmānaya* (left-handed) and refers to *mantras* for control of elephants (*hatīsādhā-mantra*). The poet seems to be a Viṣṇuite: he salutes Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇā and tells the story to celebrate the victory of the Vaiṣṇava Prahlāda over the followers of the *vāmānaya* cult. His work has been claimed as "the first Assamese book on Vaiṣṇavism".[53]

Hara-gaurī-saṁvāda.—A more considerable work of Hema Sarasvatī has recently been discovered in the district of Goalpara. It consists of six different chapters in 899 verses of more than 4,000 lines. The first chapter deals with the story of Hiraṇyakśipu's death at the hands of Man-Lion Viṣṇu as recounted in *Nṛsiṁha Purāṇa*, while the remaining five chapters are professedly taken from *Hara-gaurī-saṁvāda*. Chapters 2-5 relate the tales of demon Tāḍakā's warfare, the burning down of Kāmadeva with fire coming out of god Śiva's eye, and the birth of Kārtika; chapter 6 purports to give an account of the means and ends of *yoga* practices. In this poetical work Hema Sarasvatī tells us about himself in a slightly

52. *Assam Burañji*, ed. by S. K. Bhuyan, D.H.A.S., 1945, p. 18.

52a. The tale of Prahlāda as narrated by Hema Sarasvatī does not however appear in the printed original (*Vāmana Purāṇa*, Jagaddhitecchu Press, Bombay, 1808 Śakabdā; and the ed. of Tarkaratna, Cal., 1314 B.S.) It is possible that there might have been another recension of the work current in Kāmarūpa at that time.

53. Kaliram Medhi, *Assamese Grammar and Origin of the Assamese Language*, intro., p. xci.

varying way from *Prahlāda-caritra*: He was one of the four sons of Durlabhanārāyaṇa's minister (*mahāpātra*), Paśupati, and his wife Rambhāvatī. The most prominent among the four brothers was Dhruva, and Dhanañjaya was the eldest. The original name of the poet was Hemanta; he acquired the epithet of Hema Sarasvatī by virtue of constant worship of Hara and Gaurī. He used to live with his parents at Kamatā, Durlabha's capital, where goddess Kālī was enshrined.[53a]

KAVIRATNA SARASVATĪ

Jayadratha-vadha—In this work the poet writes:

King Durlabhanārāyaṇa was the crown jewel of all kings and a great worshipper of gods. He ruled over people on earth with constant affection as if for his own son. His son is the pious Indranārāyaṇadeva. A great hero, he is learned and is of dignified demeanour. He always worships god Hari. With the strength of his arms he has with ease conquered an undivided kingdom (lit., the whole of the globe). The antagonist kings constantly pay obeisance to him and serve him. Every moment Sadāśiva blesses Indranārāyaṇa with this boon: Let the king be Pañca-Gauḍeśvara, (lord of the five Gauḍas) and let him live long with his son.

There is a village called Choṭaśilā, which is the essence (chief) of all villages. There lived Cakrapāṇi Śikdār, famous all over the world, accomplished as a man, chief among the Kāyasthas, pious, well-reputed, great among scholars, and beautifying his race like a spotless moon. He worshipped gods and Brāhmaṇs and held religious councils. There were guests always staying at his place and they never returned ungratified. By dint of his own qualities he has acquired great wealth and honour. The chief among kings, Durlabhanārāyaṇa, was all praise for him. All people were deeply grieved at his death as if they themselves had died in war or the mount Meru had fallen down or a piece of ruby had been eaten into by insects.

His son Kaviratna Sarasvatī speaks these verses of Droṇaparva, describing the killing of Jayadratha.[54]

53a. This book has recently been disinterred from oblivion by Śrī Ajaychandra Chakravarti, Dhubri.

54. *Typical Selections from Assamese Literature*, Vol. I, C. U., 1929, pp. 324-25.

Scholars have assigned, as we have already seen, the latter part of the thirteenth or the early part of the fourteenth century A.D. as the date of Durlabhanārāyaṇa's reign. Kanaklal Barua tentatively fixes 1350-65 as Indraṇārāyaṇa's period of rule.[55] It is seen from the pedigree of Rāmacaraṇa, Ṭhākura incorporated in *The Social History of Kāmarūpa*, Vol. III, 1933, that Kaviratna Sarasvatī was sixth in order of ascent from Rāmadāsa Ātā, a disciple of Śaṅkaradeva: Cakrapāṇi (Kāśyapa-gotra)—Kaviratna Sarasvatī, alias Śrīhari Sarasvatī—Haripāla Bhūyā—Rāmapāla Bhūyā—Jayapāla Bhūyā—Kṛṣṇapāla or Gopāla Bhūyā—Kṛpāla Bhūyā—Gayapāla or Gayapāṇi Bhūyā, alias Rāmadāsa Ātā—Rāmacaraṇa Ṭhākura.

Chotaśilā is probably Śilā, a village in the Barpeṭā subdivision in the Kāmrūp district.[56] This work is more an adaptation than a literal translation of the *Mahābhārata*. His language and diction are simple but inferior to and less idiomatic than that of Mādhava Kandali and Harivara Vipra. His descriptions are detailed and minute (e.g. the picture of Kailāsa quoted in the *Typical Selections from Assamese Literature*, Vol. I).

RUDRA KANDALI

Sātyaki-praveśa.—In his work Rudra Kandali praises Śrīmanta Tāmradhvaja and his younger brother, who were like Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa in the matter of fraternal affection. Tāmradhvaja is here described as wise, pious and very kind, a protector of the poor and a devotee of Viṣṇu and worshipper of Mahāmāyā. The biographies of the saint Śaṅkaradeva describe how King Durlabhanārāyaṇa of Kamatā or Kāmarūpa had a war and concluded a treaty with King Dharmanārāyaṇa of Gauḍa. One biographer however calls Durlabhanārāyaṇa king of Gauḍa with his capital at a place called Gariyā at a distance of three *praharas* from Behār (Cooch Behar) and the Kāmarūpa king is, according to him, his cousin, Dharmapāla by name.[57] This is apparently a mistake. This biographer however gives Tāmradhvaja as the name of the Kāmarūpa king's son and says that when the king returned home by boat up the Brahmaputra, he was affectionately received by

55. *Early History of Kāmarūpa*, p. 25.
56. Kaliram Medhi, *Assamese Grammar and Origin of the Assamese Language*, into p. xci.
57. Rāmacaraṇa Ṭhākura, *Śaṅkara-carita*, ed. Halirām Mahanta, 1925, p. 198.
58. *op. cit.*, p. 7.

Tāmradhvaja at the landing place.[58] But the expression *ghara-ghaṭe*, 'at his own bathing or landing place' (variantly, *baḍa ghāṭe*) is taken by Kanaklal Barua to mean "his headquarters in Ghoraghat in Rangpur".[59] Thus Tāmradhvaja was a king of Kamatā-Kāmarūpa following Durlabhanārāyaṇa but it is not clear where his capital might have been. The pre-Śaṅkaradeva characteristic of past participle in *-ibā-* is in evidence in *Sātyaki-praveśa*:

dunāi dhanu chedibāra bege ye laḍilā.
tini śare bhedibāra ātāseka dilā.
yuḍibāra śarapāṭa ānaka māriyā.[60]

Sātyaki-praveśa is a section (chs. 105-ff) of the sub-*parva* "Jayadratha-vadha" included in the Droṇaparva of the *Mahābhārata*. This section celebrates the prowess of Sātyaki, son of Śini of the Yadu race. The translation is genrally faithful to the original. In describing the fights between hero and hero, Rudra Kandali sometimes makes a long story short (e.g., between Sātyaki and the Trigartas), a short one long (e.g., between Droṇa and Dhṛṣṭadyumna); he sometimes dilates too long upon some description with much freedom from his original (e.g., in that of the fight between Droṇa and Bṛhatkṣetra) or keeps quite close to the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* (e.g., description of fight between Duḥśāsana and Sātyaki). The descriptions on the whole are very much lively. The derisive words of the Cedi, Srñjaya and Somaka soldiers hurled at Droṇa (Droṇaparva, 109. 51-60) are replaced by Rudra Kandali's homely rebukes in the homely language of common people, which is much palatable to ordinary readers and listeners. Similes and homely expressions are a constant and pleasant feature of the language of this work. Kandali retains original similes as such; or alters and simplifies them, or drops them if found too abstruse for general apprehension. He also makes out ones from his own observation or from convention.

B

CHORAL SONGS: OJĀ-PĀLI

Introduction

The lyrical Kāvyas in choral songs represent the most popular form of literature before neo-Vaiṣṇava influences pervaded the

59. *Early History of Kāmarūpa*, p. 246.
60. *Typical Selections from Assamese Literature*, vol. I, pp. 137 f.

literature of the country. In point of time these belong to the time of Śaṅkaradeva but in essence and methods of treatment they swing back to the preceeding period. They can be called a direct outcome and the main article for consumption of the semi-religious institution of *ojā-pāli*. The lyrical Kāvyas were invariably meant to be sung by such a village chorus consisting of a band of singers of four or five. The leader of the chorus is called *ojā* or *ojhā* (Skt. *upādhyāya*), the few other singers are known as *pālis*, 'assistants, supporters' (Skt. *pālita*). There is a chief among these *pālis* who goes by the name of *ḍāinā pāli* (*ḍāinā* = Skt. *dakṣiṇa*). He is in fact the right-hand man of the *ojā* and is like a second leader of the chorus. It is the business of the *ojā* to lead the chorus: He sets the refrain for the *pālis* to repeat with marking of time with their feet and striking of cymbals with their hands, and sings the main body of verses of the Kāvya. He also makes dancing movements with gestures in his hands. He addresses his audience as a story-teller does and explains to them the different incidents wherever he finds such explanations necessary. This is sometimes done by the *ḍāinā pāli*, with whom the *ojā* occasionally holds a conversation. This institution of *ojā-pāli* was the direct precursor of the Vaiṣṇava drama in the same way as the holy chorus in the festivals of Dionysus preceded Greek tragedy. When there was no regular drama in the country, the performances of the *ojā-pāli* provided the common people of villages and court circles with edification and amusement in the *nāṭ-ghar* (house of lyrical dance-drama). But even when *aṅka* or *nāṭ*, the regular drama invented by Śaṅkaradeva, came into existence, this musical institution did not cease to have its utility. It came to be known as the special property pertaining to the festival of the snake-goddess Manasā but the neo-Vaiṣṇavites also made use of the art in singing from *Kīrtana-ghoṣā* of Śaṅkaradeva and verse tales from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*.

The particular form of Kāvya — a number of lyrics with intervening *payāras* of the ordinary cast — is one of the distinct features of the age under review. Mankara, Durgāvara and Pītāmbara, all wrote in this form. But it was never practised by the Vaiṣṇava poets. Nārāyaṇadeva, coming several decades later than this trio, composed his *Padmā Purāṇa* in the form of a lyrical Kāvya but this was warranted by his very subject-matter. Another later work *Aśvamedhaparva* by Gaṅgādasa, Subuddhirāya and Bhavānīdāsa conforms to this type, but the three poets do not seem to have any affiliation to the Vaiṣṇava tenets. But for some reason

or other this art was looked down upon by the neo-Vaiṣṇavites.[61] This class of poetry has been called *pāñcāli* (*lī*) or *pācāli* (*lī*) in the text at places.[62]

As noticed above these Kāvyas have a considerable number of lyrics incorporated into them. These lyrics are set to certain melodies (*rāgas*) of classical Indian music. In his *Uṣā-Pariṇaya* Pītāmbara names these rāgas: *ahira, barāḍi, bhairavī, bhāṭhiyāli, dhanaśrī, goṇḍagiri, guñjarī, mallāra, nāga, nāṭa, pāhāḍī, paṭamañjarī, rāmagiri, sūhāi, vasanta,* (variantly also *vibhāsa*). *Rāgas* used in Durgāvara's *Rāmāyaṇa* are: *ahira, ākāśamaṇḍalī, barāḍi, belovāra, bhāṭhiyāli, cālani, devajini, devamohana, dhanāśrī guñjarī, mālaci, mañjarī, mārovāra, meghamaṇḍala paṭamañjarī, rāmagiri, śrīgandhakāli, śrīgāndhāra, sūyāi* (*sūhāi*), *vasanta*.

It is to be noted that while the story of Manasā and Cānda Sāud is taken from no Sanskrit source, Durgāvara tells the story of Rāma, basing it mainly on the earlier work of Mādhava Kandali, and Pītāmbara takes the contents of his works direct from *Harivaṁśa* and the Purāṇas. The works of Pītāmbara could thus have been classed with translations and adaptations but for their lyrical and popular nature and similarity in technique with the latter group. These lyrical Kāvyas generally centre round stories of love and marriage of young men and women.

PĪTĀMBARA KAVI

Pītāmbara was a man of Kāmarūpa living in the town of Kamatā, was a contemporary, perhaps a senior one, of Śaṅkaradeva and he composed some of his poetical works at the instance of Prince Samarasiṁha of Koc Behār. This is practically all that has been known of this poet. Śaṅkaradeva left the Āhom

61. *Uṣā-parīṇaya*, ed. by Maheswar Neog, Gauhati, ed. 2, 1955, intro., pp. xxxiv-xxxv.

62. The word *pāñcālī* (*li*) or *pācāli* (*lī*) derives itself from Skt. *pāñcālī* or *pāñcālika*, 'a doll'. And it is quite probable that this form of poetry was connected with the ancient amusement of puppet-play, especially popular in the countryside. Another suggestion is that the form originated in the Pāñcāla country (Kanauj). In the *Kālikā Purāṇa*, 89 138-39, it is enjoined that Caṇḍikā should be propitiated on the third day of the moon, directly linked with the Puṣya-nakṣatra, with *pāñcālikā-vihārā* and *śiśu-kautuka*, 'children's games'. It is likely that the term *pāñcālikā-vihāra* here denotes puppet-play or singing of *pañcāli-kāvyas*. Thus connected with Śaktism and being a sort of light amusement, the *pāñcālis* came to be looked with suspicion by the Vaiṣṇavites.

territory and came to Koc Behār-cum-Kāmarūpa in about 1546 A.D. and stayed at Barpeṭā.[63] He asked his new disciple Nārāyaṇa Ṭhākura, a man of Kāmarūpa, to point out to him some influential persons of that region who could work as proselytizers. Nārāyaṇa named three such persons, one of whom was Pītāmbara Kavī, who had already rendered *Bhāgavata Purāṇa,* X, into verse, Śaṅkaradeva then wanted to know what poetry Pītāmbara was making. Nārāyaṇa recited a portion from Pītāmbara's work, describing how Rukmiṇī, the princess of Kuṇḍinanagara, was eager to see Kṛṣṇa, in course of which appeared the couplet:

bilāpa kari kānde māi rukamīṇī
kona aṅge khuṇa dekhi nāila yadumaṇi

» Rukmiṇī wailed aloud and said: For what blemish in my limbs has not Yadumaṇi (Kṛṣṇa) come ? «

Śaṅkaradeva remarked that this poet was a Śākta and had an inordinate love for the sensuous, and that he was not fit to hold the position of a preacher as he sat on the hill of vanity (*garva parvatata siṭo uṭhiyā āchay*).[64] It would appear that Pītāmbara had an established reputation as a poet when Śaṅkaradeva entered the kingdom of Kāmarūpa, that is, before the middle of the sixteenth century. Besides *Bhāgavata Purāṇa,* X, four other works are ascribed to him: *Bhāgavata Purāṇa,* I, *Uṣā-pariṇaya* and *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* (Caṇḍī-ākhyāna) and *Nala-damayantī.* Nothing has so far been known of Pītāmbara's *Bhāgavata Purāṇa,* I, a copy of which was at one time preserved in the Cooch Behar State Library.[65] Manuscript copies of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa,* X, and *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* (*Caṇḍī-ākhyāna*) are still preserved in the same place.[66]

Khan Choudhury Amanatullah Ahmed and, after him, Dr. Shashi Bhusan Das Gupta of Calcutta University, consider the poet Pītāmbara as identical with the great scholar of the Cooch-Behar court, Pītāmbara Siddhāntavāgiśa. This scholar is reputed

63. Maheswar Neog, *Śrī-śrī-śaṅkaradeva,* ed. 2, p. 123.
64. *Kathā-gurucarita,* ed. by U. C. Lekharu, p. 95-f.
65. Khan Choudhury Amanatulla Ahmed, *Kocbihārer Itihās,* I, p. 131-n.
66. S. B. Das Gupta, ed., *Descriptive Catalogue of Bengali Manuscripts, In the State Library of Cooch Behār,* 1948, pp. 7-8, 11-12, 62-64; S. B. Das Gupta: *'Ṣoḍaśa śatābdīr ek-khāni Baṁlā Bhāgavat', Visvabhārati, Patrikā,* Vol. V., 1354 B. S., pp. 254-ff. Dr. Das Gupta has mistaken Pītāmbara to be a Bengali poet. His statement has been examined by the present writer in a current Assamese periodical, *Rāmdhenu,* Vol. III, No. vii.

to have compiled twenty-eight Smṛti works called *Kaumudīs,* three of which (*Preta-kāumudī, Saṁkrānti-kaumudī* and *Sandhyā-kaumudī*) have already been printed and published. The Siddhāntavāgīśa became known as 'Jagadguru'? His descendants still live in a small village named Sarābāḍi in the west of the Mangaldai subdivision. A man of this family, Sūryyadeva, composed a chronicle of the Koc kings, *Gandharvanārāyaṇar Vaṁśāvalī,* in the middle of nineteenth century.[67] According to this chronicle[68] the two scholars of King Naranārāyaṇa's court, Pītāmbara Siddhāntavāgīśa and Puruṣottama Vidyāvāgīśa were formerly in the court of Gauḍa and were brought into Kāmarūpa by the king's younger brother, chief minister and commander-in-chief Śukladhvaja or Cilārāya. In *Samudranārāyaṇar Vaṁśāvalī,* Pītāmbara is described as Pratāpa Bhūyā's *guru.*[69] In none of his poetical works Pītāmbara Kavi gives us any indication that he was a Siddhāntavāgīśa or that he had migrated from Gauḍa; on the other hand, he rests content to call himself a poet of Kāmatā or Kāmatāpura:

kāmātānagare surapurī parateka
tāte śiśu pītāmbara nāme kavi eka[70]
kāmatānagara surapura-avatāra
ekamukhe ke kahiba yena guṇa tāra
tāta pītambara nāme kavi śiśumati
uṣāpariṇaya gīta kaila samāpati[71]

Now Pītāmbara Siddhāntavāgīśa was taken by Śukladhvaja from Gauḍa after his captivity there (for twelve months according to Assam chronicles and Dr. Wade[72]), which was the result of his unsuccessful campaign against that country. He undertook this campaign after return from the Āhom kingdom in 1563; and after his return from Gauḍa he had the Kāmākhyā temple rebuilt in 1565 as recorded in the inscription on its inside wall. It is therefore clear that Pītāmbara Siddhantavagīśa came to Kāmārūpa in 1564 or 1565.[72a] But the poet Pītāmbara Dvija composed his *Uṣā-*

67. Amanatullah Ahmer, *ibid.*
68. Ff. 16, 83 cited by A. Ahmed, pp. 114, 114-n.
69. Amanatullah Ahmed, p. 114-n.
70. *Uṣā-parinaya,* v. 1, p. 2.
71. *Ibid,* v. 1369, p. 243.
72. *Assam Burañjī,* D.H.A.S., 1945, p. 42; J. P. Wade, *An Account of Assam,* 1927, p. 204.

72a. In the genealogical history of a Baruvā family of Mangaldai subdivision, claiming the Siddhāntavāgiśa as *kula-guru,* the pandit is said to have been brought from 'the Badshah circle' in 1483 Śaka, 1561-62 A.D. (*Kāyastha Samājar Itivṛtta,* pp. 803-f.).

pariṇaya in Kamatāpura eulogising the town as a place of gods incarnate in 1533 A.D. (or 1455 of Śaka era). The poet is thus distinct from the Smṛti scholar of the same name. That poet Pītāmbara also was a good Sanskrit scholar has been put beyond all doubt by the elegant way of his work of translation and adaptation from the Purāṇas. It seems also to be quite possible that Pītambara was not a 'dvija' but a 'dāsa' or non-'dvija'.[72b]

Uṣā-pariṇaya.—This Kāvya was completed on the fifth day of the month of Vaiśākha of the year 1455 of the Śaka era (*vāṇa-yuta-vāṇa-veda-śaśānka-pramita*) or 1533 A.D. in the town of Kamatā. This is the earliest of Pītāmbara's works now available. In it the name of 'yuvarāja (prince) Samarasiṁha (Śukladhvaja)'[73] is not mentioned as is done in the two other works considered below. It was in 1455 Śaka that Naranārāyana became king and appointed his brother Śukladhvaja as Yuvarāja (and virtually the chief minister and comander-in-chief of his army). So, though Pītāmbara lived in the capital, he did not possibly till that time secure the patronage of any royal personage. Kamatā, Kāmatā, Kāntanagara is said to have been established by King Nīladhvaja of

72b. This has been pointed out to me by Dr. Sukumar Sen of Calcutta University. In *Nala-damayantī*, written 1544-45 A.D., a MS of which was collected by Dr. Sen from the Rangpur district, Pītambara persistently subscribes himself as 'Dāsa' (Sen, *Bāṅgālā Sāhityer Itihās*, vol. I, 2nd ed., pp. 231f., 336f). In one place only in *Uṣā-pariṇaya* (v. 1367f., p. 242) Pītāmbara says:

hena puṇyamaya kathā brāhmaṇe kahilā
payāra prabandhe tāka recanā karilā
pracura katek kathā racilo saṁksepe
āra kathā dilo tāta rasa anurūpe

∝ Such sacred tales the Brāhmaṇ told and composed it in the form of verses. I have composed profuse matters into concise form and woven into it additional matters according as poetical flavours demanded. ∞

This statement is confusing enough as the verbs *kahilā, karilā* connected with the subject *brāhmaṇe* in the first two lines are in the third person, while in the following lines the verbs *racilo, dilo* clearly indicate the first person. This juxtaposition of verbs of two different persons rouses the suspicion that the subject of the first two verbs is different from the subject of the latter ones (namely, the author). We have not moreover been able to verify the text of these lines, which occur in an uncritical edition, ed. Nibhāṣārām Chaudhārī, from any complete MS. In *Typical Selections from Assamese Literature*, vol. II, pt. II, C.U., 1924, p. 321, the third and fourth lines quoted above are found wanting. Dr. Sen would suggest: Pītāmbara by the above statement means that the story he tells was recounted to him by a Brāhmaṇ (i.e., he heard it from Kathakas).

73. See ultra.

Khen or Khyān family and was later taken by Viśvasiṁha as the capital of the Koc kingdom which he established.[74]

The story of Vāṇāsura's prowess, his fight with the Yādavas, the fight on his account between Kṛṣṇa and Hara, the 'love affair' and marriage of Uṣā (Vāṇa's daughter) and Aniruddha (Pradyumna's son) are told in the greatest detail in *Harivaṁśa* (Viṣṇuparva, chapters 116-128). Pītāmbara takes the story from there and for the most part keeps close to the original. He says: —

vyāsara mukhara kathā ānibo āwase
ārasava racibo tāhāra āśe-pāśe.

∝ Shall I surely take the story from Vyāsa's mouth but also shall I compose something round about it. ∞

He takes a great deal of libetry with the description of Uṣā's alluring youthful beauty; the erotic pleasures of Hara and Pārvatī in the arbour (which reminds us of Mankara's like description); the desperation that grows at its sight in the heart of Uṣā whose fancy was already 'lightly turning to thoughts of love' for influence of the springtime; Aniruddha's sexual pleasures with the Yakṣiṇī Kāmasenā in a dream and Uṣā's erotic dream and attainment to puberty. As a matter of fact, there are fine touches of lyricism and sensuousness in the first portions of the Kāvya and Uṣā becomes the central figure of the action in place of Vāṇa as in the *Harivaṁśa*. The element of lyricism finding an expression in small lyrics is however gradually lost in the clash and thunder of arms as the action progresses and the character of Uṣā almost dwindles into the background. Love and marriage are the theme; the fall of Vāṇa comes as a byproduct of the action moving towards that consummation. However with his heroism and devotion to Hara the demon king remains an attractive and brilliant character till the last. With an eye on popularity Pītāmbara brings in the character of Uṣā's old nurse, Kokilā. This woman warns Vāṇa just after Uṣā's birth that the child will be his ruin and should be therefore thrown into water as all ill omens have appeared round about the palace in the wake of its birth. She later on reports Uṣā's clandestine union with Aniruddha to Vāṇa, adding that her prediction is coming true. There are other elements in the work which cater to the taste of the populace — a play of the supernatural in the main. Some glimpses of the social conditions of the times are seen in refer-

74. Gait, *The Koch Kings of Kamarupa*, 1895, p. 15.

ences to the worship of Gaurī and Śiva and a passing description of ceremonial marriage.

Bhāgavata Purāṇa, X.—No date of composition is mentioned in the body of the work. Pītāmbara however says :

> Kāmatānagar is a wonderful city, where lives the great king Viśvasiṁha. His son is Samarasiṁha by name, who derives much pleasure from the divine sports of Kṛṣṇa. His devotion constantly rests at the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa. ..... Pītāmbara with but a child's intellect, (living) near him made these verses, celebrating the activities of Kṛṣṇa.[75]

In other places Samarasiṁha is called 'Yuvarāja' which unmistakably refers to Śukladhvaja, better known as Cilārāya. In *Darrang Raj Vamsabali*,[76] it is stated that during the coronation ceremony of Malladeva or Naranārāyaṇa in Behār (Cooch Behar) Śukladhvaja was made *yuva-nṛpati* (= *yuvarāja*' 'young king') and was given the name (epithet) Saṁgramasiṁha possibly in recognition of his military skill.He is referred to as *choṭa rājā* all through *Kathā-gurucarita*. Pītāmbara uses the word Samarasiṁha cognition of his military skill. He is referred to as *choṭa rājā* all through *Kathā-gurucarita*. Pītāmbara uses the word Samarasiṁha as a variant of 'Saṁgramasiṁha'. That Śukladhvaja was a great devotee of Kṛṣṇa is seen from the fact that he was later initiated into Vaiṣṇavism by Śaṅkaradeva. The date of Naranārāyaṇa's accession to the throne is placed by Gait at about 1540 A.D., by Amanatulla Ahmed at about 1455 of Śaka era, that is, 1533 A.D. So, 1533 can be taken as the upper limit in determining the date of composition of Pītāmbara's *Bhāgavata Purāṇa, X*. As for the lower one it cannot, I think, go beyond about 1546 A.D. when Śaṅkaradeva heard some of its verses recited from memory by Nārāyaṇa Ṭhākura. On the whole, the work belongs to the first half of the sixteenth century.

It has already been noted how Pītāmbara was censured by Śaṅkaradeva on account of the note of sensuality obtaining in his verse rendering of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. His work is more an adaptation than translation from the original Purāṇa. He is a story-teller, narrating episodes from *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in a pleasing manner.

75. *Bhāgavata*, X, MS, Cooch Behar State Library, folio 1, cited in the *Viśvabhāratī Patrikā*, V, iv, p. 256.

76. ed. by Hemchandra Goswami, 1817, v. 313. In *Assam Burañjī*, D.H.A.S., 1945, p. 43, it is stated that Cilarāya got the epithet Saṁgrāmasiṁha after his clever escape from Gauḍa.

Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa (*Caṇḍī-ākhyāna*).—This work also was composed by Pītāmbara at the instance of Kumāra Samarasiṁha or Śukladhvaja. But this time the patron prince is complimented as a great devotee of Bhavānī, and the poet himself makes a crore of salutes to the goddess in the initial benedictory verses. Pītāmbara indicates how Śukladhvaja one day expressed regret in the royal court that none but scholars could understand what was in the Purāṇas as it was garbed in Saṇskrit, and how the prince asked the poet to render it into verses in the language of the land.[77] In the two manuscripts preserved in the State Library of Cooch Behar, the date of beginning the work of composition is given as 1524 Śaka (*veda pakṣa vāṇa āra śaśāṅka śakat*) or 1602 A.D.; but the date seems to be improbable in view of the facts that Śukladhvaja died in 1492 Śaka or 1571 A.D. and that Pītāmbara's first extant work *Uṣā-pariṇaya* was written as far back as 1533 A.D. It is quite likely that there might be a scribal mistake in the above reading and it would be reasonable to suppose this work to have been written not much later than the date of Naranārāyāṇa's coming to the throne as Pītāmbara here calls Śukladdhvaja both 'Kumāra' and 'Samarasiṁha'.

In this version Pītāmbara gives in simple and direct language the story of goddess Caṇḍī and her fight with and victory over several demons.

Pītāmbara is one of the most considerable poets of the age. Probably next to Mādhava Kandali he is the most prolific of the pre-Śaṅkaradeva writers. A scholar of great merit, he is a poet and musician of no mean degree.

DURGĀVARA KĀYASTHA

Gīti-rāmāyaṇa.—The recension of Durgāvara's *Gīti-rāmāyaṇa* at present available[78] seems to be incomplete. Nothing can be gathered from it about the identity of the poet. Another work ascribed to him, *Padmā* or *Manasā Purāṇa*, however provides a few points of detail. He pays his homage there to king Viśvasiṁha, 'the Master of Kamatā', his fortyeight queens and eighteen princely sons. The number of Viśvasiṁha's (king of Koc-Behār) wives remains unascertained; the princes however are taken to

77. MS, folio 1, cited in *Descriptive Catalogue of Bengali Manuscripts in the State Library of Cooch Behar*, Art. No. 8.

78. *Durgāvarī | Kavivara Durgāvarā-racita Gīti-rāmāyaṇa*, ed. Viṣayacandra Viśvāsī, Hajo, 1837 śaka.
Durgāvarī Gīti-rāmāyaṇa, ed. Maheswar Neog, Golaghat, 1955.

be eighteen or nineteen. The king died in C. 1540[78a] and (as Durgāvara gives the full number of his sons) the poet must have composed his *Padmā Purāṇa* by this date; while *Gīti-rāmāyaṇa* may be an earlier work of his, as no patron is mentioned therein. Durgāvara calls himself the son of Śrī Kāyastha Candradhara. Another person, Bāhubala Śikdār, is eulogised and described as a Gandharva incarnate, a devotee of Padmā (*Padmā-deukar*), and one shining in the family as a *mālatī* flower shines among all flowers. The poet wishes this person a long life (*āyu yaśa vṛddhi hauka candra divākara*). From this it may well be inferred that this musician and officer of state (Śikdār — a keeper of fort or town, or a revenue officer) was the poet's patron. It is possibly this Bāhubala Śikdār who was later raised to the rank of a naval officer as Pātra during the reign of king Naranārāyaṇa, Viśvasiṁha's son. Durgāvara lived in the village of Nīlācala on the hill of that name, where 'resides the demon-killer Pārvatī (Kāmākhyā)'—*āchaya pārvatī asurara kṣayaṅkāra*. Viśvasiṁha is said to have discovered the *yoni-pīṭha* of Kāmākhyā in a deserted condition under cover of a thick jungle in the early years of the sixteenth century; and the worship there was carried on up till that time by some local tribal people with offerings of pigs and fowls. Coming to test and realise the miraculous power of the holy spot, he built a temple over it.[78b] Possibly Viśvisiṁha made arrangements for the worship of Manasā as he did see to the regular administering of the worship of Kāmākhyā. It has been one of the special festive occasions at the place.[78c] The name Durgāvara is apparently a Śākta one. In *Manasā Purāṇa* the poet says that he was secured by his parents as a boon from all the gods :

prati deva vare putra pāileka pradhāna
kavi durgāvara gīta karilā vyākhyāna (verse 61)

Durgāvara seems also to be a common name for *bhāṭas* or wandering minstrels (*kavi gāite āila rājār bhāṭ durgāvar*[79]). In *Gīti-Rāmāyaṇa* Durgāvara does not betray an inclination towards any particular religious form, although he pays his obeisance to Rāma, several times, in course of the *gīti-kāvya*. He likewise relies on the blessings of goddess Sarasvatī (verses 368, 372, 946) for the

78a. See ante.
78b. Amanatullah Ahmed, p. 94.
78c. Maheswar Neog: 'Serpent-lore and serpent-worship in Assam', *The Eastern Anthropologist*, vol. IV, nos. 3-4, March-Aug., 1951, p. 158,
79. *Gopīcandrer Gān*, C.U., vol. I, 1922, p. 57,

easy flow of his lyrics. Judged by the general trend of the present work and the indiscriminate use of words like *sāraṅga, gāṇḍīva, murāri, cakrapāṇi, daityāri, devarāja* as applied to Rāma and his attributes, he can be taken as a village poet with not much of classical learning, or with no care to keep conformity to the conventions of scriptures. He has not also possibly seen the *Rāmāyaṇa* in original Sanskrit and relies on Mādhava Kandali's Assamese version or on his own imagination.

In the version available, the Ādi- and Ayodhyā- kāṇḍas are missing, while the Laṅka- and Uttarā-kāṇḍas are treated quite summarily. It is very much possible that the first two cantos have been lost in the march of centuries or not written at all; the Araṇya-kāṇḍa begins with a mention of the Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa :

ayodhyā kāṇḍara kathā bhaila samāpati
araṇya kāṇḍara kathā śuniyo samprati.

Regrettably enough, the fine lyrics of the missing cantos have slipped out of public memory as well, and the present writer has been able to get hold of the following single one (incomplete)[80] from Durgāvara's Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa describing Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītās' setting out for exile.

mayo bane yāŏ svāmī (he)
a svāmī nakarā nairāśa
tomāre lagate svāmī
khāṭim banabāsa (he)

opare s ūruyar chaṭā
tale tapta bāli (he rāma)
kimate calibā sītā
sukomala bhari (he)

āge yāiba rāmacandra
madhyata jānakī (he rāma)
tāra pāche calī yāiba
lakṣmaṇa sārathi (he)

daṇḍakā banate āche
sīṁha byāghra ati (he rāma)
kimate calibā sītā
nārī bhīrumati (he).

80. Through the kind courtesy of the poetess, Sm. Nalinībālā Devī.

(Sītā says) :

I shall also go to the forest. O lord,
O lord, disappoint me not,
With thee, O lord,
Shall I suffer exile.

(Rāma says:)

Up above is the burning sphere of the sun
and heated sand below;
how shalt thou walk on, O Sītā
thou hast got but delicate feet.

(Sīta says:)

Rāmacandra will march first,
Jānakī in the middle,;
behind them will step out
Lakṣmaṇa, (our main prop).

(Rāma says:)

There in the Daṇḍaka forest abound
lions and tigers;
how shalt thou go, O Sītā
thou art but a timid lass.

With all its original lyrical beauty *Gīti-rāmāyaṇa* is for the most part only a popular version of Mādhava Kandali's work, meant for the use of the *ojā* of *ojā-pali* chorus. The narration of the story is sometimes scrappy and disjointed; but then the gaps could be filled up by the *ojā* or *ḍāinā-pālī*. Some passages, especially in the *payāra* or ordinary verse portions, are identically the same as in Kandali. Durgāvara sometimes drops some lines from Kandali and sometimes adds to them. Some of Kandali's verses are set to tune (*rāga*) with the addition of musical quantities like *e* or *he*.[81] Sometimes the metre is changed with some slight alteration in the wording[82] or a new rhyming is introduced.[83] In places there are minor changes effected, which however are not sufficient to hide the loans from view (e.g.).

rudhira-lepita vāṇa bāja haiyā gailā—Durgāvara
nīle dekhilanta bāli rājāra niryyāṇa
ājuriyā kāḍhilanta rāghavara vāṇa—Kandali.

81. e.g., vv. 603-19.
82. e.g., vv. 587-92, 681-99.
83. e.g, vv. 662ff.

The marvellous idiomatic expressions of Kandali are always found wanting in Durgāvara. While some archaic words like *lagāibanti, karilanti* are left in Durgāvara's work as a legacy from Kaṅdali; others are substituted by new ones (e.g. *pāsarilā,* verse 674, in place of *pālampilā*).

In the Araṇya-kāṇḍa, Durgāvara describes the abduction of Śītā after relating a few episodes of his own invention: Śītā's offering *piṇḍa* (food) to the deceased Daśaratha; Śītā's cursing the Moon, the Sun, the Air, the Earth, the river Phalgu and the Brāhmaṇas for false deposition before Rāma; Rāma and Sītā's playing at dice; creation of Ayodhyā in the forest with the help of magic; and the Ayodhyā people's performance of the *Caitra-caturdaśī* festival. There are in the telling of the story other minor deviations from the original Sanskrit and Mādhava Kandali's rendering. The meeting of Rāvaṇa and the bird Supārśva after the abduction of Sītā is not found in Kandali and is introduced by Durgāvara. The lyricist moreover makes Sūrpanakhā appear with her diabolically enchanting beauty before Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa on the Citrakūṭa hill on the bank of the Candrabhāgā in place of in Pañcavaṭī hermitage in the forest of Daṇḍaka. In Kandali Sūrpanakhā's nose and ears are cut off by Lakṣmaṇa when she rushes at Sītā seeking to devour her, but in Durgāvara Lakṣmaṇa does this as soon as that demon beauty approaches him for love or lust. In Kandali, Sūrpanakhā, with her nose and ears lopped off, runs to the demons Khara and Dūṣaṇa and after their death at the hands of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to Rāvaṇa. Durgāvara's Sūrpanakhā goes straight to Rāvaṇa, who then summons Khara, Dūṣaṇa and Triśiras to fight with the two men. Mārīca's suggestion of the way to take away Sītā, her having to remain within a marked-out circle, her calling Rāvaṇa father just in order to escape from his evil design on her, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa's asking a heron of the whereabouts of Sītā, etc. are other points of divergence from Kandali's *Rāmāyaṇa.* Thus in the Araṇya-kāṇḍa which on the whole covers more than half the Kāvya Durgāvara steers much clear of Kandali's influences in language, contents and method of treatment of the subject and proceeds with the story in an independent manner. But this is not the case with the other cantos.

The Kiṣkindhyā-kāṇḍa of Durgāvara relates how Rāma contracted friendship with five monkey chiefs, Sugrīva, Hanūmān and others, and how he killed the monkey king Bālī in an unfair way. Durgāvara's verses differ not much from Kandali. His Sundarākāṇḍa looks like a summary of Kandali's account. He keeps close to the greater poet even where he reproduces the story in his own

language. The Laṅkā-kāṇḍa is dealt with summarily in a few verses; Durgāvara is a lyricist singing of the more delicate emotions of the human heart and the description of war does not seem to be his forte. He is again in his own when he comes to the fire ordeal of Sītā and finds an appropriate subject for his treatment. He again takes to lyricising Kandali. In the words of Sītā's reply to Rāma's announcement of the harsh decision to throw her away[84] Kandali's sweeping lines are shortened into a crisp metre to echo Sītā's tense emotions. Durgāvara then skips over the appearance of Dāśaratha's spirit and comes to Rāma's coronation in Ayodhyā with which concludes this handy version of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

There is always an attempt at abridging the *Kāvya* (*saṁkṣepe racilā gīta kavi durgāvara*).[85] But the poet's imagination freely revels in the pathetic portions of the story and the thought of minimising is then set aside. Especially in the Araṇya-kāṇḍa he takes a great amount of freedom in the treatment of the subject, the construction and sequence of events in the plot. There he appears in the true colours of a village minstrel, who has to appeal to the sentiment of common village folk with high-pitched pathos rather than with high-strung logic or philosophy or soaring imagination. No philosophical interpretation is therefore given to the action of Rāma, an incarnation of the supreme Godhead. Rāma is an ordinary human being, swept away at all times by human weakness and failings. Miracles are always a part of story-telling as is the case here, but Rāma does not cease to be a weak man all the same. When he misses her in the sylvan cottage, he suspects her character, even though momentarily as a passing thought, as of a common unchaste woman. Even the much obedient and self-sacrificing Lakṣmaṇa does not escape his suspicion. He is all beside himself and bewails like a mad man or a child. He asks the heron and the peepul tree of Sītā's news, flies into anger and gets ready to kill Jaṭāyu, wants to destroy the celestial worlds at the heron's words, mistakes the night for the day. He even thinks of poisoning himself to death and goes into a swoon. The divine in him is, as it were, temporarily in abeyance. Durgāvara's Rāma even casts a longing lingering look behind at his lost kingdom, and later, when he brings Sītā safe from Laṅkā, he says that he did this not for getting her back into his bosom, but to escape slur on his valour.[86] Sīta's heart-broken reply to this is:

84. vv. 916 et seq.
85. v. 905.
86. vv. 906ff.

itara nārīra sama dekhilā
naṭara naṭunī yena anyajaṇe dilā

« Thou considerest me to be a common woman and, like a dancing man giving away his dancing wife, seekest to dispose me on others »

Durgāvara works up some delicately sensuous touches when Rāma is reminded of his associations with Sītā by the humming black-bees[87] and the fair banks of Pampā-sarovara bedecked with all the flowers.[88]

A local custom of those days is in evidence when after the creation of a magic Ayodhyā, Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā perform the *Caitra-caturdaśī* festival, in the company of the citizens of Ayodhyā.[89] The performance is described as follows:

> Rāma was very happy and put on various apparels and flowers. He placed *mādhavī* flowers on his head. He looked charming with these and scented himself with *aguru* and *candana*. He placed on his body such ornaments as *kaṅkaṇa, keyūra*, chains and tinkling bells. Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā also dressed themselves beautifully. With all this luxury their minds were charmed by Madana (Cupid). Śrīrāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Sītā and the Ayodhyā people took pitchers in their hands. They began to play the *Caitra caturdaśi* and went round and round.

The *Caitra Caturdaśī* festival is perfound in honour of the god of love, Madana or Kāmadeva at the fourteenth night of the bright half of the month of Caitra. About ten miles to the north of Gauhati is the venue of a massive temple now in ruins, dedicated to that god, on a small hill. The god with the consort Rati is still worshipped there under a small shed. This worship is a branch of the Śiva-śakti cult and seems to have been widely carried on in the days of Durgāvara. A later description of the worship of Kāmadeva, is found in *Tripurā Burañjī* (early 18th century). Durgāvara moreover mentions that at the time of the fire ordeal Sītā bowed to the Sun god with folded hands and worshipped Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśa mentally.[90] *Yoginī*

87. v. 374.
88. vv. 487 et seq.
89. vv. 54-62.
90. v. 90.

Tantra[90a] refers to the worship of this Hindu trinity on a lake called Vārānasī, seven dhanus to the east of lake Apunarbhava of Hājo on the Caitra *Kāmatrayodaśī* day. This seems to be a special reference to the contemporary vogue of worshipping the Sun. Belief in astrology was common in those days, and Durgāvara's Rāma believes that such a piece of ill luck as having to lose Sītā is the influence of some evil star.[91] The evil influence of Saturn and the mildness of the Moon are also under reference.[92]

Durgāvara excels as a writer of lyrics, most of which are of the pathetic sentiment. The sweet and plaintive *ahira rāga* seems to be the poet's favourite tune. The best lyrics in the Kāvya are deeply pathetic, and consist of the bewailings of Sītā, Rāma, Tārā and others. As in a true lyric the descriptions of the human body (Sūrpaṇakhā or Sītā) or an animal (golden deer) are put forth in a few suggestive lines, which give the idea of fine engravings on a cameo. The magic city of Ayodhyā and the *Madana-Caturdaśī* festival are also painted with a few clear strokes. The description of the fight between Rāvaṇa and Jaṭāyu is also remarkable for its power.

SONGS OF MANASĀ WORSHIP

In Assam Manasā, Viṣahari, Padmāvatī, or Mārai, is worshipped in the districts of Goalpārā and Kāmrūp and the subdivision of Mangaldai. This serpent goddess attracts her votaries from all classes of people from Brāhmaṇs to the lowest in the social grade. Even Muhammedans can and do join *ojā-pāli* choruses to sing the songs of Manasā during her worship. It is not clear how and where the Manasā cult originated, but traces of serpent worship have been noted among different tribes of Assam, the Khāsis, the Meitheis (Maṇipurīs), the Mishmis, the Hājangs and Rābhās. The story of Manasā and Śaiva merchant Candradhara, later converted to the cult of Manasā, seems only to indicate the history of late admission of a non-Aryan goddess into the Hindu pantheon. She is worshipped during the four rainy months of the year, Āṣādha, Śrāvaṇa, Bhādra and Āśvina. The poet Mankara lays down that she should be worshipped for four days in the month of Śrāvaṇa (July-August). He also says that the goddess is to be placed on a *mañca* (altar) and worshipped day and

90a. 2. 9. 50.
91. v. 324.
92. v. 400, also v. 513.

night while the four rainy months continue. In her earthen image Nāgas (serpents) constitute her seat; Ṇāgas are her costume and Nāgas form her tiara. She can be worshipped in an earthen pot with *siju* twigs (a kind of Euphorbia) put in it, with hundred-petalled lotuses. Singing of songs of the goddess and dancing of the *deodhani* (lit., woman of god) and, sometimes her male counterpart the *deodhā,* forms an attractive feature of the performance, which generally continues for four days but sometimes for a longer period.[93] There is a large mass of *mantras* in Assamese, the utterance of which is believed to have the efficacy of curing a man of snake-bite.

The following is a sketch of the story of Manasā as told by the Manasā poets :

One day the great god Śiva saw a pair of *Śrīphala* fruits (*Aegle marmelos*) and much intoxicated with smoking of hemp, he imagined them to be the breasts of his young wife Cāṇḍi, was sensually disturbed within, and released a quantity of semen on a lotus leaf. From that creative fluid on the lotus leaf sprang up a beautiful godling with four arms and three eyes. Born out of Śiva's mental disturbance and on a lotus leaf, she came to be known as Manasā, Padmāvatī or Padmā. Vāsuki, the king of snakes endowed her with poison and provided her with Nāgas as attendants. Hence her name Viṣahari and her association with snakes, Vāsuki sent her to her father Śiva's place, where she had the misfortune of meeting her step-mother Caṇḍī, who out of petty jealousy gave her some blows and blinded one of her eyes with strokes of her bangles. Śiva took compassion on the hapless child and gave her in marriage to sage Jaratkāru. The eccentric sage however deserted her on a very slight provocation. Before leaving, he thumped with his hands Padmā's womb, as a result of which a child, Āstika, was born to her.

Candradhara, the king and merchant of the rich Campakanagara, was a devout worshipper of Lord Śiva. When he was away from home on a trade voyage, his wife Saṇekā or Soṇekā worshipped Manasā with a view to getting back her husband soon. Caṇḍī instigated the merchant against Manasā and gave him a gold stick to strike her antagonist with. Candradhara hastened home and threw away all the things of Manasā worship. Thus began the enmity between a goddess and a mortal man. Padmā had Candra-

93. M. Neog: 'Serpent-lore and serpent-worship in Assam', *The Eastern Anthropologist,* IV, 3 and 4, pp. 151-57.

dhara's six sons and Śaṅkha Ojā, the great physician of snake-bite, done to temporary death by Śiva's permission. The merchant's fourteen ships, loaded with the richest merchandise, were also sunk and kept under sea water. But Candradhara would not bend.

Padmā got the souls of Uṣā and Aniruddha on loan from heaven for twelve years and had them born on earth as Beulā, daughter of king Sāhe or Chāhe of Ujani-rājya, and Lakhīndāra, the seventh son of Cānda Sāud. Padmā one day took the form of a Brāhmaṇ widow and found out an excuse with Beulā to curse the latter thus: "Thou shalt be a widow like myself on the night following thy marriage". Beulā was married in course of time to Lakhīndāra. In spite of their being confined within a house all wrought of iron, Lakhīndāra was bitten by the venomous snake Kāli or Kāliya at the accursed hour.

With the permission of Cānda and Sāṇekā, Beulā started on her journey of quest for Lakhīndāra's soul on a raft floating down the sea. She took with her, her husband's dead body which melted away on the way. She reached the heavenly regions and performed a dance in the assembly of the gods. All the gods were much pleased and impressed and asked Padmā to give back the danseuse her husband. Padmā agreed to do this on condition that Cānda would adore her. Beulā returned home not only with Lakhīndāra but with his six elder brothers and Cānda's fourteen ships full with cargo. Overcome with joy and the grace of Manasā, Candradhara at first consented to worship the goddess only with the left hand and with his face turned away from her. But when time came, he faced the deity and poured lotus flowers at her feet with both the hands joined together.

There are three chief Manasā poets, whose songs are sung at the time of worship—Mankara, Durgāvara and Sukavi Nārāyaṇa-deva. Their verses are popularly known as Mankarī, Durgāvarī and Sukanānnī (Sukavinārāyaṇī) respectively. Nārāyaṇadeva belongs to later times and is believed to have been a court-poet of King Balinārāyaṇa alias Dharmanārāyaṇa of Darangī-rājya (early seventeenth century)[94] The imposing name *Padmā Purāṇa* is applied to the works of all the three poets, although the writings do not conform to the accepted definition of a Purāṇa; nor are they written in the Sanskrit language like the literature of the name.

94. *Ibid.*

Mankara.—Mankara seems to be the first Assamese Manasā poet. In his benedictory verse he sings of King Jalpeśvara and the king of Kamatā (*kamatāir rājā bando rājā jalpeśvara*) and of the people of the town of Jalpeśvara, a second Amarāvatī in wealth and splendour. There is a very small percentage of Persian words, like *bāzār* to be traced in his vocabulary. King Jalpeśvara was a king of Kāmarūpa; and his capital was Jalpeśvara, modern Jalpāiguri. He was a Śaiva and built a temple to Śiva, called Jalpeśvara.[95] In *Skaṇḍa Purāṇa,* Āvaṅtya Khaṇḍa, ch. 66, there is the story of a Śaiva king Jalpa. *Kālikā Purāṇa,* ch. 80, speaks of Jalpīśa Śiva, to whose protection the Kṣatriya's scared by Parasurāma, surrendered themselves.[96] This Purāṇa is a work of the tenth century A.D. If the temple and the presiding deity are considered as named after its founder, King Jalpeśvara, he must be a very early king. The kingdom of Kāmatā with its capital Kamatāpura was established by Nīladhvaja the first Khen or Khyān king, whose grandson Nīlambara was overthrown by Hussain Shah in 1496 A.D. The name Kamatā seems to have been used by the Koc kings of Koc Behār of the sixteenth century for their kingdom.[97] There is a wonderfully striking similarity between Mankara's salutations to 'a hundred queens and eighteen princes' and Durgāvara's reference to Viśvasiṁha's 'forty-eight queens and eighteen princes'[98] This leads us to suspect that *kamatāir rājā* (king of Kamatā) and *rājā jalpeśvara* (King of Jalpeśvara) is the same monarch who is none other than Viśvasiṁha, who was the master of the capital city Kamatā-nagara and the region represented by modern Jalpāiguri district.[99] So it will not perhaps be wide of the mark to take Mankara as a poet of Kamatā (western Assam) of the early sixteenth century. His language is of a popular cast and represents the tongue of Goālpārā and Kāmrūp at the first impact of Islamic languages. The marriage-rites as described by the poet conform to those of this region. Koc people (Koc-Kocani) are constantly under reference and there is the mention of a musical instrument *gomānā,* which is in general use among the Boḍos. The poet seems to be a votary of Manasā; but he also bows to the gods Nārāyaṇa,

95. Gunabhiram Barua, *Āsām Burañjī,* 1900, p. 43.
96. B. Kakati, *The Mother Goddess Kāmākhyā,* §§ 11-12.
97. Gait, *History of Assam,* 2nd ed., pp. 42 ff.
98. See ante.
99. This would make Mankara and Durgāvara contemporary, which is not otherwise unlikely. Different sources differ on the point of the number of Viśvasiṁha's wives.

Brahmā, Gaṅgā, Pārvatī, Kāmākhyā of Kāmarupa, and the Nāgas of Pātāla among others. He also pays his obeisance to the Lauhitya (Brahmaputra). There is a reference to the Buddha (*bauddharūpa*). Some words like *kadam-tal, Dvārakāpurī, Vṛndāvana,* etc. point to the prevalence of the Kṛṣṇa-lore at the time. Mankara was a village poet and minstrel, singing his Manasā songs with litle cymbals in his hands. His language is simple and direct; there is an easy flow of imagination and of music. The erotic element is somewhat prominent particularly in the description of the *gandharva* marriage of Hara and Gaurī. A crude humour is in evidence when the wife of the hermit Hemanta attempts falsely to stage her giving birth to a child (Durgā), actually found by the sage floating on sea waters in an iron pitcher, or when Śiva is suspected of enjoying the illicit company of Koc women. Mankara deals with the following topics: cosmology, the origin of gods, upbringing of Gaurī in the hermitage of sage Hemanta, her marriage with Śiva, the birth of *Padmāvatī* from Śiva's semen but from no womb, the origin of the Manasā cult.

Durgāvara.—Durgāvara is a more cultured and dignified poet than Mankara. He is also the more skilled in the art of poesy. His songs are sung in Kāmākhyā by the *ojā-pālī* during the worship of Manasā. They are each set to a particular classical Indian *rāga,* which is indicated at the top. Durgāvara's description of action, of human form, and of natural scenery are powerful; there is a note of realism in them. The story of Beulā and Lakhīndāra constitutes his main subject-matter.[100]

100. Bhāratchandra Das, *Asamīyā Sāhityar Burañjī,* Manasā Śākhā, Gauhati, 1949. B. K. Barua and S. N. Sarma, ed., *Mankarī āru Durgāvarī* (Manasā songs of Mankara and Durgāvara), 1952.

ŚAṄKARADEVA: HIS POETICAL WORKS

BY

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SECTION I

LIFE OF ŚAṄKARADEVA

During the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries India had seen an outburst in the fields of religion and society. A new religion was founded on the liberal doctrine of Bhakti as revealed in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa.* It was a progressive and democratic movement which laid emphasis on the unity of the Godhead, stood against excessive ritualism, preached a faith based on constant devotion, fought against caste prejudices and stressed on the equality of man. Several saints of great endowments appeared in various provinces to carry the gospels of the new faith to the masses by rendering the Sanskrit Purāṇas into regional languages. Of these saints, Rāmānanda, a Brāhmaṇa of Allahabad, was the most impressive figure and occupied the first place in point of time (1400-1470 A.D.). He worshipped Rāma and preached his doctrine in Hindi. Kabir (1440-1518 A.D.) was one of his chief disciples. Another eminent leader of the movement was Vallabhāchārya (1479-1531 A.D.), a Brāhmaṇa of the Telugu country. He worshipped Kṛṣṇa and propagated his doctrine in the south. In Mahārāṣṭra the religion of Bhakti was preached by Nāmadeva (1400-1430 A.D.) who was a tailor by caste. In Bengal arose the notable saint Chaitanya (1485-1533 A.D.), born of a learned Brāhmaṇa family of Nadia. In Assam appeared the many gifted Śaṅkaradeva (1449-1569 A.D.), a Kāyastha by caste, who shaped the religious, social, cultural, and literary life of the people of the province for ages to come.

At the time of Śaṅkaradeva's appearance, Assam was politically divided into a number of independent principalities. The Chutiyās ruled over the easternmost region of the country while the south-east was under the Kachāris. West of the Chutiyās and of the Kachāris on the south were the domains of some petty chiefs called Bhuyās. To the extreme west was situated the kingdom of Kamatā, which later on came to be known as Cooch Behar and was under the domination of the Koch kings. The rest of the Brahma-

putra Valley was ruled by the Āhoms. Thus contending political forces worked to separate the Assamese people from one another. In such an age Śaṅkaradeva became a cementing force; with an all-embracing faith and a common national language he carved out a way for the cultural, spiritual and linguistic growth of Assam. Patronage received from some of the rulers of these states greatly advanced the cause of the new faith and though primarily a religious movement it led on to manifold expressions in art and literature. The Koch rulers patronised scholars to translate the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas. The Āhom kings also greatly encouraged literary activities and made it possible to create a new type of historical prose known as *Burañjis*.

Śaṅkara was born in a Bhuyā family at Ālipukhuri, a place about sixteen miles from the present town of Nowgong, on the south bank of the Brahmaputra. The Bhuyās were at that time a very important people holding landed estates and enjoying other privileges from the king. Śaṅkara's family was called the Śiromaṇi Bhuyā, being the chief among the Bhuyās. His father was Kusumbara. Śaṅkara's mother died within three days of his birth, and he was brought up by his grandmother Khersūtī. When Śaṅkara was twelve years old he was sent to a village school maintained by Mahendra Kandali, an erudite Sanskrit scholar.

The earlier years of Śaṅkara's life were spent in hard study and preparation. His scholarship in Sanskrit and knowledge of the scriptures were well revealed in the number of translations and adaptations he made in Assamese in the later years of his life. He compiled a work on Vaiṣṇavism in Sanskrit styled *Bhakti Ratnākara*, and also composed many Sanskrit verses that were incorporated in his plays. His imaginative power and extraordinary intellect were well displayed even in his school days. Just after learning his alphabet, Śaṅkara composed an exquisite poem made up of consonantal wordings without the addition of any vowel sounds except the first. During this period he also composed a little kāvya *Hariścandra Upākhyāna*.

Śaṅkara completed his study at the age of twenty-two and came out a finished scholar. Soon after his return from school official responsibilities of managing the family estates fell upon his shoulder. Now he was also married to Sūryavatī, a Kāyastha girl. Sūryavatī died four years after her marriage leaving a girl. During this time Śaṅkara lost his father. These two bereavements filled his youthful mind with overwhelming sorrow and he even contemplated renouncing the world. After giving his

daughter in marriage, Śaṅkara set out on a long and extensive pilgrimage (1541 A.D.). He was accompanied by about seventeen companions including his former Guru Mahendra Kandali. The detailed account of this prilgrimage has been recorded in the biographies of Śaṅkaradeva, compiled by his disciples. He visited most of the sacred places and temples of northern and southern India. Among the important places and temples that he saw were Gayā, Puri, Vṛndāvana, Mathurā, Dvārakā, Kāśi, Prayāga, Sītākuṇḍa, Varāhakuṇḍa, Ayodhyā and Vadarikāśrama. At these holy places he came into contact with Vaiṣṇavite teachers of various schools, and entered with them into many learned and theological discussions. The results of these discussions and the influences they exercised over his mind were reflected in the Vaiṣṇavite movement which he subsequently started in Assam. After twelve years of such wandering through many sacred seminaries of Vaiṣṇavite learning, Śaṅkaradeva returned home a much-travelled man, acquiring firsthand knowledge of Vaiṣṇavite theology, texts, mode of worship, and management of institutions.

Soon after his return, Śaṅkara married again and removed his residence from Ālipukhuri to a near-about village, Bardovā.[1] Now his mission of life took a definite shape; he started with fresh impetus and vigorous enthusiasm his religious movement for mass conversion. At Bardovā, he set up a *Satra* (monastery), erected a *Namghara*, village-hall for daily devotion, and a place for community singing and held there religious discourses. Around him, he collected a group of devout disciples, and held daily devotional recitations known as *Nāma kīrtana*. The official name of Śaṅkaradeva's Vaiṣṇavism is *Ekaśaraṇa dharma*—the religion of supreme surrender to one; and that one is Viṣṇu who in the form of Nārāyaṇa assumes incarnations from age to age. The most favourite incarnation in which Viṣṇu is to be worshipped is that of Kṛṣṇa. The surrender to one is very rigorously enjoined. For an *Ekaśaranīyā*, the worship of other gods and goddesses is strictly prohibited. It has been said by Śaṅkaradeva himself that a "Vaiṣṇava should not worship any other god except Viṣṇu, he should not enter any other god's temple, nor should he partake of the offerings made to any other god. In so doing *bhakti* would be vitiated". (*The Mother Goddess Kāmākhyā*).

1. It should be noted that Śaṅkaradeva did neither advocate a religion of extreme asceticism nor complete renunciation of family life. He realised that men and women have to live in the world and to pursue their professions. His religion is therefore more suited to the householders.

At the age of sixty-seven (1516 A.D.) Śaṅkaradeva had to leave his ancestral residence at Bardovā owing to the occasional disturbances created by the neighbouring Kachāri king and his subjects. He therefrom removed to Gāṅ-mau and then to Dhuvāhāṭa, a place in the Majuli island on the Brahmaputra. For about fourteen years he had resided at Dhuvāhāṭa, and his stay here was marked by two important incidents. The first was the conversion of a famous Śākta scholar Mādhavadeva, who later on became the greatest apostle and the most redoubtable exponent of the tenets of Śaṅkara. The second incident relates to Śaṅkaradeva's encounter with the Āhom king Suhummung. The Brāhmaṇas accused Śaṅkara before the Āhom king of preaching an unorthodox religion and one not envisaged by the *Vedas*. The Āhom king summoned Śaṅkara to argue with the Brāhmaṇas of his court. Śaṅkara defeated them and got off from the trial with credit. Śaṅkara, however, felt that his life would be unsafe in Āhom territory and so left the place. He then journeyed to Barpeta (1543 A.D.), a place in the present district of Kāmrup, then under the Koch king of Cooch Behar. In Barpeta he laid the fundation of a *Satra*, erected a *Namghara* and began propagating his faith. He spent the remaining years of his life in Barpeta in comparative peace. The major portion of his writings namely the songs, dramas and kāvyas were composed here. After three years (1546 A.D.) of stay in Barpeta, Śaṅkaradeva set out again on a pilgrimage at the old age of ninetyseven. He was accompanied by one hundred and twenty devotees. During his journey he met Chaitanya Deva at Puri, and contacted the grand-daughter of Kabir.

On return Śaṅkara resumed his customary works of prayer, meditation and *Nāma-kīrtana*, and gave religious instructions to the people. During this period, he paid occasional visits to the court of the Koch king at Cooch Behar at the invitation of the king. He passed away at Cooch Behar in 1569 A.D. on one of such visits[2]

Section II

POETRY

Besides producing far-reaching religious and social effects, the Śaṅkarite movement gave a great impetus to the development of

2. For fuller biographical account see B. Kakati's *Śaṅkaradeva*, Madras, now included in *From Chaitanya to Vivekananda*.

learning and literature in Assam. Śaṅkaradeva, though a remarkable Sanskrit scholar, wrote mainly in Assamese, the living language of the people, with the aim of making the Sanskrit lore accessible to the uneducated masses. He himself composed a large number of texts, consisting of translations, commentaries, and original works to expound his creed. These writings had also their practical utility. They were constantly required for regulation of daily duties. This, therefore, greatly encouraged literacy and learning.[3]

Śaṅkaradeva drew inspiration chiefly from the *Bhāgavata*[4], which was described as the Sun amidst the Purāṇas comprising as it does the essence of Vedānta philosophy (*Purāṇa sūrya mahā Bhāgavata Vedāntaro ito paramatattva*). An early attempt was, therefore, made to translate the book into Assamese. It was really a very bold and extraordinary undertaking to render into a provincial language a venerable text written in the grand style of a classical tongue. In this connection it is interesting to note that Śaṅkaradeva was accused before the Koch king Naranārāyaṇa by the Brāhmaṇas as he read, taught and translated the *Bhāgavata*.

The translation of the entire text was not a light job for one man; so Śaṅkaradeva allotted different sectoins for translation to his different disciples. He himself undertook the rendering of the major portion, namely, Books I, II, III, VII, VIII, IX, X and Book XII.[5]

3. *Granth-pujā*, veneration of sacred texts and copying of religious manuscripts were considered to be great acts of piety. Each *Nāmghar*, village prayer-hall and *Gosāin-ghar*, private house for worship, is to possess manuscripts of sacred texts and these are read daily. These factors not only encouraged literacy but gave tremendous impetus to manuscript production. Some of these manuscripts were beautifully illustrated.

4. A miraculous story is told by his biographers about Śaṅkaradeva's coming across with the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. A Brāhmaṇa pundit of Tirhut named Jagadiśa Miśra went to Puri to read out the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in the temple. In a dream, the Brāhmaṇa received a mandate from Jagannātha to the effect that he should proceed to Kāmarūpa and read out the *Bhāgavata* to Śaṅkaradeva. The Brāhmaṇa searched out Śaṅkara at Bardovā and read out the book before him. When his mission of reading out all the twelve books of the *Bhāgavata* closed after a year the Brāhmaṇa died. It should, however, be noted that Śaṅkaradeva began the translation of the *Bhāgavata* before meeting Jagadīśa Miśra. The Brāhmaṇa probably assisted him in solving some knotty problems of the original Sanskrit text with the help of Śrīdharasvāmī's commentary.

5. The entire *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* was reduced into Assamese verse by the joint efforts of several contemporary poets. Besides Śaṅkaradeva, other writers who undertook the translation of different sections were Ananta Kandali (Books IV, VI and a section of Book X), Keśavacaraṇa (Books VII

The rendering of the *Bhāgavata* marks an era of renaissance in Assamese poetry; its literary influence on Śaṅkarite literature was manifold and immense and proved a shaping force upon Śaṅkara's writings. Śaṅkaradeva was not only indebted to the *Bhāgavata* for its Kṛṣṇāite legends but also for literary forms, expressions and traditions. Śaṅkara translated the *Bhāgavata* not only into Assamese words, but into Assamese idioms. For example, take the following verses from the original:

Evaṃ sa bhagavān Kṛṣṇo vṛndāvanacaraḥ kvacit |
Yayau Rāmamṛte rājan kālindiṃ sakhibhivṛtaḥ ||
Atha gāvaśca gopāśca nidāghatāpa, Pīḍitaḥ |
Duṣṭaṃ jalaṃ papustasyāstṛṣārttā viṣadūṣitam ||

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and compare them with Śaṅkara's translation :

Dineka Govindadeva Baloka lagata nalai
āpuni melilā save gāi |
Gopa siśu sava same Jamunāra tīre tīre
dhenugaṇa phuraṇta carāi ||
Jeṣṭha māsara ghora raudre piḍileka ati
eko āra tṛṣāṭa najāni |
kālira hradata nāmi nirantare garu gopa
pāraimāne pile viṣapānī ||

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To make the passage more clear and homely the poet rendered the expressions *sakhibhivṛtaḥ* and *nidāgha-tāpapīḍitaḥ* respectively as *gopaśiśusava same* and *jeṣṭha māsara ghora raudre pīḍileka ati.* For in Assam, *Jaiṣṭha* is particularly significant as a month of extremely hot days when pools and rivulets dry up and grasses in the field are scorched by the hot sun.

Śaṅkaradeva's translations in this way are of an interpretative character. The poet had access to and utilised other Purāṇas or commentaries in making the Assamese version. For instance,

and IX), Gōpālacaraṇa Dvija (Books III, VIII), Kavi Kalāpacandra (Sections of Book IV), Śrī Viṣṇu Bhārati (Sections of Book IV), Ratnākara Miśra (Sections of Book IV), Śrīcandra Deva (Sections of Book IV), Anirudha Kāyastha (Sections of Books IV and V), and Hari (Sections of Book V). All the Books of the Assamese version of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* have been published in one volume by Harinarayana Dutta Barua, Nalbari.

we may refer to Śaṅkaradeva's allusion to the *Kadamba* tree on the bank of the Kāliya lake having been touched by the feet of Garuḍa where the bird rested while carrying nectar. This incident, small though it is, is not in the *Bhāgavata;* our author probably introduced it from other sources. In this way his translation endeavours to elaborate, and to illustrate, the different ideas and episodes of the original Sanskrit texts perfectly in homely and direct Assamese style so that even an illiterate man can appreciate and understand. The Assamese version of the *Bhāgavata* is, therefore, looked upon both as text and commentary of the original.

Although intended for the common people, his translation was admired by scholars also. Regarding its popularity Śaṅkaradeva's biographer Bhūṣaṇa Dvija records an illuminating incident. Kaṇṭhabhūṣaṇa, an Assamese Brāhmaṇa, went to Banaras to study Vedānta philosophy under a Sannyāsī named Brahmānanda. Brahmānanda one day read out to his students some *Ślokas* from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa,* but the students understanding not a single verse of it remained silent. Brahmānanda, however, was surprised to find that his Assamese student explained the *ślokas* without any aid from the teacher. Being interrogated Kaṇṭhabhūṣaṇa replied that he was already acquainted with the Assamese version of the text made by Śaṅkaradeva which was written in so simple, expressive and convincing a style that even a woman or a Śūdra could understand it.[6]

Of all the books of the *Bhāgavata,* the *Ādi Daśama,* the first part of Book X, is very popular. This Book describes the incidents of Kṛṣṇa's early life, such as child Kṛṣṇa's killing of different demons, his playing at games and tending of cattle with his friends in the fields and woods, his stealing of butter, milk and curd, and quarrel with the milk-maids, and the various chastisements he had from his foster-mother Yaśodā. Though permeated with religious emotion, the *Daśama* gives an intensely human and realistic picture of child life, a mother's love and grief for her little son, response to Nature, and other poetic embellishments that eternally move the human heart. It should however be noted that unlike the Vaiṣṇavite literature of other provinces Rādhā does not appear in these scenes and further she is not even a character in Śaṅkarite literature.

6. *Śrī Śrī Śaṅkaradeva* by Bhūṣaṇa Dvija, edited by Durgadhara Barkakati, Jorhat, 1925, p. 144ff.

The *Bhāgavata* was an inexhaustible source from which Śaṅkaradeva drew again and again. Besides the translation, he composed a large number of other books with material from this Purāṇa. His *Nimi Nava Sidha Samvāda* is a doctrinal treatise based on Book XI of the *Bhāgavata* (*Nava siddha kathā ito ekādaśa skanddha*). Nārada here recounts before Vāsudeva the discussions which took place between king Nimi and the nine sages, Kavi, Havi, Antarikṣa, Prabuddha, Pippalāyana, Avihorta, Draviḍa, Camasa and Karabhājana on nine different doctrinal points. Each sage expounds one of these problems put to him by the king, namely, the nature of the *Bhāgavata* religion, Bhakti, Māyā, way of escape from Māyā, Brahmayoga and Karmayoga, demerits of an uninitiated (*Abhakta*), and nature of Avatāra. Here some of the abstruse metaphysical problems are expounded in the Assamese language. From its very nature, the work does not strive to reach any high level of poetry, though some of his verses bear marks of literary accomplishments. The merits of Bhakti are expressed in splendid and popular similes:

Bhaje Mādhavaka nāma smare sarvakṣaṇa |
Ekebāre sije tāra tini prayojana ||
Prathame opaje prema lakṣaṇa bhakati |
Gṛha śarīrate pāche mile birakati ||
Premara āspada Kṛṣṇa mūrti spūrti haya |
Eke kāle mile āsi sampada tritaya ||
Atiśaya kṣudhāta bhujanta yena mate |
Sije tini prayojana pratyeka grāsate ||
Hove tuṣṭa deha puṣṭa kṣudhā guchi yāya |
Prema bhakatira rājā śunā abhiprāya ||
Alpa bhakatita hove prema ati puṣṭa |
Kiñcita bhojane yena kichumāna tuṣṭa ||[7]

"He who takes to the name of Mādhava and meditates on it
finds all his three needs fulfilled at the same time.
First he finds a seizing of love, the sign of devotion,
then an indifference to his household and his body,
an appreciation grows of the image of Kṛṣṇa, the object of love.
These three assets come to one at a time,
as if one finds food when one is extremely hungry,
and finds a fiulfilment of one's three needs at each morsel:
one is pleased, one's body is restored, and hunger itself disappears.

7. *Navasiddha-Saṃvāda*, published by Śrī Tirthanatha Goswami, Dhalara Satra.

Listen, O king, to the nature of love and devotion;
even a little of devotion sustains love well,
just as little food satisfies some."

More homely and attractive are the following couplets:

Yena pitṛ śiśuka lāḍu lobha diyaya |
Tāka pāibo buli śiśu auṣadha pivaya ||
Pāche khaṇḍa lāḍuve garbharo roga hare |
Sehi mate ajñānī vedara śikṣā dhare ||
Pāche Vede bole era isava kāmanā |
Niṣkāme karibā eka Kṛṣṇata arpaṇā |

"Just as the father tempts the child with a sweet-ball and the child in expectation of it swallows the medicine, later a fragment of the sweet-ball cures it of all its ailments, so the ignorant takes to the love of the *Vedas;* later the *Vedas* say, Leave these desires; without attachment do you dedicate yourself to Kṛṣṇa."

His *Bhakti Pradīpa*[8] also analyses the various elements that constitute *Bhakti.* Though the work is said to have been compiled from the *Garuḍa Purāṇa,* in fact its contents tally more with the materials of Book XI of the *Bhāgavata.* Here Arjuna puts to Kṛṣṇa the following questions:

Hena śuni Dhanañjaye sudhilā dunāi |
Bhakatisi bhailā yeve mokṣara upāya ||
Kimate bhakati kare kimate lakṣaṇa |
Kahiyoka hauka mora janma-nivāraṇa ||
Kona vidhi karibeka bhakati tomāta |
Kenabā prayāsa āche kahiyo āmāta ||
Yito jane kare āna devatā bhakati |
Tāra kene gati hove kahiyo samprati ||

"Hearing this Dhananjaya asks once again:
If then devotion alone is the means of salvation,
How does one make devotion? What are its characteristics?
Tell me that I may be relieved of birth.
How should one devote oneself to you?
What means is there do tell me.
One who devotes onself to other gods:
Tell me, how fares such a person?"

Among the nine means of developing the attitude of Bhakti (*navavidhā bhakti*) the author here greatly emphasizes on *Śravaṇa* and *Kīrtana,* i.e., listening and chanting of God's names. Śaṅkara-

8. Critically edited with Introduction, variant readings, and copious word-notes by Śrī Maheswar Neog.

deva preached a religion of supreme surrender to the One and, therefore, his creed is known as *Ekaśaraṇīyā-dharma*. In the *Ekaśaraṇīyā-dharma*, the worship of other gods and goddesses is strictly prohibited. This has been made clear by Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhakti Pradīpa*:

Eka citte tumi moka mātra karā sevā |
Pariharā dūrate yateka āna devā ||
Huyoka śaraṇāpanna eka mote mātra |
Moke bhajā huibā teve mukutira pātra ||
Nāma nuśunibā tumi āna devatāra |
Yena mate nuhibe bhakati vyabhicāra ||

Devote yourself to me with a single mind
Forsake from a distance all other gods.
Surrender yourself to me alone,
Devote to me, then will you be fit for salvation
Never listen to names of other gods —
that your devotion may remain unsullied."

His *Anādi Pātana* is mainly an adaptation from Book III of *Bhāgavata*, though a few episodes are introduced from the *Vāmana Purāṇa*. The book deals with cosmological matters and is devoid of literary merit. *Guṇamālā* (Garland of Praises) is one of the last works of Śaṅkaradeva composed at the request of the Koch king Naranārāyaṇa. In essence, *Guṇamālā* is a little hand-book based on Books X and XI of the *Bhāgavata*. It is a *stotra* or *stuti* type of poem with six small sections containing hymns of praise to Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa. The author within the compass of a single laudatory verse recounts many incidents from Kṛṣṇa's life making them easy to remember. In fact, there is not a Vaiṣṇavite disciple who cannot recite *Guṇamālā* from beginning to end from memory. Superabundance of alliteration with jingling rhymes make the poem suitable for recitation. By way of example, the following verses may be quoted:

Kālika damilā — *Pūtanā śuṣilā |*
Devaka tuṣilā — *vrajaka bhūṣilā ||*
Keśī vatsavaka — *samasta daityaka |*
Lagāilā camaka — *ḍakāilā yamaka ||*
Tumi bārambāra — *huyā avatāra |*
Pṛthivīra bhāra — *khandilā apāra ||*
Indraka damilā — *Brahmāyo namilā |*
Vanata bhramilā — *gopika krīḍilā ||*
Paśi rańgaśāla — *yata mahāmāla |*
karilā āsphāla — *vadhilā gopāla ||*

"You subjugated the serpent Kāli and squeezed out the Rākṣasī Putanā. You delighted the gods and adorned Vraja. You terrified all demons like Keśī, and Vatsavaka. Again and again you incarnate yourself and lessen the burden of the earth. You subjugated Indra in the forests and played with Gopīs. You came on the stage, stormed and slew all the terrible forces".

The next outstanding literary production of Śaṅkaradeva is the *Kīrtana*[9] which even to-day exercises unique influence upon the mind and thought of the Assamese people. It is looked upon with the same religious feeling and reverence as *Rāmacaritamānasa* of Tulasīdāsa in northern India. There is no Assamese Hindu home which does not possess a copy of *Kīrtana* either in manuscript written on sāñchi-leaves or in print, no house which does not recite some of its verses on religious occasions and during illness.

The date of composition of the *Kīrtana* is not known. Some biographers say that Śaṅkaradeva did not write the book during one particular period, and that the compositon was spread over several years. From the methodical arrangement of the chapters, it may be said that though the book was written at different periods, the entire work however was planned and it was certainly not a work of his early years. Furthermore, the *Kīrtana* is not a single poem but a selective collection of twentysix poems comprising about 2261 couplets in diverse metres.[10] Most of the poems are, however, adaptations from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Two of its poems *Sahasra Nāma Vṛttānta* and *Ghunucā* were contributions by other writers. They were written respectively by two of his disciples Ananta Kandali and Śrīdhara Kandali and were incorporated in the anthology at the desire of the authors. Each poem included in the *Kīrtana* is of the nature of an independent *kāvya* modelled after Sanskrit prototypes and illuminative of many didactic doctrinal points. The very name *Kīrtana* is suggestive of the fact that the poems were recited in religious congregations and services. Each poem bears a *ghoṣā*, a refrain. These poems are recited by the leader of the religious gathering. After reading a couplet, the leader repeats the *ghoṣā* or refrain and the party takes it up along with the clapping of hands.

9. There are several popular editions of *Kīrtana*. The earliest printed edition was made by Haribilasa Agarwala in 1876 A.D.

10. Most of these are narrative poems with didactic philosophical and exhortary verses on *Vaiṣnava* faith, inserted particularly at the end of each section of the poem. General names for these poems are *ākhyāna, upākhyāna, kīrtana, varṇana*, and *vṛtānta*.

The first poem of the *Kīrtana,* Caturviṁśati Avatāra (Twenty-four incarnations) describes briefly the twentyfour incarnations of God, making particular references to the divine personality of the Kṛṣṇa avatāra and to his activities towards liberation of mankind. The subject-matter of the second poem Nāmāparādha is said to have been taken from the Svargakhaṇḍa of the *Padmapurāṇa.* The poem is in the form of a dialogue between Nārada and the four Siddhas, sons of Brahmā who dwelt at length on the various ways of emancipation in the Kali Age. Pāṣaṇḍamarddana, the next poem, is so named as it refers to the subjugation of the evil mind (*Pāṣaṇḍa mati*). The poem draws its materials from the *Bhāgavata, Viṣṇudharmottara, Bṛhat Nāradīya Purāṇa,* the *Padma Purāṇa,* and the *Suta Saṃhitā.* It recommends constant recitations of the name of God to be the best medicine in this world of sufferings. Śaṅkara realised that the Brahmanical pretensions had raised a barrier between man and God, and so both by pen and from pulpit, he endeavoured to break down all prejudices of caste, creed and rank. In many passages Śaṅkara emphatically laid down that to obtain final release or to come to the presence of God one need neither be a Brāhmaṇa, nor a sage, nor should one know all the scriptures (*Nelāge deva dvija ṛṣi huibe | nelāge samasta śāstra jānibe* ||). The poem is important as it makes clear that the Vaiṣṇavism preached by Śaṅkaradeva was democratic in spirit, principle and organisation and all people could embrace it. For the very same reasons Mohammedans and others including tribal people were converted to his creed.

The Dhyāna Varṇana (Description of Meditation) is a small poem of twentyeight stanzas. The poem holds a magnificent picture of Vaikuṇṭha, the celestial abode of Viṣṇu, where all devotees aspire to go after death.

Vaikuṇṭha nāme āche mahā thāna ||
Śārī śārī rañje vimānacaya |
Vaiduryaya hirā marakatamaya ||
Candra Sūrjya yena prakāśe āti |
Najāni yāta paśi dina rāti ||
Cāru sarovara nirmmala jala |
Sugandha padma śobhe utapala ||
Āche rājahaṃsa samuhe rañji |
Lilāye mṛṇāla bhuñje ubhañji ||
Pāve pārijāta malayā vāva |
Caṭake tyaje sulalita rāva ||

Bhramara gaṇe gāve hari gīta |
Vaiṣṇava jaṇe śuni āṇandita ||

"There is the rare place named Vaikuṇṭha,
There are row upon row of palaces, studded with sapphires and diamonds,
The Moon and the Sun shine dazzling there,
It is difficult to know
whether it is day or night,
There are lovely lakes with clear water,
Fragrant lotuses and lilies bloom there,
All are beautified by geese,
Pleasurably they feed on the roots of the lotus,
There is the Pārijāta flower and the Malaya breeze,
The Catakas cry sweetly,
The bees hum hymns to Hari,
Listening which the Vaiṣṇavas are pleased".

The Ajāmilopākhyāna (Story of Ajāmila taken from the Book VI of the *Bhāgavata* narrates the story of a Brāhmaṇa who lived in open sin with a Śūdra harlot and broke all laws sacred to his caste in maintaining his mistress and the ten children begotten on this woman. At the time of his death the sinful Ajāmila called his youngest son Nārāyaṇa to him and because he happened to utter the name of Nārāyaṇa (which was also a name of God) at the time of death, the soul of the Brāhmaṇa was taken to the abode of Viṣṇu and not to the city of Yama. The poem emphasizes on the merits of chanting God's name: even an unconscious recital of the name of God brings salvation to hard sinners just as abdominal disease is cured by even unconscious swallowing of a powerful medicine (*Yena mahauṣadhi najāni bhuñjile tāro garbha roga hare*).

The merit of devotion is propounded through the well-known story of Prahlāda in the poem Prahlāda Carita taken from Book VII of the *Bhāgavata.* The same doctrine is made explicit in Gajendropākhyāna, a small poem of thirty stanzas from Book VIII of the *Bhāgavata.* It describes a furious battle scene between Grāha (Crocodile) and Gajendra (Elephant). Gajendra was overpowered by Grāha and he was counting the hour of death. Suddenly, it flashed into his mind that devotion to Hari might save him from this predicament. So he prayed to Viṣṇu with devotion by holding a lotus with his trunk :—

Ehi buli maraṇata nabhaila vikala |
Śuṇḍe merāi dharilanta suvarṇa kamala ||

Parama āṇande mādhavata diyā citta |
Gajendre karilā stuti ati viparīta ||

"Thus thought he, and cast away all fear of death; with his trunk he caught hold of a golden lotus; with great joy and faith in Mādhava, Gajendra began to worship Him intensely".

Viṣṇu came and rescued his distressed devotee in time. Many of the verses of this poem are distinguished by great poetic beauty, particularly the description of the Trikūṭa mountain and its adjacent lake, the dwelling place of Grāha.

In Haramohana (adapted from Book VIII of the *Bhāgavata*) by enumerating feminine charms in detail the poet creates an image of *Divya Kanyā* (Celestial Nymph). Śiva entreated Viṣṇu to show him his feminine form. Viṣṇu, therefore, transformed himself into the form of Mohinī (Enchantress); at her sight violent emotions of love suddenly let themselves loose in Śiva's mind and Śiva losing self-control and all sense of decorum and decency ran after Mohinī like an infatuated man. In portraying Mohinī, the poet selected feminine physical charms that have a direct erotic appeal. The description of the *Divya Kanyā* becomes in the following verses pictorial and at the same time full of delicate voluptuousness:

Tapta suvarṇara sama jvale dehā nirupama
lalita valita hāta pāva |
Cakṣu kamalara pāsi mukhe manohara hāsi
saghane daraśai kāma bhāva ||
Urddhaka kṣepanta bhantā karanta kaṭākṣa chaṭā
lilā gati dekhāi phure pāka |
Solake uchala khopā khase pārijāta thopā
bāma hāte samvaranta tāka ||
Karṇata kuṇḍala dole tana halaphala kare
gale ratnamālā jhiki pāre |
Suvarṇa kaṅkaṇa dhvani kare runu jhunu śuni
prakāse hṛdaya hema hāre ||
Kaṇṭhe lare sātasari layalāse kāḍhe bhari
āgabāḍi pāche guci yānta |
Pindhi śāḍi khontā jāli yena mairāya kare cāli
Haraka kaṭākṣa kari cānta ||
Daraśānta kāṣa piṭhi kṣaṃo hāse sama dṛṣṭi
cāhi lāje cānta cakṣu mudi |

Bhramanta aneka bhāve uruvāve vastra vāve
ucca kuca kumbha ṭlave udi ||
Kaṅkāle kiṅkiṇi bāje caraṇa kamala māje
ratnara nūpura runa jhuna |
Hāle ati madhyadeśa Saṃsāra mohinī veśa
eko aṅge nāhi khati khuṇa ||

"Like burnt gold her body shines unparalleled,
graceful and developed are her hands and feet,
her eyes, the petals of the lotus, a ravishing smile on her lips,
repeatedly does she reveal a coquettish manner.
She plays with a ball, scatters flashes from her eyes,
she sways this way and that at ease,
her high chignon loosens, drops her cluster of *pārijāta,*
she manages that with her left hand.
On her ears hang eardrops, her breasts shake,
On her neck a gold wreath shines.
One listens to the tinkling that her gold bangles make,
her breast is beautified by a gold necklace.
On her neck shakes the seven-rolled chain,
she sets her steps with grace and ease,
seeming to step forward she moves backwards,
putting on her *śārī* with some air, as if a peacock spreads its fan,
she casts her glance sideways at Hara.
She reveals her sides and her back, her look as if she would smile,
looking in bashfulness she shuts her eyes.
She roams about in various ways.
she makes her clothes float in the breeze
and the high pitchers of her breast are bared.
On her waist a girdle jingles.
sound *run-jhun* jewelled *nūpuras,* between her lotus feet.
Her middle bends, she is in the garb of the world-enchantress,
not a blemish is on any of her limbs".

By way of warning there is a sermon on the plight of men who are entangled in the web of women. The irresistable temptation of women is emphasized in the following couplets:

Ghora nārīmāyā sarva māyāte kutsita |
Mahā siddha muniro kaṭākṣe hare cita |
Darśane kare tapa japa yoga bhaṅga |
Jāni jñānīgaṇe kāminīra ere saṅga |

"Of all the terrible apparitions of the world woman's is the ugliest. A slight side glance of hers captivates even the hearts of

celebrated sages. Her sight destroys prayer, penance and meditation. Knowing this the wise keeps away from the company of women".

It should however, be noted that this was not the attitude of Śaṅkaradeva towards women in general; elsewhere he revealed a more appreciative attitude and took into account diverse delicate qualities of female character. For example:

Karma samayata toka mantrī hena lekhi |
Raṅgara belāta yena tai prāṇa-sakhī ||
Snehara prastāve tai mātṛ hena thāna |
Śayana belāta tai dāsīra samāna ||

(*Hariścandra Upākhyāna*).

"In time of work, you offer counsel like a minister. In sports you are my dearest mate. In respect of showing affection you resemble my mother. At bed-time you serve me as a faithful maid".

In the poem Śiśulīlā the various activities of child Kṛṣṇa and his god-like powers are depicted in sweet and sonorous language. Thus we have a pretty picture of the naughty Kṛṣṇa as a child:

Thiyadaṅgā diyā pāche tumi dāmodara |
Anartha kariyā phurā govālira ghara ||
Ānandate samasta govāligaṇa āsi |
Kṛṣṇara akīrtti Yaśodāta denta hāsi ||
Ki bhaila tomāra iṭo tanaya durjjana |
Kṛṣṇara nimitte āra narahe jīvana ||
Gāi natu dohante dāmuri melegai |
Gṛha pasi curi kari khānta dugdha dai |
Vānarako khuvāve Govinda kino cāṇḍa |
Vānara nakhāi yeve kobaī bhāṅge bhāṇḍa ||
Dhuki yeve napāve manata nāi tuṣti |
Śikiyāra parā āne urālata uṭhi ||

"Then, after learning walking, O Dāmodara,
You began making mischief in the houses of the milkmaids.
The amused milkmaids also came to Yaśodā and lodged laughingly their complaint against Kṛṣṇa.
What a wicked son have you given birth to
Because of Kṛṣṇa, life has become intolerable.
He sets free the calves before the cows are milked.
He would also steal into the house and consume all the milk and curd.
Govinda is so wicked that he feeds even monkeys with these;

And when monkeys refuse to eat more, he destroys the pails.
Putting the pails beyond his reach on a hanging rope is no safety;
For he fetches them from the lift by getting up on the wooden threshing block".

The poem Rāsakrīḍā taken from Book X of the *Bhāgavata*, relates to Kṛṣṇa's Rāsa dance with the *gopīs* in the Arcadian grove on the bank of the Yamunā on a silvery autumnal full-moon night. The poem devotes a large number of verses to scenes from Nature where nature appears to be pulsating with life. In the midst of the Rāsa dance Kṛṣṇa suddenly disappeared and the gopīs approached the trees and the shrubs on the bank of the Yamunā and entreated them to tell the whereabouts of their beloved. Feelingly does the poet describe scenes from Nature:

Ucca vṛkṣa dekhi sodhe sādari |
Śuniyo aśvattha vaṭa pākaḍi ||
Yāhānte dekhiyā Nanda kumāra |
Nenta curi kari citta āmāra |
He kuruvaka aśoka campā |
*Kahiyo kathā karā anukampā || ****
Ovā tulasi samidhāna diyā |
*Tumi Govindara caraṇa priyā || ****
He jāti yuṭhi sakhi mālatī |
*Kṛṣṇa parase ki labhilā gati || ****
He āma jāma bela bakula |
Nāi upakāri tomāra tula ||
Kṛṣṇara virahe dekho āndhāra |
Kovā kaika gaila prāṇa āmāra ||

"Seeing a tall tree, the beautiful damsel asked:
Hear me, O you banyan tree,
Nanda's son saw me from here,
And stole away my soul.
O you *Kurubaka, Aśoka* and *Campā* trees,
speak you to me and show compassion.
O you *Tulasi* tree, give me a reply,
you are the beloved of Govinda's feet.
O *Jāti, Yuti,* and friendly *Mālati* creepers,
Did you attain the supreme way at Kṛṣṇa's touch?
O *Āma, Jāma, Bela* and *Bakula* trees,
benefactors like you none else are.
At Kṛṣṇa's absence I see darkness all round;
Say where has the soul of my life gone?"

The commotion of the milkmaids of Gokula caused by the note of Kṛṣṇa's flute is very graphically described :

Su-svara madhura kari Hari gāilā gīta ||
Śuni kāme ātrāvala huyā gopigaṇe |
Dileka lavaḍa gīta dhvani nirikṣaṇe ||
Karṇata kuṇḍala ḍole begate hāṇṭhite |
Cittata dharile Kṛṣṇe cale alakṣite ||
Kato gopī jāya gāi dohanaka eḍi ||
Ākhāte thākila dugdha caru saite paḍi ||
Piyante āchila śiśu tāhāko nagaṇi |
Pati śuśruṣāko eḍi jāya kato katojanī ||
Kato gopī āchila svāmīra paraśante |
Ādhā bhuñjā huyā kato jāya lavaḍante ||

Hari made his sweet voice more melodious still, and sang a song.

Hearing his song, the Gopīs were troubled by love.
And in their unrest they ran in the direction of the music.
Earrings swayed from their ears as they ran.
Kṛṣṇa captured their souls by stealth and wile.
Many Gopīs left their cows unmilked.
Others left their pails of milk on ovens uncared for.
Some even forgot their babies on their breasts.
Many others went away neglecting the care of their husbands,
Some even went away from the embrace of their beloveds.
Yet others left their half-finished meal and began to run.

Syamantaka Haraṇa[11] relates to the gem that daily yielded eight loads of gold, and dispelled all fear of portents, famine, death, diseases, tigers and serpents. This gem which Satrājit received from the Sun-god was stolen by king Jāmbuvān while he went on a hunt. Kṛṣṇa recovered it from Jāmbuvān after a great fight. In this spirited poem full of material thrill the poet presents a vivid and vigorous description of the battle characterised by strong dramatic elements. The following couplets alone will give some idea of the fight between Jāmbuvān and Kṛṣṇa :—

Hena śuni Jāmbavanta dhāilā mahā balavanta |
Nicini svāmika pāche dharilanta yuddha kāche ||

11. Different categories of *kāvyas* in early Assamese Vaiṣṇava literature are *Haraṇa kāvya, Pariṇaya* or *Vivāha kāvya, Vadha* or *Vijaya*, or *Yuddha kāvya, Saṃvāda* or *Dūta kāvya, Carita kāvya* and *Purāṇa kāvya*. Elegiac poems are called *Prayāṇar gīta*.

Sāmānya manuṣya buli mahākrodhe gaiḷā jvali |
Nājāni prabhāva ati laagāileka hatāhati ||
Duyo huyā mahā kruddha lagāileka ghora yuddha |
Duyo mātaṅgara līlā bariṣe parvata-śilā ||
Kata beli hāne gacha kato kope cāpe kāṣa |
Yujilanta māla bandhe dhari dhari bhari chānde ||
Duiro duiko nāhi tuṣṭi hāne vajra sama muṣṭi |
Māṃsara kāraṇe yena yujanta duigoṭa śena |
Keho bale nuhi kṣīṇa Yujanta āthaiśa dina |

Hearing this Jāmbavanta, of immense strength, made a dash,
knowing not Him to be the master,
even Him he caught for a duel.
Taking Him to be an ordinary mortal,
He flew into a fierce rage.
Knowing not His supreme power,
He began to exchange blows, with Him.
Both of them grew exceedingly angry,
and began a terrible duel.
It was as if two elephants were at play,
and mountain rocks began to fall in showers.
For a while, trees began to be hurled.
With consuming anger, each would sometimes close on the other,
They also closed on each other in wrestling fashion,
catching and catching yet again and fighting by planting their feet.
None is satisfied with the inflictions on the other.
Each struck the other in thunderous blows.
It was as if two eagles were fighting
for the one and the same piece of meat.
None of the two was inferior to the other in strength,
And for twentyeight days they fought on.

Kamṣavadha, a poem of two hundred and thirteen couplets, describes Kṛṣṇa's heroic exploits finally leading to the killing of Kaṁsa. Gopī-Uddhava-Saṃvāda is a little poem of about thirty-three stanzas relating to Kṛṣṇa's message to the Gopīs of Gokula, which was sent through Uddhava. The poem is full of sadness and describes in mournful verses lamentations of the Gopīs on their separation from Kṛṣṇa. Kujīra Vāñchā-purāṇa (Fulfilment of Kuji's desire) and Akrūrara Vāñchā-pūraṇa (Fulfilment of Akrura's desire) describe how God fulfils the desire of his devo-

tees. Jarāsandha Yuddha and Kāla Yavana Vadha give the stories of struggles between Jarāsandha and Balarāma and killing of the former by the fiery glance of Mucukunda at the contrivance of Kṛṣṇa. Mucukunda Stuti is a hymn of adoration.

In Nāradara Kṛṣṇa Darśana, (from Book X of the *Bhāgavata*) the author wanted to illustrate that Kṛṣṇa is omniscient. One day Nārada went to the female apartments of Kṛṣṇa's palace at Dvāraka, and found in one room Kṛṣṇa enjoying the company of his principal wife Rukmiṇī. He then proceeded to the next room where he found Kṛṣṇa with Lakṣmī. The sage went to all the 16,008 rooms of the palace and found Kṛṣṇa in every one of them enjoying separately the company of his 16,008 wives. Vipraputra Ānayana (Bringing back of the Brāhmaṇa's children) relates that while Kṛṣṇa was the ruler of Dvārakā, there came one day to his palace a Brāhmaṇa with a dead child in his arms. He cried out that in kingdom where Brāhmaṇas had to weep in sorrow the king was not a Kṣatriya but a mere dancer (*Jāhāra rājyata śoke kānde dvijagaṇa | Nuhike kṣatriya sito naṭara lakṣaṇa ||*). The Brāhmaṇa had nine children, he said, all of whom had died in infancy. Arjuna, who was sitting with Kṛṣṇa, hurriedly approached the Brāhmaṇa and tried to console him. Arjuna promised to the Brāhmaṇa that he would see that his next child would not die and swore that if he could not protect the next child of the Brāhmaṇa he would burn himself to death. But the tenth child of the Brāhmaṇa also died immediately after birth. The Brāhmaṇa went to Arjuna and rebuked him for promising to do a thing that he could not perform. Arjuna, however, left the Brāhmaṇa and immediately went to Yamapuri the abode of the dead, in search of the child. He could not find the child there; then in vain he went to different regions. Unsuccessful, he came back to Dvārakā and arranged to burn himself to death. But Kṛṣṇa now asked Arjuna not to immolate himself and promised to show him the children of the Brāhmaṇa. Kṛṣṇa ascended his chariot and with Arjuna drove it over seven oceans, seven islands, and crossing the region of night arrived at the kingdom of waters. There they saw Viṣṇu reposing on the serpent Ananta with the ten children of the Brāhmaṇa. Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna worshipped Viṣṇu and begged of him the children. The children were brought back to earth again and handed over to the Brāhmaṇa. The central idea of the poem is that without God's grace nothing can be performed merely by human endeavours. (*Pauruṣa puruṣara kichu nui | Kṛṣṇara prasāde samasta hui ||*). When the news of the bringing back of the Brāhmaṇa's children reached the ears of Daivakī she also

entreated Kṛṣṇa to give back her six children killed by Kaṃsa. This is the subject-matter of Daivakīra Putra Ānayana, a little poem of thirtyfour couplets. Kṛṣṇa brought back these six sons who were in Sutalapuri in the company of king Bali. After visiting their mother the children went directly to Vaikuṇṭhapuri by the grace of Kṛṣṇa. The next poem Veda Stuti (from Book X of the *Bhāgavata*) is philosophical in content and full of reflective thoughts. For example:—

Mukuṭa kuṇḍala yena suvarṇara bhinna nuhi
michā mātra nāma rūpa yata |
Ahaṃkāra pañcabhūta tomāta pṛthaka nuhi
prabhu paramārtha vicārata ||

"The crown, and the earrings are not different from gold in species; The name, the form and the ego put forth a false show. In absolute consideration, O Lord, even pride, and the five elements are not different from you."

Another semi-dramatic poem, consisting chiefly of conversation is Dāmodara Viprākhyāna, adapted from Book X of the *Bhāgavata*. Dāmodara a poor but devout Brāhmaṇa could hardly maintain himself and his wife. His wife one day asked Dāmodara to visit Kṛṣṇa, who was one of Dāmodar's friends in school. Dāmodara hesitated to see his friend who was then in an affluent condition; but at last he had to yield to the importunity of his wife and started to his friend's house with a little packet of presents of fried rice. Kṛṣṇa was delighted to see his old school companion and enjoyed heartily the small present brought by Dāmodara. The poet here wanted to show how God is pleased even with small offerings given in sincere devotion. In the centre of this small narrative poem, presented in a simple popular tone, stands prominently the character of a poor Brāhmaṇa. The poem in beautiful words speaks of a friend's affection and duties.

Līlāmālā (107 stanzas) recounts mostly the incidents of Kṛṣṇa's early life and Vaikuṇṭha Prayāṇa describes the final departure of Kṛṣṇa. Both are adapted from Book X of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Vaikuṇṭha Prayāna or Kṛṣṇara Vaikuṇṭha Prayāṇa is the largest poem of *Kīrtana* comprising 254 stanzas divided into nineteen sections. It describes the migration of the families of Yadu from Dvārakā to Prabhāsa, their indulgences in liquor and merry-making, quarrel and destruction of the Yadus, the passing away of Kṛṣṇa shot by an arrow of a hunter named Jarā and Kṛṣṇa's message to Arjuna who carried the remaining members of the Yadus to Indraprastha. The poem opens with a

discussion between Kṛṣṇa and Uddhava who was informed by the former of the impending destruction of the Yadu race. Kṛṣṇa instructed Uddhava on Bhakti and directed him to set out on a pilgrimage. The last section of the poem ends with a scene where Uddhava gave to Vidura the news of the Yadu-race and Kṛṣṇa's passing away. The entire poem is dominated by a sad note. Naturally one would expect *Kīrtana* to end with the poem Vaikuṇtha Prayāṇa, but Śaṅkaradeva incorporated in it Ureṣāvarṇana, a poem mainly on the temple of Jagannātha. Materials of the poem are taken from *Brahma Purāṇa,* and it relates to the setting up of the Jagannātha *kṣetra* and erection of sacred temples in Orissa by king Indradyumna, in much detail.

Kīrtana was the mature product of Śaṅkaradeva's mind; as we have already observed a number of episodes from the *Bhāgavata* are presented in it with the definite intention of telling the people in a clear and straightforward style the rudiments of the doctrine of Bhakti, the ethics and moral code for a *bhakta* (devotee). Here we find, a number of stories, first of its kind in our literature, charmingly told, combining sermons and prayers couched in a feeling language. But to a modern reader the merits of *Kīrtana* do not depend so much upon didactic doctrines, moral sermons or theology but upon splendid expressions, grand descriptive passages, originality of treatment and marvellous rhythmic felicities that run throughout all the poems of the book. As for the secret of its popularity, Śrī Jnananath Bora rightly says, "All the sentiments—pleasure and pain, love and separation, anger and forgiveness, are equally blended in *Kīrtana.* It affords pleasure to all classes of readers. To children it gives stories and songs for amusement, it delights the young with true poetic beauty and the elderly people find here religious instructions and wisdom."

Kīrtana stands as a book of grand verse not only for its religious outlook but also for elevated and noble thoughts that transcend all religions. We find such striking passages of universal appeal as : —

Manuṣyara āyu śata variṣa saṃkhyāta |
Arddheka niṣphala jāya jānibā nidrāta ||
Viṃśati variṣa āra jāya omolante |
Neya daśa variṣa dhanaka upārjjante ||
Vṛddhakāle jāya śeṣa variṣa viṃśati |
Ekó kārya sādhibāka nāhike śakati ||
Śarīrako pīḍe vyādhi cakṣuye nākale |
Āśā pāīśe bāndhiyā gṛhata thāki gale ||

(*Prahlāda Caritra*)

"Of the years which are taken to make the span of life, half are wasted in sleep. Twenty years man spends in play, and ten years in accumulating riches. Old age takes his last twenty ears, when he is incapable of doing anything. His body is then tormented by disease, his eyes stop functioning, and hope being his last resort, he breaks up, keeping himself to his house."

Such familiar ideas as : —

Viṣaya cintāya Parama pramatta
phuro mahā mana darpe |
Tumi apramatta hele mārā tāka
induraka yena sarpe ||

(Mucukunda Stuti)

Insensible and arrogant
I wander about with thoughts of the world.

You being devoid of arrogance destroy me easily,
just as a serpent kills a rat.

Such pithy expressions of philosophical import as : —

Śarīraka mai bolo buddhi bhaila hata |
Hiyāta harāilā tumi khojo bāhirata ||

(Śiśulīlā)

"My intellect has been clouded as I call my body 'I',
You are within me, and in vain I search you outside".

and such noble things as —

Brāhmaṇara caṇḍālara nibicāri kula |
Dātāta corata yena dṛṣṭi eka tula ||
Nīcata sādhuta yāra bhaila eka jñāna |
Tāhākese paṇḍita bolaya sarvajàna ||

(Śrī Kṛṣṇara Vaikuṇtha Prayāṇa)

"Him indeed all call a wise man who does not distinguish between the caste of a Brāhmaṇa and that of a Caṇḍāla; who looks at a donor and a thief with an eye of equality, and who does not differentiate between a debased man and an honest person."

Also :

Kukura caṇḍāla garddabharo ātmā Rāma ||
Jāniyā savāko paḍi karibā praṇāma ||

"God is the soul of the dogs, the donkeys and of the outcastes. Knowing this, pay reverence to all living creatures.

Limitation of space precludes further quoting.

Of his other Kāvyas *Hariścandra Upākhyāna*[12] was composed while Śaṅkara was a student at Mahendra Kandali's school. The materials of the poem were collected mainly from *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* (*Mārkaṇḍeya purāṇara kathāta pradhāna | payāre racibo Hariścandra upākhyāna ||*). All through the poem the author has extolled the merits of bhakti. Another kāvya of his younger age is *Rukmiṇī Haraṇa* (Abduction of Rukmīṇi).[13]

Rukmiṇī Haraṇa is a charming idyll, the materials of which are said to have been taken from the *Bhāgavata* and *Harivaṃśa*. In the opening verses, the poet states that he has composed the kāvya from materials collected from both these texts to make it more palatable just as one mixes milk with honey to make it a sweeter drink. To give the poem a touch of realism, the author adds to the original tale scenes of common domestic experience which transforms the Purānic story into a narrative of popular experience. Rukmiṇī, daughter of Bhīṣmaka, king of Vidarbha, chose Kṛṣṇa for her husband. Her parents also agreed to give her in marriage to Kṛṣṇa. But Rukma, her brother stood in the way and arranged her marriage with Śiśupāla. Rukmiṇī, in despair, sent messages to Kṛṣṇa through Vedanidhi, an old boastful, tall-talker Brāhmaṇa, to rescue her from Śiśupāla. Vedanidhi plays in the poem the part of a friend and confidant. Vedanidhi hastened to Dvārakā to fetch Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa accompanied by the Brāhmaṇa immediately started for Kuṇḍina. Kṛṣṇa's chariot rolled on with the speed of the wind, swift as a *nārāca* arrow, and with uproarious movements like the thunder of destructions. Feeling like losing his senses the poor Brāhmaṇa in fear covered his eyes with his palms. His head reeled and reeled and Vedanidhi dropped down senseless on the floor of the chariot. Kṛṣṇa slowed down, attended to the Brāhmaṇa and restored him to his senses. On the eve of the wedding day Kṛṣṇa arrived at Kuṇḍina and as arranged before eloped with Rukmiṇī while she was on her way to the temple of Bhavāṇī. Rukma, and other princes who assembled at the marriage, pursued them in vain. Kṛṣṇa carried Rukmiṇī to Dvārakā and celebrated the marriage with all pomp and merry-making. This wide theme offers the poet full scope to exercise his powers of realistic descriptions. Domestic discussions about Rukmiṇī's marriage, Kṛṣṇa's arrival, war with the rival suitors,

12. Edited with an introduction by Śrī P. Goswami, Gauhati.
13. Edited with an introduction from Dr. B. Kakati by Śri Harinarayan Dutta Barua, Nalbari.

marriage rites, etc. are elaborately portrayed by the poet. Even the medieval Assamese personal ornaments and costumes are presented in all their artistic designs and colourfulness. Here Śaṅkara described the wedding, doubtless from the models of existing domestic ceremonies, with abundance of popular pictures. The marriage scene has touches both of pleasant humour and pathos. To the wedding came all the gods and the denizens from the three worlds and each of them brought valuable presents befitting his own social dignity and prestige. Śiva was, however, put into an amusing situation, as he had nothing to offer. Even his wearing apparels were of tiger-skin, in his hands were only *śūla and dambaru*, a bull was all his possession; his forehead carried the crescent moon; serpents adorned his body as ornaments, skulls as necklaces and his wallet contained nothing but ashes :

Śave devagaṇe ucargi āche |
Mane mane Hara guṇanta pāche ||
Ki dive āve karo kona karmma |
Gāvara vastra siyo vāgha carmma ||
Hāte laiyā āchaya śūla dambaru |
Ghara bāhire eka guṭi garu ||
Sarpara kiṅkiṇī sarpara hāra |
Sakala gāve sarpa alaṁkāra ||
Śirata āche arddha candrakalā |
Manusyara muṇḍe gāthicho mālā ||
Bokaṇḍita āche bhasmara dhūli |
Āka dile haibo laghū samūli ||

So, reflecting that a present of any of these articles would only make him an object of ridicule, Śiva cleverly disappeared from the assembly.

There are rare flashes of description, realistic characterisation, and unforgettable phrases. We recall such a description of the city of Kuṇḍina :

Kuṇḍina nagara ati manohara dekhilā Śrī Gopāla |
Nānā vidha ghara ati uccatara parama cāru caucāla ||
Kato gṛha āche sāji śuddha kāce upare ratnara kāma |
Yena śukla giri āche śarī śārī dekhibāka anupāma ||
Vicitra kaṣaṭi kaṭi śilākuṭi gṛhara bāndhilā kāṇṭhi |
Tāte nānā paṭa ghaṭa naṭa bhaṭa prakaṭi gaḍhilā hāṭhi ||
Bāgha ghoṅga siṅgha nānāvihaṅgama śārī śārī sājiyāche |
Aneka putali āche hāta tuli aṅgi bhaṅgi kari nāce ||

Darpaṇa ākāra sāji dilā bāra kuṇḍrākṣa dilanta tāta |
Suvarṇara ghaṭa kare phaṭa phaṭa niśeṣa gṛha upare |
Vajrasama dṛḍha caupāsara gaḍa devara durgama ḍare |
Vicitra bākhara bike nirantara vaṇiyā loke pravandhe ||
*Āgara candana vāse sarvakṣaṇa āmoda karaya gandhe |****
Hāṭa bāṭa beri kare nānā kheḍi nāgarī yata cavāla |
Aneka ramaṇī pindhe kini kini mukutā hīrā pravāla |
Asaṁkhya pukhurī capa capa kari cāru jale āche bhari |
Cārio kāṣare bāndhiche bākhare ghāṭe ghāṭe khāṭa khari ||

"Then Gopāla sees Kuṇḍina, a very lovely city,
Various houses, so high, extremely well-roofed;
Many houses are there looking neat, on them decoration of jewels,
Like white hills row on row, so lovely to the eye;
sculptures made of the best of granite are there;
On them they carved various designs and figures of the elephant,
they made tigers, lions, various birds, all in rows.
Many figures are there with raised hands and dancing.
The walls were made like glasses, with windows.
On all the houses shine golden pitchers.
All around the city are well-built ramparts.
The merchants sell wonderful jewels there.
The atmosphere is redolent of *āgar* and *sandal*.
The children of the city play about at the markets and on the roads.
Many of the women are decked in pearls and diamonds.
There are innumerable tanks full to the brim with pleasant water.
The banks of the tanks are paved with jewels."

No kāvya is complete without a description of battle scenes. Our poet fulfilled this requirement also by giving an animated description of the battle between Kṛṣṇa and other disappointed suitor-kings of Rukmiṇī. The battle scene abounds in heroic sentiments. Bhīṣmaka tells his son Rukma when the latter was defeated by Kṛṣṇa :

Uṭha uṭha putra tai era ito marma |
Lāja apamāna kṣatriyara kona dharma ||
Hāriyā jinaya keho jiniyā hāraya |
Ṣarvakāle saṃsārata kāro nāhi jaya ||

"Arise, arise, O son, leave you this humour. A Kṣatriya is never swayed by blame or praise. Victors lose, and losers win, — none in this world is ever victorious."

Balabhadra consoled Rukmiṇī on the defeat of her brother with the following words : —

Erā mana kaṣṭa śoka nakaribā sakhi ||
Kṣetri jāti bhaile hōve hena vyavahāra |
Vivāda lāgile bhāi bhāi cinte māra ||
Dāruṇa kṣartiya jāti henase abodha |
Saṅgrāma lāgile pitāputre kare yuddha ||

"O friend, give up sorrow. A Kṣatriya always fares like this. In fight a brother may oppose a brother. Kṣatriyas are so foolish that in a fight even a son battles against his father."

Throughout the poem scattered in profusion are the familiar phrases and colloquial compounds gathered from the lips of the people. These idioms which may be said to be 'like real language of men' gave additional freshness to the kāvya and place it far above conventional compositions. Further, the poet transformed many a commonplace idea into neat and witty maxims that are even to-day quoted as proverbial expressions. We get such familiar maxims as : —

Jokara mukhata dile cuṇa |
"The leech collects back before lime".
Kāke bharacile apavitra hove daula |
"Does the temple get desecrated when the crow commits nuisance over it ?"

Candrara āgata najvalaya tārā |
"A star appears dim before the moon".
Mitraka viṣāda dili śatru pāile lāi |
"When one falls out with one's friend one's enemy gets emboldened".

Yateka kukure kāmora māraya saveo āṭhura nāma |
"The dogs always bite below the knee".

Balichalan (Deception on Bali) was written while Śaṅkara was at Pātbāusī. This is in main an adaptation of the well-known episodes of Bali from Book VIII of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. The poem is permeated all through with the conception of the doctrine of Bhakti, particularly of the *dāsya* type, i.e. man's attitude towards God as that of a faithful servant. There is a series of signifi-

cant sayings which are of great importance as bearing on merits of gifts, hindrances of wealth and riches towards spiritual progress (*Śrī pāile pāve tāka parama āpade*), evils of desire, and the merit of contentment arising out of the control of the senses : —

Tinio lokata yata āche dhānya dhana |
Yata divya nārī āche sundarī pradhāna ||
Yata divya gharabāri vastra alaṃkāra |
Saveo nupūre mana eka lubhiyāra ||
Pṛthu Gaya ādi kari rājā aparyyanta |
Arthara tṛṣṇāra keho napāileka anta ||
Saptadvīpā pṛthivī karilā adhikāra ||
Tathāpi tṛṣṇāra keho napāileka pāra ||
Indriyaka dami yiṭo nakare ākrośa |
Si si mahā sukhī yito alpate santoṣa ||
Asantuṣṭa prāṇīra nakhaṇḍe mana dukha ||
Trailokyara lakṣmī pāile nāhi tāra sukha ||
Yehi pāve tāte mahā tuṣṭa hove mana |
Tevese viprara teja bāḍhe anukṣaṇa ||
Asantoṣe samaste tejake kare ṭhāya |
Yena jala pari agni nirvvāṇaka pāya ||

"All the grains and wealth
that are in the three worlds —
all the women of beauty,
all the beautiful houses, clothes and jewels—
all these do not satiate even one greedy person.
Kings innumerable like Prithu and Gaya
could not find the limit to their desire for wealth.
They conquered the seven-islands of the earth,
even then they could not cross the barrier of desire,
The one who controls one's senses and has no craving
is the one who is really happy and contended with a little.
The unsatisfied person has no end to worries;
the riches of the three worlds cannot make him happy.
The Brāhmaṇa who is satisfied with whatever he gets
finds himself increasing in spiritual power.
Dissatisfaction sucks all his power
like water falling on fire and quenching it".

Śaṅkaradeva did not confine himself to Kṛṣṇaite materials alone but wrote also on themes from the *Rāmāyaṇa*. He rendered into Assamese the Uttarā Kāṇḍa (last canto) of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Mādhava Kandali's Assamese version of the *Rāmāyaṇa*[14] existed only in five cantos without the first and the last. The Uttarā Kāṇḍa may, however, be called an independent *Rāmāyaṇa* as most of the incidents of the epic are narrated in this canto through songs sung by Lava and Kuśa in the court of Rāma. Unlike, however, his translation of the *Bhāgavata,* where the original was faithfully followed as it was considered to be a sacred text, in the Uttarā Kāṇḍa, the fidelity to the original whether in respect of ideal, character or incident, was not the main aim of the translator. Even the central figure of Rāma of Vālmiki's epic is not an epic hero but an incarnation of Viṣṇu.

For in one of the *bhanitās* Śaṅkara says of Rāma thus:

Tumi tribhubaṇa pati tumi jagatara gati |
Tumisi acintya guṇa ananta śakati ||
Prakṛtita antara parama tumi tattva |
Ādi anta nājāniya tomāra mahattva ||
Tumi bhāra harā bāre bāre avatari |
Duṣṭaka daṇḍiyā mahantaka rakṣā kari ||
Tumisi Īśvara surāsure kare seva |
Antata tumisi thākā nathākaya keva ||

"Thou art the Lord of the three worlds,
and the way of the universe.
Thou art the unthinkable virtue, unlimited power.
Beyond *Prakṛti* thou art the supreme secret.
One does not know the beginning or the end of Thy glory.
Thou relievest the burden of the world,
incarnating repeatedly,
chastizing the wicked and protecting the good.
Thou art Īśvara, whom gods and demons reverence.
At the last also thou alone stayest and none else".

It is evident that Śaṅkaradeva undertook its rendering to serve the fixed purpose of propagating the Bhakti cult. To give it a Vaiṣṇavite appearance *bhanitās* are inserted in each section with passionate religious fervour. Thus, one section concludes with the following sermons :—

Śunā sabhāsada Rāmāyaṇa pada
pātakara dhūmraketu |

14. Mādhava Kandali (1400 A.D.) was the earliest translator of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Assamese.

Apāra saṃsāra sukhe hove pāra
Rāma nāma bāndhi setu ||
Duṣṭa kāla sarpe savāko daṃśile
bhaila śruti hata budhi |
Rāma nāma iṭo amṛta vināi
nāi nāi mahauṣadhi ||
Yataka pātaka saṃhāribe pāre
Rāmara nāme samprati |
Tateka pāteka karibe pāpīra
Bāpara nāhike śakati ||
Aganika yena tṛṇe novāraya
pāpara tenaya nāma |
Isi dharma nija mukuti vānijya
Ḍāki bolā Rāma Rāma ||

Listen, O members of the assembly,
to the verses of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.
These are a terror to sin.
One crosses the boundless *saṃsāra* (world) with ease,
if one only makes a bridge of the name of Rāma.
The wicked snake Time has bitten everyone,
one has lost one's wits.
Apart from this nectar named Rāma
no medicine is there now.
So many sins can be destroyed
by the name of Rāma, as are
beyond the means
even of the hardest sinner to commit.
As grass cannot control fire,
so is the case with sin.
This is one's own faith, the trade of salvation,
Cry aloud, Rāma, Rāma.

Besides each incident of the epic serves as a convenient peg to hang Vaiṣṇavite sermons upon. For example in the concluding section of Lakṣmaṇa Visarjana (Desertion of Lakṣmaṇa) we have the following verses :—

Sunā sabhāsada save Rāmāyaṇa kathā |
Rāma Lakṣmaṇara hena milila avasthā ||
Ito gṛhavāsa sāmānyara kona lekhā |
Svapanara sama nidhi dhana jana dekhā ||

Durghora mṛtyuka kiya nākaliya kāche |
Hena jānā antake keśata dhari āche ||
Āura aruvanta nāhi kālara hātara |
Parama bāndhava eke Mādhavata pāra ||
Hena jāni diyā Rāma caranata citta |
*Karā pāna Rāmanāma parama amṛta ||*****
Viṣaye vilāse nilā ihena janmaka |
Chāira arthe pore yena jāti candanaka ||
Mahāratna maṇi yena sama nāi mūle |
Tāka salāi āni kācamaṇi pindhe gale ||
Eke kākamāṃsa siyo āhāra kukurara |
Ati alpe siyò dekhā nuhike vistara ||
Tāka mahā pravandha kariyā napāi lāga |
Yadi pāvai āsi tāko āne khòje bhāga ||
Sehimate vibhava viṣaya yata sukha |
Tāke ḷāgi hovā kene Kṛṣṇata vimukha ||

Listen, members of the assemblage,
to the story of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.
Even Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa fell into this situation,
What need to mention the life of ordinary people ?
Consider as dream all this men and wealth.
Do not call Death near,
for know you that he has caught you by the hair.
No other rescue is there from the clutch of Time,
no other great friend than the only Mādhava.
Therefore, do you meditate on the feet of Rāma,
Drink the name of Rāma, the supreme nectar.
You will find this to be the conclusion of the *Vedas*.
It is Rāma's name which gives one salvation.
Matter and luxury have spoiled this life,
as one burns white sandal for ashes.
In value there is no equal to the great jewel :
but the foolish one changes it for glass beads
and puts them on his neck.
The flesh of the crow which is food of the dog,
Little it is, not large in quantity,
Even then it is difficult to obtain,
and if the dog comes upon it others claim a share.
So ugly and mean are the pleasures of the world,
Because of them why do you ignore Kṛṣṇa?

As the *Rāmāyaṇa* is a kāvya and not a *śāstra,* Śaṅkaradeva allowed greater latitude to embellish the poem with free use of invented materials and he availed himself of the innumerable opportunities for descriptions which the story offers. The abiding interest of the poem lies in abundance of folk elements which at places produce comic effects by exaggeration. The dinner scene where the angry sage Durvāsā with his hungry disciples were entertained by Rāma, though full of domestic realism, is yet humorous through overstatement :

Ṛṣira ākrośa dekhi saṃkita Rāghave |
Annapāna āpuni sājiyā sabāndhave ||
Āgata jogāila āni aneka yatane |
Dekhi Durvāsāra mahā tuṣṭa bhaila mane ||
Kari paripati pāche śiṣye same ṛṣi |
Bhūñjibe lāgilā anna parama hariṣi ||
Ghana kṣira kṣirisā khāilanta lāge māne |
Nadharaya peṭa piṭhāpanā paramāne ||
Dadhi dugdha ghṛta ghole bhailā gaṇḍagola |
Ophandila udara dekhiya yena ḍhola ||
Lobhata bhuñjanta tathāpito jāṇṭi jāṇṭi |
Novāranta rākhibe mātante āse bānti ||
Napānte uśāsa ati olamila ghāra |
Moi moi peṭa kato tolanta ugāra ||
Tana tana peṭa kato ḍhilānta kapiṇa |
Dui hātata vai dravya dekhi lāge ghiṇa ||
Khāibe kato napāri karanta hāi phui |
Namātanta yācante thākanta thiva hui ||
Dadhi dugdha pañcāmṛte basāileka gāṅg |
Ehi mate ṛṣira bhojana bhaila sāṅg ||

At the sage's greed Rāghava became terrified;
Himself preparing food and drink
he laid them before the sage.
At this Durvāsā became much delighted.
Condensed milk and butter he ate as much as he could,
the pastry and rice pudding were beyond the capacity
of his belly,
curd, milk, ghee and whey caused a tumult
and his belly became inflated like a drum.
Even then did he ate out of greed,
he could not keep down what he ate,
it came out as he spoke;

he could not breathe, his shoulders hang down,
repeatedly did he belch,
his belly became so tight that he had to loosen his cloth,
the eatables stuck to both his hand so as to look disgusting;
being unable to eat further he became restless,
he did not respond when more was offered.
A river of curd, milk and the five-nectars flow;
thus did the feast of the sage came to a close.

The heroes here have lost their original elevated character and been reduced to the status of common men and women of the day. As an instance, Sītā is described in her parting scene as a rustic woman. She reproaches Rāma in an unrestrained language which at places borders on the vulgar. Śaṅkaradeva had some fondness for elaboration and even in pathetic scenes such as Sītā's final departure he seems to have unnecessarily lingered. Sītā indulges in profuse weeping, flings a sermon on brotherly affection at her sons Lava and Kuśa, hugging them to her neck, and utters a long farewell homage to her husband Rāma. As soon as Sītā is carried away in a golden chair Rāma becomes unconscious and suddenly slips down from the throne. The entire assembly bursts into tearful lamentations. The scene, on the whole, has taken on a distinct local colour:

Deva ṛṣi save santāpe kāndanta
dharite citta napāri |
Bhāluka vānara kānde nirantara
māṭita pari lotāri ||
Bharata Lakṣmaṇa vīra Śatrughna
bhūmita parilā kāndi |
Kauśalyā pramukhye muṭhi hānai hiye
Sītā buli rāva bāndhi ||
Sevakinī yata Sītāra śokata
kānde pari lotāpuṭi |
Pāila svarga kolā krandanara siṭo
tumbula rolaka uṭi ||

The gods and the sages could not restrain themselves and began to weep out of grief.

The bears and the monkeys wept everywhere rolling on the ground.

Bharata, Lakṣmaṇa, the hero Śatrughna fell to the ground weeping.

Kauśalyā and others struck their breasts and cried out: Sītā, Sītā.

All the maids in grief for Sītā rolled on the ground and cried.

The uproar of grief and lamentation reached the sky.

By such descriptions the poet held up before his listeners a pure domestic tragedy full of sorrow, sadness and unrestricted pathos which had an intense appeal to the popular mind. In these descriptions we do not get that calm dignity, intense yet restrained feeling, which pervade the original epic.

Section III

SONGS

In two other branches of Assamese literature Śaṅkaradeva was a pioneer and left his distinctive mark, namely in *Baragīta*[15] devotional songs, and *Aṅkiyā-nāṭ*,[16] one-act play. Both were new literary types in Assamese. The popularity of the *Baragītas*, the prayer-songs grew rapidly as the Vaiṣṇava code had laid down singing of prayers as an obligatory daily duty and it was considered an essential part of liturgy. Further, singing of hymns became a medium of preaching and propaganda. Śaṅkaradeva, therefore, created a system of devotional services, both congregational and private, known as *Prasanga* and *Nāma Kīrtana*, and also established institutions to train singers (*Gāyan* and *Bāyan*). In the Vaiṣṇava church of Assam, singing is universal even to-day. These compositions were however, not couched in homely Assamese as the poems of *Kīrtana* or the kāvyas. These were written in an artificial speech called Brajabuli, a mixed Maithili-Assamese language. Such a literary medium was in vogue among the medieval Vaiṣṇavite poets of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. It is difficult to guess why Śaṅkaradeva made a departure from the popular language of his poems and chose Brajabuli for his devotional lyrics

15. There are many popular editions of Śaṅkaradeva's *Baragītas*. '*Śrī Śaṅkaradevara Baragita*' edited by Śrī Rajmohan Nath contains copious word and explanatory notes.

16. Plays of Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhava Deva and Gopāla Deva were first published in one volume in *Aṅkīyā Nāṭ* by the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Gauhati, 1940. Another publication titled *Aṅkāvalī* and edited by Śrī Kaliram Medhi, M.A., Gauhati, appeared in 1950. There are also independent editions of one or two of these plays.

and plays. It is noteworthy that Śaṅkaradeva composed his first *Baragīta* not in Assam but at Vadarikāśrama during his first pilgrimage (C 1481 A.D.). We quote below the entire song not only for its historical importance, but also for its deeper message and authentic sense of form :

Rāga Dhanaśrī

Mana meri Rāma caraṇahi lāgu |
Tai dekha nā antaka āgu ||
Mana āyu kṣaṇe kṣaṇe ṭuṭe |
Dekha prāṇa kona dina chuṭe ||
Mana kāla ajagare gile |
Jāna tileke maraṇa mile ||
Mana niścaya patana kāyā |
Tai Rāma bhaja teji māyā |
Re mana isava viṣaya dhāndhā |
Kene dekhi nadekhasa āndhā ||
Mana sukhe pāra kaice ninda |
Tai cetiyā cinta Govinda ||
Mana jāniyā Śaṅkare kahe |
Dekha Rāma vine gati nahe ||

Rest my mind, rest on the feet of Rāma;
Seest thou not the great end approaching ?
My mind, every moment life is fleeting,
Beware, any moment it might flee away.
My mind, the serpent of time is swallowing:
Knowest thou, how death by inches is advancing?
My mind, surely this body would wither away.
So break through illusion and resort to Rāma.
O mind, thou art blind;
This vanity of things: thou seest;
Yet nought thou seest.
Why art thou, slumbering at ease.
O mind, awake and think of Govinda.
O mind, Śaṅkara knows it and says,
Except through Rāma, there is no hope.[17]

It should be noted that Brajabuli, as a language had lesser uses of compound consonants, a preponderance of vowels and alliterative expressions and these phonetic traits may be said to make it a more suitable medium for lyric compositions. In addition to

17. From B. Kakati's *Śaṅkaradeva* with little changes.

this flexibility, some element of sacredness was associated with this artificial language, as it was traditionally considered to be the language of Vraja (Vṛndāvana) in which Kṛṣṇa and the Gopīs spoke. This archaic language bearing vocables of fuller feeling-tones was employed to "meet requirements which do not arise in ordinary speech" and it immensely succeeded in interpreting the Vaiṣṇavite atmosphere. Śaṅkaradeva was our first great poet to use this artificial language and superb was the use he made of it in his *Baragītas*[18] and *Aṅkiyā nāṭas*. For structural models of these *Baragītas* the Buddhist *Caryāpadas* may be said to have led the way.

The *Baragītas* are far more poetical than the kāvyas, and more passionate even than the *ākhyānas* of *Kīrtana*. The growing popularity of music and the requirements of congregational prayers and devotional services made Śaṅkaradeva compose a large number of *Baragītas*, the most beautiful prayer-songs in our literature even to-day.

Śaṅkaradeva's *Baragītas* are woven with strands of religious experiences, philosophical reflections, secular and ethical broodings, poignant introspection of the self, agony of spirit and saintly humility. Some of them are speculative. They speak of the nature of God, His relation with men, His infinite compassion and grace, the burden of human existence, the way of liberation and so forth. Others are exhortatory, urging man to 'chant the name of Hari', to 'think of Govinda', 'to rest on the feet of Rāma', 'to leave the illusory pleasures of the world', etc. Each one of the *Baragītas* invariably concludes with a passionate prayer for shelter at the feet of Govinda, and deliverance from this suffering world. The following hymn in praise of God is an illustrative example:

Life of the life on earth, self-created,
Janārdana, crusher of Danuja, reliever of suffering,
source of joy to the virtuous, joy of joys,
delight to Nanda, roamer in the wilds.
Distinguished in sports and loveliness,
outshining the autumnal moon.

18. The term *Baragīta* has a special significance in the Vaiṣṇavite literature of Assam and the songs of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhava Deva are generally considered as *Baragītas*. The *Baragītas* are sung at different devotional services known as *prasaṅga* which are held at different hours of the day. *Prasaṅga* and *Nāmakīrtana* are held for longer time during religious festivals and on saints' days.

Sleeper on the serpent Śeṣa, auspicious, destroyer of Keśī.
Clad in golden robes, indestructible,
Friend to the world, prop of the universe,
Mādhava, foe to Madhu, sweet to the sight,
destroyer of Mura.
The lotus feet of Keśava
This is desired by Thy servant Śaṅkara.

Deeply distressed by the fever and fret of life Śaṅkara in some of the psalms expresses a sense of utter wearines in the world of change and sorrow. Thus he bewails:

Rāga Suhāi

Śrī Rāma mai ati pāpī pāmara teri bhāvanā nāi |
Janama cinṭāmaṇi kahe gayo yaice kācaka lāi || Dhruṃ
Divase viṣaya biyākula niśi śayane goñāi |
Mane dhana khuji vimohita teri ārati nāi ||
Hṛdaya kamale Hari baiṭhaha cinto caraṇa nā teri |
Karala garala yaca bhojana hāmu amiyā heri ||
Parama murukha hāmu Mādhava eko bhakati najānā |
Dāsa dāsa buli tārahu ehu Śaṅkara bhāṇā ||

A dire sinner to Śrī Rāma,
Think I not of Him.
In pursuit of things glasslike,
My precious life I fritter away.
During the day I pursue worldly pleasures,
Night I pass fruitlessly in sleep.
With agitated mind I search for wealth,
No devotion I feel for Thee.
Within my lotus-heart resides Hari,
Yet I meditate not His feet.
Casting away nectar I take poison.
Fool as I am, I know no devotion to Mādhava.
Save Thy slave, O Lord,
Entreats thus Śaṅkara.

Also in the following prayer :

Rāga Kedāra

Pāve pari Hari karaho kātari prāṇa rākhabi mora |
Viṣaya viṣadhara viṣe jarājara jīvana nārahe thora ||
Dhruṃ.

Athira dhṇa jana jīvana yauvana
athira ehu saṃsāra |
Putra parivāra savahi asāra
karabo kāheri sāra |
Kamala-dala-jala citta cañcala
thira nahe tila eka |
Nāhi bhayo bhava bhoge Hari Hari
parama pada parateka ||
Kahatu Śaṅkara e dukha sāgara
pāra karā Hṛṣikeśa ||
Tuhu gati mati dehu Śrīpati
tattva pantha upadeśa ||

Falling prostrate at Thy feet, O Lord,
I make entreaties that thou may preserve my soul.
My life is poisoned with the venom
of the serpent of worldliness.
It cannot stand any more.
Wealth and family are illusory,
So are life, youth, and this our world.
Wife and children are all insubstantial.
Upon whom shall I rely ?
My soul is as fickle
As water on floating lotus leaves,
And never at rest for a moment.
Drowned in the enjoyment of worldly pleasures,
I could not touch Thy supreme feet.
Śaṅkara prays: O Hṛṣikeśa,
Steer me safe across this sea of sorrows,
O Śrīpati, Thou art my mind and destiny.
Give me the doctrine and the way,
In the path of spiritual progress.

Senses are great obstacles in the path of God-realisation and Śaṅkara wants to transcend them through Grace and so he prays :

Nārāyaṇa caraṇe karahō gohāri
Viṣaya-vilāsa pāśa chāḍi
Indriya mohi ohi vātovāri || Dhruṃ.
Nāsā gandha madhura rasa rasanā |
Śravaṇa vividha dhvani dhāya ||
Nayanā rūpa paraśa tvaca cāhe |

Kāhe bhajoho pahu pāya ||
Kāma krodha mada mṇa moha meri |
Aisava vairi viśāla ||
Śaṇkara kaha pahu tuhu vine nāhi āna |
Sevakapāla Gopāla ||

O Nārāyaṇa, this prayer do I make at Thy feet :

Free me from the shackles of earthly pleasures,
and annihilate my senses.
My nostrils crave for fragrance,
and the tongue pines for delicious taste,
And eyes look for forms and the touch for flesh.
As such, how can I worship the feet of the Lord ?
Lust, anger, vanity, pride and passion —
They are mighty foes.
Śaṅkara says: O Lord, except Gopāla
There is none to protect Thy servant from these foes.

In this world of illusion, faith, adoration and devotion to Kṛṣṇa or Rāma can only release human beings from death, destruction, and utter ruin. The following hymns describe Śaṅkara's conception of devotion, spirit of humility and self-surrender :

Rāga Dhanaśrī

Pāmaru mana Rāma caraṇe citta dehu |
Athira jīvana Rāma Mādhavakeri nāma
maraṇaka sambala lehu || Dhruṃ.
Rajaṃī divasa dūra āvi yāvata
āvata antaka garaji |
Kathi tanupāta milata matimāni
Rāma bhajahu sava varaji ||
Āśā pāś paraśi mānasapaśu
Paḍali bandī beri beri |
Bhava kārāgāra tāraka nāhi āra
vine bhakati-rati teri ||
Avaniśi sevahū Rāma parama pahu
Rahu hṛdi paṅkaje merā |
Kṛṣṇa kiṃkara bhaṇa Rāma parama dhana
maraṇahi saṅga na chorā ||

"O sinful mind, cling to the feet of Rāma.
Life is unstable.

As weapon against death,
Take the name of Rāma-Mādhava.
Days, nights and life pass away,
And death approaches with thundering sound.
Think of the body's decay
Forsake everything and seek shelter under Rāma.
O animal in man's dress,
in the snare of cravings,
You are a prisoner now.
From this prison-world none can rescue you,
Save your own devotion to the Lord.
Devoutly I serve the great lord Rāma;
Let Him reside in my heart.
Rāma is my most precious treasure.
O Lord, leave me not in the grip of death,
Prays the servant of Kṛṣṇa."

The same note of self-surrender has become dominant in the following prayer-offering also :

Oh you wicked mind of mine,
Devote yourself to the feet of Rāma.
Life is fickle.
Let the Name of Mādhava.
Be your main stay
Wherewith to face death.
The eternal course of night and day
Brings you nearer to death.
Anywhere you may be overtaken.
Knowing this,
Dedicate yourself to Rāma's name,
And leave the rest.
Oh you beast of a mind,
You are entangled again and again
In the web of desire.
Nothing can free you from the prison of earth,
Save devotion to Hari.
Worship, then, day and night,
Rāma the supreme Lord.
Let Rāma be enthroned in the lotus of the soul.
Says the servant of Kṛṣṇa :
Rāma is my Supreme wealth
Let me not lose it till death.

The incomprehensibility of the ways of God and the attitude of humility (śaraṇapatti) of a devotee is well illustrated in the following lyric :

How can we know the Infinite ways of the Lord ?
Even great devotees like Sanaka and Sanātana,
Have contemplated on the Creator,
And got confused.

Countless worlds come and go
Through the mere pores of the Lord.

By incarnating Himself as the Divine Boar,
And as Nara Simgha,
He destroys the burden of the world.

Sons, daughters, wealth, wife—
All that we have and behold—
Are all but illusion.

Even so, creatures are a part
Of the Blessed One.

Why, then, this snare of delusion ?
Sayeth Sankara,
Oh Lord, I crave your feet, nothing else.
Grant me this prayer : That I may cherish Thy
Feet in heart,
And chant Thy Hallowed Name.

The intellect and wisdom cannot qualify one to obtain release from this world unless he possesses true devotion. Śaṅkara therefore says —

Soi soi ṭhākura moi yo Hari parakāśā |
Nāma dharata rūpa smarata tākeri hāmu dāsā || Dhruṃ.
Paṇḍite paḍhe śāstra mātra sāra bhakate liye |
Antara jala phuṭaya kamala madhu madhukare piye ||
Yāhe bhakati tāhe mukuti bhakate etattva jānā |
Yaice vaṇika cintāmaṇika jāniyā guṇa bhakhānā ||
Kṛṣṇa kiṃkara Śaṅkara kaha bhaja Govindaka pāya |
Sohi paṇḍita sohi maṇḍita yo Hariguṇa gāya. ||

"He is my Master through whom light of the Lord manifests itself.
I am His servant who recites His name
and cherishes his image in heart.
Like the bee that sucks honey from the lotus
that blossoms in the bosom of a lake,

The devotee drinks nectar (of the Holy name),
while the *pundit* parrots scriptures.
Devotion alone leads to salvation—
a devotee should remember this.

As an experienced jeweller
appraises the merits of the peerless jewel.
So Śaṅkara the servant of Kṛṣṇa says,
Fall thou down and pray at the feet of Govinda.
He who chants the praises of Hari
Is the real *pundit* and the glorious man."

The variety of learning and pompous rites and rituals cannot lead to salvation:

The scholar does not see the straightest path,
Nor does the performer of a million sacrifices
attain Hari.
Both fall down to earth ever and anon.
All rites and rituals,
All pilgrimages to Gayā and Kāśī
Made round the years,
All *yogas* done and rhetoric learnt,
Only cloud the vision.
There is no salvation without Bhakti.
The name of Rāma is
The blessedest thing on earth.

That is the highest knowledge.
In the age of Kali,
Hari's name is the Supreme religion.
The scriptures and the lore.
Do not enable one,
To know Hari.
Sayeth the servant of Krishna:
Human life is short and difficult to get (again).
Forget, therefore, the vanity of learning and rites,
And worship the feet of Hari
In your inmost soul.

Some of these songs are allegorical in import:

E bhava gahana vana ati moha pāśe channa
tāte hāmu hariṇa berāi |
Phandilo māyāra pāśe kālavyādha dhāyā āse
kāma krodha kuttā khedi khāya ||

Harāilo cetana Hari najāno kimate tari
śunite dagadha bhela jīva |
Lobha moha duhu vāgha satate nā chāre lāga.
rākhu rākhu Sadāśiva ||
Palāite nedekho sandhi dine dine dṛḍhabandī
bhaila manda manara yukuti |
Tuvā Hari lāgo goḍa mora māyāpāśa choḍa
Śaṅkara karaya kākūti ||

This world is a dense forest,
Full of the fetters of desire;
And myself, a weakling of a deer,
wandering here alone.
Time like a hunter,
charges me fast.
I am fettered by the hoofs of *māyā*.
O Hari, I have lost my heart,
and know not the way to liberation.
Even to think of my lot,
I burn within.
Avarice and illusion, the two tigers
are following me.
Save me, O Thou Infinitely Good!
I see not the way of escape!
And what a pity. The more am I entangled,
The more I lose discrimination.
Śaṅkara takes refuge at Thy feet
and entreats Thee!
Free him from the fetters of *māyā*.

In some of the hymns, we have references to the episodes of the Indian epics explaining divine grace and glories. In the following *Bargīta*, Rāvaṇa is depicted as the Supreme Evil of earth of whom men are in constant dread and fear:

Hark, Oh you arch enemy of the gods,
You, root-cause of destruction

Of the *Rākṣyasas*:

Legions of monkeys in battle array,
Are marching forward.
The earth trembles under their feet.
They have crossed over the ocean.
Dangerous rocks in hand,

They rush again and again for battle.
All Lanka is surrounded."
Its streets and squares are invaded by them.
And loud and piercing are the battle cries they raise
The cries come thick.
They frighten the inmost soul.
Oh Rāghava, you are majestic and mighty.
You are the Lord.
Rāvaṇa jumps audaciously on you,
When gods, men, giants, reptiles, hills and all
Tremble in fear.
The ten-headed Rāvaṇa was a fool
To have abducted Jānakī.
Sayeth Śaṅkara :
Oh Rāvaṇa, creature of night,
Fall flat at the foot of Raghupati,
That is the only salvation for you.

In some *Bargītas* we come across descriptions of child Krishna, his setting out in the morning to tend cattle with the cowboy, companions his repartees in the forest glens to his friends, and return in the evening fatigued, with sleep-riden eyes. This group of *Bargītas* is full of pastoral settings resembling the idyllic scenes of rural Assam. The lovely atmosphere is electrified with notes of humanism, particularly in the idle worries of the mother, Yasoda for the safe return of her son Kṛṣṇa and with the notes of profound love in the intense desire of the *Gopīs* for reunion with Kṛṣṇa—notes which touch the spheres.

The following *Baragīta* which describes sorrows and lamentations of the Gopīs when Kṛṣṇa departed from Mathura, is cited as an illustration :—

Rāga Kalyāṇa

Uddhava Vandho ! Madhupuri rahala murāru |
Kādhe rahaba nāheri ava jīvana
vana bhayo bhavana hāmāru || Dhruṃ.
Yāhe viyoga āgi
aṅga tāvāya
tila eku rahaye nā pāri |
Sohi Vraja sūra
dūra gayo Govinda
diśa daśa divase āndhāri ||
Bhayo maraṇa ohi
sehi Hari caraṇaku
ḅichuri rahaya nā pāi |

Dekhata Kālindi
giri Ṿirindāvana
tanu mana ḍahaya sadāya ||
Vrajājana jīvana
bāhuri nāhi āvata
hāmāku karatha anāthā. |
Gopiṇī prema
paraśi nīra jhuraya
Śaṅkara kaha guṇagāthā. ||

O friend Uddhava,
Murāru chooses to stay away at Madhupuri.
Without seeing him shall we live ?
Our homes have turned to wilderness.
The fire of separation burns our limbs,
We find no peace for a minute even.
Govinda, the sun of Vraja has departed,
So darkness prevails even at noon in the ten directions.
Being separated from the feet of Hari
We will soon perish.
The very sight of the Kālindī, Govardhana and Vṛndāvana
Burns ceaselessly our minds and bodies.
Alas! the life of Vraja shall fade for ever.
Throwing us in utter helplessness.
In love, tears roll down the cheecks of the Gopīs.
Thus Śaṅkara sings the praises of the Lord.

The following hymn in beautiful imagery has a deeper note of pathos :—

Tāla : ekatāla |
Mādhava virahe haraya cetana. |
tanu jīvana na rahe || Dhrum.
Canda candana manda malaya samīre. |
Keśava vine viṣa variṣe śarīre. ||
Ghana ghana hānaya madana pañca vāṇa |
Kokila kuhu kuhu lohu meri prāṇa. ||
Paṃkayapāta ahita himabāri. |
Madhukara nikara karaya mahāmāri. ||
Aicana samaye Madhupuri piu prāṇa |
Kṛṣṇa kiṃkara rasa Śaṅkara bhāṇa. ||

Benumbed are our senses at separation from Mādhava.
Life will soon part with the body's company.
The moon, sandal-paste and the breeze of Malaya,
rain poison on us.
For we are bereft of our beloved Keśava.
Time and again Madana shoots his five arrows,

And the cuckoo kills us with its exciting. and mellifluous notes.
Lotus-leaves and cold water turn harmful,
Bees come in cluster heaping great destruction upon us.
Alas ! even at such a time our beloved,
our very life, stays at Madhupuri.
Śaṅkara, the servant of Kṛṣṇa.
Knows the depth of such sentiments.

In the *Baragītas* we find Śaṅkaradeva in his exalted moments. Here he exhibited his power of fusing philosophical thought with lyrical fervour. He blended in these song-poems lofty thoughts with splendid rhythmic felicities and artistic sublimities. Numerous are the similes, metaphors, alliterations and other figures of speech which make them delightful and appealing. Other types of songs are known as *Bhaṭimā, Cāpaya* and *Catihā. Bhaṭimās* are long poems of eulogistic and descriptive character. They mention divine qualities, glorify divine deeds and speak of God's grace. Later on *Bhaṭimās* addressed to Śaṅkaradeva known as *Guru Bhaṭimās* were also composed.[18a] During his pilgrimage at Banaras Śaṅkaradeva met some disciples of Kabir and was charmed with Kabir's *Cautisā* verses. The *Cautisā* is an exposition of the religious significance of the consonants of the alphabet. Just as in Chaucer's "A.B.C." the verses begin with the successive letters of the Latin alphabet, the lines in this form of composition begin with the successive letters of the Sanskrit alphabet. Their reproduction in Assamese resulted in the *Catihās*.

Section IV

DRAMA

The *Aṅkiyā-nāṭas* were composed mainly to appeal to the eye, the ear as well as to the mind of the common people. These plays exercised a tremendous influence on our national and cultural life; they led to the growth of the popular stage, and development of music and dancing. The drama represents a spectacle and the appeal of the spectacular in an age when printing was unknown, was profound. Although first used mainly as a means of furthering the cause of Assamese Vaiṣṇavism by their spectacular appeal to the people at large, these plays have come to exercise an abiding influence on our common folk to this day. They inspired our poetry and led to the creation of a special type of descriptive poem called *Bhatimā*. Further in the *Aṅkiyā-nāṭas* we find our first prose, a prose rhythmic in form, and full of elevated and musical expressions.

18a. The cult of *Guru* in Assam Vaiṣṇavism arose after the death of Śaṅkaradeva. This system of worship of saints gave rise to many holidays in the Calendar set aside for commemoration of saints and also led to the compilation of *Carit Puthis*, biographies of the saints.

Of Śaṅkaradeva's dramas *Kāli Damana*[19] (Subjugation of the serpent Kāli) composed at Bardovā about 1518 A.D., *Patnī Prasāda* (Favour to the wives) written about 1521 A.D. at Dhuvāhāṭā, *Rāsa Kṛiḍā* or *Keli Gopāla,* (1540 A.D.), *Rukmiṇī Haraṇa* (Abduction of Rukmiṇī), *Pārijāta Haraṇa* (Stealing of the flower Pārijāta) and *Rāma-Vijaya* (Conquest of Rāma), the last composed at Cooch Behar sometime in 1568 A.D.[20] at the request of the king Naranārāyaṇa, are now extant.[21] The subject-matter of the first three plays was drawn mainly from the *Bhāgavata. Rukmiṇī Haraṇa* and *Pārijāta Haraṇa* are adaptations respectively from *Hari Vaṁśa* and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa,* the story of *Rāma Vijaya* is taken mainly from the *Rāmāyaṇa.* The stories of all these plays, however, have a happy ending. In subject-matter, technique and purpose of the plays Śaṅkaradeva had to work under certain limitations. The story of each play was predetermined and fixed; in presentation emphasis had to be given on the propaganda side rather than on artistic representation. The author here is a preacher first and artist afterwards. So he selected the episodes that served his purpose best. Nevertheless, even under these limitations, in some of his plays particularly in *Rukmiṇī Haraṇa, Pārijāta Haraṇa* and *Rāma Vijaya,* effective characterisation is noticeable ; and even in a small canvas the main characters stand out in clear relief. In *Rāma Vijaya,* when Rāma returned from Mithila in the company of Daśaratha, Sīta and

19. Tradition says that the first play produced by Śaṅkaradeva was *Cinha Yātrā.* His biographers have left detailed account of the lrst performance of this drama, where painted scenes were used, masks were worn and dance preponderated.

20. Śrīgópālapadacchatracchāyālālasamānasaḥ |
Śukladhvajanṛpa etat kārayāmāsa nāṭakam ||
Vindurandhravedacandraśāke Śaṅkara—saṃjñakaḥ |
Śrīrāmavijayo nāma nāṭakaṃ vidadhedhunā ||
Rāmavijaya or *Sītāsayamvara* is the last work of Śaṅkaradeva.

21. He is said to have written another play named *Janma Yātrā,* which is now not extant.

Lakṣmaṇa, the party met on the way Paraśu Rāma. Paraśu Rāma was angry at Rāma's breaking the bow of his master Śiva. Paraśu Rāma bit his own shoulders in rage and challenged Rāma to a trial of strength. This intense excitement of the situation is powerfully suggested by the words of the *Sūtradhāra* and the speeches of Paraśu Rāma. The words of Daśaratha, who sought the sage's forgiveness for his son are full of parental love and solicitude. Daśaratha entreated :—

> *He Paraśurāma prabhū hāmāra putra Rāmacandra bālakamati | Ihāka doṣa maraṣa gosāi, tohāri caraṇaka dāsa bhelo | māthe khera dharo hāmāka putradāna dehu | Java nāhi kṣamā karaba, tava putraka cori hāmāra māthā lehu |*

"O Lord Paraśurāma, my son Rāmacandra is a child. Forgive him. I fall a slave at thy feet. With straw on my head I beg the safety of my son. If thou canst not forgive my son, then in exchange take thou my head."

The characters of *Pārijāta Haraṇa* have fine human touches. Nārada, the quarrel-maker, had one day presented a *Pārijāta* flower to Kṛṣṇa which Kṛṣṇa in his turn gave to Rukmiṇī who was then waiting upon her husband. The news was immediately carried by Nārada to Satyabhāmā. Satyabhāmā's jealousy was aroused at the fortune of her co-wife. She burst into a hysteric fit and became indifferent to her food and drink. Nārada again went to Kṛṣṇa and apprised him of the situation. Kṛṣṇa hurriedly went inside to comfort her. Satyabhāmā chid her husband with harsh words till Kṛṣṇa agreed to uproot the whole Pārijāta tree from Indra's garden and transplant it in Satyabhāmā's palace. Satyabhāmā accompanied Kṛṣṇa on this expedition to Amarāvatī. While Kṛṣṇa was about to uproot the tree, which act was being obstructed by the keepers of the garden, an amusing battle of words ensued between Satyabhāmā and Śacī, Indra's wife. We take at random a snatch of their conversation :

Sacī :

> *Ave Satyabhāmā, tohāri svāmī Mādhavaka kathā hāmu sava jāni.| Ohi Gopī-viṭāla Gopāla | Unikara āgu Gukulaka stri nāhi rahala | Dekhu kaṃsaka dāsi Kūbuji tāheka hāta eḍāvala nāhi | Tāheka āra ki kahava | Aisana anācāri Kṛṣṇaka garava kavekahŏ hāmāka Pārijāta niyā jāya | Aḥ vajrapāte savaṃse nāśa bheli | Jānava | *****

Satyabhāmā :

> *Āve Indrāṇi, Jagataka parama guru hāmāra svāmi | Jāhera nāma sumarite mahā mahā pāpīsava saṃsāra nistare | tāheka atave nindā karaha | Āve nilājinī marite najāna | Tohāri svāmī Indraka kathā kahite ghṛnāse upaje | Dekho Amarāvatika yata veśyā tohāka svāmika se nahi āṇṭala | Tahāri svāmī kayali ko | Gautama ṛṣīka bhāryā Ahalyā ṭāheka māyākarikahu jāti bhraṣṭa kayala | Tannimitte sava śarīra dhākijonidāka bhela | Āve pāmari aisana Indraka hāmāka āgu vakhāṇaha | ******

Śaci speaks :

> O you Satyabhāmā, I know well of your husband Mādhava, a cowherd who did mischief to the Gopī. The women of Gokula had no escape from him. Even the hunch-backed maid of Kaṃsa could not save herself from him. What more should I say ? To such a Kṛṣṇa, I emphasize this: you are stealing my Pārijāta blossoms. You would be exterminated along with your line, I am quite sure.

Satyabhāmā retorts :

> Well Indrānī, know that the lord of the world is my husband; the mere contemplation of his name liberates great sinners from worldly life. How do you dare to speak ill of him? O you shameless one, do you not know how to die? To refer to your husband Indra gives me disgust. Look, even the harlots of Amarāvatī could not bring satisfaction to Indra, and see what he did ? Ahalyā, the holy wife of Gautama was polluted by a device of magic. It is for this that the person fo your husband was covered with a thousand marks of disgrace. You low-bred woman, you extol this Indra before me ?

These characters, though classical, do not reveal in their speech, demeanour and action any trace of the dignity and grandeur of the original. In reality they represent the rustic women of the author's time. Again both in *Rukmiṇī Haraṇa* and *Rāma Vijaya,* Śaṅkaradeva introduced a few love scenes probably to suit the requirements of the illiterate audience.

A noteworthy characteristic of these plays is that in them verses greatly preponderate and the author uses them to further the progress of the play. Situations and incidents, at places, instead

of being represented through action and character are suggested by the mere machinery of descriptive verses put into the mouth of the *Sūtradhāra*. Most of the minor incidents, and feelings, sentiments, even of the major characters are displayed through songs. Thus in *Rāma Vijaya* Rāma's adventures with the Rākṣasī Tārakā, while Rāma was on his way to the hermitage of Kauśika, and later the scenes of sacrifice where he killed the Rākṣasas such as Subāhu and Mārīca in the hermitage of Kauśika, are effectively recited in songs and not shown in action. Again in *Rukmiṇī Haraṇa* such incidents as Rukmiṇī's entreaties to Kṛṣṇa to save her brother's life, the bridal procession of Kṛṣṇa and Rukmiṇī to Dvārakā and the gay picture of the marriage are recounted only in songs. The use of dance is another device by which the story is unfolded to the audience. The dialogue and characterisation are very thin and feeble in such dramas as *Patnī Prasāda, Rāskrīḍā* and *Kāli Damana*. Their stories are chiefly described by the *Sūtradhāra* in prose and verse. Unlike as in Sanskrit plays, the *Sūtradhāra* is an integral part in an *Aṅkīyā* drama and he remains all along on the stage. He opens the play, introduces the characters, gives them directions, announces their exit and entrance on the stage, fills up lacunae in the action of the play by song, dance and speeches, and lectures wherever any opportunity arises on the ethical and spiritual points of the plot.

The *Bhaṭimās* of the plays serve mainly as epilogues and prologues. Some are, however, of the nature of panegyric poetry. The *Bhaṭimā* recited by the *Sūtradhāra* in *Rāma Vijaya* unfolds before us the top-knot beauty of Sītā and is very impressive :—

Ki kahaba rūpa kumārīka Rāma |
Kaṇaka putali tula tanu anupāma ||
Ratana tilaka lola alaka kapola |
Heriye bhrubhaṅga tribhuvana bhola ||
Dekhiyā badana cānda bheli lāja |
Nayana nirikhi kamala jala mājha ||
Heriye bhujayuga milala ucaṅka |
Lalita mṛṇāla majala jala paṅka ||
Ārakata karatala muni mana moha |
Kaṇaka śalakā aṇguli karu śoha ||
Banduli nindi adhara karu kānti ||
Dāḍimba niviḍa vīja danta pānti ||
Īṣata hasita madana moha jāi |
Nāsā tilaphula kamalinī māi ||
Nava yauvana tana badari pramāṇa ||

Uru karikara kaṭi dambaruka thāna ||
Pada paṅkaja nava paḷlava pāntī |
Campaka pākari āṅguli karu kānti ||
Nakhacaya cāru cānda parakāśa |
Lahu lahu mattagajagamana vilāsa ||
Kata lāvanu vihi niramala jāni |
Kokila-nāda amiya jhure vāṇī ||

"O Rāma, how to describe the beauty of the princess ? Her figure is like an exquisite image of gold. There is the jewelled mark on her forehead with tresses hanging down. At the sight of her demeanour the three worlds are entranced, the sight of her face shamed the moon, the sight of her eyes sent the lotus down into the deep. Seeing her arms the graceful lotus stalk disappeared under the mud. Her palms are so red that they absorb the attention even of sages. Her fingers shine as gold sticks. Her cheeks outshine the *Banduli* flower. The rows of the teeth are as thick as the seeds of the pomegranate. Her slightly smiling face enthrals even the god of love. The sweet maid's nose is the blossom of the sesamum; with fresh youth her breasts grow to the size of plums. Her thighs are like the trunk of an elephant; her waist like a *dambaru*. Her feet are like a row of fresh leaves; her fingers gleam like *Campaka* petals. The nails look like the moon. Her slow movement resembles the majestic steps of an elephant. So much sweetness the Creator could make ! He words stream like delicate notes of the cuckoo."

For technique, Śaṅkaradeva's indebtedness to Sanskrit dramatic theory is complete. He utilized in the *Aṅkiyā* dramas *nāndī*, benediction, *prastāvanā*, prologue and epilogue. Prologue and epilogue described as *Bhaṭimā* are in Assamese verse; *nāndī* verses are in Sanskrit.

We quote the following extract from *Kāli Damana* to illustrate Śaṅkaradeva's skill in Sanskrit verse compositions,[22] use of songs and prose, and specimen of dramatic technique followed in his plays.[23]

22. Sanskrit influence is overwhelming in the plays; and verses written in Sanskrit are interspersed all through them. For these plays Śaṅkaradeva himself wrote about one hundred and eighty stanzas in Sanskrit in diverse metres.

23. Further, this citation may help scholars in the comparative study of the development of dramatic literatures in other Modern Indian languages also.

Kāḷi Damana

Śrīkṛṣṇāya naṁaḥ

Śloka

Meghaśyāmalamūrtimāyatamahābāhuṃ mahôraḥsthlam
Āraktāyatakañjalocanayugaṃ pītāmbaraṃ sundaram |
Muktāhīrakahemahāravalayālaṃkārakāntidyutim
Kṛṣṇam śārada-sāndracandrasadṛśaṃhṛd paṅkajehambhaje ||

Api ca:

Yenākāri mahāhidarpadalanaṃ krīḍā hradinyā jale
Yenābhāji bhujaṅgabhoganikhilaṃ padbhyāṃ mudā
marddṭam ||
Yenāmāri mahāmahāsuracamūcakraṃ paraṃ līlayā
Tasmai- śrīkaruṇāmayāya mahate Kṛṣṇāya nityaṃ namaḥ ||

Sūtradhāra — Uhi prakāre Śrīkṛṣṇaka paraṇāma kayēkaho, sabhāsada lokaka sambodhi bola

Śloka

Bho bhoḥ sāmājikā yūyaṃ śṛṇudhvaṃ śraddhayādhunā ||
Kṛṣṇasya kālidamana-yātrā-vārtāṃ nibodhata ||

Sūtradhāra — Āhe sabhāsada loka, ye parama puruṣôttama sanātana Nārāyaṇa Śrī Śrī Kṛṣṇa uhi sabhāmadhye kālidamana līlā yātra[24] *parama kautuke karaba | tāhe sāvadhāne dekhaha śunaha | Nirantare Haribola Hari.*

Bhaṭimā

Jaya jaya yadukula Kamala prakāśaka
nāśaka kaṃsaka prāṇa |
Jaya jaya jagataka bhakataka bhīti
niti kara nirajāna ||
Jaya jaganāyaka mukui dāyaka
sāyaka śāraṅgadhārī |
Duṣṭa Ariṣṭaka muṣṭika moḍala
Coḍala bandhu Murāri ||
Dharu Govardhana bāraṇa barikhana
bheli Indramada dūra |

24. These are also called Yātrā in the plays.

Tribhuvana kampaka kāḷi sarpaka
darpaka kayali cūra ||
Nandaku nandana vandana devaka
sevaka yākeri sarbba |
Gopamukhe anna māgala bhāṅgala
dvija nijakarma garbba ||
Gôkula jana yata tāraka māraka
kuvalaya Dhenuka nāśi |
Putanikā tana Śôsala môṣala
tôsala mana vrajavāsī ||
E dukha dāhaka pāvaka bhāvaka
pūrala puna manakāma |
Jagajana jātaka pātaka ghātaka
yākeri e guṇa nāma ||
Yāhe bhakati rakati śakati
tārala uhi saṃsāra |
Kīṭa pataṅgama jaṅgama saṅgama
bhakataka pāi nistāra ||
Sohi Kṛṣṇaka uhi nāṭaka
utpātaka dukha mūla |
Kalimala ānala jānala māṇala
nāhi nāhi uhi tula |
Śuna sava loi hoi noi
dekhahu vacana bicāri |
Iha saṃsāra sāra nāhi āra
cintahu caraṇa Murāri ||
Brahmā Maheśvara cākara pākara
tākara guṇa muhē lehu |
Bāndhava Mādhava sādhava mukuti
tāhe caraṇe citta dehu ||
Uhi Īśvara tāraka māraka
kāraka sava saṃsāra ||
Tāhe karu seva devaka deva
nāhi nāhi Hari vine āra ||
Yataye paramā dharamā karamā
savakahu rājā nāma |
Kṛṣṇaka kiṅkara Śaṅkara kahu
save bolahu rāma rāma ||

Sūtradhāra — Āhe sabhāsada loka, ye jagataka parama guru parama puruṣa puruṣottama sanātana Brahmā Maheśa sevita caraṇa pamkaja Nārāyaṇa Śrī Śrī Kṛṣṇa uhi sabhāmadhye Kāli Damana nāma līlā yātrā kautuke karaba tāhe sāvadhāne dekhaha śunaha | Nirantare Haribola Hari || (Ākāśaka karṇa diyā) Āhe Saṅgī, kona vādya śuniye |

Saṅgī — Sakhi, mṛdaṅga vamśīdhvani śuni | Āḥ milala milala ||

Śloka

Govatsān puratah kṛtvā gopālaḥ pālakaḥ satām
Sabhāṃ praviveśa gopaiḥ saha veṇuṃ ninādayan |

Sūtradhāra — Āhe sāmājika loka hāmu ye kahala sohi Īśvara Śrī Gopāla vatsapāla sahite ethā praveśi kahu yaice līlā kautuka karaba tāhe dekhaha śunaha | Nirantare Haribola Hari ||

Gīta

Rāga Sindhurā, Ekatāli

Āvata e kāṇu surabhi carāi |
Rañjita dhenu reṇu veṇu bajāi || Dhruṃ

Pada

Śire śikhaṇḍaka gaṇḍakuṇḍala dólāve |
Ure hemahāra hīrā mañjira jurāve ||
Bālaka beḍhi kheli khelaite yāya |
Kahatu Śaṅkara gati Govinda pāya ||

Sūtradhāra — Aisana līlā keli kautuke nṛtya karite Gopāla sahite śiśusava Kālihradaka samīpa pāvala | Se viṣamaya pānī nājāni parama piyāse pīḍita huyā savahu hradara jala udara bhari pāna karala | Tatakāle | durghora viṣajālā pānīye cetana harala | Śarīra kampi Kampi prāṇa cāri vatsa vatsapālasava kālindi tīre parala |

Śloka

Vatsakān pālakān Kṛṣṇo vilokya mṛtakān tadā |
Cakāra pracuraṃ khedam adbhutaṃ bhaktavatsalaḥ ||

Sūtradhara — Tadanantare vatsa vatsapāla savaka viṣajala pāne mṛtaka pekhi Śrī Kṛṣṇa hā hā ki bheli buli dharikahū ulata pālata kari dekhala | Nirantare prāṇa marala |[25]

25. Up to this point the *Sūtradhāra* dominates the play. He recites the *Nāndī Śloka*, unfolds the *prastāvanā*, sings the *Bhaṭimā* song, introduces the characters and goes on narrating incidents of the play both with songs and dances. This is true, more or less, of all the plays of Śaṅkaradeva.

Section V

INFLUENCE OF CONTEMPORARY POETS

It is true that the Vaiṣṇavite movement gave a tremendous impetus to the development of Asamese literature in various directions but to the personality and the genius of Śaṅkaradeva it added fresh lustre. Śaṅkaradeva was himself the source of infinite inspiration to his contemporary writers.[26] His devout disciple Mādhava Deva, another literary illumni of the time, composed songs[27] and dramas at the suggestion of his guru. The incident relating to the commission for compilation of *Nāmaghoṣā* or *Hājārī Ghoṣā* by Mādhava Deva, a book of philosophical verses is described in *Kathā Guru Carita* in a graphic manner.[28] Mādhava Deva undertook the translation of Viṣṇupuri Sannyāsī's *Bhakti Ratnāvali,* and composed the kāvya *Rājasūī*[29] at the request of Śaṅkaradeva. Tradition goes so far that the first couplet of each of the texts of *Nāmaghoṣā* and *Bhakti Ratnāvalī* was composed by Śaṅkaradeva as a mark of loving admiration for his disciple. Rāma Sarasvatī, another voluminous contemporary writer undertook to render the *Mahābhārata* at the suggestion of Śaṅkaradeva.[30] His indebtedness to Śaṅkara was very great. An interesting episode is recorded as to the translation of some sections of Book X of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* by the Brāhmaṇa Ananta Kandali. In a dream Ananta Kandali was directed to partake of the remains of Śaṅkara's food and when the Brāhmaṇa asked Śaṅkara for it the latter refused to offer, but instead entrusted Ananta Kandali with the rendering of the remaining sections of Book X of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa,* which Śaṅkara himself previously undertook to translate. Most of the other poets of the different Books of the *Bhāgavata* were either directly commissioned by Śaṅkaradeva or inspired by his immediate disciples to undertake the translations. Govindacaraṇa Dvija who rendered Book III of the *Bhāgavata* acknowledged clearly his indebtedness to Śaṅkaradeva and to Śaṅkara's disciple Dāmodara Deva in the following verse:

26. *Kathā Gurucarita,* p. 97.
27. *Kathā Gurucarita,* pp. 165, 209, 213.
28. *Ibid,* p. 218.
29. *Kathā Gurucarita,* p. 205.
30. B. Kakati: *Puraṇi Asamīyā Sāhitya,* p. 21.

Āmāra bāndhava bandhu Śrīmanta Śaṅkara |
Tehe viracilā pada Śrī Bhāgavatara ||
Si sava kathāka āmi mane ādarilo |
Si kāraṇe samkṣepiyā pada viracilo ||

Sārvabhauma Bhattacharya, another well-known Brāhmaṇa scholar himself tells us that he resided at Prāgjyotiṣapura where he was known as a devout Śākta. He entered into a long discussion with Śaṅkaradeva about the merits of the two forms of Vaiṣṇava and Śākta worship and getting defeated in dispute he left for Banaras for study under a teacher, Bisweswar Chakravarti. After five years of close study, he became, as he tells us, well versed in *śāstras*. At Banaras he made up his mind to become a worshipper of Hari and on his return he at once turned to Śaṅkara and became one of his disciples (*Śaṃkaraka guru māni śaraṇa paśila*). Afterwards at the inspiration of Śaṅkaradeva, Sārvabhauma rendered into Assamese certain sections of the *Padma Purāṇa*.

It would indeed be a long list to mention the names of Śrīdhara Kandali, Śiṣṭa Bhattāchāryya and a host of other poets of the period who were indebted in various ways to Śaṅkaradeva.

Section VI

LANGUAGE AND LITERARY FORMS

After this brief summary no separate treatment seems necessary about the dominant motif of Śaṅkaradeva's literature. His literature was meant chiefly to serve practical purposes in the Vaiṣṇavite movement. Śaṅkarite literature in tone, colour and form, appears predominantly to be religious and, therefore, suffers from certain limitations. Nevertheless there are magnificent and inspired utterances that have a universal appeal and touch every human heart. In many of such passages philosophy, morals, rules of conduct are given not only to his age but for all ages.

We have already noticed that Nature, too, has some place in Śaṅkaradeva's writings. In fact, the brilliant descriptions of Nature were largely instrumental in rendering many of his religious verses into real gems of lyrical poetry. The poet took rapturous delight in lingering over the description of the beauties of rivers, oceans, groves, forests and mountain scenery. He portrayed them as they presented themselves to his eyes, and did not project his own feelings and sentiments into them. Although not

attempting to discover any spiritual message he saw in her glory and manifestation of the Creator. Take his famous passages from Divya Upavana in the Haramohana or the Citrakūṭa in Gajendra Upākhyāna. Each one of them exhibits the author's delicate observation of Nature and unfolds a colourful landscape.

To judge Śaṅkaradeva, it is necessary to say a word about his use of language, verse forms and other literary embellishments. It has already been said that in *Baragītas* and *Aṅkīyā* dramas Śaṅkaradeva used a kind of mongrel dialect known as Brajabuli. His other verse compositions were, however, in simple and racy Assamese as his mission was to educate the common men with great ideas. The Assamese language was born out of Māgadhi Prākrit and the influence of Prākrit abundantly lingered in his vocables and phonology. Moreover, this led to confused forms and varied vocabularies. In his language we find simplification of conjoint consonants, omission in certain words even of the intervocalic consonants, reduction of aspirates to *h*, change of *y* into *j*, lengthening and shortening of vowels for metrical exigencies, less use of compounds (*samāsa*) and special knack for spontaneous nasalisation. Cases of confusion are commonly seen in *t* and *ṭ*, *s* and *ṣ*, *n* and *ṇ*, *l* and *r*, *ṛ*, and *ri*.[31]

Assamese was till then in its formative stage. So it forced the poet to invent new words or to coin new forms and idioms, more effective than the existing old words. His catholic mind prompted him to borrow words unhesitatingly from Perso-Arabic vocables. In verse forms, Śaṅkaradeva followed his great master Mādhava Kandali and adopted the traditional and standard metres *Pada, Dularī, Chavi, Jhumurā,* etc., with masterly metrical skill.

We have already noticed that Śaṅkaradeva was an erudite scholar in Sanskrit and he drank deep into the Sanskrit literature. Besides borrowing materials for his *kāvyas* and *plays* from the *Vedas,* the *Upaniṣadas,* the *Rāmāyaṇa,* the *Mahābhārata,* the various *Purāṇas* and the *Tantra*-texts, Śaṅkaradeva composed *ślokas* and *stotras* even in Sanskrit. Further, he compiled an anthology of Sanskrit verses on Vaiṣṇavite faith and philosophy. The title of the text is *Bhakti Ratnākara;*[32] and it contains

31. It is difficult to say something definite on phonology for different manuscripts reveal different phonological peculiarities.

32. The manuscript is now being edited for publication by Pandit Manoranjan Śastrī, Nalbari.

near about forty sections relating to diverse topics on Vaiṣṇavism. The verses of the book were collected from such works as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Prabodha Candrodaya Nāṭaka, Śānti Sataka* of the Kasmir poet Śihlana, *Vaiṣṇavānanda Lahari* and *Yogasāra.*

In literary conventions, modes, figures of speech also Śaṅkaradeva closely adhered to the canons of the Sanskrit poetics and followed the classical traditions. Most of the imageries, expressions, ideas used in his poetry were drawn from the inexhaustible source of Sanskrit poetry; as for instance the comparison of the loveliness of a body to the flash of lightning (*vijulī reha*) or burnt gold (*tapta suvarṇa*), the thighs to trunks of an elephant (*karikara*), or stems of plantain, the neck to a conch (*kambukaṇṭha*), the arms to rounded body of a serpent (*valita bhujanga*), the forearms to lotus stalk (*mṛṇāla daṇḍa*), fingers to the petals of *campaka* flower (*campaka pāpari*), or sticks of gold (*kaṇaka śalakhā*), an eye to a new lotus petal or a *cakovā* bird, the eyebrows to Cupid's bow, the sidelong glance to Cupid's arrow, face to moon, nose to a sesamum flower, redness of the lips to a *banduli* flower or a ripe *bimba* fruit, the well formed teeth to rows of pearls or seeds of a pomegranate, breasts to *badari* fruits or ample jars, movements to swan's (*Rājahaṃsa*), elephant's (*gajagati*) or to lion's (*mṛgarāja*), voice to cuckoo and hundreds of such stereotyped comparisons. Among various figures of speech alliteration which goes to create impression with different sounds and marvellous melody is seen all through his poetry. Repetition of the same syllable in the following *Baragīta* presents a brilliant example of alliteration while describing march of Rāma's army to Laṇkā :—

Rāga : Aśovārī

Śuna śuna re sura vairī pramāṇā niśācara nāśa nidānā |
Rāmanāma yama samaraka sāji samadale kayali payānā ||
Ṭhāṭa prakaṭa paṭu Dhruṃ kauṭi kauṭi kapi giri garagara pada ghāve |
Bāridhi tari tari kare gurutara giri-dhari dhari samaraka dhāve ||
Hāṭa ghāṭa vahu vāṭa viyapi Caugaḍe veḍhali Laṅkā |
Guru ghana ghana ghoṣa gharisaṇa garjjana Śravaṇe janamaya śaṅkā ||

Dhīra vīra sura śekhara Rāghava Rāvaṇa tuvā pari jhāmpe |
Sura nara kinnara phaṇadhara tharathara Mahīdhara tarasi prakampe ||
Andha mugudha daśakandha pāpabudha jānakī śirata carāi |
Raghupati pada-vara dhara rajani cara Śaṅkara kahatu upāi ||

"Listen, O people ,listen, the destroyer of demon enemies, the cause of destruction of the rākṣasas.
He whose name is Rāma, marches out to the fierce battle accompanied by his hosts.
Millions are the monkeys skilled in the show of fight, the hills shaking at the strike of their feet.
Crossing the sea they take hills and mountains in hand and rush to the battle-field.
Spreading over streets and market places they encircle Laṅkā.
Every now and then is heard noise like that of claps of thunder
and the clash of clouds,
so that it strikes the listener with fear.
Steady, chief among heroes, is Rāghava—
Rāvaṇa, on you he does leap !
Gods, men, kinnaras, serpents—all shake—
the mountains quake in terror.
O you blind and fatuous ten-headed one
you of misguided intelligence,
Take Jānakī on your head and take her back,
O you night prowler, take to the shelter of Raghūpati—
this is the means (of saving yourself) given by Śaṅkara".

In the following verses, to illustrate how strong is the desire for pleasures of the senses, several forceful illustrations are set down:

Viṣayara duḥkha jāni tathāpito eko prāṇī neḍe dunāi tāke bhuñji mare |
Galata bāndhiyā pāghe kātibāka nenta chāge yena nilarjjatā āti kare ||
Aneka bhartsani pāi ucchiṣṭa bhūñjibe yāi yena aṭi kukura nirgate |

(Śrīkṛṣṇara Vaikuṇṭha Prayāṇa)

"Worldliness is unhappiness.
Creatures know this.
Yet none forsakes it, rather all run after it again.
Like goat which behaves disgracefully
Even when led to the altar for sacrifice, roped by the neck.
Or like a shameless dog though uninvited
and vehemently chid
come to partake of the remains of a feast".

Of the figures of sense, similes of various types are a very favourable device and are frequently employed to elaborate an idea. Sometimes series of similes run through a stanza to impress one and the same fact again and again. To suggest Śiśupāla's undeserving desire to marry Rukmiṇī, no less than a dozen similes are piled up together:

Moka vihā karibāka āila Śiśupāla |
Mora māne teveto jīvana bhaila bhāla ||

Tāhāra ki mukhe moka vihāibāka pāre |
Siṃhara bhāryāka yena śṛgāla āhāre ||

Hāta mele candraka chavāla yena raṅge |
Amṛtaka icchā kare cukare kona beṅge ||

Sehimate āśā Śiśupālara āmāka |
Yena jañja bhāgaka bhuñjibe cāve kāka ||

Māhādāna khoje yena patita brāhmaṇa |
Viśiṣṭa svargaka vāñcai brahmavadhi jana ||

Sehimate āśā Śiśupāla nṛpatira |
Tāra mukhe svāmī huibe pāibe Rukmiṇīra ||

Trailókyara nātha mādhavaka eri yāi |
Kone Śiśupālaka varibe cakṣu khāi ||

Siṃha eri śukaraka khoje kona prāṇī |
Dugdha eri kona jane piye mācho pānī ||

"(Rukmiṇī says) This Śiśupāla comes to marry me: my life has taken a better turn indeed ! With what cheek has he come to marry me? As a fox would feed on the female of the lion, as a baby would snatch at the moon, as the frog from the corner would desire for nectar, so would Śiśupāla desire me. As the crow would feed on the offerings made at a *yajña,* as the degraded Brāhmaṇa would covet great gifts, as the Brāhmaṇa-slayer would desire for the high heaven, so would king Śiśupāla desire me. He talks of being husband to Rukmiṇī. But setting aside Mādhava, the Lord of the three worlds, who would shut one's eyes and choose Śiśupāla? What man would ignore the lion and ask for the pig? Who would ignore milk and drink fish-washing water?"

He is also rich in other *alaṃkāras* such as *Rūpaka, Utprekṣā, Vyājastuti, Arthāntaranyāsa, Svabhāvokti,* etc. Another literary skill which made Śaṅkaradeva's writings acceptable to the popular mind is the use of proverbs in surprising numbers. These pithy sayings, racy of the soil, are used to illustrate facts of ordinary life, moral precepts and the wisdom of the common man.

It cannot be denied that Śaṅkaradeva had great fondness for repetition. We come across frequent repetitions of imagery, expressions, sermons, refrains, incidents and even set descriptions. As rightly pointed out by L. N. Bezbarua, many passages of *Kīrtana* occur in *Daśama* and agree verse by verse, sometimes only with slight variations. The *Bhaṭimās* of the plays *Rukmiṇī Haraṇa* and *Rāma Vijaya* describing the beauties of Kṛṣṇa and Rukmiṇī, Rāma and Sītā, are identical both in ideas and expression. But whatever be the merits or limitations of Śaṅkaradeva's writings, they have been for the last five centuries a source of delight, inspiration, consolation and wisdom to the Assamese people. In his own age Śaṅkaradeva was acclaimed as a master poet, and his compositions became the model and criterion of poetic excellence during the succeeding generations. We honour him for greatly developing the resources of the Assamese language, for widening the imaginative range of Assamese literature and for raising it to classical elegance and richness by imparting into it what is good and beautiful in Sanskrit. In the significant expression of Mādhava Deva, we may say that "formerly the streams of love-nectar flowed only within the confines of heaven, until Śaṅkara came and breached the embankments; and lo! now it flows tumultuous through all the world". Despite a change of outlook, shifting of ideals, and birth of new literary forms, Śaṅkaradeva's literature has come to stay with us as a standard and measure of great poetry. Even today his *Aṅkīyā* plays are acted, the *Baragītas* are sung and the Kāvyas are read with enthusiasm. We treasure them as a part of our national, cultural and spiritual heritage.

EARLY ASSAMESE PROSE

BY

B. K. BARUA

I. Prose of the *Aṅkīyā Nāṭas*

Though recorded literature in Assamese began as early as the twelfth century A.D. prose came to it very much later. The earliest specimens of Assamese literature are written in songs and verses. Verse was employed even in subjects which were definitely non-poetical in nature. Even subjects like astronomy, medicine, arithmetic got a versified treatment. The use of prose was, however, first found in the *Aṅkīyā* plays of Śaṅkaradeva. In the dialogues of these plays Śaṅkaradeva employed a mongrel dialect called Brajabuli. Though originally sprung from the Maithili, Brajabuli may be called a sub-Assamese language for it was nurtured and nourished by Assamese poets and writers. In the middle ages Assamese scholars used to visit the various centres of learning in northern India for education and pilgrimage. In those days, Mithila was a noted centre of Vaiṣṇavite learning. Scholars and devotees who visited Mithilā from Assam studied not only scriptures but also learnt the songs of Maithili poets like Vidyāpati and Umāpati. In imitation of these popular songs the Assamese poets were tempted to compose songs, verses and plays in a mixed Assamese-Maithili speech.

In structure, the *Aṅkīyā Nāṭas* are dramas no doubt, but in content they are nothing but a combination of songs and lyrics put in a dramatic form. Even their dialogues are rhythmic and read like musical prose. A passage like the following alone gives a clear idea of the language employed in these plays and their musical style than any analysis:

Tadanantare parama vipriya vāṇī śuniye rājanandinīka māthe yaice kalasa bhāgala Śrīkṛṣṇaka nairāsa śunie diśa daśa andhiyāri dekhiye murchhita huyā tatkāle parala yaise kadalika vāte upāralu | Śrīkṛṣṇaka virahatāpe Rukmiṇīka yaice avasthā milala tāhe dekhaha śunaha ||

Besides, the prose of these plays reveals such rhetorical figures of speech as assonance and alliteration which are generally considered to be the traits of verse. These poetic embellishments are not sparingly used, on the contrary a whole sentence resounds with poetical vocabulary. For example;

Jagataka parama guru parama puruṣa puruṣottama sanātana Brahmā Maheśa sevita caraṇa paṃkaja Nārāyaṇa Śrī Śrī Kṛṣṇa | Sohi Daśaratha rājakumāra koṭi kandapa darpa dalana Śrī Rāmacandra ||

For another peculiarity also the prose of these plays resembles verse. Occasionally the last words of consecutive sentences would end in rhyme, and at places different sentences would possess equal numbers of syllables as in verse.

This prose contains many colloquial and homely expressions. Words, phrases, similes from everyday speech were laid under contribution and made to fit into the dramatic style. A few of the homely Assamese similes that frequently occur are:

Kācaka cāhite māṇika harāya (In looking for glass one loses pearls);

Jaice śiśira pari padma saṅkucita bhaila (As a lotus closes under dew);

Jaicana vanāgni vṛṣti jale nirbāpita bhaila (As a forest fire is put out by rain);

Kadalika vāte upārala (As a plantain tree is uprooted by the wind).

It should be noted that *Aṅkīyā Nāṭas* were patterned after Sanskrit models and this not merely in plot-construction but also in subject-matter. This explains the presence of Sanskrit influences in them. Besides, inclusion of *Nāndī ślokas* in Sanskrit, the *Aṅkīyā Nāṭas* abound in many Sanskrit and Sanskritised expressions and sentences.

The post-Śaṅkarite *Aṅkīya Nāṭas* disclose a conventionality. They have before them the same ideal and pattern and this has continued so till to-day. *Aṅkīyā Nāṭas* are composed even now particularly by the religious pontiffs of the Satras in the very same artificial Brajabuli language. Though there is not much of originality in dramatic style, form and technique yet these dramatists exhibit remarkable power in craftsmanship and handling a language which is not in current use. The *Aṅkīyā Nāṭas* made immense contribution in the field of Assamese drama and dramatic literature, and their contribution in the development of early Assamese prose cannot be too highly emphasised.

II. *Prose of the Mantra texts*

Contemporaneous with or even earlier than the prose of the *Aṅkīyā* plays we have the prose of the charms and riddles which are commonly known as *Mantra Puthis*.[1] These books have not only literary value but also historical importance as the repository of popular beliefs of the middle ages. The chief of these *Mantra* books are: *Karati Puthi* (associated with knife), *Virā-Jarā Puthi* (Charms against evil spirits), *Sāpara Dharaṇī Mantra* (Snake charms), *Sarvaḍhākā Mantra* (Charms covering all), *Śuci Mantra* (Auspicious charms).

Very old though these charms are, it is difficult to ascertain their definite date of composition. They were surely written at different times and hence the prodigiousness of the difficulty. In many of the charms one comes across references to the *Quoran* and the *Firingis*. The subject-matters of the Mantra-Puthis are to some extent related to the *Atharva Veda*. In the *Brahma Karati* there are clear references to it and in one passage it says: "God was sleeping in His eternal bed. When He exhaled His breath, the four *Vedas* came out of Him. To this the *Araṇya Karati* of the *Atharva Veda* can bear witness".

Some of the charms bear traces even of the *Buddhist Dhāraṇīs*. The Assamese *Mantra* texts further have been highly influenced by popular beliefs and superstitions. The very fact that the charms are generally practised by non-Brahmanical medical men proves that this literature has no Vedic sanction. In the *Brahma Karati* these texts have, therefore, been called the *Obhotā Veda* (The *Veda* upturned). In order to give a Vedic stamp to the charms, expressions like *Om, Svāhā*, etc. have been woven into them. Many of these charms, further, end in words like *uṁg, aṁg, hriṁg, um, kroṁg, phat*, etc. having a magical ring.[2]

The prose of these writings is irregular and cryptic. The sentences have a disjointed structure and are free from the rigours of grammar. They lack the essential characteristics of prose style

1. Popular editions of these texts are printed by various publishers.
2. In this connection we may appropriately quote the statement of J. Vendryes who holds that words possess a magical value which accounts for the power of incantations and curses. Further, the mere word suffices to produce powerful effects, especially when it is enshrined in a verse, where the words are fixed and governed by rhythm. Virgil says that a formula in rhyme will make the moon come down out of heaven. *Language*, pp. 184-85.

namely coherence and precision; most of the sentences are but a conglomeration of unintelligible and mystic expressions and phrases without grammatical verbs and proper syntactical forms. Here is a passage as illustration:

Rāmara śara Lakṣmaṇara śara nāga śara pāta śara cingliyā śara piṅgaliyā śara deva śara Indra śara.....

These mystic charms read more like verse than prose, and since they are composed for the purpose of incantation, it is natural that they should be rhythmic and resemble songs. The balance, the symmetry, presence of alliteration, repetition of phrases like formulas are other qualities which make them approximate to verse. As literature, these charms are not without their importance. At places they contain narrative passages with literary ornamentation. The following picture of the divine court of Brahmā in the *Sudarśana Karati* reveals a first attempt at sustained descriptive writing in a mixed prosaic poetical style and with a facile handling of rhetorical figures:

Brahmādeva bahi āche camatkāra kari | ādi puvata vasilā Indra Yama dakṣiṇata | uttarata Kuvera Varuṇa paścimata | āno devagaṇo āche sabhā pāti sehi samājaka cakra dekhileka pāche | dekhi tharahari kāmpe yata prajā āche | camakāra kari Indra surapati kāmpe Yama Varuṇa Kuvera | meru mandara kāmpe kari tharathara | koṭi sūrya sama yena cakra sudarśana | pralayara agni yena dahi kare channa | bharaka bharaka kari gāve lāge jui | palāi deva daitya ceñcāporā hui | caribaka saṅkā nāhi cakṣu yāya phuṭi | yāke yaite pāve cakra pelāilo kāti |

In translation the passage somewhat reads like this:

"The god Brahmā was sitting in a gorgeous manner. Indra took his seat to the east while Yama to the south of him. To his north sat Kuvera and Varuṇa, and to the west sat other gods in assembly. To that court came the wheel (*cakra*), seeing which all members felt a violent tremor. Indra, the king of the immortals, Yama, Varuṇa, Kuvera, all shook violently. The polar mountain Mandara also shook terribly. The wheel *Sudarśana* is brighter than a crore of suns together and its intensity was greater than the fire of doomsday cataclysm. The gods and the demons began stampeding at the impact of the fire radiated by the wheel. Nobody could look at it without getting their eyes blinded. The wheel tore to pieces whomsover it got within its reach".

Here is another passage which describes the flight of ghosts before the terrible wheel of *Sudarśana*. It is interesting not only for its narration and homely style but also for the touch of humour which is rather rare in early prose writings :

Kāro eko khāna kāṇa kulāra samāna | eka kāne dui kāṇa āru cāri kāṇa | eka bhari dui bhari kāro koṅgā bhari | cakrara bhayata save palāi lavari | ati kato dhelā kato kalā kato kujā kato khorā kato bejimuvā kato dānta āchanta joṅgā | cakrara bhayata lāgi palāi nirantara | kato kukuramuvā uṭamuvā bekā bhari peṅgā peṅgeri | kato barāmuvā bāghamuvā kato dīghalamuvā | kato dīghala peṭā kato jibhā meli thakā | kato mukhe bara lāla | kato oparacakuvā kato ṭheṭu bhagā | kato kāmorīyā peṭa | juṭilā juṭuli culi kāro mūra joṅgā | kāro hāṭa cuṭi dui bhari cuṭi kāro peṭa yāya māṭita bāgari | beṅgara samāna cakṣu cepeṭā nāsikā | kāro cuṭi ḍhola peṭa kato beṅgāmuvā | kato caku kaṇā kato caku khala cāla suturā suturi | kāro dui bhari phure māṭita cucari | gāvata hārara mālā bhasma dhuli | kato dui bhari āche oparata tuli | kato phecā nakā śāsana śaliyā | save yakṣa palāya lavari |

In translation the passage reads like this :

"Some had ears as big as winnowing fans. Some had one or two or even four ears. Others had either one leg or two and were lying before the *Sudarśana* wheel; all fled helter-skelter. Some were leprous white while others were as black as ebony. Some lame or hunch-backed and others possessed mouths shaped like the needle. Others possessed long and sharp-pointed teeth. The faces of some resembled the faces of camels, dogs, hogs or tigers. Others were long-mouthed. Some were long-bellied. Others had hanging tongues, or watering tongues, water trickling down their chins. Some had eyes turned upward. The hair of some were matted. The heads of some were pointed, some had very short hands and legs, with the result that while moving their bellies brushed the earth. Others possessed eyes and flat noses like those of frogs. Some even looked like toads. Some were blind. Others had their eyes sunk to the sockets. The skins of some were choppy. The legs of some went splashing, while the legs of others were held upwards. Their bodies were besmeared with human ashes and garlands of bones dangled from their necks. All these ghosts took to flight."

The passage doubtless reads more like verse than prose or a curious blending of both. It should be noted that prose emerged

out of poetry, and in early prose there was a close resemblance between the two. In this connection the observation which Dr. S. K. De made with reference to the language of *Śūnya Purāṇa*, an early Bengali prose text, may also be appropriately applied to the *Mantra Puthis*. "Not only the condensed mode and ordenance of verse is followed here" says Dr. De, "but the symmetry of the lines, turns of phrases peculiar to verse, the refrain-like repetition of sentences, the very frequent intrusion of half-staves or full verse lines capable of accurate scansion, occasional occurrence of end-rhymes, and lastly, the muffled under-hum of verse-rhythm throughout—all indicate that the passage, in close approach to the rhythm and tune of poetry, was meant, if it is prose at all, to be chanted with the verses to which it was only an appendage".[3]

III. *Bhaṭṭadeva and his prose-works*

The *Aṅkīyā Nāṭas* and the charms hold the earliest specimens of prose, but they are mostly specimens only. This was first conferred on Assamese prose by Bhaṭṭadeva who directly and mainly employed prose for literary treatment. It was in his hands that Assamese prose was hardened, nourished and was fitted for the expression of high spiritual matters. Vaikuṇṭhanāth Kaviratna Bhāgavaṭa Bhaṭṭachārya, popularly known as Bhaṭṭadeva, is believed to have flourished between 1558 A.D. and 1638 A.D. His chief prose works are *Kathā Bhāgavata* (The *Bhāgavata* in prose) and *Kathā Gītā* (The *Gīta* in prose).[4] Noticing the rather early times in which *Kathā Gītā* was composed, Acharyya P. C. Ray, the noted scientist and savant of India, says, "Indeed the prose *Gītā* of Bhaṭṭadeva composed in the sixteenth century is unique in its kind.....It is a priceless treasure. Assamese prose literature developed to a stage in the far distant sixteenth century which no other literature of the world reached except the writings of Hooker and Latimer in England".

Before assessing Bhaṭṭadeva's works it is necessary to see why he discarded the traditional verse form in favour of prose. The

3. Sushil Kumar De : *History of Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 459-460.

4. *Kathā Gītā* edited by Pandit H. C. Goswami, Gauhati, 1840 Śaka (1918 A.D.) All the boks of *Kathā Bhāgavata* have not been published. So far only Books I to VI have been published by Śrī Ramadeva Adhikar Goswami of Patbāusi Satra. It should be noted that the word *Kathā* is used in *Assamese* as in Jaina literature in the sense of prose narrative.

master influence in his life was that of Dāmodara Deva at whose command Bhaṭṭadeva undertook to render these texts into Assamese prose for the benefit of women and low-caste people. Bhaṭṭadeva was to an extent successful in his great attempt. Any one who has read *Kathā Bhāgavata* and *Kathā Gītā* can without demur say that the author has succeeded in making his works intelligible to common people. By translating these two most sacred and dignified Sanskrit texts into Assamese Bhaṭṭadeva not only conferred a high status to the Assamese language but also made it an easy medium for expressing abstract thoughts and profound philosophical ideas.

Bhaṭṭadeva's learning and scholarship made his style dignified and balanced. With unparallelled skill the author has employed both Assamese and Sanskrit vocables side by side for exposition of deep spiritual thoughts. His works reveal varying styles according to the subject-matter. For, as one reads *Kathā Bhāgavata* one feels as if one is in the midst of a religious congregation assembled for faith and prayer, and the religious scholar is explaining the text with comments on and answers to possible objections to the interpretations. None can fully appreciate the compositional skill of *Kathā Gītā* without entering into the atmosphere of dialogue that prevails all through these books. Here is an illustrative extract : —

Yadi bolā ketiyā avatārā tāta śunā | yekhana dharmmara hāni adharmara udbhava haya tekhane sādhura rakṣārthe durjanara nāśa nimitte dharma pratipālana pade yuge yuge mayi avatāra dharo | yena mātṛye putraka lālana tāḍana kariteo nirddaya nahe temane mayiyo sādhuka rākhi asādhuka nāśa kariteo vaiṣamya śaṅkā nakaribā | mayi āpunāra icchāi janma dharmapālana nimitte āna laukika karmma karo āru jāne si dehata abhimāna eḍi moka bhāve | yadi bolā kemane janma karmmaka jānile tomāka pāve tāka śunā |

In *Kathā Bhāgavata,* Bhaṭṭadeva is more conscious of narrating stories and episodes. So his language here is homlier and closer to raciness and terseness of the spoken speech. In this book he employed short sentences, popular vocabulary and expressive cadence of the colloquial, the three more appealing qualities needed for story-telling. The characteristic of the narrative style can be seen in the following paragraph:

Caturtha adhyāye Ṛsabhara caritra kahibā | Śuke kahanta pāche nābhi putraka bhagavantara lakṣaṇa dekhi bala vīryya bidyā

yaśa sampatiye śreṣṭha lakṣi Sabha nāma thaila | Tāke nasahiyā Indra sei bariṣaṭa nabariṣiḷa tāka jāni bhagavanta Ṛṣabhadeva yoga bale bṛṣṭi karila | Nābhiyo putraka lālana tolana kari parama ānanda pāila | Pāche lokara anurāga dekhi putraka rājā pāti Vadarikāśrāmaka gailā | Tathāye bhakti kari bhagavantaka pāila |

(*Kathā Bhāgavata,* Book V. Ch. 4).

Although Bhaṭṭadeva's works were mainly translations yet they have enough of originality in them, and these have been made pleasanter by the author's incomparable style. Further, these texts are not to be considered mere renderings of one language into another but the writer made the materials his own and interpreted them according to his standpoint. The author never failed to weave into the texts homely similes, familiar maxims from standard commentaries wherever they were considered more illustrative of the arguments.

Bhaṭṭadeva had a profound grasp of Sanskrit grammar and literature which earned for him the title of Bhāgavata Bhaṭṭācārya (versed in the *Bhāgavata*). Bhaṭṭadeva has several original Sanskrit works to his credit and before he handled Assamese prose he wrote in Sanskrit a text titled *Bhaktisāra* (the Quintessence of Faith), a book of high metaphysical interest. Inevitably therefore, Sanskrit influences, particularly its syntax tinged his Assamese writings. Besides, as these texts are translations of Sanskrit, *tatsama* words naturally find easy access into them; but the author is nowhere pompous or unintelligible. The judicious use of Sanskrit words has only conferred on these religious writings dignity and grace. In syntactical structure also his writings are disciplined by Sanskrit grammar and as such they appear to be flawless. In his *Kathā Gītā,* however, the sentences at places run to complex length due to addition of clauses after clauses for illustrating certain knotty points. In spite of these occasional lapses, the syntax is regular, the verb is not dropped or shifted at will, and clauses are not thrown together with utter disregard of the principles of grammar.

Bhaṭṭadeva's works are important steps towards the great achievements of Assamese philosophical and narrative prose. He created a sure-footed expository prose-style with an eye to grammatical perfection. His aim was to explain religious matters in a logical and clear manner, and in this Bhaṭṭadeva succeeded to a large extent. His conversational and argumentative prose style

of *Kathā Gītā* served as a model and pattern to the Vaisnavite prose-writers of philosophical matters of later years and his simpler and freer style of *Kathā Bhāgavata* greatly influenced the writers of *Carita Puthis*.

IV. *Prose of the Burañjīs*

The greatest development in Assamese prose literature is found in the *Burañjīs*, the chronicles of the Āhom court. The *Burañjīs* were compiled under the orders of kings and of the high dignitaries of the state, for they alone could grant access to state documents on which the chronicles had invariably to be based. These documents were principally the periodic reports transmitted to the court by military commanders and frontier governors, diplomatic epistles sent to and received from foreign rulers and allies, judicial and revenue papers submitted to the kings and ministers for their final orders and the day-to-day annals of the court which incorporated all the transactions done, important utterances made, and significant occurrences reported by reliable eye-witnesses (*Assam Burañjī*, Introduction, p. xxxvi). These *Burañjīs* were at first written in Āhom, the language of the rulers. Later, however, they came to be compiled in the Assamese language. The *Burañjīs* constitute an unprecedented and glorious chapter in Assamese literature. It will not be an exaggeration to remark that it is through these *Burañjīs* that modern Assamese prose emerges. Commenting on this unique historical literature Sir G. A. Grierson observes: "The Assamese are justly proud of their national literature. In no department have they been more successful than in a branch of study in which India, as a rule, is curiously deficient. The historical works or *Burañjīs* are numerous and voluminous. A knowledge of *Burañjīs* was an indispensable qualification to an Assamese gentleman" (*Linguistic Survey of India*).

The compilation of *Burañjīs* was a sacred task, and, therefore it was customary to begin it with a salutation to the deity. The chronicles were prepared generally by men who commanded a comprehensive knowledge about state affairs, and we have several *Burañjīs* whose authors were high government officials. Hence the language of these chronicles is dignified and graceful. Records as they are of concrete facts, they have been put in a language which is ordinarily free from sentimental rhetoric. Couched in easy, straightforward, and unambiguous language, they are charming and admirable writings.

All these vast historical writings have not yet been compeltely brought to light. Dr. S. K. Bhuyan is publishing some of them under the auspices of the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Government of Assam. The prose chronicles published so far by the said Department are: *Assam Burañjī* by Harakanta Barua (1930), *Deodhāi Asama Burañjī*, a compilation from several sources (1932), *Tuṅgkhuṅgīyā Burañjī* by Srīnāth Duarā (1932), *Kachāri Burañjī* (1936), *Jayantiyā Burañjī* (1937), *Tripurā Burañjī* (1938), and *Asama Burañjī* (1945). Two other important chronicles, viz. the *Puraṇi Asama Burāñjī* (1922) and the *Pādshāha Burañjī* have been published by the Kāmarūpa Anusandhāna Samiti and edited respectively by Pandit Hemachandra Goswami and Dr. S. K. Bhuyan.

The dates of composition of all these *Burañjīs* have not definitely been ascertained; they were perhaps compiled over a long peroid, beginning from the late sixteenth to the early nineteenth century. Chronologically speaking, *Puraṇi Asama Burañjī* edited by the late Pandit Hemachandra Goswami, may be taken to be the earliest. Goswami considers the work to be a compilation of the reign of Gadādhar Siṃha (1681-1695). Another chronicle *Svarganārāyaṇadeva Mahārājara Ākhyāna* now published under the title *Assam Burañjī* was also believed to be compiled, according to Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, during this period.

Pandit Goswami also came to the conclusion that *Kathā Gītā* was composed sometime after 1594. So the time intervening between the composition of *Kathā Gītā* and *Puraṇi Asama Burañjī* is roughly about one hundred years. *Puraṇi Asama Burañjī* shows clearly how during these one hundred years, Assamese prose was shaping itself. It is true that Bhaṭṭadeva broke away from the conventional style of ornamental language, and had for the first time in the history of Assamese literature adopted the spoken language as medium for prose; but he was not completely free from the influence of the ornate and cultivated Sanskritised style. As already pointed out Bhaṭṭadeva indeed succeeded to a large extent in using an Assamese vocabulary in spite of his classical learning that encumbered him. But in the structure of his sentences he could not completely get away from the Sanskrit model, and a large percentage of *tatsama* words made their inroads into his writings. The language of the *Burañjīs*, however, is completely free from classical influences as they were written on a subject-matter which was entirely different in tone and kind. The *Burañjīs* have no association whatsoever with scriptural texts. These are

narrations and descriptions of affairs of royal families, an intimate portrayal of manners and characters of the people of the time compiled by experienced men of affairs with a sense of historical perspective. They give us in a historical method the court life, the royal routine, the daily relation of the court with outsiders of every description. For these reasons the language of the *Buranjis* cannot but reflect the spoken language of the court. Based as it was on the cultural language of the court, it is admirable for richness, straightforwardness, clearness, and fitted well for historical narration. "It is curious how the Assamese intellect", observes Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, "nurtured on the extravagance of Vaiṣṇava poetry, could pin itself down to the chronicling of grim realities and hard facts in a colourless and impersonal fashion. The bridge between the two phases of the intellect labouring in the realm of fiction or of fact was afforded by the model set forth in the *Buranjis* written in the Āhom language, the chronicles of which enjoyed immunity from the influence of imaginative poetry and who were subjected to rigorous discipline and supervision as their works were compiled as a matter of official routine".[5] How the *Buranjis* struck out a style graceful and full of cadence will be seen from the following descriptive passage from *Puraṇi Asama Buranji* which refers to a battle scene between the Āhoms and the Moghuls:

Lānamākharu Ceṭiyā Pāṇḍuta Baḍaphukana hai thākila | Samaste Baruābore gai hājoka beḍhi gaḍha dile | Tañcu Sandikai gaḍha nahala māne hātī āgakai āchila | Pāche Baṅgāle gaḍa bāja hui samukhe yuddha dile | Pāche Ābdula Islāma Navābata kāḍa lāgila | Muhudi Nabāba āga hala | Hātira kapālata guli lāgila | Hātiyo ubhati palāla ghoḍā paḍila naṭā | Teve baṅgāla āponāra gaḍha bhaṅga hui rahila | Āhomeo gaḍha dāṅgi baṅgālaka beḍhi dharilegai | Baṅgāleo olāi yuddha nedi pāche kākuti kari bāṭa māge | Bole āmi yuddha eḍilo tomārā dharmma patha cāri diyā | Āmāra deśaka yāo tathāpito baḍaphukane neḍile mahārājata bhaye | Eimate ek māsa gala | Baṅgāle khāba nāpāi gaḍhara bhitarate sukāi mare | Āmāra mānuhe kāḍara āgata cāulara ṭupali māri paṭhāi | bangāleo kāḍara āgata rupara ṭupali māri pathāi | eikathā mahārājā suni dāi dhari paṭhāle |

(*Puraṇi Asama Buranji*, p. 103-4).

Though there was no need for literary airs and graces, yet the *Buranjis* are not wholly devoid of such embellishment. In this

5. *Tungkhungia Bunañji*, Intro. p. 24.

connection another remark of Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, made with reference to the literary flavour in *Pādshāh Buranji*, may also be applied to other *Buranjis* with equal force. He states, "The historical narrative is not dry bone. One notices in it thought and emotions too. Hence it ascends to the level of pure literature. It will not be too much to say that such a confluence of history and literature is not to be found in any modern Indian literature in the pre-British period. What would otherwise be a dry historical narrative, has in the hands of the writer, become an entertaining historical literature punctuated to the reader's satisfaction by such elements of style as simile, analogy, illustrations, episodes and diversions". The secret of success in the *Buranjis* lies greatly in sentence construction, vernacular idioms and the expressive cadence of the spoken language. The writers are adepts in expressing themselves in short sentences and simple phraseology. Take it where you will, the vivacity and simplicity of the style is inestimable:

Carāye povāli tole ṭhoṭata dhari uruvāi cāi | pākhi jadi gajila uḍiba jadi pāḍile | māikīra lagata cari buli āhi bāsa layahi | pākhi jadi samāna hala māikiye ādhārā diba novāri uḍuvāi niye | eka uḍānadi paregai dunāi bāsa napāi hi | kono śiyāla kukure khāi nāi mānuhe dhari niye doābāra bāh nāpāi | kumāre caru bece pāike hātata lai bajāi cāi | yadi hātata bājila cāri kaḍā kaḍiko diye caruko niye | sei jadi hātata nābāje niyeniki |

(*Puraṇi Asama Buranji*, p. 133).

The *Buranjis* further contributed largely towards enrichment of Assamese vocabularies in deverse directions. They incorporate a large number of administrative terms and legal expressions used in the Āhom court. Words from the Āhom language are also not rare. Such words are used to denote things and institutions which are distinctly connected with Āhom life and culture. Words of Arabic and Persian origin also have been deeply laid under contribution, particularly in ambassadorial and diplomatic deeds and documents.

These *Buranjis* were mostly written in the eastern dialect of Assamese (*ujani-bhāṣā*) which from this time began to take rank as a standard literary speech. The causes contributing to this were the predominating importance of eastern Assam as the seat of the Āhom court and administration, and centre of trade and commerce, which made the eastern Assamese the language of affairs. It was after the pattern of this prose that the easy and simple prose of the *Orunodoi* (1846) the first periodical in Assamese, developed in the early years of the 19th century.

V. *Prose of the Carita Puthis*

Even when the historical literature was developing under State patronage, literature of a different kind was taking its birth, under the aegis of the Vaiṣṇavite Satras. This was the *Carita Puthis,* lives of the saints. Besides the life of Śaṅkaradeva, the lives of many other Vaiṣṇavite saints were continued to be written both in prose and verse during and after the 17th century A.D. Recitations from the biographies of the saints as a kind of religious spur to villagers are done after congregational prayers even up to this day. *Kathā Guru Carita*[6] (a prose biography of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva) has it that it was Mādhavadeva who for the first time introduced this practice by himself taking to recitation of his Guru's biography. After the death of Śaṅkaradeva, his disciples must have tried over a long period to compile his biography. In all the biographies the day-to-day experiences and incidents of the saints' lives personally witnessed by the monkish compilers or handed down by sacred traditions have been laid down without sifting the importance from the insignificant, and accepting legends and myths without any historical scrutiny. Be that as it may, these *Carita Puthis* are the first attempts in Assamese at writing biographies.

The *Carita Puthis* aimed at generating a sense of reverence and devotion in the minds of the ordinary men towards the saints by a recital of incidents from their lives. Hence the prose of these lives and the manner of their compilation differ widely from that of Bhaṭṭadeva as well as the court chronicles. While Bhaṭṭadeva's original was Sanskrit, the *Buraṅjīs* derived their materials from state papers and records. The *Carita Puthis* were free from both these types of influences. The subject-matter of the *Carita Puthis* was directly the lives of the eminent Vaiṣṇavite saints. They, therefore, contain pictures of contemporary Assamese religious life, records of customs and manners current at the time, and accounts of the religious institutions. Further, they were compiled to supply inspiration to the masses. Naturally these writings were expressed in simple, emotional and more homely and informal speech of the people.

It should be noted that the use of a spoken language is dependent mainly on three factors—the structure of the sentences, the particular use of pronouns and verbs, and adequacy or otherwise

6. Now published by Shri Harinarayan Dutta Barua, Nalbari, and edited by Prof. U. C. Lekharu.

of the vocabulary. "What particularly characterizes spoken language", says J. Vendryes "is that it contents itself with emphasizing the main lines of thought. These alone emerge and dominate the sentence, while the logical relations of words, and component parts of a sentence, are either imperfectly indicated, with the help, if necessary, of intonation and gesture, or are not indicated at all and have to be supplied by intuition. This spoken language thus approximates to spontaneous language, so called because it gushes spontaneously from the mind under the pressure of strong emotion. The striking words are then prominently placed, as the speaker has neither the leisure nor the time to mould his thought according to the strict rules of reflective and organized language." Further, in every spoken style there is always some dramatic quality. Everywhere in the *Carita Puthis* dialogues have been woven into descriptive passages with unparalleled literary elegance. Both short and long sentences occur wherever they are required for balance and poise, for effectiveness and for beauty. In the same passage indicative, interrogative and such other types of sentences occur as indeed they do so in spontaneous speech of everyday. This breaks down monotony and affords diversity. The following passage on saint Rādhikā, taking from the *Kathā-Guru-Carita* will hold that style to bold relief:—

"Gurujane gai bole viprasaba ei jāna dhara śāntī halehe bāndhiba pāri | Pāche brāhmaṇe bole āmara ghare pati śāntī āche, kāilai anā haba | Bole ānibāhā eikhāṇi, kabā palare Brahmaputrara jala āniba lāge rolehe patibratā sati | Tehe gai sabe vipre sudhile gṛhepati olāla | Palare jala anā ka'lata tochā khāle napāro buli | Pācha dinā sabe cāpila | Guru sudhile bole āge ghare ghare mae bulie jala anā ka'lata pācha huiki paila | Tehe gurujane bāmuṇara āgata Skandha Purāṇara eka ārhi kaiche | Kaliṅga deśara rājāra mukhata bethā roga haḷa | Pāche dukhata rājā ene aṅgīkāra karile bole mora byādhi yeye cāba pāre tāke mora ardha rājya dima | Tāke śuni aneka deśara aneka vaidya dhanantarī Atharvavedī āhi aneka ṭakā bākhara rajata subarṇa bhāṅi jāraṇa kari khuvāi die | Phota michā | Pāche rājāra āpāla lāgi nihale rākhi thaya | Ei mate kata bandī hai pari āche āśāta | Pāche katodinara mūrata eṭā beja majaliyā āhi dvārata bole rājā bandī nakaile āmi e cālohete pārô ki cāro | Dvārī jāna dilegai | Rājā niyāle | Gai vaidye bole cāba pāri | Śāntīra eṭopā khīra lāge | Rājāra ocarate guru brāhmaṇa āchila cāle | Bole mahārājā āmāra grihe āche etikṣaṇe anā yāba | Ei buli uṭhi gañ bhari gaiche | Pathe pāi yi loke sudhile bole bara bega daho | Bole rājā auṣadhalai Śāntira tana āno

āmāra grehara | Pāche si bole tai sarvanāśa habi | Racho mai kao | Tumi gai cotālara mūre ghumāi basi thāka gai asantoṣa bhāve | Ānasabe mātile gā nudhubi | Pāche tora bhāryyā mātile ei kathā kabi | Buli eśapati veśyāra tana bicāri diba diche rājā auṣadhalai | Vaide khuiche kata pāma | Ki gā dhuma yā | Vipre gai sei mate āche bahi | Putre bhātre māte namāte | Patnī olāi mātilehi kale sei krame | Tāi bole gā dhovā ki cintā karā | More nāhaiche | ekahe kama | Pānīlai yāote pūrāma | Ni dibā | Vipre śuni atrāhi hai guni mane bole mora jāti krīyā sakalo gala ei veśyāra saṅge-ṣīva dukhahe haba | Ei buli sabāke chāri bane gai yoga cinti gati labhile. Jānā gurusaba, tomārā sabaro tenehe haiche | Bāmuṇe śuni maune tuṣa heṭa māthe adhomukhe rala" (pp. 39-49).

The inconsistency of the homely life is, as it were, reflected in speech which may, and does often run counter to grammar. In strict grammar in Assamese, the subject comes first, and the verb comes last, other parts of speech coming in between the two. In an irregular sentence the writer uses at the beginning, or at the end, the word which he wants to specially emphasize, no matter what part of speech it is. The *Carita Puthis* contain many such irregular popular usages. Further, the use of the right word at the right place makes these writings easily attractive. Right use of verbs, idioms and phrases makes the prose of the *Carita Puthis* not only chaste but also lively. Although there is no attempt at literary grace, yet the prose of the *Carita Puthis* is not absolutely free from ornament. Their diction was enriched by profusion of metaphors, similes, alliterations which had come spontaneously and without much effort.

As has already been noted, the subject-matter of the *Carita Puthis* is something different from the dry religious truths and court feuds. These are something like the daily diaries of famous and revered masters. Here the reader feels quite at home; for in these writings they find the records of men who are intimately connected with their society. The subject-matter of *Kathā Gītā* and the *Burañjīs* was factual, objective and impersonal — for the most part they are dissertations on philosophy, or dry accounts of facts. The subject-matter of the *Carita Puthis*, however, is to some extent, subjective. The writer is himself a devotee and as such he has spiritual meeting with the hero of his book. A mere factual statement of events and incidents is never his aim. He must show how the example of his master has touched and influenced him, so that others might feel a similar inspiration. In his pages the hero lives over again — with his happiness and sorrow, fame and

calumny, rise and fall, and all such things which evoke a human interest and even sympathy in the reader's mind. Here in these writings for the first time we come into more intimate relationship with the great personalities of our country and see them in the social surroundings in which they lived, and contemporary men and women with whom they worked and daily conversed. In this respect the *Carita Puthis* may be taken to be human documents of irresistible charm, absorbing interest, and of wide appeal.

Of special interests in these biographies are the simplicity, deep faith and sincerity of the devotee-compiler, which create a fine and homely atmosphere. This could not have been achieved merely by the adoption of the spoken language. The whole atmosphere is delightfully free and unconventional like homely life itself. It is the spirit of ease and unsophisticatedness which had made it possible even for anecdotes of the supernatural kind to find an accommodation in them. While the anecdotes of the supernatural kind associated with the lives of the saints arouse a sense of reverence for the wonderful in the hearts of the devotees, those of their everyday life help in establishing a sense of kinship and sympathy by bringing out their essential human nature. These human documents are not without the element of humour; specially the quaintness of many colloquialisms and the very naivete of the authors tend to produce a sense of humour for the modern reader.

VI. *Miscellaneous Prose*

(a) *Prose of Religious Books*

As noticed above, it was Bhaṭṭadeva, who directed the course of Assamese literature towards prose. Some of his own contemporaries followed his lead and translated several Sanskrit texts in prose. All of these books have, however, not yet seen the light. Even those that have been published have not yet been subjected to a critical examination. It is, therefore, not easy to ascertain their chronology. Many of them follow different orthographies. Hence comparative study can hardly yield good results. A discussion, on the basis of chronology, of Bhaṭṭadeva's successors has not, therefore, been attempted here. Instead, an effort has been made to see the different samples of prose that they disclose.

The first essay in Assamese commentary literature is provided by Paraśurāma's *Kathā Ghoṣā* — a prose rendering of the famous *Nāma Ghoṣā* of Mādhavadeva. The manuscript copy of *Kathā Ghoṣā* now kept in the library of the Kāmarūpa Anusan-

dhāna Samiti, is dated 1715 A.D. In explaining the text, the writer of *Kathā Ghoṣā* has cited matters from other scriptures as well. Another book, of the same period, is *Sātvata Tantra* — an Assamese rendering of a Sanskrit text of the same title. Kṛṣṇananda Dvija's *Pūrṇa Bhāgavata,* though principally a verse rendering, contains prose passages here and there. Pandit Goswami, in his *Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts* mentions that a book named *Padma Purāṇa* — a prose manual of morals and manners, was composed in 1769 A.D. The book begins with a chapter on the virtue of putting *Rudrākṣa* beads on one's person. The book contains also chapters on the merits of a bath in the Brahmaputra, and of fasting on *Ekādaśī* (11th day of the moon) and Janmāṣṭamī (Lord Kṛṣṇa's birthday) days, and rules to be observed in the several months of the calendar. Another noted book is Raghunātha Mahanta's *Kathā Rāmāyaṇa* (*Rāmāyaṇa* in prose). The same author has to his credit the metrical *Śatruñjaya,* composed in 1618 A.D. Pandit Goswami believes *Kathā Rāmāyaṇa* to be a work of the same period. *Kathā Rāmāyaṇa* is not a literal translation of the Sanskrit epic. The Ādi, Āyodhyā, Āraṇya, and the Kiṣkindhyā cantos have been abridged. There is a dramatic setting about the whole book. The influence of the *Aṅkīyā Nāṭas* is specially to be noticed in the language of *Kathā Rāmāyaṇa,* as can be seen by comparing it with Śaṅkaradeva's *Rāma Vijaya.* The language of *Kathā Rāmāyaṇa* is not completely free from the influence of Sanskrit. *Tatsama* words appear, and here and there Sanskrit sentences also occur.

(b) *Prose of Utilitarian Literature*

Many Sanskrit books other than religious were translated into Assamese prose. Of these, several old manuscripts have been discovered. They deal with medicine, astronomy, rules of arithmetic, dancing and architecture. In these books for the first time Assamese prose was employed for the discussion of utilitarian knowledge. Most of them were translated from Sanskrit texts and by Sanskrit scholars. It was natural, therefore, that Sanskrit would leave some stamp on them, more especially as upto that time a sufficient number of *tatbhava* and racy words with clear-cut usages had not been evolved. The study of Sanskrit texts for knowledge was indeed indispensable but Sanskrit words were even more necessary to enrich Assamese prose vocabulary. It must, however, be added that although *tatsama* words were borrowed, the Assamese writers used a more straightforward and

direct style suited to their subject-matter which may be classed under science. For the same reason these books are, generally speaking, free from unintelligibility and vagueness. Apart from their value as literary beauties and technical excellences, they are most important as examples of the contemporary handling of prose for scientific purpose. The chief is *Hastividyārṇava* of Sukumar Barkath. This illustrated book was written in 1734 under orders of king Śiva Siṁha and his consort, Queen Ambikādevī. The illustrations were drawn by the painters Dilbar and Dosai. The book contains descriptions of several kinds of elephants, the ways of training them, their diseases and their cures. The book also lays down the different categories of elephants to be used by men belonging to different social classes. The materials of *Hastividyārṇava* are stated in the text itself to have been taken from *Gajendra Cintāmaṇi* of Śambhunātha. The prose of *Hastividyārṇava* does not differ from the prose of the chronicles. It has similar sentence formation and vocabulary. The orthography is phonetic and the structure of sentences follows that of everyday speech.

The *Ghorānidāna,* a treatise on horses, is another book of the same class. This book has been edited (1932) by Tarini Charan Bhattacharya and published by the Government of Assam. In his preface to *Ghorā Nidāna,* Dr. S. K. Bhuyan observes: "These two representative treatises (*Hastividyārṇava* and *Ghorā Nidāna*) reveal the richness and variety of the Assamese pharmacopoea and their literary value consists in the presentation of a very large number of expressions now thrown in to disuse". Another book of useful knowledge is *Śrīhastamuktāvalī* of Śubhaṅkara. The book is a collection of Sanskrit *ślokas* taken from different texts on dramaturgy, and dealing with the movements of hands and fingers in acting. To these *ślokas* Assamese translations have been added. The translator has tried to give, as far as possible, suitable Assamese equivalents to Sanskrit words. Kaviraj Chakravarti's *Bhāsvati* is a book of astronomy. If he is the same person who wrote *Saṅkhacūḍa Vadha, Śakuntalā Kāvya,* the metrical *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* and a translation of *Gītagovinda* then he must be a contemporary of king Śiva Siṁha (1714-1744). *Bhāsvati* is an abridged adaptation of the Sanskrit *Śurya Siddhānta.* Of the books of arithmetic mention must be made of *Aṅkara Āryyā* of Kashinath. The book discusses, besides arithmetic, rules of land measurement and the method of finding the square root of figures. At places the book contains Sanskrit verses.

There were treatises also on architecture, road construction, and such other subjects. A passage, bearing on building construction, taken from the history of Changrung Phukan, now preserved in the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, is quoted below to show the type of prose that this book contains:

Pramatta Siṃha Devara pāṭa gharara khera ruvā ṭakupāta betara lekhā devara bara gharata ruvā 1280 ṭā | Saḍāha kāmi 8 kāũna, bāna kāmi 13½ kāũna, ṭupara kāmi 11 kauna, chāvani kāmi 3 kāũna, 36½ khera, 464080 ṭā ṭakupāta, 34080 ṭā betabarasuta, 1680 sarusuta, 51 kaũna, barabāṭagharara ruvā, 729 ṭā śaḍahakāmi 1 ṭakā, bānakāmi 5 kaũna, hōlāṅgara duvāra bale 4 hāta okhake 5 hāta, ghariyāla dharā dui phuṭāra mājhata 8 hāta, mājari okhake 2 hāta, 4 āñgũla tāṅkākara mājara 2 hāta, 2 āñgula ṭupa dīrghe 18 hāta dole gharīyā charāra duvāra okhake 5 hātara parā mājha pāli gaḍhalai 38 beñŏ āre parā māṭī gaḍhalai 45 beñŏ, ālira so mājara parā daraba gharalai nilaga 24 beñŏ |

Hara Gaurī Samvāda is another book written in the form of questions and answers. It is a translation of the mythico-historical king. The book was prepared perhaps during the reign of Kamaleswar Siṁha (1790-1810).

From the number of prose works composed during the period between the time of Bhaṭṭadeva and the composition of *Hastividyārṇava,* that have come to our hand, it is easy to see how Assamese prose literature developed enormously in several directions. The influence of Sanskrit was, of course, there over all. It was more obviously the case with serious books — philosophical and religious — which were mostly translations from Sanskrit and that done by Sanskrit scholars. Assamese had not till then developed an adequate number of *tadbhava* and racy words, nor were their use standardised. Except Sanskrit there was nothing that could serve as a pattern of grammar and style. Therefore imitation of Sanskrit on the part of the new-born Assamese prose was not merely necessary, but also inevitable. Though modelled after Sanskrit texts and commentaries Assamese prose had done away with unnecessary verbal rhetoric and too many compounds, and had thus attained clarity. Its aim was the spread of religious and useful knowledge amongst the average man. Hence its clarity and simplicity. Everywhere in these books there are proofs of ability to express ideas in an exact, logical, relevant, and whenever needed, in short and brief fashion. Apart from their value as literature

and art, these books are of the greatest importance for proper appraisement of the intellectual activity of old Assam.

VII. *Prose of Diplomatic Letters and State Documents*

(a) *Prose of Diplomatic Letters*

The use of Assamese prose in state papers, files and documents not only widened its scope but also conferred on the everyday speech a literary status. This was doubtless owing to the sympathy and patronage of the court. Before the Āhoms came, all state records were kept in Sanskrit. It was during the times of the Āhoms that Assamese prose was used for the first time in state business. In the courts of the Kachāri, Koch, and Jayantiyā Kings also Assamese got predominance. Old Assamese prose was thus nurtured in the court of kings and potentates. Prose became the vehicle of expression in diplomatic letters, state records, and grants and the medium for the law courts. The result was that prose expanded in different directions, developing different techniques and forms and getting enriched in its vocabulary.

One such diplomatic letter written in 1555 A.D. by king Naranārāyaṇa of Cooch Behar to king Svarganārāyaṇa has come to hand. Naranārāyaṇa's letter is rather free from the presence of too many Persian words which is generally the case in letters of this kind of the 16th century. The letter is given below:

"Svasti sakala digadantikarṇatānāsphāna samīraṇa pracalita himakara hāra hāsa kāśa kailāsa pāṇḍura yaśorāśi virājita tripiṣṭapa tridaśataraṅgiṇī salila nirmāna pavitra kalevara bhīṣaṇa pracaṇḍa dhīra dhairyya maryyādā pārābāra sakala dikkāminī gīyamāna guṇa santāna Śrī Śrī Svarganārāyaṇa mahārāja pracaṇḍa pratāpeṣu |

Lekhanaṅ kāryañca | Ethā āmāra kuśala | Tomāra kuśala nirantare bāñchā kari | Athana tomārā āmāra santoṣa sampādaka patrātare patri gatāyāta haile ubhayānukula prītira bīja aṅkurita haite rahe | Tomāra āmāra kartabyese bardhatāka pāi puṣpita phalita haibeka | Āmārā sei udyugate āci | Tomāro egoṭa kartabya ucita haya | Nākara tāka apāne jāna | Adhika ki lekhima | Satānanda kāṇyi o Rāmeśvara śarmā kālaketuo dhubā sarddāra udaṇḍa cāuniyā syāmarāi imarāka pāṭhāitechi | Tāmarāra mukhe sakala samācāra bujhiyā citāpa bidāya dibā | Apara ukīlara saṅge ghuḍi 2 dhanu 1 cheṅga matsya 1 jora bālisa 1 jakāi 1 sāri 5 khāna ei sakala diyā gaiche | Āra samācāra buji kahi pāṭhāibeka āra tomāra arthe saṅ-

deśa gomaseṅ 1 cita 5 ghāgari 10 kṛṣṇāmara 20 śukla cāmara 10 | Iti śaka 1447 māsa Āṣāḍha |

A letter written by king Svarganārāyaṇa to king Naranārāyaṇa also has come to hand. A copy of this letter has been preserved in the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies. The letter is as following:

Svasti tripura hara caraṇa svarga śrī parṇa sudhāpāna bhriṅgapayamāna sampana dāna santāna śauryya dhairyya gāmbhīryyodāryya pārābāra tuhinakara nikara taraṅgiṇī taraṅga pāṇḍura yaśorāśi virajita kula kamala prakāśakaika bhāskara Śrīmanmallanārāyaṇa rāja mahodara caritreṣu |

Lekhanaṅ kāryañca | Atra kuśala | Tomāra kuśala bārttā śuniya parmāpyāyīta hailo | Āra je lekhica prītibrikṣa aṅkurita seie tomāra āmāra sādhlādeta briddhira pāyā phalita puṣpita haibāra khāna yi kahica i goṭa viśeṣa kintu tomāra āmāra prīti goṭa jihata hante ghatice tāka samaste jāne | Seirūpa maryyādā vyavahārata yadi rahiba phalita puṣpita kisaka nahaba| Āmarā pūrva abhiprāyate āci āra ukīlara saṅge ji sakala dravyādi pathāichila i sakala sabhāta dekhāibāra ucita nahaya kintu ji sakale jihaka ācari thāke apīti haileo ācarnīya sakale tāke nīti svarūpe dekhe eteke divāka povā | Āra samuccaya sei sei dravyata pravarttanīya lokera dvārāe ji bujhuvā gaiche seirūpe bujhibā | Tomāra ukīlera saṅge āmāra ukīla Śrīcaṇḍībara o Śrī Dāmodara Śarmāka pathovā gaiche | Emarāra mukhe sakala samācāra bujhibā | Tomāra arthe sandeśa naḍā kāpora 2 thāna gajadanta 4 gāṭhiyana 2 monā pahucibe | Iti śaka 1478 |

Both these letters begin with Sanskrit *ślokas,* and have some Sanskrit influences. As these were sent to the heads of foreign states their sentence-formations were sober and business-like and the descriptions dignified. A collection of old diplomatic letters, preserved in the National Archive of the Government of India, has been edited by Dr. Surendranath Sen and published by the Calcutta University (1942), under the title "*Prācīn Bāṅgalā Patra Saṅkalan*". Several letters written by Āhom Kings and officers have been printed in the volume. They are the best of contemporary correspondence and stand out as documents of high importance for the political history of the time.

(b) *Prose of Land-grants*

Several stone and copper plates on land-grants made by Āhom kings have been discovered. The following quotation, taken from a stone inscription of Cāmadharā Gaṛ, dated 1616 A.D., provides a specimen of the prose of the land-grants:

"Śrībhaṇḍāri gosāi Lāṅgipo gosāi | Baḍaphukana nāi saliyāvāi |Cāmadhāra simā kari hāruni dāruni dārunilai gaḍh | Śaka 1538 | Śrī Śrī Svargaṅārāyaṇara jaya jaya | Śrī kuluṅ gosāi Śrī Kulatā gosāi | Śrī jadubaruvā jaya hala |

The number of stone inscriptions containing Assamese prose, and discovered till now is however not great. Most of the land-grants were made on copper plates, and they were written in the pattern of Indian land-grants. Each plate commences with the benedictory word *svasti.* The initial *śloka* written in Sanskrit, and bearing the year, contains laudatory references to the king who makes the grant. These copper plate land-grants contain, besides the measurement and boundaries of the lands, an enumeration of a host of allied information. They contain a detailed account of the measure of expenditure to be made on specified festive occasions, the graded quantities in which articles of offerings are to be distributed amongst the religious assemblage, and enumeration of the graded services to be rendered by each of the *Sevāits, Pāiks, Bardeuris,* etc., and the graded amounts of rice, butter, oil, betel-nut and betel-leaf and such other articles that are to be allotted to different festive occasions and religious ceremonies.

(c) *Prose of Court-documents*

It has already been noted that Assamese was used in the court as a state language, and all deeds, documents, records, complaints, and court judgments were kept in Assamese. A vast mass of such documents is now discovered which reveals the prominent characteristics of the prose used therein. The following is a specimen of the prose used in a document of complaint:

Sargadevara bandi Śivarāma bara thākura e prārthanā kari janāiche | pūve iśvara Gaurīnātha Siṁha sargadeva e bandira pitā Hārināṭha barathākuraka barakalā pathārata pūve āhata gach paścime marānai uttare baraśimalu dakṣine hijala gach ei cāri had kari callis purā roati māṭī sargadeva punyārthā brahmottara kari dichila | Sei kālaṛe parā ājilaike tini cāri janā sargadeva dinata eko jaya jañjala nohovākai dhan-bita nabharākai māṭi khāi achilohaka | Etiyā Siddhirama Hājarikāe sei māṭīre parā balakai pakā dhānakô dāi nile bandiko mārile ene hale bandiye kenekai deśata thākim | Dāḍiye duvāre ephālai bhāgi yāva lagāhe halô | Yadi sargadevara dukhani caraṇe sudhi-puci nerākhile rakṣā pāba

naparā halo | Eteke sargadevara caraṇata prārthanā kari jānāicho sargadevara carane rākhile rakṣā pāo | Iti 1761 tārikha 9 kārtika |[7]

The language of this petition is very simple and lucid. The use of homely idioms and well-arranged sentences and flawless style confers on it literary grace. In this petition the language employed has been an apt medium of ideas and makes the solicitations transparently clear. The petitioner has given not merely a catalogue of facts which he wants to state but also tried successfully to appeal to the king's feelings by precise communication.

The following quotation from a *Manuh-becā Kākata* (Sale-deed of slaves) will be found interesting both for form and content:

1721 puṣara 4 dina thakāta kujabāre Śrī Śrī Kamaleśvarasiṅgha mahārājāra rājyata manuśyara kraya vikraya kare | Salagurīyā sādhu ātā kine | Lerelu saikiyā Siddhibarā haite samanite kuri gayāi bece | Mohanaka rūpa chaṭakā atyarthe sākhī Ṭañgacudekā Kalāi 1 Dusarīyā śaikīyā Bahudāsa 1 carācôvā Jīurāma 1 carāra dalai cābara 2 nātha 1 āru anekô āchila |

(d) *Prose of the Peḍā-Kākata* (Chest papers)

During the reign of the Āhom king Śiva Saṃha (1714-1744), a survey of lands was made in the present Kamarūp district. Along with it, a census of the people was also taken. The papers containing figures, statistics, and accounts of these survey and census are technically known as *Peḍā-Kākata*, as these papers were kept locked up in wooden chests (*peḍā*). Besides, matters relating to land survey, these papers contain records of disputes over land, their arbitrations, judgments and orders.

VIII: *General Remarks*

In the foregoing sections an attempt has been made to indicate the channels along which and the way in which Assamese prose has evolved from the 15th century to the 18th century A.D. For convenience' sake early Assamese prose literature may broadly be thrown into four categories, namely, the prose of religious books, of *Burañjīs*, of *Caritaputhis*, and of state deeds and diplomatic documents. Further, it should be noted that early Assamese prose developed around the *Satras* (monasteries) and the court; consequently it acquired mainly two broad styles. The *Satras* were

7. Quoted from *Manual of Bengali Language* by Nicholl (1894) p. 358-9.

centres of religious and Sanskritic learning and culture; both these influences have, therefore, left their indelible mark on the prose that grew around the *Satras*. The second variety of prose developed around the court and under the patronage of kings and as such it not only got a wider field of subject-matter but also a freer mode of expression. In this prose, old conservatism both of matter and language gave way to liberalism. Reckless borrowing, mainly of Sanskrit words and phrases are abandoned, and it unhesitatingly began to borrow vocables from other sources including Arabic and Persian. A large number of racy, native words found their way into the literary diction which resulted in the growth of hybrids in a varied and enriching manner. Their introduction removed serious vocabular defects of 'one word for one idea'. Assamese now comes to possess several synonyms to express one and the same thing. Thus Assamese prose grew less monotonous and more varied and became a thing of considerable grace and power.

MĀDHAVADEVA AND HIS WORKS

By

T. N. Sarma

The spiritual relation between Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva is described in two different ways. Śaṅkaradeva the incarnation of Kṛṣṇa accepted Mādhavadeva as his chief apostle through whom he made the religion of bhakti known to all. In this respect they are likened to Kṛṣṇa and Uddhava[1]. According to the second view Mādhavadeva is regarded as an incarnation of the supreme God Nārāyaṇa and as such the analogy of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma is brought in to explain his relationhsip with Śaṅkaradeva.[2] Whatever may be the spiritual significance of this to the Vaiṣṇava *bhakats* of Assam there can be no question that Mādhava rightly deserves this exalted position. He gave the final shape to Mahāpurusīya cult, completed the religious exegesis which in sheer literary merit still remains unsurpassed, and above all filled his disciples with an inspiration that made it possible for them to carry the message of the new religion to the remotest and inaccessible parts of Assam. Guru Nānak, notwithstanding his having two sons preferred to appoint Aṅgada, the most devoted of his disciples, the head of the newly formed religious community. Śaṅkaradeva similarly nominated Mādhava as his successor in preference to his son of whose ability he was rather dubious. This succession according to tradition was a sort of spiritual transmission and as such Mādhavadeva occupies a unique position in the Vaiṣṇava hierarchy of Assam.

The story that so many Bhūyā families migrated to Assam in a body may or may not be historically true but that they moved from place to place, sometimes en masse, within the province, has little to doubt. The chaotic condition of the first half of the fifteenth century was mainly responsible for this internal migration of the nobility of the period. This was however a boon in disguise, for wherever they went they tried to keep the Aryan religion and culture alive, specially at a time when the slow and fitful process of Aryanisation in this part of India came to a sudden stop. It was in

1. Bhūṣaṇa Dvija: Śaṅkara-carita, 404, 616.
2. *Amūlya-ratna,* ed. Kṛṣṇa Kānta Das, Nalbari 47-48; 210-215. This work, however, seems to be apocryphal.—EDITOR.

such a family that Śaṅkaradeva was born and it was again a Bhūyā family that gave us Mādhavadeva.

Mādhava was born in the family of Hari Bhūyā, a contemporary of Caṇḍīvara, the great-grandfather of Śaṅkaradeva. His father Govindagirī after the death of his wife left his home in the western part of Kāmarūpa and came to Ṭembuwānī in the modern district of Nowgong in search of better fortune or a congenial social surrounding. Ṭembuwānī at that time was the place of the Śiromaṇi Bhūyās. There he married for the second time a girl named Manoramā. Those were the troubled days of Kachārī raids. The Kachārīs in general had not been hinduised till then. They were in constant conflict with the Āhoms in the east, but met with reversal almost on every occasion. The Bhuyā warriors must have helped the Āhoms against the Kachārīs and naturally the Kachārīs viewed the activities of the Bhūyās with suspicion. They took every opportunity to take the Bhūyās by surprise and become a constant menace to their life and property. It was during the turmoil of such raid that Govindagirī with his newly married wife who was in the family way hastened to betake themselves to a safer place. As ill luck would have it, they were robbed of all their money and belongings when they were asleep by the side of a river on the way. Govindagirī turned a poor man overnight. A gentleman who happened to pass by that river took pity on the couple and admitted them to his boat. From that day for almost a decade Govindagirī virtually spent his days as a dependent of Harisingā Barā, for that was the name of the gentleman. It was here about the last but one decade of the fifteenth century that Mādhavadeva came to this world.

Mādhavadeva passed his boyhood in want and hardship. Cut off from his near relations in a distant place Govindagirī found himself in an unenviable position. His age was not such as to be able to undertake new adventures to earn a comfortable living. His health had already gone down hill owing to a sort of rheumatic pain. Govindagirī was thus forced by circumstances to continue in that state of dependency for several years. One day one of the sons of Harisingabarā had treated him very badly and this he felt so much that in spite of failing health he started to seek fortune elsewhere. For sometime he moved from place to place with his wife, son and newly born daughter till at last he met Ghāgari Mājhi, a friend of his early days. Ghāgari succeeded in persuading Govinda to accept his hospitality. Ghāgari Mājhi was a conscientious man. He did not like that Govindagirī should feel the un-

easiness of being dependent on others. He therefore rendered all possible help to young Mādhava, who was hardly in his teens, in growing foodstuff and earning money for himself. The family in this manner spent several years with Ghāgari Mājhi. When Urvaśī, for that was the name of Mādhava's sister, had reached the marriageable age, the family migrated to Dhuwāhāṭ in search of a suitable Kāyastha young man. Dhuwāhāṭ was within the Āhom kingdom and Āhom kings allowed the Bhuyās to settle there. For some years Dhuwāhāṭ virtually remained a Bhūyā settlement. Govindagirī gave his daughter to a youngman named Gayāpaṇi whom afterwards Śaṅkara renamed as Rāmadāsa in consideration of his devotion to Rāma. Gayāpāṇi was a man of some means and he offered to take the burden of the family of his father-in-law. Thus relieved the old man remembered his native village Bāṇḍukā. He started for Bāṇḍukā with Mādhava. His wife remained with Gayāpāṇī at Dhuwāhāṭ.

So far Mādhava got his education in the school of adversity only. At Bāṇḍukā Govindagirī made proper arrangements for his formal schooling. He received training in the vocation of his caste (*Kāyasthikā vṛtti*) and the humanities too were not neglected.

Govindagirī died after a few years of his arrival at Bāṇḍukā. Mādhava started for Dhuwāhāṭ to inform his mother of her recent widowhood. When it remained only a few days' rowing to Dhūwāhāṭ he perchance got the news of his mother's sudden illness. Naturally his anxiety knew no bounds and he made up his mind to propitiate Mother Durgā by offering two white goats on the occasion of the next autumnal worship. His mother, however, had come round before he reached Dhūwāhāṭ. When the autumn set in Mādhava gave a few rupees to Rāmadāsa, his brother-in-law, for buying two white goats.

By this time Śaṅkaradeva had come and settled at Dhuwāhāṭ with a band of followers. Rāmadāsa too had already accepted Śaṅkara as his religious guide and naturally he could not relish the idea of sacrificing animals much less buying the victims himself. But he, by himself, was no match for Mādhava to argue his case against the futility of Devī-worship and, therefore, animal sacrifice. He took Mādhava to Śaṅkaradeva and introduced him. Śaṅkaradeva greeted Mādhava with a winning smile, for after all, the handsome youngman was no óther than Mādhava the son of Mano Āiti, his niece. It was not a courtesy visit and they at once plunged into a religious debate whether Devi-worship was at all necessary much

less sacrificing animals to her. Śaṅkara had to argue for hours, it is stated in the *Carita-puthis,* to convince the youth that if supreme Viṣṇu was propitiated one no longer stood in need of going for other gods. It is further stated that a quatrain from the *Bhāgavata* wrought the miracle at last. Śaṅkaradeva quoted, "Just as watering at the root of a tree nourishes the trunk, branches and twigs and just as different senses thrive if the vital life is maintained so when one worships Acyuta he worships all other gods".[3] The authority of the *Bhāgavata* was unquestionable in those days. Mādhava found himself helpless before this statement, so clear and unmistakable. He at once prostrated himself before Śaṅkara and this was by way of homage from a śiṣya to his guru. The quatrain from the *Bhāgavata* was only instrumental in winning over the resolute youth. It was something more. Who knows the same quatrain would not have fallen on deaf ears had it come from a lesser personality!

Next day Mādhavadeva received formal initiation at the feet of Śaṅkaradeva, and from that day onward he identified himself wholly with the mission of his guru the spread of *Ekaśaraṇa Nāma-dharma.* He was a bachelor when he met Śaṅkaradeva for the first time and remained so for the rest of his life. He devoted his life to the cause of *Nāma-dharma,* and served his guru with such zeal and earnestness as became proverbial with the later generation of his followers. He was a constant associate of Śaṅkaradeva and accompanied him during the latter's two pilgrimages. Nevertheless his strong individuality remained unimpaired.

Mādhavadeva became the head of the newly formed religious community at the express wish of Śaṅkaradeva at his death-bed. Śaṅkara did not delegate the authority of administering *śaraṇa* (formal initiation) to any of his disciples. They were specially deputed to preach *Nāma-dharma* among *Brāhmaṇas* in particular. Both of them carried their work with untiring zeal. Soon the disciples, specially of Dāmodara, began to swell in number. Dāmodara held Śaṅkara in high esteem. In fact, the latter was the impetus of all his activities but he could not persuade himself to show the same respect to Mādhavadeva when the latter became the religious head. Mādhava too was uncompromising in this respect. He could not tolerate the slightest tendency towards minimising the over-all authority of Śaṅkaradeva and for that matter of himself. Dāmodara refused to accept any work other than the *Bhā-*

3. *Bhāgavata,* 4. 31. 14.

gavata as the first authority, not even Śaṅkara's writings.[4] He adopted a liberal attitude towards Vedic rites and formalities and image-worship.[5] This was more than what Mādhava and his followers could tolerate. Thus began a rift in the lute which within a year of Śaṅkaradeva's death culminated in a complete schism.

Mādhava did not think it wise to confine the authority of administering *Śaraṇa* to himself alone. He selected some of his followers and invested them with proper authority to admit disciples and offer śaraṇa to neophytes in the name of the great guru. This of course did not take place at a time. His followers received *ājñā* (formal deputation) at different times. Of these Mathurā Ātā of Barpeta, Bar Viṣṇu Ātā of Dakṣiṇpār (south bank of the Brahmaputra), Gopāla Ātā of Bhawānipura (near Barpeta), Padma Ātā of Kamalābāri, Lakṣmīkānta Ātā and his nephew Rāmacaraṇa stand foremost. These selfless devotees carried the banner of *Nāma-dharma* to different parts of the land, founded *satras* which as centres of Vaiṣṇava religion and culture still occupy an important position in the Assamese social scheme. There were several Bhakats of tribal origin. They assumed Hindu names after *Śaraṇa*, Mādhavadeva in his *Namghoṣā* alludes to them several times.[6] It is however difficult to say what status these tribal disciples actually enjoyed in the general assembly of *bhakats*. It is true that one or two such tribal *bhakats* established *satras* and a few of these still survive. Curiously enough their descendants now far from being proud of their tribal origin give a different account altogether.

Some Brāhmaṇs presumably Śāktas brought allegations before the Koc king Raghudeva that Mādhava was preaching against Devī-worship and the authority of the Vedas and Brāhmaṇs. Now the Koc kings were open to all sorts of religious influence, nevertheless they regarded Kāmākhyā as the guardian deity of the kingdom. Any disrespect towards the deity was considered as an act equivalent to treason. So Raghudeva issued orders for immediate search and arrest of Mādhavadeva. Mādhava was brought to Vijayanagar, the capital of Raghudeva. He was treated however with due respect. He was a prisoner guest of Raghudeva for some days but after a due enquiry was again set free. After some

4. Daityāri 66, 10-12.
5. Ramacaraṇa, *Śaṅkara-carita* 3900—3903.
   Karimira dharmira mata dharilāhā yāi
   Kali yuga tāka ācaraṇe gati nāi.
6. *Garo Bhoṭa Yabana Harira nāma lai—Nāmghoṣā* 473.
   Rāma buli tare Miri Asama Kachārī;—Ibid, 501.

days he was again directed to remove his headquarters to Hājo, the seat of the famous temple of Hayagrīva Mādhava. Even at Hājo he could not pass his days in peace and soon became a victim of royal suspicion. So he made up his mind to leave the kingdom of Raghudeva. Accordingly he crossed the river Soṇkoṣ. The king of Koc Behār Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa received him most respectfully. Mādhavadeva spent his last days in Koc Behār. He was there for about three years. This was the most peaceful period of his life. He completed his *Nāmaghoṣā* the crowning glory of his literary activities during this time. The last part of the *Nāmaghoṣā* clearly reveals a blissful state of the poet's mind. His death was quite sudden. He dropped down while changing his clothes and within a short time breathed his last with the Holy Name in his lips. It was in the year 1596.

So long as Śaṅkaradeva was alive none of his followers, not even Mādhavadeva, had the authority of conferring ordination on desiring entrants. Such men were brought before Śaṅkaradeva who only could administer formal *Śaraṇa*. The *Śaṅkara-carita* of Rāmacaraṇa gives a list of the new entrants who were presented by Nārāyaṇa one of the Śaṅkara's associates.[7] Mādhavadeva, however, thought it prudent to delegate his authority to some of his associates of genuine devotion and religious zeal, specially when the rival group of Dāmodara was doing good work by appointing deputies. *Śaṅkara-carita* of Rāmacaraṇa relates an incident how Nārāyaṇa roused Mādhava to activity by pointing out the example of Dāmodaradeva in this respect.[8] This saved the organisation from stagnation, which otherwise would have been the result had authority remained solely with the head of the hierarchy.

Mādhavadeva was responsible for the raising of the *Śāstra*—the Book embodying the Holy Name—to the pedestal in complete exclusion of the idol. Śaṅkaradeva relegated idol-worship (*arccana*) to the background bringing *Śravaṇa* and *Kīrtana* to the forefront,[9] whereas Mādhava wiped it completely out of the picture. It was Mādhavadeva who introduced the system of

7. Ramacaraṇa, *Śaṅkara-carita* 2903—2936
   "*Nārāyaṇe āni āni bhakata karāilā*".
8. Ibid 3956—3962.
9. Śaṅkaradeva — *Prathama Skandha* — 38.
   Yadyapi bhakati navabidha Mādavar
   Śravaṇa kīrtana tāto mahā sreṣṭhatar
   Arccana bandana dhyāna samastate kari
   Yaśa kirtanata āti tuṣṭa honta hari.

thāpanā which means the Holy Book on the pedestal. But unlike the Granth-Sahib of the Śikhs the puthi or the *thāpanā* need not be worshipped with formalities. When Padma Ātā the youngest of his favourite disciples was going to take leave of Mādhava at Koc Behār after a short visit the latter presented him with a copy of *Nāma-mālikā,* his last work, and said, "This is my last work and you are the youngest of my disciples. So take this book and you will find me here. So instal it on the *thāpanā.* You will find Śaṅkara in his *Daśama* and *Kīrtana* and me in my *Ratnāvalī* and *Nāmghoṣā.*"[10]

The religious principle responsible for this emphasis on the Holy Book is not far to seek. The name and Hari are identical,[11] and as such the name is not merely a group of sounds but it is a living entity (*caitanya*). The Book inasmuch as it embodies the name deserves to be held as *caitanya.* Moreover the Book represents the guru through his words. Mādhavadeva did not nominate anybody as the supreme head of the community but in a message to Gopāla Ātā sometime before his death he reiterated his decision not to nominate anybody as his successor, and asked his disciples to seek him in *Nāmaghoṣā* which would solve their problems.[12]

With Mādhavadeva devotion to his guru was a part of his *Sādhanā.* This influenced the later Mahāpuruṣīyā *Sādhanā* to a great extent and sometimes led to over-emphasis particularly with a section of his followers known as kāla saṁhati.

So far as he himself was concerned Mādhavadeva preferred to remain a celibate by choice but celibacy formed no part of his teachings. Nevertheless his example inspired many to take the life of celibacy, which ultimately led to the introduction of compulsory celibacy in many satras.

The most important contribution which Mādhavadeva made to the growth of Vaiṣṇavism in Assam is that he completed the religious exegesis of the sect. Like his guru he too was a prolific writer. He wrote six playlets, rendered *Bhakti-ratnāvalī* and *Ādikāṇḍa* into metrical Assamese, composed several poetical works including *Nāmaghōṣā.* A gifted musician himself he contributed about 200 songs to the hymnology of the sect. They are employed

10. Bezbaroa, Lakshminath, *Śrīśaṅkaradeva āru Śrīmādhavadeva*—p. 341.
11. *Yei nāma sei hari jānā niṣṭha kari*"—*Nāmaghośā* 514.
12. Goswami, Tirthanath, ed. *Śrī Śrī Gōpaladeva Carita,* pp. 61-70. See also Daityāri, *Gurucarita,* ed. Rajmohan Nath, p. 382 (73, 49-50).

in the private and congregational services whether daily (*nitya prasaṅga*) or occasional (*naimittika prasaṅga*). There are a few works such as *Amūlya-ratna* and *Bhūṣaṇ-herowā* which although popularly attributed to him are of doubtful authenticity. Of these the first three are definitely not by Mādhavadeva. They contain references to persons and events belonging to so late a period as the eighteenth century. There are many songs which go by the name of Mādhavadeva, but a careful examination would lead us to a contrary supposition.

The literary career of Mādhavadeva began sometime during the middle of the sixteenth century. The *Janmarahasya* was the first work from his pen. It is a small work of about 300 verses. It relates the story of creation and destruction of the world and thus establishes the omnipotence of God. The book was written at the express wish of Rāṇī Bhuvaneśwarī, the wife of Cilārāya. She wanted a simple book on the subject for the use of women-devotees.

The metrical rendering of *Bhakti-ratnāvalī* of Viṣṇupurī comes next. Viṣṇupurī figures prominently in the Vaiṣṇava tradition and literature of Assam. The metrical translations of *Bhakti-ratnāvalī* is regarded as one of the four sacred books of the *Mahāpuruṣīyā* sect.[14] *Nāmghoṣā* begins with the Assamese rendering of the benedictory verse of *Kāntimālā*—a commentary by the author himself. The story how Śaṅkaradeva obtained a copy of this work is interesting. A certain Brahman scholar named Kaṇṭhabhūṣaṇa brought the work from *Kāśi.* The biographers relate different stories as to how Kaṇṭhabhūṣaṇa came upon the work. According to Daityāri, Kaṇṭhabhūṣaṇa bought the book at Kāśi.[15] But the work was not so famous at the middle of the 16th century that a scholar from Kāmarūpa would buy it in preference to other famous works. Rāmānanda says that the book was presented to Kaṇṭhabhūṣana by Rāmabhaṭṭa, a disciple of Viṣṇupurī,[16] for the spread of the religion of the *Bhāgavata* in Kāmarūpa. Bhūṣaṇa Dvija's version does not differ much. Rāmacaraṇa adds something more which gives the episode a legendary colour. All of them are at one with regard to the following: that Kaṇṭhabhūṣana brought

13. See my article 'Mādhavadevar Nāṭ Dukhan', in the *Awahan.* Medhi, Kaliram—*Ankāvali.*
14. The other three books, are the *Kīrtana* and *Daśama Skandha* by Śaṅkaradeva and the *Nāmāghoṣā* by Mādhavadeva.
15. Daityāri, *Gurucarita,* chap. 39, (R. M. Nath ed.)
16. Rāmānanda—vv. 1424—1459.

it from Kāśi and that he presented it to Śaṅkaradeva. Śaṅkaradeva was very glad to secure the book. His joy knew no bounds when he found the chapter on *Ekaśaraṇa* at the end. He at once entrusted Mādhava with the work of translating it into Assamese. Mādhavadeva did it so creditably that Śaṅkara congratulated him with the following remark—"You have a remarkable hold over your pen, you can both elaborate and summarise with equal ease. I on my part can only make abridgments."[16a]

The fundamental teachings of *Bhakti-ratnāvalī* as revealed in the commentary and as may be gathered from the arrangement of the verses may be summed up as follows—

(1) *Ekaśaraṇa*—i.e., surrendering oneself to the One and One alone, and there should be no compromise in matters of worship of gods other than supreme Viṣṇu.

(2) The passion of servitude recommended as the mode of bhakti.

(3) *Śravaṇa* and *Kīrtana* are the two chief means of realising true bhakti.[17]

(4) *Satsaṅga* as an important factor of bhakti.

The book lays special emphasis on *ekaśaraṇa*. Rāmānanda rightly observes that the purpose of taking the discussion on this topic to the end of the book is to attach the highest importance to *ekaśaraṇa* in the scheme of Vaiṣṇava Sādhana.[18]

Bhakti-ratnāvalī is known simply as *Ratnāvalī* in Assamese. It was once regarded as the most difficult book because of the abstract nature of the verses in comparison to other narrative poems. The Assamese proverb *Ka buliba nājāne ratnāvalī paḍhe,* 'a man who cannot read the first letter ventures to read *Ratnāvalī*', is still used in ordinary conversation to criticise an act of impudence.

16a. The general consensus of opinion is that the translation was done much after Saṅkaradeva's death (see Kathā-guru-carita, p. 202).—*Editor.*

17. Nābhāji in his *Bhaktamāl* sums up the teachings of Viṣṇupuri as follows:

Bhāgavata dharma utaṅga
Āna dharma ānana nadekhā
Pītara paṭa taṭa vigata
Niṣaka jyon kundana rekhā
Kṛṣṇa kṛpa che kahi
Beli satasaṅga dekhāyo

18. Rāmānanda—1449-50

Savāte kariyā sreṣṭha ekānta śaraṇa
Gariṣṭha kāraṇe śeṣe karichā bandhana.

In translating the work Mādhava fully utilized the commentary *Kāntimālā* written by Viṣṇupurī himself. Viṣṇupurī in his turn followed Śrīdhara Svāmī differing here and there only in minor points, and for that too he begs apology at the end of the work.[19]

Ādikāṇḍa: The next work is the metrical rendering of the first book of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Mādhava Kandalī a pre-Śaṅkaradeva poet rendered the whole *Rāmāyaṇa* into metrical Assamese. The copies of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* were preserved in Kāṇḍas or parvas in family collections. It is said that the first and the last book of the *Rāmāyaṇa* as translated by Mādhava Kandalī were lost during the troubled days of Kachārī raids. Śaṅkaradeva therefore took up the task of completing the work and himself prepared the metrical rendering of the Uttarakāṇḍa directing Mādhava to do the Adikāṇḍa. Mādhavadeva did his part most successfully. The beauty of his *Ādikāṇḍa* lies in its elegant verses and homely

19. As regards the date of Viṣṇupurī there was some controversy in *Indian Culture*, Vol. V, pp. 101 and 107 and also in Dr. Biman Bihari Majumdar's *Caitanya cariter upādān*, p. 563. The matter was again discussed by Dr. S. K. De in his *Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement*, p. 14. The question would not have been so perplexing if only the evidences from Assamese sources could be examined. See B. K. Barua's Date of Viṣṇupurī Sannyāśī in *New Indian Antiquary*, 1939.

The ground for fixing an early date for Viṣṇupurī was that according to the biographers of Caitanya Mādhavendra Purī or Jayadhvaja was the guru of Viṣṇupurī (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, 1. 9. 9-12, and *Caitanya-maṅgal* of Jayānanda, p. 34). The discussion was brought to a termination by Dr. S. K. De in a footnote to his *Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement*. By quoting a colophon from a manuscript of *Bhakti-ratnāvalī* preserved in the Dacca University he proves that "apparently Puruṣottama was Viṣṇupurī's guru and not Jayadhvaja or Mādhavendrapurī". The colophon in question runs thus:

Iti Śrī Puruṣottama - caraṇāravinda - kṛpā-makaranānda - bindu-pronmīlita - viveka - tairabhuktaparamahamsa - Śrī - Viṣṇu-puri-grathita Śrī bhāgavatamṛtābdhi - labdha - Śrī - bhakti-ratnāvalī-kāntimālā samāptā.

The sixteenth-century Assamese rendering of *Bhakti-ratnāvalī* contains a literal and complete translation of the above colophon, where also it is Puruṣottama who is described as the guru of Viṣṇupurī. Here we have the evidence of one of the earliest copies of the work, for the Assamese *Ratnāvalī* was completed towards the 6th decade of the 16th century. The copy was presented to Kanṭhabhūṣaṇa by a disciple of Viṣṇupurī. So Viṣṇupurī must have lived in the second part of the 15th and the first part of the 16th century. The Trihut tradition as reported by Hamilton (*Purniya Report*, 1809, p. 275) that a Sanyāsī named Viṣṇupurī lived there about three hundred years back goes to support the above date. So the story related in *Bhaktamāl granth* that *Viṣṇupurī* wrote *Bhakti-ratnāvalī* at the request of Caitanya may not be without foundation.

similes. The work nowhere reads like a translation. The appropriate use of Assamese proverbs with a slight touch of humour gives the work the flavour of an original work.

There are some portions in Ādikāṇḍa which present a case for genuine doubt as to the authorship of Mādhavadeva in respect of the whole work. The Ahalyā episode, for example, as related in Ādikāṇḍa differs greatly from the original. The lustful advances of Indra, description of their sexual enjoyment betray a low taste on the part of the poet. It is not warranted by the original too. The original quite decently passes over the matter in a few ślokas. It is difficult to suppose that so puritanic a writer like Mādhavadeva could indulge in such a low type of literary exercise. It is not unlikely that one or more minor poets in later times forced themselves in.

Rājasūya Yajña popularly known as *Rājasūya* was written between 1565 and 1568. Mādhava began the book before Śaṅkaradeva left for Koc Behār but could complete it only afterwards. The aim of the book is to establish the supreme Godhood of Kṛṣṇa. Mādhava utilizes the episode of the Rājasūya sacrifice of the Pāṇḍavas for this purpose. Kṛṣṇa there is selected as the first guest to receive oblation, the solitary voice of Śiśupāla only dissenting. The poem opens with a beautiful description of Dvārakā and gives a detailed account of the daily life of Kṛṣṇa as a householder which, as Mādhava puts it, is only a show of worldliness on the part of God in human form in conjunction with his deceptive principle *Yoga-māyā*.[20] The poem then takes us through a series of dramatic events and varied scenes to the court of Jarāsandha where the famous duel between Bhīma and Jarāsandha is fought followed by a general amnesty of the prisoner kings which ultimately contributed towards the success of the Rājasūya sacrifice of Yudhiṣṭhira.

The book is written in the Kāvya style and may be regarded as one of the finest poems of the Vaiṣṇava age. Although a kāvya its beauty lies not in the use of appropriate alaṅkāras and in fact Mādhava rarely indulges in complicated alaṅkāras or word-tricks. His is the art of natural description (*svabhāvokti*) with his personality and perspective infused into it. The descriptions of Dvārakā and Indraprastha, of the march of Śrī Kṛṣṇa to Indraprastha, the account of the duel between Jarāsanda and Bhīma contain

20. *Rājasūya*—25.

Yetikṣaṇe Kṛṣṇe yogamāyāka āgrahi
Manuṣya ceṣṭāka dekhāi thākā līlā kari,

a sonorousness, dignity and grace which impart to the work a rare poetical value. With *Rājasūya* the first phase of his literary life was over and the next phase is marked by the playlets and Bargītas.

Mādhavadeva composed a series of playlets. Some of them appear to be spurious. The internal evidences preclude any assumption in favour of Mādhavadeva's authorship so far as *Rās-jhumurā, Bhūṣan-herowā, Brahma-mohan,* and *Koṭorā-khelowā* are concerned.[21] The remaining genuine plays number five; they are *Arjun-bhañjan, Cordharā, Pimparā-gucuwā, Bhojana-vihāra,* and *Bhūmi-loṭowā.* The Carita-puthis mention two more but they are not available at present. Of the genuine ones the last four are called *Jhumurās,* and the first is a yātrā or simply an Aṅka.

The word *jhumurā* represents an extended meaning of the word *Jhumur* which is a kind of song sung in chorus to a short tāla (rhythm).[22] It is employed in a group dance generally performed by women in Choṭanagpur district and some parts of Orissa.[23] Originally a group dance of women *jhumur* later on came to mean a short performance where females mainly took part. On examination of the genuine jhumurās of Mādhavadeva we find that in all of them the themes represented deal with the childish pranks of Kṛṣṇa, the grand naughty boy. The gopīs and Yaśodā take the chief part. There is no other male part except that of the Sūtradhāra. This is the reason why the term is not applicable in the case of *Arjun-bhañjan,* which is not confined to female characters only. It is not unlikely that these *jhumurās* were originally meant for female performers before a female audience. There is a type of semi-dramatic performance called *pācati* prevalent in Assam even now. It is purely a function of the village women held just after the Janmāṣṭamī festival. An episode from the child-life of Kṛṣṇa is represented through dialogues and songs. It is not known whether Mādhavadeva was connected in any way with the origin of this institution but there is no doubt that his jhumurās provided an incentive to the growth and spread. Imitative dramatists in later days produced literary counterfeits and

21. Medhi, Kaliram—*Aṅkāvalī,* pp. lxxxv—vii. The writer's article—'Mādhavadevar Nāṭ Dukhan' in *Āwāhan,* 1540.

22. The Assamese metre 'Jhumurī' consisting of eight syllables in each line is reminiscent of the *jhumur* song. The metre being short and rhythmic can be fitted to a *jhumur* song.

23. One may witness this dance in the tea gardens of Assam where there are Mundari and Oriya labourers.

passed them on as true coins. They wrote short plays, appended the name of Mādhava in the colophon and the *bhaṇitā* lines of the songs and passed them as *jhumurās,* as if any playlet with Mādhavadeva's name in it could be a jhumurā. Thus the original significance of the word was lost sight of. Daityāri too is a victim of this confusion when he calls *Dadhimathan* a jhumurā.

The frolicsome activities of Boy-Kṛṣṇa as described in the *Bhāgavata* inspired many later poets to try their talents in this direction. Beautiful couplets based on some amusing situation from the life of Child-Kṛṣṇa were produced. They acquired much popularity within a short time and became a part of the floating poetry of the period. Some such couplets are preserved in a few anthologies. The *Padyāvalī*[24] of Rūpa-Goswāmī is an anthology of this nature. The *Kṛṣṇa-Karṇāmṛta* of Līlāśuka is another such collection of devotional lyric stanzas. Some of the stanzas which Mādhavadeva utilized as the source for the themes of his playlets appear in the *Kṛṣṇa-Karṇāmṛta.*[25] Curiously enough the stanzas adapted by Mādhava for his dramas are found in the expanded recensions. There are several other collections of similar verses called *Sumaṅgala-stotra, Bilvamangala Stotra, Kṛṣṇa-Stotra* and so forth. The verses taken by Mādhavadeva appear in the *Bilvamaṅgala-Stotra* also. *Līlāśuka* and *Bilvamaṅgala,* it is believed, are two names of the same person. Scholars are of opinion that there were more than one Bilvamaṅgala. Anyway it is quite certain that these stanzas, universally popular as they were, became more important than their author or authors. That is why Mādhava felt no necessity of mentioning the source of these stanzas and indeed there is hardly any scope for doing so in a drama.[26] These stanzas appear either as introductory verses or as sloka-portions[27] of the dramas. The theme dramatised is described in the couplet in a nutshell and as such serves as the Nāndī too; for according to dramaturgy Nāndi should covertly allude to the plot (*Vastu-Nirdeśa*).

The playlets of Mādhavadeva may be compared to the small one-act dramas of today so far as presentation of the plot and the

24. Ed. S. K. De, Dacca Univ. Oriental Publ. Series, Dacca 1934.
25. Ed. S. K. De, Dacca Univ. Oriental Publ. 1938. The southern recension—Published from Sri Vani-Vilasa press, Srirangam.
26. The complete information regarding these stanzas with exact reference to their source (*Bilvamaṅgalastotra*) will be found in Kaliram Medhi's "*Aṅkāvalī*", p. 386.
27. The Śloka portions of an Aṅkīyā drama introduces the subject matter of the next change.

maintaining of the unity of impression are concerned. It is not possible to detect in these jhumurās all the *sandhis* that go to make a full plot. The drama begins with the climax and the denouement consists in the final impression rather than in the solution of the different turn of events. Mādhavadeva's was a unique art of leading the audience to the aesthetic experience of bhakti through the sentiment of filial love. The filial love in a man is sought to be roused and sublimated to a love of a higher plane, of God. Mādhava never forgets to hint at the supreme Godhood of the Boy whose boyish nature he delineates in a masterly way. Mādhava was a celibate and spent the major part of his life away from the family atmosphere and yet curiously enough his works stand unsurpassed in the whole field of Assamese literature, ancient and modern, in point of delineating child-nature and expressing the aesthetic emotion of *Vātsalya.* Is it the subconscious yearning of a childless celibate that manifested itself as 'a joy forever' in his literary productions? This, of course, is a subject for those who revel in the study of psychology in literature.

Like his guru Mādhava too used the artificial language that went by the name of *Brajāvalī.* The language however appears to have lost much of its former status of a new-fangled language of poesy. The songs and dialogues are in Brajāvalī but the descriptive or narrative portions meant for plain recital are in Assamese. This was an innovation made by Mādhavadeva and therefore not found in the dramas of Śaṅkaradeva. Mādhavadeva cut down the use of songs and Sanskrit ślokas to the minimum and thus avoided harping on the narration of intervening events not represented in the drama. The whole-time Sūtradhāra is there but he plays a less prominent part in comparison to the Sūtradhāra of the dramas of Śaṅkaradeva so as to leave scope for fuller dialogues. As a result of all this the playlets of Mādhavadeva are free from monotony and overbearing presence of the Sūtradhāra — a defect which has taken away much of the dramatic effect of *Rāsakrīḍā* and *Kāli-damana* of Śaṅkaradeva.

The plays and *Bargītas* of Mādhavadeva were written during the second period of his literary life which began with the death of Śaṅkaradeva and ended with his departure for Koc Behār in 1693. The *Bargītas* are devotional songs like *Bhajanas* fitted to one or other *rāga.* They are called Bargītas in analogy of such homely terms as *Bar-Sabāh* (The great congregation), *Bar-bhakat* (great devotee). These songs are held as 'bar' because they are affiliated to a higher class of music (*Mārga-saṅgīta*). The other

songs employed in Nāma-Prasaṅga are fitted to crude and simple indigenous melodies (*Deśī-Sangīta*). In fact the words '*gīta*' and '*nāma*' bear different connotation in Assamese. The former means a song fitted to a *rāga* and the latter means simply a composition meant for recital in a simple tune. The musical pattern of the *rāgas* of the *Bargītas* show little affinity to the Hindustani music of today. This is probably due to the fact that these rāgas came to Assam long before the renaissance of Hindustani music under the Moghuls. So the *rāgas* represented by the *Bargītas* preserve the pre-Moghul form of Hindustani music. It is regrettable however that for want of proper training on the part of the gāyanas the *Bargīta* has undergone considerable deterioration.

The *Bargītas* may be classified according to the traditional scheme.[28] This scheme takes the subject-matter of the songs into consideration and so also its employment in the daily song services. Thus there are *Jāganar Gītas* which describe Yaśoda's entreaties to arouse Kṛṣṇa from his sleep in the morning. Then we have *calanar gīta*. Kṛṣṇa in these songs leads his cows to the grazing field. There are others describing the *dol* sports of Kṛṣṇa and they are known as "daular gīta". There are definite rules, determined by convention as to the proper employment of the different classes of Bargītas. One cannot sing a *Jāganar gīta* at the time of midday service. As indirect devotional lyrics these songs reveal the heart of the God-intoxicated soul of a bhakta poet. If viewed from this standpoint we have two sets of Bargītas before us. They represent two stages of spiritual development in Mādhavadeva. One is characterised by delicate sensuousness of a bhakta poet for whom Kṛṣṇa is no longer a legendary cowherd boy but a living and charming personality. He feels the pleasing presence of this Boy, enjoys his touch, takes keen delight in his personal charm and beauty. At another time he suffers the agony of separation because that beautiful face is no longer before him. The following is a typical Bargīta of the class in question.

> "Oh, how shall I narrate the tale of my sorrow. I have not seen that beautiful face. My life flows out of me. As a result of past merits I got my Śyāma who is the source of all good qualities by my side, but cruel fate has taken him away from me. I cannot live without Kānu the beautiful. My mind becomes restless at the very utterance of the name Śyāma. The day somehow I spend in misery but night only lingers and lingers. The moon, sandal-paste or even the southern breeze turns hostile, it appears. I cannot sit calm; nor do I know where to go, my mind is restless. Friends, let us simply curse that Kānu."

28. Sri Rajmohan Nath in his edition of Mādhava's bargītas makes an attempt to classify these songs according to various sentiments expressed in them in imitation of the traditional classification of Bengali padas. Such a classification, however, serves no purpose so far as the *bargītas* are concerned, for the Assamese Vaiṣṇavas attach little importance to erotic mysticism and as such to the different stages of bhāvas.

The second set of *Bargītas* is characterised by calm intentness of a quiescent soul. We feel in these songs the tranquillity of the morning sea after a long stormy night. The turbulent river has reached the sea to merge her identity in the calm and vastness that ensure complete security. The proud scholar is '*Dīna*' and '*Mūrukha*' now surrendering himself completely at the feet of his ever-compassionate Lord (*Dayār Ṭhākur Yadumaṇi*). There are about fifty Bargītas of this nature and the following is one of them.

> "O Hari, my kind Lord Yadumaṇi, O Ram, this meanest of the souls sings your name aloud. Please be gracious, Nārāyaṇa, for my mind is fickle. May it remain fixed at your feet. A certain Brahmin, Ajāmila, stupid and sinful though he was, by mistake called for his son. This much alone freed him from Karma and he attained Vaikuṇṭha. This of course the whole world knows. I am sinful, perhaps thousand times worse—a fallen soul, but your grace lifts up a fallen soul. This is what I am banking upon."

In the elegance, softness and music of his poetic diction as well as in point of richness of sentiment the *Bargītas* of Mādhavadeva will stand comparison with compositions of other master songwriters of India.

The second set of *Bargītas* mark the transition from the second to the third phase of Mādhavadeva's spiritual and therefore literary career. The note of fervent submission (*śaraṇa*) and quiescence (*śānta*) so predominant a characteristic in *Nāmaghoṣā* is already heard in these Bargītas. Mādhavadeva's *vātsalya sādhana* has landed him in *śānta* and *dāsya* at the journey's end. *Nāmaghoṣā* is the magnum opus of his literary life and probably of the religious literature of the period.

Mādhavadeva wrote one more work during his stay at Koc Behār (1593-1596). It is the metrical rendering of a Sanskrit anthological work entitled *Nāmamālikā*. The work as the title implies,

is not a garland of names but it extols the merits of the Holy Name. It is, however, an instance of literary side-slip. The book was prepared to order. Biru Kārji, an old minister of the king of Koc Behār, got a book from Orissa which somehow or other interested him. He requested Mādhava to prepare a metrical translation of the book. Mādhavadeva obeyed his patron but the book itself did not appeal to him much and in fact he held a low opinion of it. The arrangement and the method of treatment, as he remarks at the beginning, are far from satisfactory.[29] There was another reason why the book failed to have an appeal for him. The book gives an intolerably long list of the merits resulting from the singing of the Holy Name. This was what Mādhava could not persuade himself to appreciate. According to him to sing the praise of Hari is an end by itself and one should not aspire after good results to be enjoyed here or hereafter. So when concluding the book he states his view in clear terms :

"Sing the name of Hari with joy. This and this alone is the precious wealth that a bhakta may reasonably aspire after."[30]

We may, therefore, leave aside *Nāmamālikā* while making a survey of the last phase of Mādhavadeva's literary expression as it has hardly any bearing on the natural course of development in matters of thought, language and style of the original compositions of the last part of his life. We must turn to *Nāmaghoṣā* for this purpose.

Nāmaghoṣā is the record of religious experiences of a genuinely devoted soul and it may also be regarded as an expression of spiritual craving of a whole generation of men stirred to a religious quest by diverse thought-currents and practices of the day. It embodies the teachings of his guru, his own findings after a careful study of the Śāstras and above all the truth he realised in his own heart. His last message to Gôpālā Āṭā of Bhawānīpur runs thus :

"Read *Nāmaghoṣā* every day for whatever I have received from Śaṅkaradeva and whatever I could gather as a result of my study of the scriptures and above all the truth of my own realisation have been incorporated in this work. So do not fail to keep this book by your side and a careful study of it will lead you to perfect enlightenment."[31]

29. *Nāhike sṛṅkhala grantha āti nirarthak*
Āra pada kari kone milāibe kautuk
Nāmalmalika, v. 10.

30. *Kariyo ānande Hari nāmara kīrtana*
Ehimāne mātra bhakatara mahādhana. Ibid 228.

31. *Śrī Śrī Gopāladeva Carita;* ed. Tirthanath Goswami, pp. 61-70.

Mādhavadeva began *Nāmaghoṣā* after Śaṅkaradeva had left for Koc Behār. The story goes that Śaṅkaradeva on the eve of his journey directed Mādhava to write a book which would be like a jujube fruit (Skt. *Badari*), soft outside but hard at the core within; meaning thereby that the abstruse teachings of *Nāmadharma* should be presented in an attractive manner in soft and elegant verses. Mādhava obeyed his guru but could not make much progress so long as he was at Barpetā. His life at Koc Behār was more or less of a recluse and it was there that the major part of the book was written between 1593-1596. He could complete the work shortly before his death. Even the closest of his disciples knew little of this work till after his death. The message quoted above perplexed Gopāla Ātā to a great extent since he was not aware of a work entitled *Nāmaghoṣā* till then.[32]

The word *Ghoṣā* means a refrain, the first verse of a song repeated every time in chorus. This verse indicates also the tune in which the remainder is to be sung. In this respect it is an equivalent of the words such as *dhurā, dhūā* (Skt. *Dhruva*) or *dihā* (Skt. *dīśā*). The word is from √ *ghuṣ*, to chant aloud.[33] Originally *ghoṣā* meant a song sung aloud. This shade is still retained in the word *banghoṣā* which means a love song sung by cowherd boys in woody nooks and villages. During the Vaiṣṇava period the term acquired a slightly different meaning, i.e., a burden of a devotional song sung aloud in chorus. Such a ghoṣā appears at the top of each section of *Kīrtana* by Śaṅkaradeva. The couplets in *Nāmghoṣā* were written in imitation of these burden verses of *Kīrtana*. There are altogether a thousand such verses and hence the work is otherwise known as *Hejāri Ghoṣā*. The last part of the book consists of the names and attributes of Viṣṇu fitted to convenient metres for the purpose of singing in private or congregational services. This part of the book is called *nāmachanda* and its importance is very great from the point of ceremonial aspects of *Nāmadharma*. This part of the book therefore was responsible for determining the title *Nāmaghoṣā* for the collections of a thousand *ghoṣā*.[34]

32. Ibid, p. 73.

33. cf. (a) *Eri Āna Kām, Bolā Rāma Rām*
Ghuṣioka ghane ghana
(b) *Sadāya ḍākiyā ghusiyo Hari*
We find similar use in Sanskrit and Prakṛt.

34. The manuscripts of the Nāmaghoṣā do not show uniformity in numbering the verses. The same sequence too is not maintained. Whatever the process of numbering may be every manuscript reaches the number 1000 or 1001 at the end.

There are three sections in *Nāmaghoṣā*. The first section deals with the doctrinal aspect of *Nāmadharma*. The second section called Śaraṇa-chanda is a collection of lyrical stanzas of self-effacing devotion. The third section as stated above is a series of metrical arrangements of the names and attributes of Viṣṇu meant for song services of the sect.

The first section, which may be called the Ghoṣā proper, extols *Nāma-dharma* as the universal religion.[35] It is simple in practice, catholic in views and monotheistic in adherence. The cardinal teachings of *Nāmaghoṣā* may be summed up as follows:

(i) The *Ekadeva* doctrine of the Mahāpuruṣa is reiterated again with all the emphasis at the command of the author. Kṛṣṇa is the one and true God, his word the *Bhāgavata* is the only authoritative scripture.[36] He is the only one capable of effecting cessation of misery on the part of created beings, for he lords over time and māyā.[37]

(ii) The name (*nāma*) and *Kṛṣṇa* (*Nāmī*) are identical and hence the Nāma is a living entity. It is also full of Ānanda or rasa (*Nāma-ānanda, Nāma-rasa*). Nāma alone can lead a devotee to ultimate bliss.

(iii) Bhakti is the ultimate end of life. It is *paramapuruṣārtha*. The four other objects, namely, dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa are merely subservient to Bhakti.[38] The *Nāmaghoṣā* opens with a homage to the bhakat who is indifferent to mukti and the first section ends with the definition of a true (ekānta) bhakat, a bhakat who ceases to have any desire for four objects of human life and who has emerged himself in the wonderful Name.[39] In fact Mādhava is never tired of repeating the doctrine throughout the

35. Nāmghoṣā—Published by Barkataki and Co, Jorhat. v. 500—501—
Hari Nāme nāhike niyama adhikārī
Rāma buli tare Miri Asama Kachārī
36. *Eka khāni mātra śāstra niṣṭha.*
Devakī nandane kailā yāka
Devo ekamātra Devaki devīra sūta. *Nāmghoṣā* v. 665.
37. *Kṛṣṇa eka deva dukhahārī*
Kāla māyādiro adhikāri
Kṛṣṇa bine sreṣṭha deva Nāhi nāhi āra
38. *Cāripuruṣārtha tāhāra nijarā* Ibid 586.
Hari nāme mūla-dhārā Ibid 372.
39. *Ekānta bhakata jārā haya Kichu artha tārā nabānchaya |*
mahā adabhuta Hariguṇa nāma-maya Ibid 694.

book.[40] Complete submission at the feet of Kṛṣṇa (*śaraṇa*) is the *summum bonum* of human life.

(iv) Purity of heart is the chief pre-requisite of progress in *Nāmadharma*. Purity again can be attained only with the help of the Nāma.

(v) *Nāmadharma* is open to all. In former days the precious Nāma of Hari was a matter for secrecy but Śaṅkaradeva out of compassion for the human race made it available to all.[41] Every man can hope to develop his personality to the greatest possible height (*narottama*) by resorting to the praise of Kṛṣṇa.[42]

Theology in the *Nāmaghoṣa* is turned into elegant poetry by the magic touch of Mādhava, the poet. Towards the end of the book however the theologian is no more, the poet too shrinks to the background and it is the mystic alone who shines. Mādhavadeva began as a scholastic theologian, turned a poet and ended as a mystic. His literary output is a faithful record of this progress. In *Janmarahasya, Bhaktiratnāvalī* and *Ādikāṇḍa* we find him as a scholar theologian busy in explaining and translating books dealing with Vaiṣṇava legends and doctrines. It marks the preparatory stage of a future religious preacher. In his *Rājasūya* the theologian gives into the poet and in his dramas he is primarily a poet. The *Bargītas* record the turmoil of the dark night of his soul. When we reach *Nāma-ghoṣā,* specially its śaraṇa section, we feel the quiescene of a calm and beautiful first light. The sense of self almost disappears, he enjoys the blissful state of *śaraṇa,* his only concern being the security of this state for the future. The following is an exquisite example which describes Mādhava in the śaraṇa state.

"You are the scion of the Yadus and so also the joy of the Yadus. You are the Lord of māyā and hence the dispeller of *Māyā*.[42a] You are Nārāyaṇa the untinged eternal, in you I have found complete refuge.

40. Ibid. 1, 77, 124, 251, 288, 328, 532, 650, 651, 684, 742, 995, etc., etc.
41. *Parama amūlya ratna Harira nāmara perā*
Āti gupta svarūpe āchila
Lokaka kṛpāye Hari Śaṅkara svarūpe āsi
Muda bhāṅgi samastake dila
42. *Kewale Kṛṣṇara Kīrtane karaya*
Samastake narottama

42a. The original is "Mādhava Madhusūdana". Mādhavadeva in the *nāmāṇvaya* chapter of his *Nāmaghoṣā* explains the epithet 'Madhusūdana' as follows: Māyā—apparently pleasant (Madhumatī) drives every soul mad. Since God destroys this Madhu or māyā he is called Mādhusūdana.

Compassionate Lord! bestower of all fortunes! O Hari, leave me not alone this time for at your crimson feet I have taken refuge. Forsooth I am at your feet.

Ah, I am at the feet of Hari, Ah Nārāyaṇa, blessed today is this human birth of mine. Ah, Hari, Ah Nārāyaṇa."

Mādhavadeva's mysticism consists in complete self surrender to Kṛṣṇa who is the compassionate master (*Dayāśīla deva*) and a bosom friend (*Prāṇa Bāndhava*). The relationship between Kṛṣṇa and himself is not that of a lover and the beloved but of a kind master and his selfless servant. His final attainment consists not in complete union or self-annihilation but in a state of security and bliss under the sheltering shadow of his master's feet (*caraṇa chatrara chāyā*).[43] He yearns for a perpetual joy of bhakti even at the released state hereafter.[44] It is the rasa or emotional ecstasy of bhakti that constitutes his sole concern. *Nāmaghoṣā* begins with a prayer for such bhakti, that is rasa (*rasamayī bhakati*), and ends with the confession that Mādhava the ignorant (*mūrukha*) steeped in that rasa goes on singing.[45] The term '*mūrukha*' which Mādhava finds pleasure in using again and again with respect to himself does not merely convey the characteristic humility of a Vaiṣṇava poet. It has a deeper meaning. In calling himself a *mūrukha* he shows indifference to *Jñāna* or enlightenment. It is the joy of bhakti which should be the primary concern with a true bhakta and to attain it he need not necessarily be a jñānī. Mādhavadeva's approach is straight and there is no complexity in the psychological mode adopted by him. So symbols have hardly any place in his writings and this remark applies specially to the *Ghoṣā*. His was a rare sādhana and a very few seekers of God have been able to raise the passion of divine servitude to such a glorious height of mystic ecstasy.

43. Ibid 129, 312, 313, etc.
44. 310, 333, 337 etc.
45. *Ehu rasa Mādhava mūrukha-mati gāwe*, Ibid. 1001.

RĀMA SARASVATĪ AND HIS WORKS

BY

J. SARMA

Rāma Sarasvatī occupies a place of eminence among the writers who flourished in Assam in the sixteenth century. The writers of this age are without exception connected with the Vaiṣṇava movement and the subject-matters of their writings are all drawn from the epics and the Purāṇas. The Kṛṣṇa cult as propagated in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* was the common theme and even those who drew from the epics were greatly influenced by this Purāṇa. Rāma Sarasvatī was a devout Vaiṣṇava. He made verse-renderings of some books of the *Mahābhārata* and has also preserved for us matters not to be found in the *Mahābhārata*. It has not been found possible to ascertain whether the subject-matter of his original work was drawn from Sanskrit sources, or from legends and traditions current in this part of the country or whether it was in his own invention. But it is true that stories like *Manicandra, Aśvakarṇa, Sindhuyātrā* are not to be met with elsewhere and they may very well be called 'the matter of Assam'. One of the most voluminous of writers, Rāma Sarasvatī retains his popularity even to-day.

The works of Rāma Sarasvatī have not yet been properly edited and published, although manuscripts, in some cases centuries old, are still available. The immense popularity of his works has led enterprising publishers to get them printed primarily for profit; but they have also thereby preserved from oblivion and brought to light works by an eminent writer which otherwise would have been lost. A few verses of Rāma Sarasvatī were first printed in *Kāvyakusuma,* an anthology of old Assamese poetry, edited in 1884 by late Rai Bahadur Gunābhirām Baruā. Attention to the life and poetry of Rāma Sarasvatī was drawn by writers in the Assamese journal *Jonākī* particularly by Ratneswar Mahanta. In this connection there was a controversy as to whether Rāma Sarasvatī of the Mahābhārata fame and Ananta Kandali, a junior contemporary poet and disciple of Śrī Śaṅkaradeva, were one and the same person. This controversy spread over several years. Dinanath Bezbarua, Gunabhiram Barua, Kaliram Sarma Barua (who edited and published *Jayadeva-kāvya,* an Assamese rendering in verse of *Gīta-govinda*), Lakshminath

Bezbarua and some others held that these two Vaiṣṇava poets were identical. But the matter has been almost finally settled. Hemchandra Goswami, in his *Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts,* thus sums up: "Many writers have confused him (Ananta Kandali) with Rāma Sarasvatī which is evidently not warranted by facts" (p. 36). But the unique character of Rāma Sarasvatī's writings was, however, emphasised, by Dr. B. Kakati in a few articles in *Cetanā* in 1920-21, subsequently published in his *Puraṇi Asamiyā Sāhitya.*

Events of his life.—We have no detailed and connected accounts of the life of Rāma Saravatī. What little we have are to be gleaned from his writings. He describes himself somewhere as a native of Caṃariyā in Kāmarūpa, elsewhere of Pacariyā.

Kāmarūpa madhya grāma nāhika upām
tāte grāma bhailā Camariyā yāra yāra nām.

(Bhīṣmaparva, 1350)

(In Kāmarūpa there is a village without a parallel, known as Camariyā.)

Grāmamadhye sāroddhāra Pacariyā nāma yāra
Kaliyuge śreṣṭha likhe yāka,
Brāhmaṇa sakale nita Bhāgavata aviśrāma
Carcā kare pātiyā sabhāka

(Virāṭaparva: quoted by D. N. Bezbarua in his *Asamiyā Bhāṣa āru Sāhityar Burañji*)

[Counted as the matchless in Kaliyuga is a village known as Pacariyā — the best among villages;

there the Brāhmaṇas assemble for continuous holy discussion on the *Bhāgavata.*]

Gopīnātha Pāṭhaka, son of Rāma Sarasvatī, has rendered into Assamese verse two books of the *Mahābhārata.* In *Droṇaparva* he describes himself as the grandson of a wise and pious Brāhmaṇa, Bhīmasena Dvija of ChināKona in Pāṭcaurā and son of Rāma Sarasvatī, Pāthaka of Prince Śukladhvaja. At any rate, the poet's father was a resident of the district either of Kāmrūp or Darrang. As for the poet, it was quite possible that he shifted from place to place along with his royal patrons as the prevailing political conditions of the time demanded.

While Gopīnātha Pāṭhaka describes Bhīmaṣena Dvija as the father of Rāma Sarasvatī, the poet himself however, speaks of his father as Kavicūḍāmaṇi:

Vipramadhye sāroddhāra Kavicūḍāmaṇi yāra
Nāma bhailā kula prakāśaka
Adyāpi yaśasyā railā upāsante kāla gailā
Bhaktibhāve śrīhariharaka (Prabhu Mādhavaka).[1]

Udyogaparva, verse 184.

[Kavicūḍāmaṇi was the choicest among Brāhmaṇas; his very name shed lustre on the family; his fame still remains as one who passed his days as an ardent devotee of Hari and Hara (Lord Mādhava).]

Sehi grāmeśvara bhailā Kavicūḍāmaṇi
Paṇḍitagaṇara madhye yāka agragaṇi.

—*Bhīṣmaparva,* v. 1351.

(Kavicūḍāmaṇi, the lord of the village was reckoned as the chief among the scholars.)

This discrepancy is easily reconciled. Bhīmasena Dvija might have been the real name of the poet's father, and Kavicūḍāmaṇi was just a title as was usual in those days. Rāma Sarasvatī himself, as we shall see, acquired several such titles for his great learning and literary talent.

Kavicūḍāmaṇi had two sons, Kavicandra and Rāma Sarasvatī, the younger,

Āta anantare tāra dui putra bhaila.
Jyeṣṭha bhailā Kavicandra āti śuddha-mati
Tāhāna anuja bhailā Rāma Sarasvatī.

—Bhīṣmaparva, 1352-53.

(In course of time he had two sons. Kavicandra was the elder and he was pure of mind. Rāma Sarasvatī was the younger.)

Tāne śreṣṭha putra sānta Govindaka upāsanta
Bhāgavata śāstre yāra rati
Veda ye purāṇa gaṇe nakahanta yāta vine
tāna pāve kariyā bhakati.

1. Mss. with the Kāmarūpa Anusandhāna Samiti.

Guṇavanta vaṁśadhara tehe kavicandra vara
samandhata sodara āmāra;

Yāra mahākṛpāyeśe (yāra kripā anugrahe[2]*)*
śiksā upadeśa snehe
Iṭo pada karilõ pracāra.

—Udyoga parva, v. 185.

(His best son, by nature peaceful, is a worshipper of Govinda. He is devoted to the study of the holy *Bhāgavata*. He worships at the feet of His that is the last word of the Vedas and the Purāṇas. Talented in the family, he is my elder, Kavicandra. It was through his favour and affectionate guidance that I have been able to propagate these verses).

In the opening verse of the *Jayadeva-kāvya,* he speaks of his elder brother thus:

Jñāna cakṣu dilāhā sodara rūpa dhari
Namo Kavicandrara caraṇe āga vāḍhi:

(Assuming the form of a brother, you have given me eyes of wisdom. I come forward to bow down at the feet of Kavicandra.)

All this gives an idea of the family and parentage of Rāma Sarasvatī and the pious influence he breathed in his early life. He must have been deeply imbued with the teachings of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and other Vaiṣṇvite Purāṇas. He must also have been widely acquainted with Sanskrit works in a variety of subjects, particularly with works on poetics, music and erotics. Later on when he joined the circle of luminaries at the court of king Nārāyaṇa, he studied cart-loads of works in manuscript placed at his disposal by the great patron of culture.

He begins his *Vanaparva* with a prayer to the son of Daivakī; he bows down to all true Vaiṣṇavas, to Mukundadeva, greatest among saints, and to Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana.[3] In several places elsewhere Rāma Sarasvatī calls himself a servant of Mukunda (Mukunda-kiṅkara[4]).

2. Mss. with Kāmarūpa Anusandhāna Samiti.
3. *Vanaparva,* vv. 2-4.
4. *Vanaparva,* vv. 42, 1416, 1778, 3321.

It was Mukundadeva who conferred on him the titles of Bhāratacandra and Kavicandra. D. N. Bezbarua, in his *Asamiyā Bhāṣā āru Sāhityar Barañjī* remarks that it was Mukundadeva, son of Śukladhvaja who gave him the title of Bhāratacandra and Kavicandra.[5] Rāma Sarasvatī could not have spoken in such terms of Mukunda even though he might have been the son of his royal patron. Moreover, prince Śukladhvaja is not said to have a son, Mukunda by name. Rāma Sarasvatī, however, speaks of one Mukunda as son of Raghudeva (son of Prince Śukladhvaja).[6] Mukundadeva undoubtedly was a spiritual preceptor of Rāma Sarasvatī, who, as was usual, invoked his blessings when beginning the *Vanaparva*. This is corroborated by his respectful reference to Mukundadeva as his 'own *guru*'.

Praṇāmo Mukunda deva mora nija guru
(I bow down to my own guru Mukundadeva.)

—Vyañjanparva, v. 88 (D.H.A.S.)

Koc King Naranārāyaṇa.—Rāma Sarasvatī's literary talents drew the attention of Naranārāyaṇa, the Koc king and his brother Śukladhvaja or Cilārāya. Śrī Śaṅkaradeva, the great Vaiṣṇava reformer, had already come to live and preach his faith in the Koc territory to avoid persecution in the east. He has already exerted great influence on the cultural life there. The king himself wanted to accept the discipleship of Śrī Śaṅkaradeva. The heart of Prince Śukladhvaja "was deeply stirred by Śaṅkara's preaching of the cult of the *Bhāgavata.*"[7] Eminent scholars and poets were invited to his court to translate the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* into Assamese and also to compose treatises on varied subjects, such as grammar, poetics and astronomy.[8] This was calculated to help the spread of culture and learning. Rāma Sarasvatī was asked to make verse rendering of the *Mahābhārata,* the seven books of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the eighteen Purāṇas for popular edification.[9]

The Poet's Career.—After the death of Naranārāyaṇa, he came to the capital of Raghudeva, son of Śukladhvaja. The Koc territory was partitioned during the life-time of Naranārāyaṇa, the

5. p. 191
6. *Udyogaparva,* v. 645.
7. *Vanaparva,* v. 3319.
8. K. L. Barua, *Early History of Kāmarūpa,* chap. XVI.
9. *Darrang-rāja-vaṁśāvalī,* vv. 604-612.

portion to the east of the Svarṇakoṣa (Soṇkoṣ) being allotted to Raghudeva.[10] At Vijayanagara, the new capital, Raghudeva was attended by many a tributary prince. The city was as magnificent as Amarāvatī. There he used to listen to the recitation of holy books and caused them to be translated into Assamese.[11]

The river Svarṇakoṣa, the western boundary of Raghudeva's territory has been given almost a divine origin by Rāma Sarasvatī in *Baghāsura-vadha* in which he describes how Arjuna by his great skill in archery drew water out of the earth for his ablution before fighting the demons.[12]

In 1583 A.D. during the reign of Raghudeva, the temple of Hayagrīva-Mādhava at Hājo was rebuilt. In *Vanaparva,* Rāma Sarasvatī introduces the story of Sukarṇa and his birth. Sukarṇa in this narrative is said to be begotten by Hayagrīva-Mādhava and Padmarekhā for the latter's devotion to the deity.[13] In *Kulācala-vadha* also there is a description of the worship of Śvetamādhava (Hayagrīva-Mādhava).[14] These verses may have been written in honour of the deity, probably for recital on the occasion of the consecration of the temple and later on incorporated into the poems.

Parīkṣita succeeded his father Raghudeva. He built his capital near the Aśvakrānta hill.[15] Rāma Sarasvatī must have moved with the king from Vijayapura,[16] as we know that he was preceptor of Parīkṣit's brother, who was afterwards renamed by the Āhom king as Dharmanārāyaṇa on his installation as tributary *rājā* of Darrang. He was also the family priest of Dharmanārāyaṇa and his touching reference to the death of Raghudeva's son, his description of Balinārāyaṇa's marriage and his solicitude for the welfare of the royal family can be expected only from one intimately connected.[17] The poet is known to have written *Śāntiparva,*[18] the story of Sāvitrī in verse, during the reign of Sundaranārāyaṇa, successor of Dharmanārāyaṇa.

10. *Darrang-rāja-vaṁśāvalī,* vv. 606-612.
11. *Vanaparva,* v. 3320.
12. *Baghāsuravadha,* p. 163.
13. *Vanaparva,* vv. 4091-4130.
14. *Kulācalavadha,* pp. 6-9.
15. *Darrang-rāja-vaṁśāvalī,* v. 30.
16. *Ghoṣa Yātrā,* vv. 196-197. (D.H.A.S. Ms.).
17. *Udyogaparva,* vv. 638-644; (Kāmarūpa Anusandhāna Samiti Ms.).
18. *Śāntiparva,* vv. 13-14; (Ms. 476, D.H.A.S.).

Rāma Sarasvatī was thus connected with four ruling kings of the Koc branch, viz., from Naranārāyaṇa to Sundaranārāyaṇa during the period from the sixties of the 16th century to the forties of the 17th.

As is well-known, King Naranārāyaṇa was a great patron of culture. In order to propagate and popularise the great Indian epic, the *Mahābhārata,* he engaged Rāma Sarasvatī and asked him to render it into Assamese verse :

Śuniyoka ājñā mora Rāma Sarasvatī
Bhāratara pada tumi kariyo samprati

—*Darrang-rāja-vaṁśāvali,* v. 606.

(Hear me, Rāma Sarasvatī, you do render into Assamese verse the *Bhārata* for the present.)

The Mahābhārata in Assam.—It may be recalled that before him no such organised attempt at translating the great epic was made in this part of India. The *Mahābhārata* story must have penetrated into Assam by the 4th century A.D.[19] Sculptural representation of the *Mahābhārata* stories are rare.[20] In some of the copper-plate land-grants occur names of Bhīma, Arjuna, Naraka, and Bhagadatta.[21] It was during the reign of Durlabhanārāyaṇa (A.D. 1330-1350)[22] that we come across Assamese renderings of portions of the *Mahābhārata.* Harivara Vipra composed *Vabruvāhanar* Yuddha based on Jaimini. One of his contemporaries, Kaviratna was the author of *Jayadratha-vadha.* Rudra Kandali was another writer who rendered a portion of the epic into the local language. Mādhava Kandali, the fourteenth century writer of the Assamese version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* wrote *Devajit,* a poem describing the defeat of Indra and other gods at the hands of Arjuna who fought with the inspiration of Kṛṣṇa. The book also describes how afterwards Arjuna entered the body of Kṛṣṇa, the four Pāṇḍavas in the body of Mahādeva and Draupadī in that of Pārvatī.[22a]

We ought to bear in mind that the epic stories were broadcast through verbal transmission by learned scholars for the good of the

19. S. K. Chatterji, *Kirāta-jana-kiṛti,* p. 47.
20. B. K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam,* p. 173.
21. *Kāmarūpa-Śāsanāvalī,* pp. 99, 139, 151.
22. K. L. Barua, *Early History of Kāmarūpa,* p. 250.
22a. The authorship of *Devajit* is not free from doubts.—Ed.

people at large. Versions without number of the *Mahābhārata* were composed and recited, but nothing remains of the vast output of such oral literature. Temples of deities and courts of kings had been throughout the early ages the centres of propagation of the epics in India.[23]

Patronage.—Rāma Sarasvatī had to complete a holy and tremendous task and his attainments were undoubtedly equal to it. The king gave all facilities for the work by supplying him with the entire collection of books and commentaries in his possession. In order that the poet might continue his work without worries and with comfort, the king provided him with money and placed servants at his disposal.

Naraṇārāyaṇa's Patronage.—

Āmāka karila ājñā parama sādare
Bhāratara pada tumi kariyoka sāre
Āmāra gṛhata āche ṭīkā bhāṣya yata
Niyoka apona gṛhe diloho samasta
Ehi buli rājā save baladhi jorāi
Paṭhāilā pustaka save āmāsāra ṭhāi
Dhana vastra alaṅkāra dilā bahutara
Dāsadāsī diyā mana baḍhāilā āmāra

—*Vanaparva*, v. 840-841.

(With great courtesy he told me: "Please translate *Bhārata* into (Assamese) verse. I give you all commentaries; take them to your place". So saying the king sent me all the books on a bullock-cart. He also gave me for encouragement sufficient money, cloths, ornaments and servants.)

The king took great delight in listening to rare versions of the *Mahābhārata* and persons getting them for him were rewarded.[24] The rewards in shape of money and land which Rāma Sarasvatī received from his royal patron were sufficient for seven generations after him.[25]

Rāma Sarasvatī introduced other writers like Kaṁsāri to the king and secured for them royal permission to compose verses on

23. Mecdonell: *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, p. 288.
24. *Vanaparva*, verse 829; *Baghāsuravādha*.
25. *Vyañjan-parva*, verse 332.

the *Mahābhārata* stories. Rāma Sarasvatī himself composed thirty thousand verses while other poets did only three thousand.[26] Elsewhere he speaks of his composing twenty-four thousand verses.[27]

Even as a beginner, Rāma Sarasvatī's art brought him appreciation from his patrons as well as from persons of eminence. The king called him by the name Rāma Sarasvatī. Śukladhvaja gave him the title Kavicandra. Mukunda, his spiritual preceptor, called him Bhāratacandra. He was also known as Bhārata-bhuṣaṇa. Rāma Sarasvatī's name as given by his parents was Aniruddha.[28] We have already referred to the confusion regarding Ananta Kandali and Rāma Sarasvatī and there are still some who believe that they were one person and Rāma Sarasvatī had ten names. The name of the poet's elder brother also was Kavicandra; in Rāma Sarasvatī's case Kavicandra was only a title conferred upon him in recognition of his poetic ability.

Chronology of His Works.—The exact dates of composition of the different works of Rāma Sarasvatī are not at all easy to fix. In his different books, he refers, as was the custom, to his royal patrons and we have to be guided solely by this in the chronological arrangement of his poems.

Ādiparva by Aniruddha Dvija (for this was the original name of Rāma Sarasvatī) must have been composed prior to his contact with the Koc court, for there are no references to the king, while in subsequent works, the pious patron is frequently praised. *Vanaparva* was begun in the latter part of the king's reign and the poet was yet an immature youth.[29] *Vanaparva* of Rāma Sarasvatī consists of several books — all stout volumes — and the composition of these must have been spread over several years of the politically chaotic period. In *Baghāsuravadha* (a part of *Vanaparva*) there is a clear reference to the death of Naranārāyaṇa.[30]

Two books which form parts of *Vanaparva*, viz., *Ghoṣa-yātrā* and *Sindhu-yātrā* were, however, completed during the reign of

26. *Vanaparva*, verse 2367.
27. *Kulācalavadha* (conclusion).
28. *Vanaparva*, verses 2366-2367; 3321.
29. *Vanaparva*, verse 1186.
30. *Tente Vaikuṇṭaka pāilā dharmayaśa thāki gailā bakhānanta mahanta sakale.* He (the King) has ascended to Vaikuṇṭha; but he has left behind the fame of his piety and the good people all discuss about it (*Baghāsuravadha*).

Dharmanārāyaṇa (A.D. 1615-1637).[31] *Virāṭaparva* and *Udyogaparva* and *Bhīṣmaparva,* also were completed during the life-time of this prince.[32] *Jayadevakāvya* (an Assamese version of the *Gītagovinda*) appears to be composed after the above works during the reign of the same king.[33] *Śantiparva* (story of Sāvitrī) is the last contribution of his poetic career.[34]

Karṇaparva, Sindhurāparva, Vyāsāśrama and *Bhīmacarita* give us no indication whatever about the time they were written.

It must not be supposed, however, that Rāma Sarasvatī could complete the rendering of the entire Mahābhārata. As far as is known, he could write the voluminous *Vanaparva* and a few more of the other parvas, viz., Ādiparva, Virāṭaparva, Udyogaparva, Bhīṣmaparva and Karṇaparva. In the body of these books also we find portions contributed by other writers such as Kaṁsāri. Gopīnātha Pāṭhaka, son of Rāma Sarasvatī, also rendered some books into verse and his work is not unworthy of a son of the eminent father.

As a Translator.—The other books besides *Vanaparva* are mostly paraphrases of the original. Matters not strictly necessary for keeping up the main story are very often eliminated and hence we find only about one fourth of the original matter in the Assamese versions. Rāma Sarasvatī is true to the original and in almost all books retains the flavour of the original.

Dharmamaya bṛkṣa yudhiṣṭhira mahābala |
Nakula Sahadeva tāte bhailā phulaphala ||
Mañi dṛḍha siphā mūle bhedichõ pātāla
Bhīma Dhanañjaya dui bhāi bhailā ḍāla

—*Udyogaparva,* v. 79-80.

(Yudiṣṭhira is a mighty tree of virtue and righteousness. Nakula and Sahadeva are the flowers and the fruits thereon. I am the root passing down to Pātāla and keeping the tree fixed. Bhīma and Dhananjaya are the branches).

31. *Ghoṣàyātrā,* verse 198, Ms. No. 467, D.H.A.S.; *Sindhuyātrā,* verses 1021, 1091 (edition of Nandeswar Chakravarti, 1927).
32. *Udyogaparva,* verse 648 verses 638-449, Kāmarūpa Anusandhāna Samiti. *Bhīṣmaparva, verse* 1361, Ms. Kāmarūpa Anusandhāna Samiti.
33. *Jayadeva-kāvya.*
34. *Śāntiparva,* Ms. No. 476, D.H.A.S.

Naṭe bhāṭe veḍhi kare nānā stuti
Eteke prakāre yāra nidrā bimukuti
Āve ghane ghane ghora śṛgālara rāve
Siṁha bāghe beḍhi beḍhi tomāka jagāwe

—*Udyogaparva,* 363-64.

(Formerly he used to be roused from sleep by the praises sung by the naṭa and bhāṭa. Now the jackals, lions and tigers that rove round rouse you up by their repeated unseemly noise).

The *Gītā* portion of *Bhīṣmaparva* is only about forty verses. Here is an instance of brevity without the sacrifice of the main argument of the book. This may be said of all the books of the original *Mahābhārata* that he has translated.

Rāma Sarasvatī's Uniqueness.—Rāma Sarasvatī's claim to consideration as a narrative poet does not rest on his translation work. He has earned fame and popularity by his *Vanaparva* which is a book—rather a collection of books—quite distinct from the *Vanaparva* in the *Mahābhārata.* The life of the Pāṇḍavas in exile, as depicted in the *Mahābhārata* cannot be called eventful. It is a life of quiet discourse with sages in the forest. But in *Vanaparva* of Rāma Sarasvatī, the Pāṇḍavas have to undergo numerous difficulties, experience untold hardship and go in for thrilling adventures. Because of their great devotion, Lord Kṛṣṇa on all occasions, comes to their rescue. The Pāṇḍavas are made instrumental in the annihilation of the enemies of peace and virtue. They fulfil this divine mission in a manner quite worthy of true 'warriors' who are also Vaiṣṇavas. An analysis of the *Vanaparva* of Rāma Sarasvatī, which is a collection of several long narratives, can alone give an idea of the unique character of this book.

Different Books of Vanaparva.—In the exordium to the *Vanaparva* Rāma Sarasvatī gives an idea of the different stories of adventures of the Pāṇḍavas that are incorporated into the *Vanaparva* of his creation. Only a few incidents of the original epic are retained by Rāma Sarasvatī and no trace whatever is found of the stories that he introduces from sources which yet are unknown. Almost all the narratives that Rāma Sarasvatī mentions are now available. Some of these, as already stated, have been printed while others are deposited in collections of D.H.A.S. and Kāmarūpa Anusandhāna Samiti. They include *Puṣpaharaṇa, Vijaya-*

parva, Manicaṇḍra Ghoṣa, Kālakuñjavadha, Bhojakutavadha,[35] *Jaṅghāsuravadha, Sindhuyātrā, Kamalaparva, Pātālaparva* (*Aśvakarṇavadha*) and *Ghoṣayātrā*. In *Baghāsuravadha,* the poet refers to *Kālajaṅghavadha*·*Pakṣimokṣa* (release of the bird: *Bihaṅgamavadha*) *Khaṭāsuravadha,* and *Dhūmrākṣavadha* (*Kulācalavadha*) and these are also available, some of them are even in print. Some of the narratives, such as *Kālavikālavadha, Vṛhddattavadha, Himaśravavadha* are yet to be found out. This list is quite sufficient to give us an idea of the massive character of the *Vanaparva* and when Rāma Sarasvatī wrote that he composed thirty thousand verses, it was no exaggeration. Each of these poems is an independent book by itself and although all these are included in one *parva* they are rarely found together in one collection.

Analysis of the Contents of Vanaparva: Puṣpaharaṇa.—Once when the Pāṇḍavas were wandering in exile, they had to pass through a mustard field and Bhīma destroyed the mustard flowers without knowing it. Yudhiṣṭhira advised him to serve the owner of the field to compensate the loss thus incurred. The owner happened to be Kālu Brāhmaṇa, who employed him in paddy cultivation. Bhīma worked miracles and he was soon found out to be one of the Paṇḍavas in exile. This aspect of Bhīma's character is developed in Rāma Sarasvatī's well-known narrative, *Bhīmacarita.*

Maṇicandra-ghoṣa—On another occasion while the five brothers along with Draupadī were passing through *Bhavārṇava* forest, they had to take shelter near a certain lake one day. All except Bhīma were bitten by a serpent called Puṇḍrīka, and fell down unconscious. Bhīma was told that the dead persons could be revived at the touch of a certain jewel in possession of the king of the serpents inhabiting the nether region. Bhīma's adventure into the serpent kingdom is a thrilling tale. Bhīma gets the *maṇi* and a wife and returns to bring his brothers and Draupadī back to life. Rāma Sarasvatī may have caught some portion of Manasā story and used it for his purpose just as Vaiṣṇavite stories have been woven into the Manasā Kāvyas.

Vijayaparva.—Rāma Sarasvatī incidentally describes how the craving for conquest in Dhṛtarāṣṭra was satisfied when through the grace of Āditya (the sun-god) he regained his eye-sight for a period of three months. In this expedition Tṛśirā, a great demon

35. *Mahiṣadānavadha.*

was vanquished by Vidura who is traditionally known to be a peaceful devotee of Viṣṇu.

Kālakuñjavadha.—Kālakuñja, a king of the Mlecchas, killed the five brothers and Draupadī fought against an army of his followers. The Mlecchas were defeated by her and the Pāṇḍavas, through the grace of Indra, were revived.

Baghāsuravadha.—Draupadī worshipped Gaurī who granted her a boon that she would not be a widow. Pāṇḍavas were asked by the sage Agasti to quell a demon called Baghāsura who was born of a hermit father and demon mother. Pāṇḍavas who were always eager to destroy the forces of evil consented and Draupadī was presented with a necklace that could even restore life to the dead. The demon with the head of a tiger became invincible because of a boon he had received from Mahādeva and Caṇḍī and defied all the world.

In the fierce fight that followed all Pāṇḍavas except Yudhiṣṭhira was killed, but they were brought back to life at the touch of the necklace. Baghāsura at last met his end at the hands of Bhīma.

Mahiṣadānavavadha or *Bhojakutavadha.*—Mahiṣadānava was in shape a buffalo, a demon born of a Brāhmaṇa father and a she-buffalo. After three days of fight Arjuna killed the demon and brought out Bhīma who had been swallowed up, from his entrails.

Bihaṅgama-mokṣa.—A gandharva who was guilty of indecorum at a musical performance before the gods was cursed to be a huge bird and the curse was to be lifted when Pāṇḍavas in the course of their exile would kill him. The bird caught hold of Draupadī and covered her under the wings and Arjuna by killing the bird rescued her.

Khaṭāsuravadha.—Khaṭāsura, a hideous demon, proposed to Draupadī when alone in the cottage that she should abandon the beggar husbands and marry him. At her sternness of attitude the demon pulled down the cottage and was about to drag her. All the Pāṇḍavas who resisted fell at his hands and Draupadī prayed to Kṛṣṇa for help at such an hour of distress. Kṛṣṇa appeared to her and advised her to strike the demon with her bracelets. The demon was accordingly killed by Draupadī.

Aśvakarṇavadha.—One day while Bhīma and Arjuna were looking for water in a well, they saw a beautiful maiden beneath.

She entreated them for a lift above. Bhīma had some misgivings about her intention, but at last, out of chivalry they decided to rescue her. Bhīma held out one end of a bow, but he was dragged down. Arjuna in order to help him out caught his brother, but both the brothers were taken to Pātāla. There she related her story. She was the daughter of King Ūśīnara, a favourite of Śiva and Durgā who granted her eternal beauty. Aśvakarṇa, a powerful demon vanquished her father. Hemā, for that was the name of the maiden, knew that Aśvakarṇa was destined to be quelled by Naranārāyaṇa. Aśvakarṇa met his end and Arjuna, at Mahādeva's behest, married Hemā.

Jaṅghāsuravadha.—On another occasion Bhīma was taken captive by Jaṅghāsura, a great devotee of Śiva. Bhīma prayed to Kṛṣṇa who sent Garuḍa for his release. The Asura was at last discomfited.

Kulācalavadha.—In the course of their wanderings in exile, the Pāṇḍavas came to the hermitage of a sage who extended to them a hearty welcome, but warned them against their entry into the territory of Dhūmrākṣa or Kulācala, a demon king who was a menace and terror to all peace-loving sages and saints. Son of a Vaiṣṇava king, Dhūmrākṣa grew up to be an oppressor of man, specially of the Vaiṣṇavas. On one occasion he came to a great sacrifice performed by *ṛṣis* and devoured all food articles set apart to be offered to the deities. The sage in charge of the sacrifice turned him into a demon with the head of a goat. The father of Dhūmrākṣa who came to punish the sages was turned with all retinue into rocks. The curse was to be lifted when Viṣṇu in his *avatāra* as Kṛṣṇa would place his feet on the rocks. His infamous son was assigned a territory and he would be killed only with a *dhūpa*-stand, when outside the limit of his kingdom.

One day the Pāṇḍavas were attacked by the hideous-looking followers of Kulācala who were looking for soft human flesh for their master's meal. Bhīma killed them all. When this was reported to Kulācala he came with a huge army and challenged the Pāṇḍavas who, except Yudhiṣṭhira, were all killed by the invincible monster. Śrī Kṛṣṇa, in response to the prayer of Yudhiṣṭhira, came and brought all the dead back to life. Meanwhile Kulācala faced Kṛṣṇa in order to be killed and be relieved of his earthly existence. The demon was not to be killed until he was touched with a *dhūpa*-stand. He fell and instantly ascended to Vaikuṇṭha. At the touch of Kṛṣṇa's feet his father with all followers who had been petrified now regained their human form.

Sindhu-yātrā.—The Pāṇḍava brothers were dwelling in huts near Dharmakṣetra where Sindhurā was performing a sacrifice. Navagraha and Viṣṇu were worshipped. Gifts were made to the needy and thereof was great rejoicing for days together. Some of the king's elephants destroyed the trees around the huts in which Pāṇḍavas were putting up. This led to a fight in which many of the valiant followers of Sindhurā, including his brother were killed. While Arjuna was engaged in fighting a follower of Sindhurā elsewhere, the infuriated king routed the four Pāṇḍavas who all fell dead. Arjuna killed a host of fighters including the invincible Kālaketu—the greatest of the king's generals; then followed a fight between Arjuna and Sindhurā—the last and the most severe. After the armoury on both sides was exhausted, they began a duel lasting for eleven days. The gods came down and intervened and the adversaries were pacified and reconciled. They did not know that they were brothers, for Sindhurā was begotten by Candra and Kuntī while the latter was yet a virgin. The timid and tiny mother put the child in a casket and set it floating on the sea till it was discovered by the childless king Suravinda who adopted the boy as heir to the throne.

Unity of the Vadhakāvyas.—In almost all these narratives, the theme is the death and destruction of demons representing all that is evil. The Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī suffer temporary defeat and disaster, but are ultimately rescued because of their unshaken faith in and devotion to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The Pāṇḍavas are fulfilling a divine mission, namely, the suppression of tyranny and wrong. The exile of the Pāṇḍavas allegorically represents trials and difficulties of the world and divine grace is the only thing that gives strength and courage. It may be represented as also a symbol of the eternal conflict between the good and the evil. Dr. Kakati[36] has aptly suggested comparison of these narrative poems of Rāma Sarasvatī with the mediaeval romances on the one hand and with ancient Greek legends such as those of Hercules and Perseus on the other.

The *Mahābhārata* has a Vaiṣṇavite bias and Winternitz even thinks that epic poetry seems to have been cultivated more in those regions of India where Viṣṇu was the predominent deity. Viṣṇu figures prominently in the epic. It has been therefore known also as 'Kṛṣṇa Veda'. It is no wonder therefore, that Rāma Sarasvatī writing under the inspiration of neo-Vaiṣṇavism expresses

36. *Puraṇi Asamīyā Sāhitya*, 'Vadha-kāvyabor',
L. 24

the glory of Kṛṣṇa through his narratives of romance, adventure and battle. The Vaiṣṇavite stamp is really unmistakable in all Kāvyas of Rāma Sarasvatī. He frequently refers to the different books of Vanaparva as *Vaiṣṇavaparva.*[37] The heroes and the heroine are painted as true Vaiṣṇava warriors. The story of the *Bhāgavata-Purāṇa* is referred to frequently in the narratives. The demons are the prototypes of Vṛtra and Hiraṇyakaśipu. There are verses scattered everywhere that are mere paraphrases of some of the ślokas of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa;* to cite only a few:—

Henato īśvara Kṛṣṇadeva Sanātana
Śatrubhāve mukta hove kariyā śravaṇa
Premabhāva smaraṇara ki kaibo mahattva[38]

Kulācalavadha, p. 404

Dekhā kena Hari bhakatira mahattvaka
Yemane temane mātra smaroka Kṛṣṇaka
Vairabhāve bhaya mane yemane temane
Prema bhajanir sīmā kahibeka kone[39]

Kulācalavadha, p. 362.

(Such is the Kṛṣṇa, the Lord eternal, One's soul is liberated even if he remembers Him as an enemy. What should I speak of the merit if He is remembered in love.

Behold the power of a devotee of Hari. Kṛṣṇa is remembered with hostility or with fear or in any other way. Who can describe the love-way of devotion to him?)

Kukṣita thākante śiśu peṭe ghāle pāve
Tāhāra doṣaka tabho nadharanta māve[40]

Kulācalavadha, p. 312.

(The child in the womb strikes the mother with its feet and yet the mother takes no note of this behaviour.)

Durghora rajanī vana bhayānaka
Preta-piśacara sthāna
Patiputrasave vicāri phuraya
Pālaṭi karā sanmāna[41]

Baghāsuravadha, v. 966.

37. *Vanaparva—Ādi,* verse 204; *Baghāsuravadha.*
38. *Bhāgavata Purāṇa,* VII., 1. 29.
39. Ibid., X. 29. 15.
40. *Bhāgavata Purāṇa,* X. 10. 14.
41. *Ibid.* X. 24. 19.

(The night is terrible and this forest is the abode of fierce demons and ghosts. Do go back; for your husbands and children are all in search of you.)

These popular narratives were not meant to be a direct propaganda of the Bhāgavata cult. But all the same they unconsciously helped to consolidate and strengthen the influence of Vaiṣṇavism in the eastern part of India. A bad story, as some one has said, has a moral; but a good one is a moral.

Naranārāyaṇa.—Another thing which strikes one in almost all these Kāvyas is the recognition of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna as Nārāyaṇa and Nara.

Devakīra garbha vyakta haibā nārāyaṇa
Kuntīra thalata nararūpe utapana

Baghāsuravadha.

(Nārāyaṇa will be born as son of Devakī and Nara as that of Kuntī.)

Devakīra garbhe nārāyaṇa avatāra
Kuntīra garbhata āsi narara vihāra

Vanaparva, first part.

(Nara and Nārāyaṇa are born in Devakī and Kuntī respectively.)

Yaduvaṁśe vasudeva tāhāna gṛhata
Daivakīra garbhe nārāyaṇara vekata;
Pāṇḍuvaṁśe mahādevī kuntīra thalata
Nare āsi Dhanañjaya bhailanta vekata

—*Sindhuyātrā,* verses 36, 1136.

(Nārāyaṇa has manifested himself in the family of Vasudeva in the Yadu clan as son of Daivakī; Nara as Dhanañjaya as son of queen Kunti in Pāṇḍu's family.)

This idea recurs in almost all Rāma Sarasvatī's Kāvyas. We know of sculptural representations of the Naranārāyaṇa story originally appearing in the *Mahābhārata* and subsequently in the *Devībhāgavata* and in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa.* Here in this part of India, this tradition seems to be preserved in the Kāvyas of Rāma Sarasvatī.

Śaṅkaradeva and Rāma Sarasvatī.—As a junior contemporary of Śrī Śaṅkaradeva, Rāma Sarasvatī came under the influence of the great reformer-poet. The age was practically the age of one book and that was the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and Śrī Śaṅkaradeva as well as Rāma Sarasvatī were both drunk deep in the 'divine nectar' of the great Purāṇa of the Vaiṣṇavas. The writings of Rāma Sarasvatī bear evidence of Śrī Śaṅkaradeva's influence in several ways, specially in some of the descriptive passages. The hymns and homilies that characterise the Vaiṣṇavite narratives are also to be met with Rāma Sarasvatī. Invocation to goddess Sarasvatī and Vedavyāsa are retained by Rāma Sarasvatī in conformity with the traditional way of beginning a Mahābhārata story. Rāma Sarasvatī is a Vaiṣṇavite writer and refers in glowing terms to the great elder Vaiṣṇavite of his time.[42]

The Origin.—Although the Vaiṣṇavite spirit permeates the narratives of Rāma Sarasvatī, the materials woven into his Vanaparva are drawn from sources yet unknown. Here are described the combats and adventures of the Pāṇḍavas while in exile but excepting a few, they are not in the *Mahābhārata* story. The exile of the Pāṇḍavas involving adventures gives the poet an opportunity to incorporate matters into his poem of which no shadow is found in the *Mahābhārata*. Rāma Sarasvatī claims to have received his materials from different Purāṇas, *Yāmalasaṁhitā, Haṁsakākī, Śivarahasya* and other works. Rāma Sarasvatī says that he has borrowed materials handed down from Mārkaṇḍeya :

Maharṣi Mārkaṇḍeye kahichā pūrvata
Paramadharmajña cāri pakṣīra āgata :

—*Baghāsuravadha.*

(The great sage Mārkaṇḍeya has revealed this to the four birds of great wisdom.)

Dvaipāyana muni Mārkaṇḍeyata kahilā
Mārkaṇḍeya muni dharmapakṣīka paḍhāilā
Dharmapakṣīgaṇeye Jaiminika kahilā

—*Kulācalavadha.*

(The sage Dvaipāyana related this to Mārkaṇḍeya; Mārkaṇḍeya taught it to Dharmapakṣīs and they in their turn transmitted it to Jaimini.)

42. *Kulācalavadha* (*Śrīmanta Śaṅkara | āpuni Iśvara,* etc.)

Dharmaye pakṣīta Mārkaṇḍeya muni kahiyā āche bujāi

—*Vanaparva-Ādi.*

(Mārkaṇḍeya has explained all to Dharmapakṣi.)

The four birds and Mārkaṇḍeya clearly point to *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa,* but this Purāṇa, as we find it now, contains a few very brief answers to questions relating to the great epic. *Haṁsakākī* still remains a mystery. *Śivarahasya* is said to be a part of *Śaṁkarasaṁhita* belonging to *Skanda Purāṇa.* What has been remarked by Winternitz about *Skanda Purāṇa* is noticeable in this connection : "The ancient Purāṇa of this name (*Skanda*), however, is probably entirely lost; for though there is a considerable number of more or less extensive works claiming to be Saṁhitās and Khaṇḍas of the *Skanda Purāṇa* and an almost overwhelming mass of Māhātmyas which give themselves out as portions of this Purāṇa, only one, very ancient, manuscript contains a text which calls itself simply 'Skanda Purāṇa'. Even this text, however, is scarcely identical with the ancient Purāṇa."[43] Most probably a great mass of Purāṇas and other literature must have been lost in course of time, and except portions of them here and there, nothing is left of them. Even if the great bulk of literature spoken of by Rāma Sarasvatī, is an exaggeration, there undoubtedly existed a great variety of literature in Prāgjyotiṣa area, and various factors combined to destroy these ancient records.

Rāma Sarasvatī is also credited with the authorship of *Vyāsāśrama,* a long narrative poem describing the career of Bhīṣma, Sir Galahad of Indian epic. His conflict with Paraśurāma, and the latter's defeat is held up as a victory of a true Vaiṣṇava warrior over pride and haughtiness which Paraśurāma represents. The story is interspersed with theological matters drawn probably from different Purāṇas. This also gives an account of Brāhmaṇas and Vaiṣṇavas who have fallen from their high ideals of life and yielded to earthly temptations.

The *Jayadevakāvya,* an Assamese version of Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda* was composed towards the end of Rāma Sarasvatī's poetic career. The book is more than a translation of the original. While it is not possible to restore in a translation the music and aroma of Jayadeva, Rāma Sarasvatī has modified the spirit of the original by introduction of some elements of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa.* He

43. Winternitz, *Indian Literature,* p. 570.

has also put into his version matters relating to Indian music and rhetoric.

By far the most widely known and popular of Rāma Sarasvatī's work is *Bhīmacarita*. Here is, an episode of Bhīma's early life as found in the *Mahābhārata* (Ādiparva), the end of Bakāsura, a great tyrant. But tagged to this is Bhīma's career as a servant in the household of Śiva, who with his consort Pārvatī and two little sons leads a life of poverty and want. Bhīma's gluttony, Śiva's lack of knowledge of worldly affairs, the helplessness of gods and sages—all these add an element of humour into this piece of work and combined with its vivid picture of poor peasant life, the book has made an appeal that no other book has ever done among the rural population. It is curious to find in the *Śivāyana* of Rāmeśvara, an eighteenth century Bengali poet writing of Śiva.[44]

This was Rāma Sarasvatī who has provided entertainment and edification for about four centuries by telling people, in language not beyond the reach of the common man, of joys and sorrows, overthrow and victory, hope and courage and above all a faith that sustains. His verse comes to bosom and business of men and is therefore, welcome even to-day. Rāma Sarasvatī cannot possibly claim a place along with Śri Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, but surely he comes next to them.

44. Sukumar Sen, *Vangasāhityā*.

ORIGIN OF THE ASSAMESE DRAMA

BY

KALIRAM MEDHI

The Assamese drama came into existence during the sixteenth century A.D. It was religious in its origin. Also it was almost entirely a native growth and although its framework was borrowed from the classical Sanskrit drama, its integral parts were made up entirely of indigenous materials. Influence of Sanskrit drama is indeed great. It is also possible, though hardly probable, that the Sanskrit-Prakrit-Maithili drama of Umāpati exercised some indirect influence on minor points. But the ultimate source of the Assamese drama, divested of the outward form, is in all probability the choral performance of the Assamese Ojā-pāli. Śaṅkaradeva appears to have improved this kind of performance and to have given birth to the Assamese drama.

The origin of the Indian drama is also similar. "The rise of the drama is thus most probably due to the coalescence of recited epic legend with ancient pantomimic art. But we know nothing of the history of the actual drama till we come across it, fully developed, about 200 A.D. It probably arose in the land of Surasenas, at Mathurā, their capital."

The Ojā-pāli of Assam is a party of chorus singers and dancers. Only a mute actor, the Devadhani, was later introduced in the *Śuknānnī* performance. The Ojā-pāli not only sing in chorus and dance with the music of *khuṭitāla,* but also explain the action by speech, gestures and body movements. And if the dialogue of the characters could be supplied the drama would be complete. This, in all probability, Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva effected by introducing actors. The Sūtradhāra of Assamese drama took the place of the *Ojā* and the *Gāyan-bāyan* replaced his *pālis*. They form the chorus and remain on the stage throughout the whole performance. The Sūtradhāra, like the leader of the Greek chorus, advises, directs and controls the whole performance. Thus he plays the role of the stage-manager of the Indian drama for the prologue and of the Greek chorus during the actual performance. It should not, however, be forgotten that Śaṅkaradeva took the framework of his plays from the Sanskrit drama and used the ancient

pantomimic art of Assam to complete his work. Assamese drama is a native growth and probably the first in India in point of time. Śaṅkaradeva gave birth to a regular vernacular drama and introduced vernacular prose first in India.

Points of resemblance with the Sanskrit drama.—The following points may be considered :

(1) *Aṅka* (dramatic work).—There are in Sanskrit, ten types of dramas (Rūpaka), viz., Nāṭaka, Prakaraṇa, Dima, Īhāmṛga, Vīthī, Samavakāra, Prahasana, Vyāyoga, Bhāṇa and Aṅka (or Utsṛṣṭikāṅka). The general name for the Assamese drama is Aṅka. This term appears specially in the *caritras* (biographies) and is used by theatrical parties to designate a dramatic work. This term has evidently been borrowed from the type of Sanskrit drama known as Aṅka. Only in one particular however, the Assamese Aṅka answers to Sanskrit theory, viz., that it is an one-act play. In all other respects the Assamese Aṅka differs from the Aṅka type of the Sanskrit drama, of which the subject-matter is imaginary, sentiment pathetic, the hero an ordinary person and the juncture, style and sub-divisions are like those of a Bhāṇa. The special characteristics of a Sanskrit Aṅka are lamentations of women and battle by speech. An Assamese Aṅka corresponds generally to a *Nātaka* which is the principal type of the Sanskrit drama and which comprises all the sentiments (*bhāva*) only with this main difference that unlike the Sanskrit Nāṭaka, which contains 5 to 10 acts, it has only one. The poet Bhāsa also wrote several one-act plays in Sanskrit which were, however, Vyāyogas and not Aṅkas.

(2) *Pūrva-raṅga* (Preliminaries).—The Sanskrit dramatic theory requires a series of preliminaries which must be performed before the actual drama begins. This was intended originally to obviate the impediments to a successful performance. Such preliminaries also form part of the Assamese performance.

(3) *Nāndī* (Benediction).—The real prologue in a Sanskrit drama begins with a Nāndī. The opening verse recited in praise of a deity, a Brāhmaṇa or a king is a *Nāndī*.[1] Some say this forms part of the preliminaries (*Pūrva-raṅga*) and others that the prologue (*āsthāpanā* or *prastāvanā*) begins with it. But it is seen that most Sanskrit plays open with a *Nāndī* verse followed by the remark—"At the close of Nāndī the Sūtradhāra (enters)." Some

1. *Āśīrvacanasaṁyuktā stutīryasmāt prayujyate Devadvijanṛpādīnāṁ tasmānnāndīti saṁjñitā.*—*Sāhitya-darpaṇa*, VI, 24.

authorities, however, maintain that the Stage-manager (*Sūtradhāra*) recites the Nāndī verse. This is exactly the case with the Assamese plays. In the Assamese drama there are usually two Nāndī verses in Sanskrit, one in praise of Kṛṣṇa or Rāma and the other hinting at the plot, followed by the remark—*nāndyante sūtradhāraḥ*. But in point of fact the Sūtradhāra himself recites these verses.

(4) *Prarocanā* (Laudation or propitiation).—This in Sanskrit drama gives the contents of the play and arouses expectation by means of its praise.[2] It also appeals to the benevolence of the audience. This practice is also followed in the Assamese drama, the prarocanā of which consists of a Sanskrit verse, beginning with *Bho bhoḥ sāmājikāḥ* followed by the Bhaṭimā.

(5) *Āmukha* (Introduction) and *Prastāvanā* (Induction).—The principal feature of an introduction in the Sanskrit drama is a dialogue led by the stage-manager with an attendant (*pāripārśvika*) or an actress (*naṭī*) or the Jester (*vidūṣaka*) indirectly hinting as to who is coming into the stage. Bharata calls this *trigata*, because it means the guesses as to the cause of the sound, as of the hum of bees, the melody of the cuckoo, or of celestial music. This practice is closely followed in the Assamese play wherein a sound in the space causes the stage-manager to turn his ear to the sky and to ask his companion (*saṅgī sakhi*) to ascertain what the sound is about. Thereupon the companion exclaims : "It is the music of the celestial kettle-drum" (*devadundubhi vājata*). Then the director announces that he (Gopāla, Rāma, or some other hero as the case may be) is coming on the stage. After this the real play begins.

(6) *Śloka* (Sanskrit verse).—There is in Sanskrit drama interchange of lyrical stanzas with prose dialogue. This is also the case with Assamese plays. Sanskrit plays are full of lyrical passages describing scenes or persons presented to view. These lyrical passages are composed in a great many different metres. Assamese plays also follow this. The frame-work of Śaṅkaradeva's plays (with one exception) is also in Sanskrit *ślokas*. The *ślokas* themselves form the skeleton of the plot and even if the songs, dialogue, poetry and the stage-manager's directions are expunged, the germ (*vīja*) of the plot (*vastu*) will be quite apparent from them. They supply the elements (*vindu*) of the plot for expan-

2. *Daśa-rūpaka* III, 6.

sion and spread out in the whole play like a drop of oil in water. A glance at the Sanskrit ślokas in *Keli-Gopāla,* for instance, will make this clear.

Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva himself composed for his six extant plays 179 Sanskrit verses out of a total of 180 and quoted only one verse in *Patnī-prasāda* from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa.* The metres used are many, including *anuṣṭubh, upendra-vajrā, upajāti, puṣpitāgrā, bhujaṅga-prayāta, vasanta-tilaka, mālinī,* and *śārdūla-vikrīḍita.* Mādhavadeva employs *indravajrā, mandākrāntā, śardūla-vikrīḍita, bhujaṅga-prayāta, āryā* and *āryā-gīti* in his plays.

(7) *Sandhi* (Juncture).—There are five stages (*Avasthā*) of the dramatic action, (*Kārya*), viz., beginning (*Ārambha*), effort (*Prayatna*), prospect of success (*Prāptyāśā*), certainty of success (*Niyatāpti*) and attainment of the result (*Phalāgama*). The ultimate aim of a plot (*Artha-prakṛti*) is the attainment of the result (*phalāgama*). There are five elements of the plot parallel to the five stages of the action. They are called junctures (*Sandhi*); they are: the opening (*Mukha*), the progression (*Pratimukha*), the development (*Garbha*), the drop (*Vimarṣa*) and the conclusion (*Nirvahaṇa*). These junctures connect one stage with another."[3] The Assamese plays, though all in one act, also reveal these five junctures of the plot. For instance, in *Rāma-Vijaya,* the arrival of Viśvāmitra at Daśaratha's court in Ayodhyā and taking of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to his hermitage for guarding the sacrifice form the opening (*Mukha*), the arrival of Rāma at Janaka's place for the Svayaṃvara of Sītā, the progression (*Pratimukha*), the breaking of the bow of Śiva and winning the hand of Sītā by Rāma, the development (*Garbha*), the battle of Rāma with assembled princes at Mithilā and the scene with Paraśurāma on the way home, the pause (*Vimarśa*) and the reception of Rāma and Sītā at home—the conclusion (*Nirvahaṇa*).

(8) *Rasa* (sentiment).—It was the aim of Śaṅkaradeva to rouse religious feelings in the spectators and in effecting this his drama excited various sentiments which are regarded as the principal features of the Sanskrit drama. Thus Śaṅkaradeva rouses principally the terrible (*Bhayānaka*) and pathetic (*Karuṇa*) sentiments in his *Kāli-damana,* the erotic (*Śṛṅgāra*) in *Keli-Gopāla,* the marvellous (*Adbhuta*) in *Patnī-prasāda,* the erotic and heroic (*Vīra*) in *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa* and *Rāma-vijaya* and the heroic and

3. *Daśa-rūpaka,* I. 28-36.

odious (*vībhatsa*) sentiments in the *Pārijāta-haraṇa.* Similarly in Mādhavadeva's plays the comic (*Hāsya*), pathetic and marvellous sentiments are moderate. It should be remembered that Śaṅkaradeva's theme was young and Mādhavadeva's child Kṛṣṇa. Śaṅkaradeva was a married person and of strong personality. So, he could excel in portraying the exploits of young Kṛṣṇa (or Rāma). On the other hand Mādhavadeva was a celibate and ascetic and of a serious and philosophic turn of mind. He had no experience of conjugal life. So, he never attempted to excite the erotic sentiment. But he was a master in the art of drawing fascinating pictures of child Kṛṣṇa with all mischievous propensities and comic elements in his plays.

(9) *The Prose.*—An important feature of Sanskrit drama is the mixture of prose and verse. The dialogue is, almost always, in prose. The prose portion of a play is generally prosaic and serves only to introduce the lofty sentiment of the verse that follows. This is exactly the case with Assamese drama in which the dialogue of actors and direction of the stage-manager, which are in prose, are mixed up with the elegant style and high sentiment of the following song or Bhaṭimā. Here also the prose is very common-place.

(10) *Mukti-maṅgala* (concluding benediction).—In the epilogue of Sanskrit plays some such question as this is asked—"Is there anything further that you desire?" The hero replies to this uttering a benediction called Bharata-vākya. In Assamese drama also such a benediction known as "Mukti-maṅgala" appears. This is generally a Bhaṭimā in Capaya metre and recited not only by the hero alone but also by the stage-manager, the chorus and the actors.

(11) *Unity of time and place.*—As in the Sanskrit drama there is no unity of time or place in the Assamese plays.

Points of difference between Aṅka and Sanskrit Drama.—

(1) The *language.*—According to the Indian tradition as given in the *Nāṭya-śaśtra* of Bharata, drama is of divine origin, and designed and fashioned by Bharata himself. It was transferred by sage Bharata to this earth as the fifth Veda, which, unlike the other four, would not be the jealous preserve of the three twice-born castes, but might be shared by the Śūdras also.[4] But in point

4. *Nāṭya-śāstra,* chap. I; Keith, *Sanskrit Drama,* p. 12.

of fact, although dramatic entertainments were thrown open to the common people as well, the language in which the plays were enacted was much too refined and developed for their appreciation and was fitted only for the demands of the cultured few, the major portion of each play is written in Sanskrit which ceased to be the language of the people by the time of Aśoka (300 B.C.) but which nevertheless survived as the classical and learned form of speech. The play of Aśvaghoṣa, the earliest Sanskrit dramatist, could not have been written before the second century B.C. and those of Bhāsa and Kālidāsa before 350 and 400 A.D. respectively. In accordance with dramatic theory Sanskrit is spoken by the principal personages of the play, by devotees and female ascetics, by the chief queen, by daughters of ministers and by courtesans, while the other females and inferior characters use several varieties of Prākrits.[5] In the circumstances it was impossible for the general audience to fully understand the whole play, much less to appreciate the artistic subtlety, the philosophic background, the moral purpose, and the poetic beauty into which the highly refined and cultured intellects were capable of entering. It has been rightly remarked that the Indian drama is a Brahmanical production aiming not at delineation but at the awakening of sentiments and making its appeal to the cultured minority. The elevated disregard of popularity accounts for much that is characteristic of the higher class of Indian plays.[6]

On the other hand Assamese drama appeals to the common people with the object of exciting religious emotion and sentiment. It represents principally the Kṛṣṇa legends in order that the audience might appreciate, with aesthetic enjoyment, the importance and excellence of the Kṛṣṇa cult. And to make the performance intelligible even to the illiterate people and women a simple language has been adopted. This is Brajabuli (Brajāvalibhāṣā in Assamese) the common language of the Kṛṣṇa cult of northern and eastern India. Brajabuli is supposed to have been the sacred language of the Kṛṣṇa devotion (just as Pāli was of Buddhism) and to have connection with the language of the classical Sanskrit drama. "The normal prose language of Sanskrit drama is Śaurasenī Prākrit and we can only suppose that it is so because it was the ordinary speech of the people among whom the drama first developed into definite shape. Once this

5. *D. R.*, II. 64-65; *N.S.*, XVI, 33-43.
6. *New Ency. Brit.*, Vol. VIII, pp. 576-78.

was established we may feel assured, the usage would be continued wherever the drama spread; we have modern evidence of the persistence of the Brajabhāṣā, the language of the revival of the Kṛṣṇa cult, after the Muhammedan invasion, in the ancient home of Śaurasenī, as the language of Kṛṣṇa devotion beyond the limits of its natural home."[7]

Thus, two poets of Mithilā, Yaśorāja Khān of Gauḍa, Rāmānanda Rāya of Orissa and Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva of Assam composed their immortal songs in this language in which Maithilī elements preponderate. There were also local variations. Thus the *Bargītas* composed by Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva have a distinct Kāmarūpī ring. It is admitted that Brajabuli is not a spoken dialect of any place but an artificial literary language used by Vaiṣṇavites principally in songs. Dr. Sukumar Sen opines that, "This artificial language was given the name of Brajabuli because it reminded one of Vraja, the land sanctified by the presence of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. The term of Brajabuli, however, should not be confused with the name of Brajabhākhā or Brajabhāṣā. The latter is the name of the actual spoken language, a form of western Hindi of the district round about Muttra."[8] But the truth appears to be that Brajabuli must have been based on some spoken dialect, for no artificial language is known to have been created out of nothing. The Vedic language, supposed by some to have been an artificial and highly developed language, is based on a spoken dialect. The Gāthā language of the Buddhists is based on Sanskrit: Pali, an artificial literary language is based on a local dialect. Prākrits are not so much varieties of speech of the people as of the grammarians. But they are all based on local dialects. So is the case with the Brajabuli. There are grounds for supposing that it is based on the old dialect of Mathurā in which Mīrābāi later wrote her commentary on the *Gīta-govinda*, Sūrdās composed his Sura-Sāgara and Swami Haridās his *Sādhāraṇ Siddhānta*.

Śaṅkaradeva and his followers used Brajabuli not only in their songs but also in their plays. It should not, however, be supposed that they used this language in all their religious works. They composed their lyrics and prayer books, like the songs and lyrics of pre-Vaiṣṇava authors, in the classical Kāmarūpī language. We

7. Keith, *Sanskrit Drama*, pp. 40-41.
8. *A History of Brajabuli literature*, p. 3.

may accordingly conclude that Śaṅkaradeva used Brajabuli in his *Bargītas* because it was the common language of Kṛṣṇa devotion and in his drama because it was supposed to have been the language of the place (Vraja) where Śaurasenī, the usual Prākrit of Sanskrit drama, was spoken.

(2) *Dramatic propriety.*—As the Assamese drama was meant for the eyes and ears of the common people the traditional rules of decorum and propriety of the Sanskrit drama were violated in order to satisfy the taste of the audience. Thus, though the dramatic theory[9] prohibits representation of such incidents as battle, killing, marriage, amorous dalliance, bathing, anointing the body, putting on garments, eating and the like, they are freely shown on the stage. We see battle scenes in *Pārijāta-haraṇa, Rukminī-haraṇa* and *Rāma-vijaya,* killing in *Pārijāta-haraṇa, Keli-Gopāla* and *Kaṃsa-vadha* and eating in *Patnī-praṣāda, Bhūmī-luṭiwā* and *Bhojana-Vihāra.* Tragedy is unknown in the Sanskrit drama. But there are a few specimens of tragedy in Assamese drama, e.g., *Kaṁsa-vadha, Jarāsandha-Vadha.*

(3) *Sūtradhāra* (Stage-manager).—The leading character in an Assamese dramatic performance is the Sūtradhāra. As in the Sanskrit drama the expression *iti Sūtraḥ niṣkrāntaḥ* (then exit stage-manager) occurs at the end of the prologue of the Assamese plays. In the Sanskrit drama after his formal exit at the end of the prologue the stage-manager never enters the stage again and the whole performance is left to the actors themselves. But in the Assamese plays the case is quite different. It is true that according to the Indian tradition[10] an actor styled Sthāpaka, exactly like the Sūtradhāra, enters the stage after the latter's exit, dances a *Cāri* dance, introduces the play and then retires. But neither the Sūtradhāra nor the Sthāpaka is heard of thereafter. The Sūtradhāra in an Assamese Bhāonā is, however, found present on the stage even after his formal exit at the conclusion of the prologue (*Prastāvanā*). He not only sings songs in chorus with gāyana-bāyana (singers and musicians) and recites *ślokas* and *bhaṭimās* but also controls and directs the performance from beginning to end supplying and explaining the links of the plot as given in the Sūtras. The actors take part only in dialogue, march, battle, dance and action such as the breaking of bow, churning of curd, etc.

9. *Nāṭya-śāstra,* XVIII, 16. ff; *Daśa-rūpaka,* III. 34-36.
10. *N. S.,* V. 149-153; *D. R.,* III. 2; *S.D.,* VI. 26.

(4) *The Jester* (Vidūṣaka).—The Vidūṣaka is a standing character of the Sanskrit drama. No dramatist, except perhaps Bhavabhūti, could ignore this character. This character is entirely absent in the Assamese plays. But to relieve the monotony of the performance the device of a *caṅg* (farcical interlude) is introduced from time to time. Some comic players extemporize the music, speech, song and dialogue in such farcical interludes which are, however, wholly unconnected with the play.

(5) *The choric song* (*Aṅkar gīta*).—In the Sanskrit plays songs are sung either by individual characters or by some one in the retiring room (Nepathya). In Assamese dramatic performances songs are all sung by the chorus.

(6) *Acts and scenes* (*Aṅka* and *Garbhāṅka*).—A Sanskrit drama is divided into scenes and acts. The scenes are marked by the entrance of one character and the exit of another. The stage is never left vacant till the end of the Act, nor does any change of locality take place till then. The Assamese drama on the other hand has division neither of acts nor of scenes. The stage (rabhā) is never left vacant and the locality often changes from time to time according to the plot.

Probable influence of Vernacular drama of other places.—It is difficult to ascertain the extent of influence, if any, of the vernacular drama of other parts of India on the Assamese drama. The Rāsadhāri and Rāma-līlā of Upper India, the Lalitā of Western India, the Kathākali and Nalatāṅgi of Southern India and the Bhavāi of Guzarat had apparently no influence. "The Rājā of Kottarakkara (1575-1650 A.D.), an eminent scholar, was the first composer and originator of the Kathākali. Under his regime there was a revolutionary revival of the ancient folk-dance drama in a new garb and an improved form".[11] One or two plays of Śaṅkaradeva had appeared before 1575 A.D. So, Kathākali could have no influence on Assamese drama. In Bengal the *Yātrā* was of very recent origin. One contemporary authority states that Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva devised and gave performance with scenes of *Cihna-yātrā* at the age of 19 years (i.e. in 1468 A.D.), before he went on his first pilgrimage. According to another he did so immediately after his return from the first pilgrimage at the age of about 53 years (i.e. 1502 A.D.). During this pilgrimage which took 12 years to complete he visited Mithilā, Mathurā, Vṛndāvana,

11. A. C. Pandeya, *The Art of Kathakali,* p. 33.

Dvārakā, Purī and many other sacred places and other centres of learning. It is known that Vidyāpati Ṭhākur of Mithilā (1348-1438 A.D.) composed his immortal songs in the Maithilī language. Also about a century earlier Umāpati, the celebrated Maithilī poet, had written his drama, *Pārijāta-haraṇa* in the Sanskrit-Prākrit-Maithilī language. It is nowhere stated that Śaṅkaradeva, the originator of Assamese drama, ever had any occasion to witness representation of this play. Also, in this drama the characters used Sanskrit and Prākrit and the songs alone were in Maithilī. On the other hand Śaṅkaradeva dispensed altogether with Prākrit, used Sanskrit only in the *ślokas* and otherwise composed all his plays in the Brajabuli-Assamese language. So, the Maithilī drama was really Sanskrit while the plays of Assamese were truly Assamese mixed with Brajabuli. Another vital point of difference is that in the Maithilī drama there is no Sūtradhāra except in the prologue (*Prastāvanā*) and absolutely no stage-direction nor speech by the stage-manager whereas in the Assamese drama there are such directions and speeches in Brajabuli by him every now and then throughout the whole performance. Accordingly the latter could never have been written in imitation of the former. There is only one point of resemblance between the two. Both are one-act plays. This, however, means nothing.

Recently four so-called plays including three written in Bengali have been found in Nepal.[12] These are not plays as we understand them by the term. They contain nothing but songs. The time of this composition is supposed to have been about the eighteenth century A.D. They could have had no influence on the Assamese drama which had taken its birth at least two hundred years earlier. The evidence available shows unmistakably that the Assamese drama is the earliest among the regular vernacular dramatic works in India. Śaṅkaradeva was its originator. Assamese prose and drama, as is at present known, occupy the first place among the vernacular literature of India.

Types of early Assamese Drama.—The plays in Assam are divided into three classes—*Nāṭ, Yātrā* and *Jhumurā.*

Nāṭ.—The generic name for the Assamese drama is Nāṭ. But it conforms neither to the rules of Sanskrit Nāṭaka nor to those of a Nāṭikā. According to tradition a Nāṭaka should have the subject-matter taken from the epics or *Purāṇas*, five junctures, five to

12. *Sāhitya Pariṣad Granthāvalī*, no. 61.

ten acts, all the sentiments, the dominant being heroic or erotic, a king, a god or a royal sage (*rājarṣi*) as the hero and a happy ending.[13] In a Nāṭikā the subject-matter should not be traditional but invented, the hero a gay and self-controlled king, the sentiment erotic, the number of acts usually four and as its special features music, song and dance.[14] Thus the Assamese Nāṭ (drama) has some elements of a Sanskrit Nāṭaka with a few exceptions, especially in the subject-matter, language and number of acts of Sanskrit drama. In the Assamese drama no distinction is made between Nāṭ and Nāṭaka. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva used both these terms as also Yātrā to designate his plays.

Yātrā.—The term Yātrā meant originally a religious procession and later a melodramatic performance. "In ancient India it was customary for ruling Princes, together with their ladies and the Court, to set out at appointed seasons, for a place of sacrifice up in the Vānaprastha. The royal party proceeded to a hallowed wood, at the foot of the Snowy Mountains, where the golden soma grass grew. During the toilsome journey the Court chaplain (Purohita) and his priestly staff edified the distinguished pilgrims with deva lore and the "old story" (Purāṇa) of the beginning of things and of the cosmic order. But the boisterous train of followers required coarser food, and their full allowance of fun and licence was but rarely cut short. Gleemen, in grotesque attire, their beards and faces dyed, with rattles, bells and tambourines, danced or rather skipped along like a savage herd of giddy goats.. ....Every grade of society from the gravest to the gayest and from the loftiest to the grossest, was represented in the Yātrā or procession."[15] In the image-procession of Assam of the present day also such operative performance is often witnessed, especially during the *Phāguwā* festival. "When the Muhammedans became rulers of India they abolished every music hall and play-house.... In spite of the Moslem precepts, dramatic activity was once more in full swing towards the end of the fourteenth century A.D., more particularly in Nepal and Tirhoot. But the literary quality of this aftercrop of Indian plays is far below the high level which was attained in Ujjain and Kanauj....The Kṛṣṇaist cult being bright and artistic was admirably fitted to envigorate the effete Hindu theatre. Sacred operas were frequently produced in connection

13. *S.D.*, VI, 7-11.
14. *S.D.*, VI, 269-272: *D.R.*, III 43-48.
15. Horrwitz, *The Indian Theatre*, pp. 114, 116.

with the religious *yātrās* even after they were detached from the temple precincts and associated with the secular stage."[16] In Bengal the *yātrās* had a firm hold and the elegant *Gīta-govinda* of Jayadeva of the twelfth century A.D. probably contributed to the later development of the Bengali *yātrās*. Dr. P. Guha Thakurta writes: "The main difficulty in the way of arriving at definite conclusions in regard to the actual source of the *yātrā* is the total absence of a chronological history of older *yātrās* and their writers. The existing specimens belong to a much later period from 1800 A.D. downwards. If we were in possession of a really authentic list of all the *yātrās* whether still in existence or not, we could have surmised something about their true nature and also the earlier methods of their production. It is quite probable that at a very early stage the *yātrāwālās* used to extemporise the music and words of the plays to suit a specific religious festival or social entertainment and that they made no serious attempt at literary composition or publication."[17] The Assamese plays are all literary works and as songs, dance and music preponderate they (or at least some of them) may rightly be called *yātrās*. Thus *Kāli-damana* of Śaṅkaradeva, *Janma-yātrā* of Gopāla Āṭā and *Nṛsiṁha yātrās* and *Syāmanta-haraṇa* of Daityāri are yātrās. They are apparently in imitation of the ancient religious processions. Unfortunately the first dramatic work in Assam, *Cihna-yātrā* is lost for ever.

Towards the close of the fifteenth or in the first decade of the sixteenth century A.D. Śaṅkaradeva composed his first play, *Cihna-yātrā*, and staged it with painted scenes representing the seven Vaikuṇṭhas (or heavens of the Vaiṣṇavites) We find in the biography written by Rāmacaraṇa Ṭhākura :—

Vaikuṇṭha nagara *paṭate lekhiyā*
Aṅka karilanta tāra
Dhaimālir ghoṣā *prathame lekhilā*
Dvitiye śloka racilā
Sutra bhaṭimāka *gītaka kariyā*
Cihna sava bibhāgilā.[18]

It is stated that a Saṁnyāsi taught Śaṅkaradeva the art of painting scenes. In the scene of each Vaikuṇṭha tanks, gardens,

16. Op. cit., pp. 176-178.
17. *The Bengali Drama*, pp. 8-9.
18. *Śaṅkara-carita*, vv. 1361-62.

bed of Ananta Nāga, Kalpataru tree and other heavenly objects were painted, exactly as described in the Vaiṣṇava literature. Then Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva trained Bāyans (musicians), Pālīs (assistants) using Khola (a kind of drum) for the first time in Assam, and also actors (*naṭuwās*), collected masks (*mukhās*) and accessories (*chōs*), got a rabhā (theatre) erected and arranged for lights. After this on a certain night he gave the performance himself taking part in it. Five principal actors were introduced. They presided over five of the Vaikuṇṭhas, Rāmrām Guru over the sixth and Śaṅkaradeva himself over the seventh. Six boys dressed as maidens then entered the stage with garlands of lotus in hand and went as Lakṣmī to six of the Vaikuṇṭhas, only there was none in the Vaikuṇṭha presided over by Śaṅkaradeva himself. Then came the devotees (*Pāriṣadas*) to each Vaikuṇṭha to offer prayer. A vivid description is found in *Śaṅkara-carita* of Rāmacaraṇa Thākura.

In Sanskrit dramas there is no reference to any use of scenery in the representation. The Yavanikā (drop scene) remains at the background throughout the performance and scene, in the modern sense of the term, never used. Actual scenery was introduced even in Europe only about the time of the Renaissance (16th-17th centuries A.D.). But in Assam Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva used scenery representing the subject-matter of the play before that. He was perhaps the first to devise and use scenes in dramatic performance.

The *Yavanikā* (*Āra Kāpora* : cf., *Bicitra pameri vastra āra kari dhari*) in the Assamese theatre is hung before an actor enters the stage. We find :—

Dhaimāli eḍile prabeśara belā hay,
Raghu Sanātane āḍe tāka dharichay[19]

Jhumurā.—Jhumurā is a short piece of one-act drama in which the songs supply the whole plot. The prose portion is recited by the Sūtradhāra and also by the actors in their dialogue in explaining the songs. The term Jhumurā is probably connected with Jhumari, a kind of Rāga. In Assamese there is a metre known as Jhumuri. But Jhumurā has probably no connection with it. In a song of Vidyāpati this term Jhumari appears where it means a kind of song sung in chorus by a number of women,—

Gābaha sahi lori jhumari ma'ana
Ārārhane janu.[20]

19. Rāmacarana Ṭhākur, *Śaṅkaracarita*, v. 1392.
20. Vidyāpati Ṭhākur, *Padāvalī*, ed. Nagendranath Gupta, Bangīya Sahitya Pariṣad, p. 478.

'O friends, sing *jhumari*, we go to worship Madana'.

Music, songs and dance.—The musical instruments used in an Assamese dramatic performance are *Khol* and *Mṛdaṅga* and varieties of *Tālas* (cymbals).

The airs (*rāga*) of the dramatic songs are all taken from the Indian tradition. Sage Bharata, Śāraṅgadeva, Dāmodara and Hanumān are all authorities on the subject. The primary musical modes of sound (*rāga*) are six. Thus, according to Hanumān, the *rāgas* are—Mālava, Mallāra, Śrī, Vasanta, Hindola and Karṅāṭa. Other writers give slightly different names. Each rāga has six Rāgiṇīs regarded as its consorts, and their union produces several other musical modes. Thus *Mālava* has *dhānasi* (*dhanaṣri*), *mālasī, rāmakirī, sindhuḍā, āsāvarī* and *bhairavī* as its consorts. The Assamese poets treat all *rāgas* and *rāgiṇīs* simply as *rāgas*. The origin of a few rāgas, such as Kau, &c., is unknown. Among the pre-Vaiṣṇava poets and *siddhas* Luipāda, Mīnanātha, Sarojavajra, Dāka, Mankara, Sukavi Narāyaṇadeva and Durgāvara composed songs in these rāgas between eighth and fifteenth centuries A.D. Later Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, Pītambara, Mādhavadeva and other Vaiṣṇava poets did so from the fifteenth century onwards. The songs in Assam are intended for singing mostly in chorus. Each contains a refrain (*dhruva*) followed by lines of one or more stanzas (*pada*) and the concluding line or lines contain the name of the composer himself. The time is marked by beating of cymbals (*tāla*). The *tālas*, viz. *ektāl, paritāl, viṣamatāla, kharmān, yati, dharam* (*dharaṇa*) *yati, chuṭā, rūpaka* and *cok* have also with a few exceptions been borrowed from Indian tradition. Politically and socially Assam was free from Muhammedan influence. So, in music also Assam was entirely uninfluenced by Muhammedan elements.

Dancing is based on rhythm and time.[21] Dancing with pose of the dancer has also been borrowed from the Indian tradition. Thus, the pose of the Kṛṣṇa dance is indicated by *Mṛgasīrṣaka* hand. It is thus described: The thumb and little finger of each hand should be stretched out and the other three fingers clenched together and held downwards. When this hand is brought near the mouth the pose represents the playing of the flute.[22] It should be noted that when the two hands in this state are brought together

21. *D.R.*, I. 13.
22. *N.S.*, IX. 82; *Śrī-hasta-muktāvalī*, 51, 598.

near the mouth but kept a little apart one below the other, in a slanting position, it looks as though the actor is playing on a flute (*vaṁśi*), the favourite musical instrument of Kṛṣṇa. Hence this is a characteristic pose.

Important Plays: Śaṅkaradeva

Śaṅkaradeva, the originator of Assamese drama, was the best vernacular dramatist. His plays, except *Patnī-prasāda,* are complete and include all aspects of the Sanskrit drama in the prologue and *Mukti-maṅgala.* His aim was to propagate his new Kṛṣṇa cult. In his six extant plays he showed superiority and excellence of Kṛṣṇa worship. Thus in *Kālidamana* Kāli's wives prayed to Kṛṣṇa as follows:—

Jāher cārio mukhya mūrti anupāma
Rāma Kāma Aniruddha Vāsudeva nāma
hena Bhagavanta Kṛṣṇa devatāra deva
tohāri caraṇe karo lakṣa koṭi seva.

And Kāli himself, after his punishment, spoke thus:—

Garava gucāyali mora, viṣaya āpada ghora
dūra kara ava moi, cinto caraṇaka toi
dehu Hari mohi ohi śikṣā, māgi bhuñjaba bhikṣā
bharamo tuvā guṇa gāi, karahu ataye karuṇā gosāi

In *Patnī-prasāda* Kṛṣṇa exhibits the futility of sacrifice and other Vedic Karma-kāṇḍa and rewarded the wives of the insolent priestly Brāhmaṇas for their devotion to him.

In *Keli-Gopāla* Kṛṣṇa said to the cowherdesses who were weeping at his absence thus:—

Ava sakhi vilāpa tāpa tyajaha
bhakata-vatsala moka jāni
bhakataka dukha dekhi hṛdi rahe nāhi
Śaṅkara kaha Hari-vāṇī.

In *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa* we find:—

Dekhu dekhu bhāṭaka mukhe Rukmiṇī Kṛṣṇa-guṇa śuniye, Kṛṣṇaka caraṇe śraddhā mātra kayala, ataye bhakataka parama kṛpālu Kṛṣṇa, tanikara vaśya huyā gṛha-gṛhiṇi kayala, āḥ Hari-bhakatika mahimā kī kahaba.

In *Pārijāta-haraṇa* Nārada praises Kṛṣṇa in this way :—

Tuhu jagata-guru devaka devā,
tohāri caraṇe rahoka meri sevā,
mukhe jono chāḍahu tuwā guṇa nāma
māgu ataye vara tohāri thāma.

And Indra with Śacī prayed thus to Kṛṣṇa : —

Jaya jaya bhakata-bhaya-hārī, jaya jaya Īśvara Murāri
jākeri nāma ucari pāi padārasa cāri
māgabo bhikṣā paridhāna kaya kaṇṭhā.

and later :—

Ohi Indrapada āpada ghora,
dūra kara Hari kumati mora
māgabo bhikṣā paridhāna kaya kaṇṭha,
dharabo tohāri bhakati panthā.

In *Rāma-vijaya* Rāma is praised thus :—

Rāmaka caraṇe śaraṇa lehu jāni
Sava aparādhaka marakha tuhu svāmī.

Śaṅkaradeva has taken his plots from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the Purāṇas. His creative fancy is rich and his poetic refinement and expression of depth of feeling, specially in *Keli-Gopāla,* are indeed excellent. He is all serious and his dramatic qualities of vigour, life and action prove his genius. The plots of his plays are given below in outline:—

(i) *Kāli-damana* (Taming of the Kāliya-nāga).—A very venomous snake, the Kāli Nāga, lived in the Kālindi pool and rendered its water poisonous. One day Kṛṣṇa came with cattle and other cowherd boys to its bank. The boys and cattle happened to drink this water and they all died. Kṛṣṇa later restored them to life. He resolved to drive the snake off the pool and with that object in view jumped into it. He began to stir and agitate the water violently and this attracted the snake to the surface. Kāli bit Kṛṣṇa in anger and held him in a firm grip with the coil of its tail. Kṛṣṇa lay there motionless as if dead. The news of this soon reached Gokula and Kṛṣṇa's parents and other cowherds and cowherdesses hurried to the pool weeping. After a while Kṛṣṇa extricated himself with a violent jerk and standing on the expanded hoods of Kāli began a cosmic dance. Kāli was soon overpowered bleeding through mouth and nose. Then his wives with children

appeared and prayed for mercy. Kāli himself bowed down at Kṛṣṇa's feet and began a prayer. Kṛṣṇa thereupon left him and directed him to leave the pool and proceed to Ramaṇaka island. After this Kṛṣṇa joined his parents and others on the shore. As evening approached they all decided to pass the night in the forest of Vṛndāvana. But at the dead of night a forest fire raged and spread around them. Then to save his parents and others Kṛṣṇa swallowed the fire and then all went home safe. The source of the play is *Bhāgavata Purāṇa.*

(2) *Patnī-prasāda.*—The cowherd boys were hungry. They asked Kṛṣṇa, their companion, to arrange food. The latter sent them to the hermitage close by where the Brahmans were performing a sacrifice. The boys went and begged the Brahmans for food. The latter, proud as they were of their learning and efficacy of sacrifice, refused to give any and dismissed them saying they were gods of the earth and Kṛṣṇa was nobody. The boys returned and reported this to Kṛṣṇa who then sent them for food to the Brahmans' wives in the settlement. The pious consorts of the Brahmans on hearing of the arrival of Kṛṣṇa, their Lord, went out to see him carrying presents of sweets and other delicacies in hand. They saw Kṛṣṇa, the object of their devotion, and paid homage to him. The Brahmans at first resisted. But eventually they too adopted the cult of Bhakti to Kṛṣṇa in preference to learning, rituals, and sacrifice. The story of this drama also is taken from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa.*

(3) *Keli-Gopāla* (sportive dance of Kṛṣṇa).—One moonlit night in autumn Kṛṣṇa sitting on a sand-bank of the Yamunā played an enchanting and amorous song on his flute ; and thus attracted the cowherdesses of Vṛndāvana to come to the spot and they joined Kṛṣṇa in a Rāsa (sportive dance).

This enchanted and exhilarated them so much that they forgot themselves and began to show disrespect to Kṛṣṇa. To punish them for their arrogance Kṛṣṇa took one of the maidens and slipped away. The milk-maids, thus deserted, suffered extreme pangs of separation and began to search for him in the jungle. Later Kṛṣṇa left alone the maiden with whom he had eloped as well for a similar offence and reappeared among the maidens he had left behind. Then they began to dance in a circle (*Rāsa-maṇḍala*). After this they waded together into the Yamunā and sported in water. On hearing the first cock-crow Kṛṣṇa sent them home. This continued for several nights. One night a Yakṣa named Śaṃ-

khacūḍa molested one of the dancing girls. Kṛṣṇa pursued and killed him.

This is the best among Śaṅkaradeva's plays. The poetic beauty and expression of depth of feeling are quite apparent. The attachment of the cowherdesses was ecstatic but selfish. They in joy forgot their husbands and children and forgot themselves. They had worshipped Goddess Kātyāyanī for obtaining Kṛṣṇa as their husband for eathly pleasure and they got the desired object but no salvation. Later, they longed and prayed for joining their soul with the supreme soul which Kṛṣṇa embodied. This they achieved by selfless devotion at Kurukṣetra. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* provides Śaṅkaradeva with the plot of the drama.

(4) *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa* (Abduction of Rukmiṇī).—On hearing praises from two Bhāṭas Kṛṣṇa and Rukmiṇī fell in love with each other without seeing. King Bhīṣmaka of Kuṇḍina also selected Kṛṣṇa for marriage of his daughter Rukmiṇī, but his son Rukma persuaded him instead to give Rukmiṇī in marriage to prince Śiśūpāla. On information being conveyed Śiśupāla came with several other princes to Bhīṣmaka's residence. When news of this reached Rukmiṇī's ears she sent her trusted priest, Vedanidhi, to Kṛṣṇa at Dvārakā with a letter to come and save her. Kṛṣṇa accordingly hastened to Kuṇḍina and saw Śiśūpāla and others on the reception ground. Then when Rukmiṇī returned from the temple of Bhavānī after finishing worship and appeared before the assembled guests Kṛṣṇa caught her by the hand, put her into his chariot and drove away. Śiśūpāla and other princes in anger pursued him and gave a fight. But they were all worsted. Later, on the way, Rukma attacked Kṛṣṇa demanding return of Rukmiṇī. Kṛṣṇa badly defeated him but spared his life at the entreaties of Rukmiṇī. The marriage was later solemnized at Dvārakā. The story of the drama is taken from the *Harivaṁśa* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

The names of Vedanidhi, Surabhi and Haridāsa are of Śaṅkaradeva's invention. In this play love of Kṛṣṇa and Rukmiṇī is finely depicted and the characters are well-drawn.

(5) *Pārijāta-haraṇa* (Taking away of the Pārijāta).—Sage Nārada came with Indra one day to Kṛṣṇa for help against Narakāsura of Prāgjyotiṣapura. At that time Nārada presented him with a heavenly flower, Pārijāta. Kṛṣṇa put it on the head of Rukmiṇī who happened to be present there at the time. Then Nārada went and reported this to Kṛṣṇa's wife Satyabhāmā and excited her jealousy and anger. In the meantime Indra prayed for

Kṛṣṇa's help for recovery from Narakāsura the ear-rings of Aditi, the umbrella of Varuṇa, Maṇi Parvata and the heavenly maidens forcibly taken away. Kṛṣṇa promised help. Then Nārada reappeared and reported to Kṛṣṇa Satyabhāmā's jealousy and wrath. Kṛṣṇa ran to Satyabhāmā and attempted to console her. But she was in a violent temper and could not be appeased. Eventually Kṛṣṇa promised to fetch the Pārijāta tree itself from Indra's Amarāvatī and then only was she pacified. Kṛṣṇa then riding on Garuḍa with Satyabhāmā flew to Prāgjyotiṣapura and killed Naraka in a fierce battle. He recovered the ear-rings of Aditi and other things and returned them to their respective owners at Amarāvatī and sent the maidens in Naraka's harem to Dvārakā. On their way back to Dvārakā Satyabhāmā saw in the Nandana forest a *pārijāta* tree and wanted to have its flowers. Accordingly Kṛṣṇa sent Nārada to Indra to ask for the same. But Indra would not allow a heavenly flower to be taken for a woman of the earth. This led Kṛṣṇa to uproot the *pārijāta* tree, put it on Garuḍa's back and resume the journey. Indra came and offered resistance. A fight followed in which Indra was badly defeated. He admitted Kṛṣṇa to be the Lord of the universe, and above all gods and men. Kṛṣṇa then returned home and planted the *pārijāta* tree just in front of Satyabhāmā's residence.

The beauty of this play is marred to some extent by the vulgar quarrel and exchange of coarse and undignified language between Śacī and Satyabhāmā. The main source of this episode is the Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

(6) *Śrī-Rāma-vijaya* (Victory of Rāma).—One day sage Viśvāmitra came to Daśaratha, king of Ayodhyā, and with the latter's permission took Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to his hermitage for protection of his sacrifice from depredations of demons (Rākṣasas). After their arrival at the hermitage two demons, Mārica and Subāhu, appeared and began to rain blood. Rāma with his arrows drove them off and the sage safely completed his sacrifice. After this Viśvāmitra took the two princes to Mithilā, where princes from far and near had assembled for the *svayaṃvara* (selection of bridegroom) of Sītā, daughter of king Janaka. According to a voice in the sky Sītā had been destined to be the consort of him who could skilfully manipulate the gigantic *ajagava* bow of Śiva and properly put an arrow to it.

None of the assembled princes could move or bend the bow. But Rāma dexterously put an arrow and in bending the bow to shoot it broke it in two. Thereupon Sītā advanced and garlanded

Rāma acknowledging him as her husband. Seeing this the assembled princes rose in a body and attacked him. A battle followed in which they were defeated and turned out of the place. The marriage was then solemnized after which the party set out for Ayodhyā. On the way, however, Paraśurāma intercepted them and attempted to kill Rāma with his axe for having broken his master's bow. A fight ensued in which Parasurāma was badly beaten and his way to heaven blocked for ever.

In this play Śaṅkaradeva deviated from the original text of the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki in a few particulars. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Viśvāmitra took Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to the sacrifice of king Janaka at Mithilā with a view to showing them the *ajagava* bow of Śiva. There was no *svayaṁbara* nor any assembly of princes. When Rāma was shown the bow he, out of curiosity, took it out of the box and broke it in two. There was no voice in the sky about selection of Sītā's groom. Janaka himself had made a vow to give Sītā in marriage to him who could break the bow. Again according to the *Rāmāyaṇa* Viśvāmitra never accompanied Rāma and his party to Ayodhyā, nor did he fight with Paraśurāma on the way. There is also slight variation from the original text in the episode of Mārica and Subāhu. It may be added that the ludicrous scene about the assembled princes' amorous exclamations at the sight of Sītā and their humiliating punishment by the maids have marred to a certain extent the artistic beauty of the play. The source of the story is the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Mādhavadeva

The next great dramatist was Mādhavadeva. Five of his genuine plays have been found. They are — *Arjuna-bhañjana, Cor-dharā, Bhūmi-luṭiwā, Pimparā-gucuwā* and *Bhojana-vihāra.* Three other plays, viz: *Bhūṣaṇa-haraṇa, Rāsa Jhumurā* and *Koṭorā-khelā* have also been found. They are believed to be spurious. They contain no prologue nor any Sanskrit *śloka.* They also offend against the tenets of the *Ekasaraṇa* cult of which Mādhavadeva was a high priest. Their language also differs from the dramatic style of Mādhavadeva. That of *Koṭorā-khelā* is undignified, coarse and vulgar.

The best plays of Mādhavadeva are *Arjuna-bhañjana* and *Bhojana-vihāra.* The plot of the former is this:—Yaśodā was giving suck to child Kṛṣṇa. At that time the cowherdesses reported that the boiling milk was over-flowing the pot. She hastily put down Kṛṣṇa and ran to the oven to attend to it. At this

Kṛṣṇa, in a rage, pelted a stone thereby breaking down the churning pot of Yaśodā and spilt the milk. Then he entered the room, began to eat fresh butter from a pot and threw portions thereof to the monkeys assembled close by. In the meantime Yaśodā returned and found Kṛṣṇa out. She grew furious and chased and eventually caught Kṛṣṇa. Then she attempted to tie Kṛṣṇa up but found the rope short by two fingers' breadth. She added fresh rope, but found it short as much. At last she succeeded in tying Kṛṣṇa to a mortar and then left. Then Kṛṣṇa began to move passing in between two Arjuna trees close by and dragging with force the mortar behind him. In so doing he pulled down the trees which fell to the ground with a tremendous noise. On hearing this sound the cowherds ran to the spot and set Kṛṣṇa free. The sources of the work are *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and *Bilvamaṅgala-stotra.*

(2) The *Bhojana-vihāra* (the picnic).—Kṛṣṇa arranged a picnic on the pasture ground in Vṛndāvana and went there with other cowherd boys driving their cattle in front of them. While they were at breakfast there sitting in a circle with Kṛṣṇa in the centre their cattle strayed away. Kṛṣṇa went out in search of them asking his companions to continue the meal. He could not find the missing cattle. He returned to the place of excursion and found also the boys gone. He bewailed their loss and came to the conclusion that Brahmā had concealed the boys with their cattle. The play abruptly terminates at this stage. The concluding portion of the plot is told in a different play, *Brahmā-mohana,* which, however, does not appear to have been written by Mādhavadeva. The remaining plays of this dramatist depict clever deceptions of child Kṛṣṇa.

Gopāla Ātā

The next dramatist was Gopāla Ātā of Bhavānipura. His two plays—*Janma-yātrā* and *Gopī-Uddhava-saṁvāda*—have been found. He gave the first performance of *Janma-yātrā* within the precincts of his Kīrtanaghara at Bhavānipura in the presence of Mādhavadeva. This was followed on the following day by a performance of the *Bokā-yātrā* or *Pācati* in the same compound. Later at the request of Gopāla Ātā, Mādhavadeva incorporated in *Janma-yātrā* a Bargīta of Śaṅkaradeva beginning with the line, "Hariko bayane heri māi". *Janma-yātrā* is a fine play.

Janma-yātrā (Drama of the birth of Kṛṣṇa).—Devaka, brother of king Ugrasena of Bhoja, gave away Devakī, his

daughter, to Vasudeva in marriage. At the time of departure of the marriage party Kaṃsa, son of Ugrasena, in order to honour and please the married couple himself drove the bridal chariot. On the way he heard an awful voice in the sky that the eighth child of Devakī would kill him. Thus startled he attempted to kill *Devakī*, but desisted when Vasudeva promised to hand over to him each child as soon as born. Vasudeva and Devakī were, however, kept in chains in a cell. Vasudeva kept his words. The eighth child, Lord Kṛṣṇa was born in the prison at midnight while it was raining and the guards were all asleep. Vasudeva stealthily carried the infant to Gokula and left it by the side of unconscious Yaśodā, wife of Nanda, who had just given birth to a female child. Vasudeva picked the latter up and carried her into the prison-cell at Mathurā and laid her by the side of weeping Devakī. The child began to cry, the sentries awoke and hurried to the palace of Kaṃsa and gave information of the birth to the king. The latter ran to the cell, took out the crying child and violently struck her against a rock to kill her. But she assumed a divine form and vanished into the air giving him a warning that his slayer was born somewhere. Kaṃsa then released Vasudeva and Devakī. In the meantime there was great rejoicing at Gokula where the cowherds and cowherdesses solemnized the birth of Nanda's son with presents, sports and merry-making. The source of the drama is *Bhāgavata Purāṇa.*

Gopī-Uddhava-saṁvāda is of inferior merit. It contains several Bargītas of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva.

Minor Dramatists

The next dramatist was Rāmacaraṇa Ṭhākura. Only one play written by him, viz., *Kaṃsa-vadha,* has been found. This is a beautiful play and it follows closely in structure the plays of Śaṅkaradeva.

Kaṃsa-vadha (Slaying of Kaṃsa).—Sage Nārada comes to Kaṃsa and warns him that his deadly enemies, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa are growing up at Gokula. Thus alarmed Kaṃsa devises means of killing them. He sends Akrūra to Gokula to fetch Rāma and Kṛṣṇa with other cowherds to his capital at Mathurā, to attend a great Dhanuryāga sacrifice. Really he intends to kill the two boys there with the help of his elephants and wrestlers. Akrūra fetches Rāma and Kṛṣṇa to Mathurā. While passing through the streets of the capital Kṛṣṇa kills a washerman for his insolence, rewards a decorator for putting on them fine clothes, blesses Sudāmā for

presents of flower, and straightens Kubuji, Kaṁsa's hunch-backed maid, for presents of sandal and scents. In the amphitheatre Kṛṣṇa breaks down the royal bow, slays the mighty elephant, Kuvalaya and kills the chief wrestler, Cāṇūra. Balarāma similarly kills the wrestler Muṣṭika in a contest. Kṛṣṇa then jumps up the high platform, grapples with Kaṃsa thereon, throws him to the ground and presses him down to death. He then releases his captive parents and reinstates Ugrasena. in the throne.

Bhūṣaṇa Dvija composed *Ajāmila Upākhyana* and Daityāri Ṭhākur wrote *Nṛsiṁha-yāṭrā* and *Syamanta-haraṇa.*

Among the later dramas may be mentioned the *Kumāra-haraṇa* the production of Rucideva-suta, *Sataskandha-vadha* of Rucideva, *Śītā-haraṇa, Durvāsā-Bhojana* and *Bali-chalana* of Gopāla, *Bhīṣma-niryāna* of Mādhava and *Sindhurā-yātrā* of Jayadeva. This last is a long play in imitation of Śaṅkaradeva. These dramatists have introduced a metre, the *muktāvalī,* not used by Śaṅkaradeva or Mādhavadeva. The following lines from *Śitā-haraṇa* may serve as an example of this metre.

Hā prāṇa Ṣīta geli kona bhitā,
Nāśā ki nimite e
Tohora santāpe kene prāṇa dhari ācho

Bāpe rājya dilā *Kaikeyī niṣedhilā*
Banaka paṭhāilā e

Maro mai āta *Kaikeyīr raṅga hauka.*
Hṛdi-yukta Śītā *nāsā ki nimitta*
Bhailo mai ati bhītā e

Sītā tejiā *moka āge* *māri khāsa*
Suna re rākṣasa *moka māri khāsa*
Tejaha Sītāka e

āro abilambe Bharate bhuñjoka rājya,
Tini hante āilo *aranyaka pāilo*
Sītāka ....haruvāilo e

Bhaiyāi Lakhāi prāṇa rākhi deśe cala.

In the succeeding period many other plays were composed by several other dramatists. It became customary for the Adhikāras

or heads of important *satras* to compose dramas following the occasion of their accession to the headship of their monasteries. The practice is still continuing.

The Assamese Theatre

For periodical performance (*Bhāonā*) there is no permanent stage in Assam. A temporary theatre is erected within the precincts of the Nāmghara or Kīrtanghara or the performance is held within the spacious hall of the *Nāmghara* itself. The temporary theatre is called a *Rabhā* or *Sabhā-ghar*. It is a large open pandal furnished with a covering as a canopy of ornamental cloth or grass and appropriately decorated. The ground is divided into two blocks separated by a wide passage from one end to the other in which the spectacles are exhibited. At the upper end of the marked arena is placed a sacred manuscript as the *Thāpanā* (altar of God) as it is customary to worship Kṛṣṇa when a dramatic performance is held (*Bhāonā karile Kṛṣṇa pūjibe lāgaya*). At the lower end of the arena is the *Dohār* (Orchestra) or the place of chorus and musicians (*gāyan-bāyan*). Behind the *Dohār* is spread a painted curtain (*ār-bastra*) which takes the place of the *Yavanikā* of the Sanskrit plays. Before an actor enters the stage he begins his preliminary dance behind this curtain and steps into the stage as soon as the curtain is drawn aside. Behind this curtain and often at some distance is the green-room (*Cho-ghara* or *Nepathya-gṛha* of the Sanskrit plays). In this room are kept all the *chos* (acessories) including bows, arrows, weapons, masks, dress etc., and the actors are painted and dressed therein. Near the *Thāpanā* an enclosure is often made as the waiting room for the actors.

The seats.—Near the Thāpanā rugs or carpets are spread on the ground on both sides of the arena for distinguished visitors including Gosāis and Mahantas to sit on. On the remaining available space are spread on which the general public sit packed together. On one side of the Rabhā and at some distance behind the male audience similar mats are spread for the females to sit on.

The lights.—Performance is, almost always, held all night from about 9 P.M. till daybreak. Lighting arrangements are therefore necessary. Often chandeliers and hanging wax-candles with glass chimneys as also *gachās* (Candle-stands) in the form of trees with branches to hold hundreds of earthern lamps of mustard oil are used. Also the Rabhā is often lighted by stationary *Āriās* (*torches*) of earthern cups. In such cups seeds of cotton are put and kept soaked in mustard oil. These are lighted with or without thick

wicks of cotton yarn. Movable *Āriās* or *mahalâs* (torches) made by wrapping rags round the forked ends of sticks or split bamboo and kept always soaked in mustard oil are also used as occasion arises. Brilliant and dazzling light of *mahatā* (Pyrotechnic light) is also used when an actor enters or dances.

The Performance

The Preliminaries (*Pūrvaraṅga*) — According to the *Nāṭya-śāstra*[23] the preliminaries of a dramatic performance consist of the beating of drum (*pratyāhāra*), sitting of singers and musicians (*avataraṇa*), beginning of the chorus (*ārambha*), tying of musical instruments (*āśrāvaṇā*), turning up and manipulation of instruments and hands (*saṃṣvadanā*), harmony of music of stringed instruments and beating of time (*āśāritā*), and then a song (*gīta*) for propitiating the gods. This is followed by a violent dance (*tāṇḍava*) which increases in intensity as it proceeds. Then a banner is hoisted (*utthāpana*) by the Sūtradhāra. This is followed by a whirling round the stage (*parivartana*) with salutations to the guardians of the world. Then follows the *Nāndī*. These preliminaries are followed in the Assamese *Pūrvaraṅga* with certain modifications. It is called *Dhemāli*. It begins with preliminary beating of drums (*Khol*) by the drummers (*bāyan*), sitting in rows, and beating of time by the chorus (*gāyan*) with cymbals (*tāla*) standing behind in a semi-circle. Simultaneously a song known as *dhemālir ghoṣā* is begun in chorus by *gāyans*. This concert is known as *saru dhemāli*. The drummers then stand up and begin the *bar dhemāli* followed by *deva dhemāli*. In certain places (at Bardowa and some other places) *Pūrva-raṅga* consists of *Rāma dhemāli, na dhemāli, bar dhemāli, ghoṣā dhemāli* and *deva dhemāli*. Then the drummers dance in a ring or whirl round the stage beating the drums all the time. This is followed by a concert in praise of the preceptor (*guru-ghāta*). After this the Sūtradhāra enters and begins his violent dance which increases in intensity as it goes on. At the conclusion of his dance he recites the *Nāndī*.[24]

The actors (*Naṭuwā* or *bhāwarīyā*). The Assamese term for an actor is Bhāwarīyā or Naṭuwā. This word, Naṭuwā, is the same as Sanskrit, *narttaka* (dancer, mimic or mummer). The principal actor in a dramatic performance is undoubtedly the Sūtradhāra as stated above.

23. *N.S.*, V. 6, 25.
24. *Rāmacaraṇa, Śaṅkara-carita*, vv. 1484-87, 1492-3.

According to the *Nāṭya-śāstra*[25] rôles may or may not be played by persons of appropriate age and sex. Thus, man may play woman's part and woman man's. Also the young may play the rôle of the old or aged and *vice versa*.[26] In an Assamese dramatic performance, however, women have no place. The rôle of both males and females is always played by males. In regard to age, however, no distinction is made between the young and the old. Generally, however, the parts of women, Rāma, Kṛṣṇa and such other characters are played by boys and those of kings, ministers, warriors, demons, bards, Śiva, sages and such others by adult males.

Decoration and accessories.—The *Nāṭya-śāstra* classes representation under four main heads,[27] viz., representation by (1) body movement (*aṅgābhinaya*), (2) speech (*vācikābhinaya*), (3) expressions of feelings and sentiments (*sāmānyābhinaya*), and (4) by accessories (*āhāryābhinaya*).

The accessories form part of the decoration in (*Nepathya*) which is sub-divided into four groups, (a) model work (*Pusta*), (b) ornaments (*Alaṅkāra*), (c) decoration of the body (*aṅga-racanā*) and (d) animals (*sajjīva*).[28]

The model work is of three kinds, consisting of (i) those made of bamboo and covered with leather or cloth (*sandhima*), (ii) those made by mechanical process (*vyājima*), and (iii) those covered with cloth (*veṣṭita*).[29] These include chariot, tree, moon, large snake and such other.

The ornaments include (i) garlands (*mālya*), (ii) artistic ornaments (*ābharaṇa*) and (iii) garments (*vāsas*). The artistic ornaments are of four kinds: Those worn in limbs perforated (*ābhedya*): such as ear-ring (*kuṇḍala*); those to be tied up (*bandhanīya*): buttock-string (*sroṇī*), for example those to be thrown or spread up (*prakṣepya*) like anklets (*nūpura*), shawl (*vastrābharaṇa*) and those superimposed or placed in or upon a body (*āropya*)—gold chain (*hema-sūtra*), necklace (*hāra*), for example.

The garments of the actors include three classes: (i) the spot less (*śuddha*), (ii) the gay or variegated (*vicitra*) and (iii) the

25. XII. 166.
26. Op. cit. XVI. 1-3.
27. Op. cit., VIII and X.
28. Op. cit., XXI.
29. Op. cit., XXI, 5-7.

dirty or tattered (*malina*). Pious or religious men and women, gods, yakṣas, Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas and such other characters wear spotless garments; the intoxicated and insane characters as also persons in mourning or on a journey, ascetics and such others put on dirty or tattered clothes; and heroes, warriors, lovers, kings, ministers and some others wear the gay garment. The colour of the dress is an important element in matters of sentiment. Special instruction is given on the mode of wearing the hair of women and beard and whiskers of men.

In bodily decoration colour forms an important ingredient. The actors paint their faces in appropriate colours. There are four elementary colours, viz., white, blue, yellow and red. Pigments of different hues are obtained by mixing them in different proportions. Thus a lotus colour is obtained by mixing white with red. Nārāyaṇa, Vāsuki, Daityas, Dānavas, Rākṣasas, Piśācas and such other actors are to be painted black; Yakṣas, Gandharvas, Vidyādharas and many others golden yellow and the people of Eastern and Central India, light blue and brown.

Masks of animals, birds, fish, &c., and arms and accoutrements made of light wood or bamboo are in general use.

In Assamese *bhāonās* such decorations and accessories as follows are also used.

(a) Assamese accessories (*Cho*) include *Pusta* and *Sajjīva* of the Indian stage. Masks form the principal accessories. Actors playing the parts of certain gods, asuras, rākṣasas, monkeys, bears, birds and reptiles wear masks with appropriate cloak, wing or tail. Masks of Brahmā, Ganeśa, Cakravāka, Bakāsura, Rāvaṇa, Śataskandha, Vāsuki, Hanumān, Jāmbuvān, Garuḍa, Varāha and such others may be cited as examples. Model works include chariot, throne, mountain, tree, animal, snake, fish, bird, bow, arrow, sword, javelin, spear, club, mace, trident, shield, coat of mail, and such other objects. The ingredients (*Upakaraṇa*) as in the Sanskrit plays, are light wood, bamboo, cane, cloth, jute, leather, cotton, hair of animals, feather of birds, gold, silver, tinfoil, mica, metallic thread, chalk, pigments, lac and wax. Iron and heavy substances are not used.

(b) Bodily decoration (*Kāchan*) includes (1) decoration with garlands, false hair, false beard and whiskers, &c., (2) decoration with ornaments of gold, silver and precious stones, (3) decoration with suitable garments and (4) face-painting.

Male actors wear crown, cap, matted hair, false beard and whiskers and hair suitable to age and position. Thus Kṛṣṇa wears a crown of peacock's tail, a sage, a head of false white hair and similar beards and whiskers indicating age and a king or a warrior, false black mustaches. Female characters, if young, tie their false black hair in a single knot and, if old or aged, false grey hair loose.

All kinds of Assamese ornaments are worn by the actors appropriate to age and sex. Tinkling bells (*ghugurā*) and anklets (*nepūr*) are also used.

The garment is peculiar. The Sūtradhāra wears a long flowing gown reaching down the heels, a bodice covering the bust and a high turban or crown on the head. This is also the case with chief minister, only with this difference that his head-dress is a cap. Kings, nobles and warriors put on trousers (*theṅgās*) and appropriate bodice and head-dress. Boy actors wear white cloth (*bhuni*). Kṛṣṇa's waist-cloth is of yellow silk; his head-dress is a *Tālani* (peacock's tail ornamented with precious stones and mica-pieces) and his bodice is of blue colour. Female actors put on flowing white or coloured gowns (*mekhalās*) with ornamental coloured bodices, sages wear light waist-cloths and scarves of pale red colour (*geruwā*), ascetics, rags and *Śiva,* a tiger skin. Silver bonds are artistically worn by female characters and boys.

Faces of actors are painted. This follows closely the Indian tradition. Four paints, viz., *hiṅgul* (red lead), *hāitāl* (yellow orpiment), *nīla* (indigo) and *dhal* (chalk) are used for the purpose and different shades and hues are made by their admixture.

ASSAMESE VERSIONS OF THE RĀMĀYAṆA

BY

U. C. LEKHARU

The *Rāmāyaṇa* portraying Indian culture and ideals had been made very popular in Assam by the various recensionists who flourished in different periods of history. Assamese literature may boast of its priority in producing the *Rāmāyaṇa* over all other provincial Aryan languages. For, there was no *Rāmāyaṇa* in any other language when the first Assamese *Rāmāyaṇa* poet Mādhava Kandali rendered Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* into Assamese verse. Not only that, the *Rāmāyaṇa* appeared in varied forms—in verse, in prose, in songs. There are five versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Assamese and each of a different type.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* probably gained more popularity after Rāmānanda of the fourteenth century had preached the Rāma cult. It was through the disciples of Rāmānanda that the worship of Rāma had spread widely in northern and middle India (Sir R. G. Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism and Saivism*). This wave reached Assam through the local aspirants who went about the holy places in quest of knowledge and religious merit. The *Rāmāyaṇa* poet Mādhava Kandali flourished towards the end of the fourteenth century A.D. He composed the verses of the *Rāmāyaṇa* at the request of King Mahāmāṇikya. Śaṅkaradeva in his Uttara Kāṇda has referred to him as a predecessor and flawless poet. The *Kathā-gurucarita* of Barpeta says that Rāghavācāryya, an aged contemporary of Śaṅkaradeva's teacher Mahendra Kandali, was the disciple of Mādhva Kandali. Further details regarding the date of the poet has been discussed in my *Asamiyā Rāmāyaṇa Sāhitya* (pages 33-36).

The poet had no other work in other provincial languages before him to serve as model or to imitate. He therefore made verses direct from the Sanskrit original—the Ādikāvya of Vālmīki. He says :—

"Vālmīki wrote in various rhymes. I have, with great care, looked into them and have written in condensed form what I could understand in my own way. Who there is, who will understand all the *rasas*? The poets write in the ways of the people. Some-

times they supply things of their own and sometimes they lengthen as the subjects would demand. It should be borne in mind that these are not words of God but are the creation of man. So one should not take offence at my diversions". At another place he says—

"The great sage Vālmīki has produced the *Rāmāyaṇa*. In fact he has created nectar for the world, etc." He has also said that he has inserted *kāvya-rasa* at the words of king Mahāmāṇikya.

Mādhava Kandali's *Rāmāyaṇa* extant till now have five cantoes only, that is from Ayodhyā to Laṅkā. The other two cantoes—the Ādi and the Uttarā are believed to have been lost. The Ādi and the Uttarā were supplemented by Mādhavadeva and Śaṅkaradeva respectively. Mādhava Kandali's mission having been to reproduce the Kāvya only he probably had left out the two cantoes, the Sanskrit orignals of which also are taken to be later additions. There is a confusing reference made by the poet himself to the effect that he made verses of the seven cantoes. This has led scholars to think that Kandali had actually rendered all the seven cantoes. But it should be noted that the poet made the reference only towards the end of the Laṅkā Kāṇḍa. The other versions of the Assamese *Rāmāyaṇa* so far discovered also do not contain these two cantoes.

The special characteristics of the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Mādhava Kandali may be summarized as follows :—

Mādhava Kandali gives local colour to the descriptions of nature, men and the works of men. His language is forceful and full of apt similies, metaphors, idioms and phrases, some taken from the original some from the local language and some built by himself. He gives photographic and dramatic descriptions of scenes. He adopts various rhymes suited to the various themes. There are also verses which are exact translations from the original. In similies and metaphors he deviates sometimes from the original and there is seen the influence of his age. For instance, he compares the palace of Rāma with that of Kailāsa whereas in the original it has been compared with the dwelling place of Indra. At the time of Kandali Śiva worship predominated in Assam and that is why Śiva's thought is uppermost in his mind. For some of his diversions one would do well to read the descriptions of Mantharā, of Citrakūṭa, of the search of the monkeys for Sītā at the command of Sugrīva, Hanumanta's fight with Rākṣasas at Madhuvana and the subsequent burning of Laṅkā,

The Rāmāyaṇa of Mādhava Kandali was first published by late Mādhavachandra Bardalai some fifty years back. Two other editions were brought out a few years back by Paṇḍit Kanakchandra Sarma of Nowgong, and Prasannalal Choudhury of Barpeta.

Gīti-Rāmāyaṇa or *Durgābarī Rāmāyaṇa*.—Durgābara, an inhabitant of Kāmākhyā or Nilācala worked out a condensed version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in songs known as *Gīti-Rāmāyaṇa*. The poet flourished during the reign of the Koch king Viswa Sinha (1515-1540 A.D.). In *Beulā-ākhyāna*, the poet's other work, he has referred to the king and has also given his own genealogy. He writes, "I bow down to the great king Viswa Siṅha of Kamatāpura and also to his fortyeight consorts and eighteen princess".

He again says—"The village Nīlācala is the best place in the whole world. There is Pārvatī, the destroyer of the Asuras.

"Bāhuvala Śikdār is Gandharva incarnate. This song is spread by Durgābara".

Further—"Durgābara, son of Chandradhara, composed this beautiful song". The songs predominate in this work and verses are interspersed between the songs. The songs are lyrical, each complete in itself and yet forming a part of the whole *Rāmāyaṇa*. They contain varied tunes or *Rāgas* as the poet calls them. The names of the *Rāgas* are also given. These are as follows :—

Belawār, Barāri, Guñjari, Dhanaśrī, Rāmagiri, Ahir, Paṭamañjari, Bhāṭiyālī, Vasanta, Suhāi, Mañjari, Megha Mandal, Devamohan, Śrī Gandhakāli, Mārawār, Devajini, Ākāśamaṇḍalī.

The work shows the influence of Mādhava Kandali in some of the verses. But he shows originality in his selection of the scenes and in his twisting some of the facts to suit mass psychology. Dr. B. Kakati in his *Puraṇi Asamiyā Sāhitya* refers to this work as a folk edition of the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa.

The Ādi and the Uttarā of this work have not yet been discovered. This work was first published by late Viṣayachandra Biswasi of Hājo some thirty years ago and is out of print at present.

The facts that seem to be the poet's creations are the following :—

1. While in forest Rāma and Sītā pass their time by playing at dice, playing *Kheri*, etc. 2. Sītā sees the golden deer and

entreats Rāma to bring it to her alive, so that she might tame it and keep it with her. 3. At Citrakūṭa Rāma was in grief but Sītā created Ayodhyā by her art in the forest, and Rāma, Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa and other courtiers indulge in the Caitrāvalī festival (festival of the month of Caitra or Vasantotsava) and plays with *moṭ* (it is a kind of play with water. See for reference *Tripurā Buranji*, D.H.A.S., Assam). 4. Sītā, carried away by Rāvaṇa wails at her fate and also thinks that Rāma coming back from the hunt would be disappointed and would suspect her character. In fact Rāma comes back and does as Sītā imagines.

A translation of Sītā's wailing is given below :—

"O fate, unavoidable is the effect of Karma. I have brought blemish to the sacred family. I have become the cause of the ruin of the family. It is for my sake that I sent my master and also Lakṣmaṇa in his search. Rāvaṇa found me alone in the cottage and took me away. Thus I have been ruined by my own action. When my master will return from the hunt and will not find me within he will surely roam about in the forest and will pass his time in anxiety. People will say against me and my master will believe in these and think many things and also that I had sent Lakṣmaṇa with a bad motive. All evils will be ascribed to me. (Rāma will think): The unchaste Sītā has fled away and left her own husband because she suffered a great deal in the forest life. Surely a woman is not one's own. Thus Nārāyaṇa will wait and upbraid me. I am disappointed for life and will not see you again. The mother looks downcast in overwhelming grief. This is said by Durgādāsa".

Gīti Rāmāyaṇa represents a type of literature of the early period and is classed with the Beulā songs of Mankara and Nārāyaṇadeva, *Uṣā-pariṇaya* and *Rukmini-haraṇa* of Pīṭāmbara Dāsa, etc.

Ananta Kandali.—Durgābara is followed by Ananta Kandali, a contemporary and follower of Śaṅkaradeva. Ananta Kandali took the work of Mādhava Kandali before him and amply borrowed from him verses and expressions, condensed somewhere and elaborated elsewhere. What speciality he claims is his incorporation of the Bhāgavatī element into the epic. He has expressively said:

Mādhava Kandali biracilā Rāmāyaṇa
Tāka śuni āmāra kautuka kare maṇa

Rāmara sāmānya santa kathā yathāvata
Bhajanīya guṇa yata nabhailā vekata
Eteke yatan karo bhakatira pade
Nubulibā nindā sadā śunā sabhāsade
Sākṣāte Parama Brahma jānibā Śrī Rama

"Mādhava Kandali wrote the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Hearing his work I aspire. He wrote the simple facts of Rāma but the devotional aspect was not made explicit. So I make the attempt for the sake of devotion and I entreat that the audience might not take offence with me. You should know Rāma to be the Absolute Brahman himself".

It has been stated above that Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva supplemented to the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Mādhava Kandali by contributing the Uttarā and the Ādi Kāṇḍas. But they were both preceded by Ananta Kandali in the writing of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. There is a reference in the *Kathā-gurucarita* of the Barpeta Satra regarding this. The reference is very significant. It is stated that Mādhava Kandali once appeared before Śaṅkaradeva in a dream and entreated him to retain his name in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, as it was seen that Ananta Kandali was trying to dispense wtih his name from his *Rāmāyaṇa*. Śri Śaṅkara having such an experience retained the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Mādhava Kandali as it was and supplemented the two cantoes, the Ādi and the Uttarā. They further added the Bhaṇitās at the end of the chapters in the style of the works of the *Vaiṣṇava* period. Originally there were no verses enjoining upon people to turn to Hari and take his name. Mādhava Kandali ended his chapters with the words "Śubha, Śubha," simply.

To Ananta Kandali as to his Guru Śrī Śaṅkaradeva, Rāma was no other than Kṛṣṇa himself in another form, and by supplementing the devotional aspect to the epic he turned it to a religious scripture fitting to the contemporary movement of which he was a distinguished votary. In many places he has distinctly referred to his speciality. In one place he has said :—

Rāmāyaṇa kathā pade nibandhilo
Bhāgavatacarccā kari
Hari kathā vine durghora kalita
Tarite keho napāri.

"I have narrated the facts of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in verse by discussing the *Bhāgavata*. In the dark age of Kali no one can attain liberation without Hari."

Ananta Kandâli describes Rāma as God and the subjects as his devotees. On the occasion of Rāma's leaving for forest he says to Sītā :—

Bharata haibeka rajā pālibeka save prajā
Tāto móra kicho cintā nāi.
Etekese mora śoka tejilo bhakata loka
Sumarante prāṇa phuṭi yāi
Ehena Ayodhyāpurī āra yata nara nārī
Save mora parama bhakata

"Bharata will be king and rule over the subjects. But I have no thought over that. The cause of my sorrow is this that I have forsaken the devotees. This thought rends my heart. The men and women of the whole of Ayodhyā are my devotees."

The above tone is explicit everywhere. The poet compares the palace of Rāma as the temple of Rāma equalling it wtih Vaikunṭha, unlike Mādhava Kandali who compares it with Kailāsa.

That the people of the time was aspiring after knowledge and were discontent with the scholars for not clearly explaining things to them are evident from some verses of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. He says :—

Paṇḍite bhāṇḍiba buli nakaribā roṣ
Āmi punu bhāngiloho paṇḍitara doṣ.

"Do no longer resent by saying that the scholars will cheat you. I have removed the faults of the scholars."

Again—*Ślokara arthaka prākṛte nubuje*
Paṇḍite nakave yāci
Etekese Rāmakathā biracilo
Bhakatira tattva bāci.

"The illiterate do not understand the words of the ślokas and the scholars also do not explain them at their own initiative and so I have written the story of Rāma by expounding the truths of the Bhakti cult."

The poet gives his own particulars in the following manner :—

"Hajo is a sacred place and it is the best place in Kāmarūpa. On the top of the Maṇikūṭa hill there is Hayagrīva, the lord of the gods. By its side flows the Brahmaputra. There is a sacred *kuṇḍa* there known as Apunarbhava, an ablution in which destroys a second birth. Deva Gaṅgādhara in the form of

Gokarṇa is shining there....Over the hill there is Hara Kāmeśwara in the form of the Liṅga and there are also Kedāra and Kamala in the forms of the Liṅga."

"In such a holy place there was Ratna *Pāṭhaka,* a Brahman who was a servant of Viṣṇu. He propagated the *Bhāgavata* there holding a Satra. There was born a son to him named Haricaraṇa. He was subsequently known as Ananta Kandali when good days dawned upon him. This humble self now composes the verse of the *Rāmāyaṇa* by incorporating the *Bhāgavata* as salvation is not possible in the Kali age without Hari" (Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa).

Ratna Pāṭhaka bent on the feet of the Brāhmans and Viṣṇu resided there for sometime. He always read the *Bhāgavata* and the saintly people always heard him. People were pleased with his cuckoo-like voice" (Kiṣkindhyā-kāṇḍa).

He has other references in the portion of the *Bhāgavata,* X, done by him and in the *Vṛtrāsura-vadha* (*Bhāgavata,* IV).

In the Xth Canto Bhāgavata he has said that he was known also as Candra Bhāratī, Ananta Kandali and as Bhāgavata Ācāryya.

On a slab of stone on a hillock to the direct north of Umānanda at North Gauhati there is a record as follows :—

Śīte taraṇi-tāpena grīṣme lauhitya-vayunā
Sukhado'khila-lokānāṁ mandapas-Candra-Bhārateḥ.

"This is the camp (*maṇḍapa*) of Candra Bhārati which for its sunrays in winter and the air of the Brahmaputra in summer, is pleasant to all people."

Śrī Rāma Kīrtana is another recension of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in a different style. This was the work of Ananta Ṭhākura Āṭā also known as Kāyastha Hṛdayānanda belonging to the fourth generation from Śaṅkaradeva. It was he who had established the Kālaśilā Satra at Nowgong. He wrote Rāma Kīrtana in 1574 Śaka,

In the body of the work he has written :—

Yaśa Candra Khān ye Bhūyā̃ āchilā prakhyāta bara
Sadāya dharmata yāra citta
Tāhāna kaṇiṣṭha bhāi Sukavi ye giri nāme
Khyati tāna putra Yadu hai,
Śaṅkarara bhāṭṛ-pautrī nāme Viṣṇupriyā śāntī

Bihāilanta Yadu śubhānay
Tāna garbhe bhailo jāta nithikoho āmi khyāta.
Parama mūrukha mūḍhamati"

"There was the great and virtuous Bhūyā, Yaśa Candra Khan. His youngest brother Sukavi-giri had a son named Yadu. This Yadu married the chaste girl Viṣṇupriyā, daughter of Śaṅkara's brother. I am born of her but have no fame. I am a dullard."

He says in another place :—

Kāyastha Hṛdayānande kaya
Śuniyoka sabhāṣada caya.

"Please hear, O ! audience. Hṛdayānanda says this." *Rāma-Kīrtana* is written in the style of Śaṅkaradeva's *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Kīrtana* and takes the facts from *Rāmāyaṇa Candrikā,* a condensed Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* written by the Assamese scholar Kalāpa-candra. The poet writes : —

Sāta kāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa Vālmīkira kṛta
Tāra sāra uddhārilā kariyā vivṛta
Rāmāyaṇa Candrikā hailanta tāra nāma
Kalāp ye dvija candra mahanta upāma
Kīrtanar chande birachilo pada sāra
Śrī Rāma Kīrtana nāma bujibā ihāra

"Kalāpa Candra Dvija by taking the essence of the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki has written *Rāmāyaṇa Candrikā.* I have made verses from it after the style of *Kīrtana.*" The poet means the *Kīrtana* of Śri Śaṅkaradeva. He himself has written :—

Jaya jaya Śrīmanta Śaṅkara pūrnakāma
Kīrtanara chande biracilā guṇa nāma

"Hail to Śrīmanta Śaṅkara the perfect in himself. He wrote the virtues and names (of Kṛṣṇa) in verses of *Kīrtana*".

The poet was a follower of Śaṅkaradeva and accepted Rāma as none other than Kṛṣṇa himself and made his work fit for daily chanting. In the reference to the date of composition the poet gives Aśva, Muni, Vāṇ, Candra Śaka which comes to 1574 Śaka.

The prose Rāmāyaṇa

The prose *Rāmāyaṇa* or *Kathā Rāmāyaṇa* was written about the latter half of 16th century (Śaka era) by Raghunātha Mahanta, a Satrādhikara of the Daiyāng Sattra. The author was

fifth in descent from Śatānanda, a contemporary and disciple of Śrī Śaṅkaradeva. This author also wrote two other poetical works—*Śatruñjaya* and *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa.* In *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa* the poet writes:—

Kṛṣṇara kinkara Barbhakta vaṁśe jāta
Alpamati Raghunātha nāmata bikhyāta

"I am born in the family of Barbhakta, servant of Kṛṣṇa and am known as Raghunātha". Satānanda was known as Barbhakta, as is learnt from the *caritaputhis.* In *Śatruñjaya* the poet says that he wrote in the saka era 1658. Thus it may be surmised that *Kathā Rāmāyaṇa* might have been written sometime earlier or later than the *Śatruñjaya.* The actual date of the work has not yet been traced as the complete work has not been discovered as yet. Late Hemchandra Goswami collected the original manuscript of this work from one Bhimkānta Mahanta of Golāghāt. In the *Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts* he has stated that Raghunātha was the son of Kṛṣṇanātha and grandson of Harikṛṣṇa and flourished in the fifth generation from Śaṅkaradeva. He was the Satrādhikāra of the Daiyāng-sattra in the Golaghat Sub-division on the bank of the Daiyāng river. An annotated edition of this work has been prepared by Gauhati University for publication.

This work is a valuable treasure of Assamese prose literature, and it contains the facts of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in a concise form. At the end of each chapter the poet has mentioned the name of the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa. In the style of the work there is a distinct trace of influence of the *Aṅkīyā-nāṭa* and the works of Bhaṭṭadeva.

The Rāmāyaṇa in Drama

It was Śrī Śaṅkaradeva who first dramatized the facts of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in his *Sītā Svayambara* or *Rāma Vijaya Nāṭ.* Mādhavadeva is also said to have written a drama known as *Rāma Bhāwanā.* There is a reference to it in the old biographical works. It is also stated that the work was not preserved after the first performance as it was difficult for various reasons to arrange performances (See *Kathāgurucarita* edited by U. C. Lekharu).

Another drama, *Sītār Pātāla-Praveśa,* was written by Ananta Kandali.

Thus the facts of the *Rāmāyaṇa* were made familiar even to lay-men.

Some other Minor and Stray Works

There are some minor and stray works built upon folklore and also the facts of the *Rāmāyaṇa* by poets. These are very popular among mass people but are not literal translations from any original Sanskrit works. There are such works extant in Bengali as well. Dr. Dinesh Chandra Sen is of opinion that the stories of these works might have arisen towards the 12th and the 13th centuries as most of these dwell on the mights of *Tantra* and *Yoga*. These later on were infused with Vaiṣṇava traits and made instrumental in the propagation of the Vaiṣṇava faith. The same may be said about the Assamese works. Details of some such works are given below.

In *Śatruñjaya* are described the powers and the victories of Bāli. In Bāli's expedition of conquering the directions even Narakāsura of Kāmapīṭha had to take side. Narakāsura made his way through the path of Yoga and reached the place of the monkey king Malayaja with his soldiers. After the description of the Yogapatha the poet has said:—

"O audience, hear this rare tale. Its name is *Śatruñjaya* and it is the work of Raghunātha Das. I have said something of the past and something of the future from what Vālmīki said to Bharadvāja while narrating about incarnation. I have introduced the tale of Śatruñjaya. Wise men should pardon me as it is customary that the poets incorporate various *rasas* in kāvyas. I have incorporated the *rasas* here from various Śāstras".

The Sanskrit *Adbhutarāmāyaṇa* tells the story of the killing of the hundred-headed Rāvaṇa by Sītā. But this Assamese version contains a different story which is as follows:

Sītā after she had descended to the nether regions became impatient of not seeing Lava and Kuśa and sent Vāsuki to take them to her by some means. Vāsuki came in the form of a Brāhman and under the pretext of training them in war instruments took them away. On the way the Brahman knew from them everything regarding them and the descent of their mother Sītā. The Brāhman then related to them that he had met Vrateswarī Devī wife of Rāma in the city of Vidyā-Vilāsinī. They then desired to see her. Sītā's joy knew no bounds to have her sons before her.

It was later known from Brahmā where Lava and Kuśa were taken. Hanumanta, who was an adept in yogic performance was sent for bringing back the brothers. Hanumanta entered the

nether world and defeating the Nāgas in a fight had interview with Lava and Kuśa and also Sīta and persuaded the princes to come back. He also succeeded in getting Sītā's consent to come to Rāma only once. Hanumanta reached Rāma's place and Sītā also along with the two sons appeared from within the earth in a celestial throne. Rāma's pangs of separation was minimized and Sītā again entered the nether world promising to come and bow down before Rāma every day after the daily performances were over.

Here ends the story. It is said to have been related to Yudhiṣṭhira by Mārkaṇḍeya.

Mahirāvaṇa Vadha.—This work was written by Śrī Candra Bhārati which is another name of Ananta Kandali.

The story is that Rāvaṇa sought for help from his brother Mahirāvaṇa of the nether region, in his war with Rāma. Mahirāvaṇa by his spell of sleep took away Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa and captivated them for making sacrifice of them before the goddess Caṇḍi. Hanumanta by his yogic skill smashed the goddess Caṇḍi, killed Mahirāvaṇa and also Garbhāsura born of Mahirāvaṇa, and took back Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa.

Gaṇaka Caritra.—This is a small work written by one Dhanañjaya.

The story here is that Rāvaṇa made a device for winning Sītā by presenting before her in the Aśoka forest illusory Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. He went to the place in a grand procession and was sure of success. Because, he would make the illusory Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa entreat Sītā to surrender to Rāvaṇa. In the meantime Hanumanta entered Laṅkā in the form of an astrologer and frustrated the purpose of the demon by bearing strong evidence of the unchastity of his wife Mandodarī and raising his fury thereby.

ASSAMESE VERSIONS OF THE MAHĀBHĀRATA

By

U. C. LEKHARU

Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa, the original author of the *Mahābhārata* taught the epic to five disciples—Vaiśampāyana, Śuka, Jaimini, Paila and Sumantu. Vaiśampāyana repeated it at the serpent sacrifice of Janmejaya. Sūta Ugraśravā or Sauti (son of Lomaharṣaṇā Sūta) heard it recited there. Sūta then sang it in the twelve-year sacrifice of Śaunaka in the Naimiṣāraṇya. Thus the *Māhābhārata* came to have three versions. The other disciples also were believed to have developed the theme of the *Mahābhārata* in their way. But the extant second version is the Aśvamedha-parva of Jaimini.

For a comparative study of the Assamese *Mahābhārata* we give below from *Śabdakalpadruma,* the parvas, chapters, and the numbers of *Ślokas* in the original Sanskrit text.

Parvas	*Anuparvas*	*Chapters*	*Ślokas*
Ādi	19	227	8984
Sabhā	9	78	2511
Āraṇyaka or Vana	16	269	11664
Virāṭa	4	76	2050
Udyōga	11	186	6628
Bhīṣma	5	117	5884
Droṇa	8	170	9909
Karṇa	1	69	4964
Śalya	4	59	3220
Sauptika	3	18	870
Strī	5	27	775
Śānti	4	339	14732
Anuśāsana	1	146	8000
Aśvamedha	2	103	3320
Āśramavāsa	3	42	1506
Mauṣala	1	8	300
Mahāprasthānika	1	3	320
Svargārohaṇa			
Harivaṁśa:	1	5	200
Āścarya	1	244	12000
Bhaviṣya	1	112	3448

Attempts at rendering the *Mahābhārata* into Assamese verse were made very early in the 13th century, and till the days of Śaṅkaradeva we find traces of three *Mahābhārata* poets. From what has been found till to-day it may be surmised that some solitary episodes or *parvas* only were done into Assamese during the period. Thus, Harivara Vipra's *Vabrubāhar Yuddha* of the *Aśvamedha-parva,* the *Jayadratha-vadha* of the *Droṇa-parva* of Kaviratna Sarasvatī and *Sātyaki-Praveśa* of the *Droṇa-Parva* in the name of Rudra Kandali are the only productions left to us till to-day. It is not that no other portions were done besides those mentioned. From what, for instance, Kaviratna Sarasvatī has stated in his *Jayadrathavadha* we know that the poet had already versified the Śakuntalā episode, and the tale of Yajāti of the Ādiparva and then took to composing the killing of Jayadratha.

The poets in those days were patronized by the kings and it is from the eulogies made by the poets of the kings that the times of the works and the poets can be traced. Thus Harivara Vipra in his *Vabrubāhar Yuddha* has said that he has composed his work during the reign of King Durlabhanārāyaṇa, the great king of Kamatāpura. A translation of the lines is given below:

"Hail to King Durlabhanārāyaṇa, the great hero of Kamatāpura. May he live thousands of years and happily, with his sons and friends, rule over his kingdom. Living in his kingdom the Brahman Harivara, worshipping the feet of Gaurī has expressed in verse, the *Aśvamedha Parva* which is appreciated by the saintly people". Durlabhanārāyaṇa ruled towards the end of the thirteenth century.[1]

Kaviratna Sarasvatī has stated that he composed his *Jayadratha-vadha* in the reign of King Indranārāyaṇa, son of Durlabhanārāyaṇa. From his writings it is known that the king was a worshipper of Sadāśiva. The poet says that in the village of Choṭaśilā (in Barpetā subdivision) was the well-known Paṇḍita chief, Cakrapāṇi Śikdār, whom King Durlabhanārāyaṇa had praised again and again. He died and there was sorrow everywhere. His son Kaviratna Sarasvatī composed the verses of the *Jayadratha-Vadha.*

Rudra Kandali in his *Śātyaki-praveśa* has in the same manner referred to King Tāmradhvaja and has said:

"The high soul Tāmradhvaja and his brother, though young, are virtuous like old men. They are devotees of both Viṣṇu and

1. Gait, *A History of Assam,* p. 81.

Mahāmāyā and they protect the subjects like their own sons. They bear love to each other like Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. May they live a thousand years with their friends".

Thus the poet may be taken to have flourished during the reign of the Kachārī king Tāmradhvaja, who ruled in the beginning of the 14th century.

These poets composed verses on popular themes of the Mahābhārata to fit to the use of the Ojā-pālis, who sang these at public gatherings and on festive occasions. In fact the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata* and the subject of Beulā were in those days the main sources of knowledge and enjoyment to the mass. The poets took the subjects from the original Sanskrit works and narrated them generally very freely in tune with the folk-songs, and the national traits with all their details found full expression in them.

The *Vabrubāhar Yuddha* taken from Jaimini's *Aśvamedha Parva*, is finished in 605 verses of *pada, jhumuri, chabi* and *dulari* metres. The description of the palace of Maṇipura is very elaborate and is simply a magnified form of a typical Assamese house, and it shows the artistic tastes of the people. The description of the fight is lively and those of sorrow are very touching. The figures of speech, idioms and phrases are homely, colloquial and aptly used.

The story of Vabrubāhar Yuddha: Yudhiṣṭhira's sacrificial horse followed by Arjuna was captured by Vabrubāhana, the king of Maṇipura. Vabrubāhana then had known from his mother Citrāngadā that Arjuna was his father. He then went to Arjuna to return the horse, but Arjuna did not only disclaim any relationship but questioned the chastity of his mother and chastised Vabrubāhana for his cowardice. Then Vabrubāhana fought with Arjuna and killed him. Śrī Kṛṣṇa appeared in the field, restored Arjuna to life and related to Arjuna that Vabrubāhana was his son through Chitrāngadā. Arjuna then remembered everything and embraced Vabrubāhana as his most worthy son.

Along with other merits, the theme in which the father and the son are opposite parties in a war has made the work very popular even to this day.

Kaviratna Sarasvatī's description of the fight in *Jayadratha-Vadha* is very expressive. The selection of words and the metre bearing them bring to the mind's eye the terrible state of the war.

It was in the Vaiṣṇavite period at the initiative and patronage of king Naranārāyaṇa (1540-1585 A.D.) and at the inspiration from Śaṅkaradeva that the whole of the *Mahābhārata* was taken up for translation into Assamese verse. The Koc king Naranārāyaṇa, the great patron of learning specially engaged Rāma Sarasvatī, a follower of Śaṅkaradeva for his great work. During the reign and at the patronage of this king, Assamese literature and learning grew abundantly and to a high extent. From the descriptions of the poets on the generosity of this king one is naturally reminded of the great king Bhoja of antiquity. Naranārāyaṇa and his brother and general Śukladhvaja bountifully gave money and other rewards to those who would offer any work on the *Mahābhārata*. The king would sit listening to the readings of the scriptures, the newly composed verses and would take active part himself in the various scriptural discussions. It was in his court that the *ekaśaraṇ nāma dharma* of Śrī Śaṅkaradeva was established in the long-drawn controversy between Śaṅkaradeva and those who opposed him. Some works of extraordinary merit even from the pen of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva came at the wish either of this king or his brother. The *Guṇamālā* of Śaṅkaradeva which is a very condensed version of *Bhāgavata* was composed overnight when once the king wished to hear the *Bhāgavata* from any one in his court at one sitting. In very many places of the *Mahābhārata* and other works the poets have sung his praises. We give below some translations of the praises from the *Mahābhārata*:

"Hail to the unequalled king Naranārāyaṇa, who is busy day and night with the search for Śāstras on religion, morals, the Purāṇas and the *Bhārata*. It is he who has brought to his court all the Paṇḍits in Gauḍa and Kāmarūpa and have placed them in possession of *Śāstras*. There in his court the wise men expound the *Śāstras* every day. I have also been brought here. At the injunction of the king I have composed the verses in great joy" (Verses 7-9 of the *Ādi-Vanaparva*).

"He is patient, forgiving, bountiful, and highly saintly and is ever full of reverence to Viṣṇu and the Vaiṣṇavas. He worships at the feet of Mādhava in every manner. Such a king ordered me" (Verses 354-356, *Ādi-Vanaparva*).

"I pay my respects to Naranārāyaṇa, the son of Viśvasiṁha, versed in all *Śāstras* and whose glory is sung by the kings. His city is on the river Swarṇakoṣa and it is wide and long and is beautiful like the place of Indra. In his kingdom there are nine lakhs of subjects excluding the Brāhmaṇas, Vaiṣṇavas and beggars,

He punishes the thieves, the wicked and the dacoits. He is overjoyed to hear the *Jaya-kāvya,* the Mahāpurāṇas and places the *Bhārata* very high in his esteem. In the interior of his court he incessantly hears the rare *Bhārata* by offering money, clothings and apparels. This king has subdued many kings and the kings of Jayantā, Kirāta, Bhāṭa, Magadha, Mailaka pay him tributes. He has bestowed on me wealth to my heart's content and having his words in mind I have composed these verses" (*Ādi Vanaparva,* verses 827-833).

"He commanded me thus:—'You compose the *Mahābhārata* in Assamese verse. I have given you all the commentaries and explanations that are in my court library and you take all to your place'. Thus the king in cart-loads have sent all the books to my place. He has given me sufficient money, clothing and apparels and also servants and maid-servants, and I have composed the verses at his words" ('Puṣpaharaṇa' portion of the *Vanaparva,* 839-842).

"My parents called me Aniruddha, Śukladhvaja gave the name of Kavicandra, the king bestowed on me the name of Rāma Sarasvatī and asked me to compose the *Mahābhārata,* those ṛṣi-like poets like Kaṁsāri also have composed verses from this epic. These poets gave me hints that they would also compose verses. I have done some portions and they also have done in portions" (*Vanaparva* 'Puṣpaharaṇa', vv. 1424-25).

"Hail to king Naranārāyaṇa versed in all the *Śāstras,* who takes the greatest delight in hearing the *Bhārata.* Day and night he hears the *Bhārata.* If anybody offers him any book on the *Bhārata* he becomes very glad and gives to one's heart's content money and apparels. He has gone to the other world but his good name survives and he is praised by the worthy. I composed verses very happily in his kingdom. There was Śrīmanta Śaṅkara, who was the greatest of Vaiṣṇavas in the whole of Jambūdvīpa. Śukladhvaja, the brother of the king accepted him as his religious *guru* and would hear the *Bhāgavata.* He also listened to the *Bhārata*" (*Baghāsura-vadha*).

Śrīmanta Śaṅkara is God in man's form. The Brāhmans being jealous of him spoke against him before the king. But Naranārāyaṇa, the greatest of the kings was a saint and he sent for me and asked me to compose verses of the *Bhārata.* At his words I have composed twenty-four thousand verses. The orignal work of Vyāsa contains thirty-thousand ślokas (End of *Kulācalavadha*).

Rāma Sarasvatī has stated: —

"Hail to Śukladhvaja, the brother of the king, and also chief among the pundits whose mind was dipped into the *Bhāgavata* religion by Śrīmanta Śaṅkara. In his kingdom I write these verses. I bow down at the feet of Mukundadeva, the unequalled in virtues, who gave the names of Bhāratacandra and Kavicandra. Victorious be Naranārāyaṇa in the world who is ever eager to hear the *Bhārata*" (*Vijaya-vanaparva,* vv. 3319-3321).

"At the word of such a king (Naranārāyaṇa) I have composed the Vanaparva verses" (v. 4820).

Engaged by Naranārāyaṇa, Rāma Sarasvatī took up the work. Some other poets also volunteered their services and assisted Rāma Sarasvatī in versification. This is evidenced by the poet's own acknowledgment, translation of which is given above. Whatever that might be, Rāma Sarasvatī could not finish the work during the life-time of Naranārāyaṇa but continued to work till the days of Dharmanārāyaṇa, king of Darrang. Subsequently other poets also extended their hands to versifying the portions left unfinished by the forerunners. We have given in the following pages the names and the works of all the *Mahābhārata* poets.

Being a devout follower of Śaṅkaradeva Rāma Sarasvatī while fulfilling the wish of the king made his *Mahābhārata* subservient to the propagation of the *Bhāgavata* religion as was preached by his great preceptor. The stories of the *Mahābhārata* like those of the *Rāmāyaṇa* naturally attract people, these being repositories of all knowledge and ideals and representatives of Indian culture. The whole of the *Mahābhārata* and especially the Vanaparva afforded ample scope for the poet to preach the Vaiṣṇava tenets—to show the glory of Lord Kṛṣṇa and the triumph of virtue over vice. The Vanaparva of the Assamese *Mahābhārata* has been made very voluminous. This parva is also known as *Vaiṣṇavaparva* and the Assamese people regard the *Mahābhārata* as a religious scripture in no sense inferior to the great *Bhāgavata.* The Vaiṣṇava element in the *Mahābhārata* had not been a new thing but it had crept in even into the original composition of Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa. Rāma Sarasvatī made it still more pronounced. The stories and the truth behind them so long unknown to the mass became not only popular but became their heart's most prized treasure. The works of the co-workers and followers of Rāma Sarasvatī all bore the same tone and spirit. Further specialities of the Assamese Mahābhārata is that it contains some sub-parvas,

and Upa-parvas some of which are very voluminous, and which are not found in the works of any other provincial languages. The poet traces their sources to the original work of Vyāsa and the commentaries accompanying it. No research has however been made so far to find out the original Sanskrit work on which the poets built their edifices and the whole field of Sanskrit manuscripts in Assam remains almost unexplored.

We give below some details of the various parvas of the Assamese *Mahābhārata* :—

Ādi Parva—The poet retells this parva in 2036 verses. Here he writes in the name of Aniruddha or Dvija Aniruddha, and does not refer to the king who employed him. This parva has not yet been published but remains in manuscript. It may be reminded that some episodes only of this parva were rendered into Assamese verses in the early period by Kaviratna Sarasvatī in the days of king Indranārāyaṇa, son of Durlabhanārāyaṇa of Kamatā. The poet has made very explicit the mission of the propagation of the Vaiṣṇava faith that remains in the background of the work. Aniruddha is another name of Rāma Sarasvatī.

Here is the description of the meeting of Parāśara with Satyavatī, the birth of the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas, the destruction of the Khāṇḍava forest and the fight of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna with Indra. *Pāñcālī-vivāha,* a work in 860 couplets, containing the episode of Draupadī's birth and marriage, springs from the hands of Rāma Sarasvatī, who also gives his name as Bhārata Bhūṣaṇa.

Sabhā Parva—This parva contains 1070 verses and the poet's name appears as Dvija Aniruddha as in *Ādi Parva*. The poet's own son Gopīnātha also assisted him with the verses from 812-1028. The work describes the Rājasūya Yajña of Yudhiṣṭhira and Yudhiṣṭhira's play of dice with the Kauravas including Śakuni.

Another poet Śiṣṭa Bhaṭṭācāryya rendered the *Śiśupālavadha* of *Sabhā Parva* in a very homely style. In *Śiyāl Gosāi* another work of the poet, he says that he belonged to the Sūryya Vipra class and had his residence at Chaparā in the Darrang district. This work is believed to have been written at about 1616 A.D.

Vana Parva—This parva contains—

Ādi Vanaparva, Puṣpaharaṇa Parva (written with Gopīnatha), *Maṇicandra Ghoṣa Parva,, Vijaya Parva*—all in 5441 verses. *Tīrtha-yātrā-parva, Sindhurā Parva* or *Sindhu-yātrā-parva*—in 1142 verses (written during the days of Dharmanārāyaṇa).

The upa-parvas related to this parva are the following :—

Kulācalavadha (in 1925 verses)
Baghāsuravadha (in 3900 verses after the death of Naranārāyaṇa)
Khaṭāsuravadha (in 182 verses)
Aśvakarṇa-yuddha
Jaṭāsuravadha
Jaṅghāsuravadha
Bhojakatavadha.

The other poets who composed verses on the Vanaparva are the following :—

Kaṁsāri—a contemporary of Rāma Sarasvatī. He wrote Kirāta Parva—a subparva. Kaṁsāri finishes the work in seven hundred and twenty-five verses. The subject-matter of the parva consists of Arjuna's mastering the war instruments in heaven under Indra, his escape from the enchantment of Urvaśī, killing of Nibāta Kavaca and Paulama, pleasing Śaṅkara in fight and attaining the Pāśupata from him, and his coming back to his brothers.

Sāgara Khari.—This poet was a resident of Śilā (Barpeta) as is known from the last verse of his work.

His work is *Kūrmawali-vadha* and it contains 366 verses. In verse 364 he states that he has made verses of the *Kūrmathaparva.* The story is as follows : —

After the Pāṇḍavas were sent to exile the Kauravas, in order to proclaim their prowess made arrangement for a horse sacrifice. A new town was established for the purpose, the house for holding the sacrifice was built and then were sent horses to the four quarters. Karṇa was sent to the west, Droṇa to the east, Duḥśāsana to the north, and Bhīṣma to the south as guards of the sacrificial horses. The horse of Duḥśāsana entered the kingdom of Kūrmawali. The king ordered Kālabhadra to capture the horse and made arrangements for war. Duḥśāsana was also taken a prisoner in the war. Duryodhana and Bhīṣma and all went there and reached the place in twelve days.

The fight ensued. Jayadratha and Karṇa bound Kālabhadra with Nāgapāśa. Kūrmawalī came and encountered Duryodhana. Duryodhana was flown off to Hastināpura. Then approached Bhīṣma who killed Kūrmawalī. Kālabhadra was released. The five-year old son of Kūrmawalī was made king. The widowed queen died ascending the funeral pyre of her husband.

It will be interesting to know the contents of the upa-parvas joined to the Vana Parva. The poet claims, as it has been stated above, that he had the sources of these in the Sanskrit works of Vyāsa, which had the commentaries with them. He got these from the court library of King Naranārāyaṇa. The poet also says that he had inserted the inner truths behind the facts and incidents, and also things from *Haṁsa-kākī* in places. By the inner truths the poet means the *Bhāgavata* teachings. In fact, the poet after describing the facts and incidents dwells in ecstasy on the glory of Lord Kṛṣṇa. He writes verse after verse in singing the *līlācaritra* of Kṛṣṇa, the ways of the Vaiṣṇavas and the cult of bhakti. He sings further the praises of Śaṅkaradeva who established Vaiṣṇavism in Assam, Kāmarūpa and Koc Behār and King Naranārāyaṇa and Śukladhvaja for their reverence for the sacrifices for Śaṅkaradeva and for patronising the cause of learning and the *Bhāgavata* religion. It will not be possible in this short space, to show the literary and other beauties that abound in the works mentioned, but we give below only the broad outlines of the stories in the various *upa-parvas*.

The Story of Kulācala-Vadha—The Pāṅḍavas are at the hermitage of sage Gālwava. They hear from the sage that Dhūmrākṣa born of Karṇadatta of Kāśī by virtue of a sacrifice to Śvetamādhava got a son who received the name Kulācala from Agasti. The sage also said that his face would be like that of a goat and his body would be of a man. This Kulācala turns a tyrant and cause of death. Arjuna and Bhīma want to see him. They start north and after some months reach the place—the Kiśora forest by the bank of the Dāmaghoṣa. There live the sage Śvetaketu near Gāndhāragiri. One day Bhīma and Arjuna were seen by a demon friend of Kulācala. The demon wants to take the two Pāṅḍavas as food for Kulācala. Then ensues a terrible fight. Bhīma kills the demon along with his ten followers. Another day other four demons see Nakula and Sahadeva and from conversation with them know them to be the brothers of those two men who killed the ten demons some days back. In fear they hasten to Kulācala and informs him of everything. Kulācala first sends his attendants who attack the Pāṅḍavas at their place of rest. A fight ensues. The commander of the demons dies. Two others also die. Then comes Kūrmarāta. He also having been defeated, Kulācala personally comes to the field and he is also ultimately killed.

This story is said to have been taken from *Aśvamedha Parva* of *Jaimini Bhārata*.

At the end of this Parva Rāma Sarasvatī has said—"The luminous Śaṅkara was God himself in man's form. But the Brāhmaṇas grew envious and spoke to the king against him.... The Brāhmaṇas would not bear Śaṅkara fearing that their source of income and honour would be destroyed. But Naranārāyaṇa was such a monarch that he brought me and enjoined upon me the task of rendering the *Bhārata* into Assamese verse. At his word I have composed twentyfour thousand ślokas so far. The original ślokas of Vyāsa were thirty thousand in number." The poet ends with the name Bhārata Bhuṣana at the end.

He also writes—Dvaipāyana has mixed *Jāmala-Saṁhitā* and *Haṁsa-Kākī*.

The story of Baghāsura-Vadha—The Pāṇḍavas after leaving the Bhavārṇava forest starts to see the sage Agasti in the Tar forest. They first reach the place of Āstika and then the *Śrīphala* forest and bathe in the Biṇḍu-tīrtha. Yudhiṣṭhira worships Kṛṣṇa and Gaurinātha and Draupadī worships Gaurī. Gaurī appears before Draupadī and gives a dish to her by virtue of which Draupadī would ever have good clothings and ornaments. She further gives the boon that Draupadī would never be a widow. The Pāṇḍavas then reach Śūdrasthāna and the hermitage of Gālwava. This sage gives them the direction of Agasti's place. After that they find the Baluka mountain where Sūryya in the form of a Kirāta appears before them and gives hints of the path. Now they reach Tarāga forest, the Kāśī river, and then the mountain of Ṛṣabha. There Bhīma and Arjuna, while out on hunting excursion, comes upon Campāvati, a beautiful place in the interior of a mountain guarded by two Asuras. They kill the Asuras and the citizens receive the heroes in great honour and request them to kill Māyāvanta, who have been oppressing them. They kill the Asura and come back. All the brothers and Draupadī then leave the place, go through Śrīkṣetra, Nandana Parvata, and reach Agasti in the Malaya mountain. They there learn that Baghāsura, son of Rākṣasī Āsārikā through sage Birinci, having had a boon from Hara has been making havoc all round. He has his place very high in the Vaiduryya mountain. They then make their way to kill the great demon. First they take recourse to the country of Sallan and the Vasanta mountain. They then bathe in the holy waters of the Bīṇḍusāra. They

are attacked by a very big lion. The five brothers kill the lion. Draupadī invokes Kṛṣṇa and through his instruction kills the lion with her bangle. The lion then assumes a celestial form and pays homage to the band saying that he is delivered of a curse of sage Angirasa. The lion is none but Upendra Somadatta, a gandharva. The Pāṇḍavas were, it may be added, brought back to life by Kṛṣṇa.

The batch reach the Brahmahrada, see Paraśurāma who blesses them and give the Paraśu-axe to Arjuna. They then reach the Nandaka mountain, the Brahma-Kṣetra, and Brahma-sarovara. They see Satānanda, son of Gautama and the Ṛṣi satra at a distance of two praharas. At a distance of a prahara from there they camp. The Ṛṣis request them to kill the demon Baghāsura. They first meet the general Suraketu on a big cat and kill him in a terrible fight. Baghāsura knows of it and comes to fight. The gods give the Pāṇḍavas power, and Bhīma and Arjuna kill the great demon Baghāsura. Ultimately Bhīma kills him and Arjuna kills the demon Surajit who has been born of Mārīci Rākṣasī through sage Aṣṭāvakra, and having defeated Baghāsura in a fight became friends and lived together on the Vaidurya mountain.

The poet writes—"Says poet Sarasvatī, the servant of Mukunda: repeat the name of Rāma. Hail to Naranārāyaṇa who is loved by all and who is ever sympathetic to the poor. He protects the good, fulfils the wishes of the people and is like death to the wicked.

"Living in his kingdom I compose these verses in various short and long rhymes."

He again says,—"Here are the facts of the *Mahāpurāṇa* (?) and these are mixed with *Bhāgavata*."

The story of Khaṭāsura-Vadha of Rāma Sarasvatī:—Janmejaya asks and Jaimini narrates the story:

Once Duryodhana went to the Gandharva forest and the Pāṇḍavas went in a different direction. Duryodhana resided there for some days. Yudhiṣṭhira consulting the brothers thought it wise to leave the place for Naimiṣāraṇya. They had the advice of the twentyeight thousand Ṛṣis who also followed them. They reached Naimiṣāraṇya and began to spend the days in listening to and discussing the life and works of Śrī-Kṛṣṇa. The four brothers of Yudhiṣṭhira would go in different directions and collect edibles. Draupadī would cook for all of them and also for the

Ṛṣis. Nine months passed in this way. One day when Draupadī was alone in their hut, Khaṭāsura, a demon, saw her and enamoured of her beauty proposed to Draupadī to marry him. Seeing that Draupadī would not be an easy prey the demon showed his fury by pulling down the hut. Draupadī shouted for Yudhiṣṭhira for her safety. Yudhiṣṭhira heard the voice of Draupadī and hurried to the place. He knew what had happened and challenged the demon who was hiding beside a tree. Yudhiṣṭhira could not kill the demon even by showering arrows but the demon made Yudhiṣṭhira senseless and bound him. He then asked Draupadī for her consent. Then came Bhīma who also had the same plight as Yudhiṣṭhira. Thus all the five brothers lay senseless on the ground. Then the demon entreated Draupadī with sweet words to marry him. Draupadī began to rebuke the demon. He then grew furious and caught hold of the scarf of Draupadī. She wrenched herself free taking the name of Viṣṇu and the demon fell on the ground. He stood up again and caught hold of her hand. Draupadī kicked him off. He then remembered that Brahmā gave him the boon that he would never be defeated in the hands of any man but would be killed if he happened to fight with a woman. So he became more furious and to kill Draupadī he gave her a heavy slap. Draupadī was ever taking the name of Viṣṇu. She now grew very furious and was intent on killing the demon herself. She took out the bangle from her right wrist and in the name of Mādhava struck it against the Asura. His head instantly got severed. But feeling that her life without the husbands would be useless she wanted to die herself when Śrī Kṛṣṇa appeared before her with all his charming beauty. Draupadī fell down at his feet and prayed to him to bring to life the Pāṇḍavas. Kṛṣṇa brought them to life and wishing them prosperity disappeared instantly. The Pāṇḍavas then repaired to the Ṛṣis, told them everything and took leave of them to go to some other place. They showered benediction on them and Draupadī. The Pāṇḍavas then repaired to the Kalyāṇa forest where they met the great serpent Ajagara whose questions they had to answer. The Khaṭāsura story ends in one hundred and twentythree verses.

The Story of Aśvakarṇa-Yuddha—King Uśīnara, a devotee of Śiva had a daughter Hemā by an Apsarā. Hara gave a boon that Hemā would ever remain young. King of the nether region, Aśvakarṇa, also got a boon from Śiva that he would be killed by none but the Naranārāyaṇa incarnation of Viṣṇu. Aśvakarṇa growing in power took all the sixteen sons of Uśīnara as servants

and Hemā as an adopted daughter. Hemā was trained in all the black arts.

While the Pāṇḍavas were in exile, Bhīma and Arjuna once happened to come over to a well to drink water. To their great surprise they saw an exquisitely beautiful damsel in the well. She by her gestures entreated them to pick her up and said that any one who would pick her up would have her hand in marriage. She stated that a friend of hers had pushed her down to such a plight. They took compassion on her and Bhīma tried first. As he seemed to fail Arjuna also helped him. But by magic power the damsel drew in and took them to the kingdom of Aśvakarṇa. There she related everything and said that they would be killed by the king. She further asked them their particulars. Bhīma was enraged at this but gave all details about them, and said that they would fear none. Bhīma also scolded her. She then related the real sad story about her and told them that her name was Hemā. The brave brothers grew in anger and showed their chivalry by killing Aśvarkarṇa. Hemā pleased at heart took the heroes to Śiva. At the injunction of Śiva Arjuna married Hemā and left her with Māyāvatī to be sent to him when the Pāṇḍavas would be kings of Hastināpura.

Kirāta Parva—*Kirāta Parva* is a sub-parva of *Vana Parva*. Kaṁsāri finishes this work in seven hundred and twentyfive verses. The subject-matter of this parva consists of Arjuna's mastering the war instruments in heaven under Indra, his escape from Urvaśī, killing of Nibāta Kavaca, Kālakeyī and Paulama and his pleasing Śaṅkara in fight and attaining the Pāśupata from him, and his coming back to the brothers.

Virāṭa Parva—(upto Kīcaka-vadha) Rāma Sarasvatī wrote up to the Kīcaka-vadha in two thousand couplets.

The Pāṇḍavas after their twelve years' exile live in disguise at the court of Virāṭa Rājā according to the pledge at the play of dice. While living there, Kīcaka, the brother-in-law of the king had a strong fascination for Draupadī and ultimately attempted an indecent assault on her. Bhīma then very skilfully attacked Kīcaka and killed him. Here ends the work of Rama Sarasvatī.

Kaṁsāri, who is another poet of the Virāṭa Parva, writes a portion of the Dakṣiṇa Gogrāha and the Uttara Gagrāha residing at the place of Śri Mādhavadeva.

To continue the story from where we leave above: The Kauravas hearing of the death of Kīcaka launched a war against Virāṭa

Rājā and tried to carry away his biggest herd of cattle. Virāṭa Rājā defeated the Kauravas with the help of the Pāṇḍavas who lived in disguise. The Kauravas then recognised the Pāṇḍavas, but it was at the end of the period. The Kauravas returned to their place and Virāṭa Rājā knowing the Pāṇḍavas honoured them and gave his daughter Uttarā in marriage to Abhimanyu, the son of Arjuna.

In the beginning of *Dakṣiṇa Gogrāha Kaṁsāri* says—"I begin the versification of *Virāṭa Parva* and I wish it may have publicity among people.....The poet Kaṁsāri narrates *Dakṣiṇa Gogrāha*." Again in the beginning of *Uttara Gogrāha* he says, "The poet Kaṁsāri says *Uttara Gogrāha*." Towards the end he gives some particulars about himself, the translation of which is the following:—

'Śrī Yaśocandra Khān, the chief in Kāmarūpa, adores the feet of Gopāla. He is virtuous, magnanimous, grave and saint-like. The world sings his praises. He with the kinsmen protected the friends from the Kirātas who surrounds the moonlike Kāyastha garden. In the Kauth Kāyastha family was in fitness born Śrīmanta Mādhava—may he ever be victorious. In his place (Satra) the Kāyastha Kaṁsāri has composed verses of the Bhārata.

"Śrīmanta Gābhur Khān is endowed with sons and brothers. Hearing his words Kāyastha Pitāmbara writes."

Again he writes—"The poet Kaṁsāri writes in verse *Virāṭa Parva*." In the portion of *Dakṣiṇa Gogrāha* he writes,—"There was Daulat Khān the chief of the Bhūyās. He died uttering the name of Viṣṇu. His relative Śrīmanta Gābhur Khā, adoring the feet of Hari and with great care composed these verses."

Udyoga-Parva (in 1099 verses)—The work gives an account of the preparation for the war of Kurukṣetra after the truce mission of Śrī Kṛṣṇa had failed. This parva was written during the time of Dharmanārāyaṇa. Here the poet says that Kavicūḍāmaṇi was a great Brāhmaṇ. His eldest son, who was virtuous was known as Kavicandra. This Kavicandra was a brother of the poet.

The translation of the piece on the particulars of the poet which occurs in verses 184-185, is the following:—

"Kavicūḍāmaṇi was a prominent Brāhmaṇ and his name glorified the family. His name still survives as he spent his days in worshipping Hari and Hara. His eldest son would worship

Govinda and had dipped himself in *Bhāgavata*. He was Kavicandra, brother to me. Through his favour, instructions, guidance and kindness, I have composed these verses."

The lamentations of Draupadī and her entreaties to Śrī Kṛṣṇa before he went to the Kauravas with terms of peace, which occur in verses 171-187 in Lechāri and Chabi metres have made the poet immortal. These portions have become so popular that almost every Assamese is acquainted with them and are very often sung both by males and females.

Another poet Dvija Rāmānanda wrote *Udyoga-Parva* at the request of king Śīva Siṁha and his consort Ambikā Devī.

Bhīṣma-Parva (in 1587 verses)—*Bhīṣma-Parva* begins with the account of the seven Varṣas into which the earth is divided and gives the description of the Kurukṣetra war for the first ten days.

This Parva was composed during the reign of Dharmanārāyaṇa. The poet says that every one, be he a subject or not, sings the praises of King Dharmanārāyaṇa who has attained equanimity in religion, who was named Dharmanārāyana by King Svarganārāyaṇa, and that he has composed the Bhīsṃa-Parva residing at the kingdom of this king.

It is stated here that Karṇa did not take part in the fight in *Bhīsṃa-Parva* as Bhīṣma called Karṇa *Ardharathī*. Here we get the names of Aniruddha, Vidyā Pañcānana and Rāma Sarasvatī.

Dharmanārāyaṇa was the king of Darrang and he ruled from 1536 to 1559 śaka, while king Naranārāyaṇa of Koc Behār ruled from 1456 to 1506 Śaka. In the verses 212 the poet states—

"In Barnagar, the great city of the Tāntrīs, built by the god Martyadeva, there are produced various silk and other cloths fit for the gods. Near by flows the beautiful Mānāha, an ablution which removes all troubles. In that city there was a great Brāhmaṇ named Kaṇṭhābharaṇa. His youngest son Vidyā-Pañcānana, having adored the feet of Guru Gopāla at heart has composed the character of Ambā in the year 1570 Śaka on the 14th day of the dark lunar part of the month of Śrāvaṇa in the Aśvinī Nakṣatra. The poet finishes the *Gītā* portion in fiftyeight verses (158 to 215).

In the verses from 1350 to 1354, the poet has stated:—"Camariyā is a village unparalled in Kāmarūpa. The lord of the

village is Kavicūḍāmaṇi, the chief of the pundits. He is honoured by the mahantas for his qualities. In course of time he had two sons—Kavicandra and Rāma Sarasvatī. Kavicandra is known by his own virtues. He was engrossed in the study of the Śāstras. His brother Rāma Sarasvatī now pays homage to all saints."

In the *Bhīṣma-Parva* we get three names of the poet—Aniruddha, Vidyā-Pañcānana and Rāma Sarasvatī.

We find another version of *Bhīṣma-Parva* written by Rāma Miśra during the days of Jayadhvaja Siṁha (1654-1663). Rāma Miśra gives his genealogy as follows:—

Kalāpacandra Dvija of Nārāyaṇpur
|
Hari Bhāratī
|
Mādhava Kandali (Āhom ambassador—not *the Rāmāyaṇa* poet)
|
Rāma Miśra.

Hemchandra Goswami in *The Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts* (page 103) remarks that the work as recovered by him consists of 3554 couplets. The first series from 1 to 738 was written by Rāma Misra. The second series comes after this and runs from 1 to 1979 written by Rāma Sarasvatī. The third series commences at 1980 and ends in 2287 written by Rāma Miśra. The fourth series begins at 1 and ends in 529 written by Rāma Sarasvatī.

The Bhagavad-gītā—The *Bhagavad-gītā* which forms a part of *Bhīṣma-Parva* needs a special note. This work and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* are the two main treatises on which Śrī Śaṅkaradeva founded his religion. The *Gītā's* main teaching was the *Ekaśaraṇa dharma* (cf. *māmekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja*).

As it has been observed, Rāma Sarasvatī in his *Bhīṣma-Parva* has finished the *Gītā* portion only in fifty-seven verses.

It was Bhaṭṭadeva, disciple of Dāmodaradeva, who wrote the *Gītā* in lucid prose mainly on the basis of the commentary of Śrīdhara Swāmī. This work along with the author's prose *Bhāgavata* are the monumental prose works of the sixteenth century.

The other work in verse is that of Govinda Miśra which is known as *Kṛṣṇa Gīta*. The poet being himself a devotee and a great scholar consulted all the great commentaries and followed that of Śrīdhara Swāmī. This work is very popular.

To make the *Gītā* fit for daily recitation in a more popular manner Ratnākara Miśra wrote *Gītā-kīrtana* in the style of *Kirtana* of Śaṅkaradeva just as Ananta Ṭhākura Ātā composed the *Rāma Kīrtana* from the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Govinda Miśra was a contemporary of Bhaṭṭadeva. His genealogy as given in *the Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts* is as follows:—

Pitāmbara Cakravartī
|
Bhaṭṭanārāyaṇa (a contemporary of Caṇḍīvara, the ancestor of Śaṅkaradeva)
|
Rāma Miśra
|
Kalāpacandra
|
Tārāpati
|
Govinda Miśra.

Droṇa-parva (4226 verses)—This parva was done by Rāma Sarasvatī jointly with Gopīnātha Pāṭhaka. Gopīnātha gives the names Dvija Gopīnatha, Gopīnatha Pāṭhaka and somewhere Kandali. Another poet named Dāmodara also composed some verses towards the end. This Dāmodara is also the author of Śalya Parva (941 verses) and a disciple of Bhaṭṭadeva.

This work describes the Kurukṣetra war fought under the generalship of Droṇa, and also the death of Jayadratha, Ghaṭotkaca and Droṇa.

In *Droṇa Parva* verses 4012-4014 published by Laksheswar Śarmah in 1909 the poet Gopīnātha gives his particulars as follows:

"There is a village named Pātchaurā. It is also known as Silakonā. It was very beautiful and looked like two gold-chains. The master of the village, a great man of the country, was the Brāhmaṇ Bhīmsena. His praises are still sung. He was like a full moon. He was a man of character, a saint, lustrous, worthy, profoundly

wise and observes the injunctions of the Śāstras. His bounty was known over the earth. He was like a second Vasiṣṭha. His son Rāma Sarasvatī was a reader at the place of Śukladhvaja. He was like a Śuka, an Angira or a Tumbaru and could be compared to none. His son Gopīnātha like only a child has composed the verses of the *Mahābhārata* in short and long rhymes."

Karṇa-parva (556 padas)—It was rendered during the time of Raghudeva, son of Śukladhvaja. The work gives the account of the Kurukṣetra war (but not under the command of Karṇa) and Karṇa's death.

The poet says—"The city of Vijayanagara in Kāmarūpa is exceedingly beautiful. There are strong walls in very many places. There remains the king Raghudeva who is like a second Indra ..... King Naranārāyaṇa praised Raghudeva by saying that in the whole family there was not a hero like him." Thus it shows that the poet wrote this at Vijayanagara during the days of Raghudeva.

Another version of *Karṇa-parva* was written by Vidyā Pañcānaṇa, a son of Kaṇṭhabhūṣaṇa, a contemporary of Śaṅkaradeva. Vidyā Pañcānana gives the account of the Kurukṣetra war in his work as having been fought under the command of Karṇa.

One Viṣṇurāma Dvija wrote *Dātā Karṇa*. Karṇa's bounty has been extolled so much that he is said to have offered the flesh of his own son by tearing him with a saw. The story is this,—

Kṛṣṇa in the guise of a Brāhman appeared before Karṇa and desired to feed upon the flesh of Vṛṣaketu, his son. Karṇa in consultation with his wife offered the flesh. Then the Brāhmaṇ asked Karṇa to invite a boy of the village to partake of the flesh. Karṇa to his great surprise found his own son Vṛṣaketu alive. Kṛṣṇa then went away much satisfied with Karṇa's charity. It is thus how Karṇa became immortal.

Śalya-parva—The work describes the Kurukṣetra was under the command of Śalya, the Rājā of Madra, and his death. The author, Dāmodara Dāsa says,—Barpeṭā is an unequalled village in Kāmarūpa. It looks like a half-moon. Previously there did Śaṅkara, Mādhava, Rāma and Dāmodara live and made known the Lord, and even the most wicked having their blessings crossed the ocean of the world. In the same manner there flourished Bhāgavata Bhaṭṭācāryya. Having his foot-dust on his head the most ignorant Dāmodara makes verses of *Śalya Parva* (791). The book

was written about 1638 A.D., and during the days of Dharmanārāyaṇa, son of Raghudeva.

Sauptika-parva—This parva was written in verse by one Devarāma alias Durgāprasāda in Śaka year 1828. This parva contains the account of the killing of the five sons of Draupadī by Aśvatthāmā and the death of Duryodhana.

Strī-parva—This parva does not seem to have been rendered into Assamese verse by any of our ancients. A recent translation in the old types of metre has however been printed.

Śānti-parva—The poet Lakṣmīnatha Dvija wrote *Śānti-parva* in 2859 verses. The work describes the coronation ceremony of Yudhiṣṭhira after the Kurukṣetra war. Bhīṣma, at the request of Sri Kṛṣṇa and Yudhiṣṭhira, gives from his death-bed various discourses on religion, society and politics.

Lakṣmīnatha was the grandson of Sarvānanda, a great Sanskrit scholar of Helechā in Kāmrūp. The Āhom king Rudra *Siṁha* rewarded Sarvānanda for his scholarship. The poet flourished in the third quarter of the 18th century A.D.

Aśvamedha-parva—This work in verse containing the account of the horse-sacrifice performed by the Pāṇḍavas at the end of the battle of Kurukṣetra was written by three poets — Gaṇgādāsa Sena, Subudhi Rāya and Bhavānīdāsa. Gangādāsa says, he was the son of Saṣṭhivara. These poets are supposed to have hailed from Tripurā. The subject-matter is taken from Jaimini and it contains 3600 verses. The book is written after the style of Nārāyaṇadeva and Durgābara and some songs are interspersed between the verses.

Vyāsa advises Yudhiṣṭhira to perform the sacrifice and Yudhiṣṭhira makes preparations. The sacrificial horse is let loose under the protection of Arjuna, who fights with different kings of various countries who obstruct the horse. Arjuna at last comes to Maṇipura where he has a fight with Vabrubāha, his son through Citrāngadā. Arjuna and his followers are all killed. At Citrāngadā and Ulupī's wailings and persuasions Vabrubāha restored all to life by the touch of a valuable jewel got by Vabrubāha from the Nāga king. Both the parties unite in love and admiration. The sacrifice is then performed. The manuscript of this work was discovered at North Gauhati and was deposited with the D.H.A.S., Assam.

Sudhanvā-Vadha (Rāma Sarasvatī)—This is an episode from *Aśvamedha-parva* describing the fight between Arjuna and

Sudhanvā and the latter's death. Haṁsadhvaja, king of Campaka, captures the sacrificial horse and the fight ensues between Arjuna and the king. The king's son Sudhanvā is late to come to the field. The king therefore orders his son to be killed by throwing him into a cauldron of boiling oil. Sudhanvā however is not injured as he is a devotee of God. Sudhanvā then fights with Arjuna and is killed along with his other brother Suratha.

One Dvija Śubhanātha wrote *Dharma-saṁvāda* of *Aśvamedha-parva* at the command of the Āhom king Śivasiṁha. It is believed to have been written about 1720 A.D.

Another work *Sudhanvā-Vadha* goes in the name of Śrīdhara Kandali.

Mauṣala-parva.—Pṛthurāma Dvija wrote *Mauṣala Parva* during the days of and at the request of the minister Pratāpavallabha (of king Kamaleswara Siṁha). The poet gives the date of the appointment of the minister as 1714 Saka.

The work describes the birth of the Muṣala or the iron rod in Dvārakā for the destruction of the family of Yadu. Then it narrates Arjuna's visit to Dvāraka and return to Hastināpura after the obsequial ceremonies of the Yādavas.

Svargārohaṇa-parva.—The poet Gopīnātha completed this work in 308 verses. In verses 171 and 172 the poet says — "The village named Śilakonā in Pāṭcaurā was adorned with Brahmaṇs. There king Śukladhvaja at the time of the lunar eclipse made offerings to the Ganges. Living at such a village and observing my own religion I have composed verses of *Svargārohaṇaparva* of *Bhārata* in various short and long metres.

The work describes the retirement of the Pāṇḍavas after Śrī Kṛṣṇa's departure from the world. Yudhiṣṭhira gives the throne to Parīkṣita, son of Abhimanyu and crossing the Lohit he enters the Himālayan region and ascends the snow-clad regions accompanied by the brothers and Draupadī and a dog. All dropped dead on the way except Yudhiṣṭhira and the dog. He is then carried by Indra to heaven.

Hari-vaṁśa.—*Hari-vaṁśa* is taken as the 19th Parva or a supplementary Parva of the *Mahābhārata*. The whole of the work is not found to have been rendered into Assamese so far. The portions done are noted below:

Hari-vaṁśa.—The poet Vidyāçandra Bhaṭṭācāryya Āgamācāryya, who wrote this work flourished during the rule of the Āhom king Rājēśvaraṣiṁha (1751-1769 A.D.). The poet acknowledges the patronage of Cārusiṁha and his princess Premadā. The poet in his work narrates Kṛṣṇa's birth and his doings in Gokula.

One Bhavānanda Miśra, son of one Śivānanda also wrote on the same subject-matter taken up by the Āgamacāryya. In his *Govinda Carita* the poet refers to the patronage of Candranārāyaṇa, king of Darrang (1565-1582 Śāka).

The other poet of *Hari-vaṁśa* is Gopālacaraṇa Dvija who flourished during the days of the Koc king Raghudeva about 1558 A.D. The poet was a reputed scholar and had a *ṭol* at Barnagar. The poet describes how Kṛṣṇa killed Narakāsura of Prāgjyotiṣapura and placed Bhagadatta on the throne and how Śrī Kṛṣṇa defeated Indra and took away Pārijāta tree to make a present of it to Satyabhāmā, his wife. The poet mingled the facts of *Hari-vaṁśa, Bhāgavata* and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa,* and so it is not a translation from *Hari-vaṁśa.*

At the time of Śaṅkaradeva one poet named Pītāmbara took the themes of *Uṣā-pariṇaya* from *Harivaṁśa.* Ananta Kandali also took the facts of the *Kumāraharaṇa* from the same source.

One of the sources of Śaṅkaradeva's *Rukmiṇi-haraṇa* (poem and also the drama) and *Pārijātaharaṇa* was *Hari-vaṁśa.*

One Dvija Śubhanāth at the command of the Āḥom king Śivasiṁha wrote *Dharma-saṁvāda* from *Hari-vaṁśa.*

ASSAMESE VERSIONS OF THE PURĀṆAS

BY

S. N. SARMA

From the earliest times Assam has never been culturally isolated from the rest of India. Whenever there was any cultural or religious upsurge in the rest of India, Assam was not left untouched. The neo-Vaiṣṇavite revival of medieval India was one of such movements which brought a cultural renaissance in Assam. The movement gave an impetus to the growth and development of provincial literatures. Its motto was to popularize the religious teachings by translations of the scriptures written in the none too easily approachable Sanskrit language. The most important branch of Sanskrit scriptures which attracted the notice of the scholar-translators was the purāṇas which embodied the teachings of the different sects of the purāṇic Hindu religion. Ancient Assamese literature is mainly translations of the epics and purāṇas, the majority of which are Vaiṣṇavite in nature. For the proper understanding and appreciation of Assamese versions of the purāṇas, a short summary of the origin and nature of the purāṇic literature in general, based mainly on authoritative sources is given below.

The word *purāṇa* originally meant old narratives (*Purāṇam ākhyānam*). According to Brāhmanical traditions as recorded in *Atharva Veda* and *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad,* the purāṇa has as much a sacred origin as the Vedas.[1] In the Vedic literature the purāṇa is often called the fifth Veda. But the existence of a special class of books called purāṇas is doubtful. Only in the Sūtra literature the existence of the real purāṇas is definitely known. But the purāṇas mentioned in the Sūtra literature might have undergone many changes before it took the nature and form of the present purāṇas. "It is indeed very likely that the purāṇas are only recasts of older works on the same species, namely of works of religious and didactic contents in which were collected ancient traditions of the creation, the deeds of the gods, the beginning of the famous royal families and so on."[2]

1. Atharva Veda, XI.7.24; Bṛh. Upaniṣad, II, 4. 10.
2. Winternitz: *History of Indian Literature,* Vol. I, p. 520.

It can hardly be denied that more than one purāṇa had come into existence long before the beginning of the Christian era. In the Saṃhitās of Manu and Jājñavalkya the word purāṇa has been used in the plural number and Āpastamba's *Dharma Sūtra* has a passage quoted from *Bhaviṣyat-Purāṇa.*

It is not precisely known when the tradition of the 'eighteen purāṇas' came into vogue. The earliest mention of 'eighteen purāṇas' is found in the Svargārohaṇa-Parva of the *Mahābhārata* and in the third part of *Harivaṁśa.* But scholars are of opinion that these passages enumerating the 'eighteen purāṇas' are interpolations. But still it is held that the earliest purāṇas must have come into being before the 7th century of the Christian era, for neither later dynasties, nor famous rulers, such as Harṣa, occur in the list of kings. The tradition of the 'eighteen purāṇas' also must have been originated not later than the first quarter of the 7th century A.D.[3] Of course, compiling of new purāṇas and adding fresh chapters to older ones went on till the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Thus the process of composition of the purāṇas may roughly be placed between the early centuries of the Christian era and the thirteenth century.

It is not definitely known what were the nature and form of the earliest purāṇas, as many changes took place during the process of their evolution. A very old definition says that a purāṇa should have five characteristics: (1) Creation (*sarga*), (2) recreation (*pratisarga*), (3) Genealogy (*vaṃśa*), (4) Cosmic Cycles (*manvantara*), (5) Accounts of royal dynasties (*vaṃśānucarita*). All these characteristics have their roots in *Ākhyānas* (tales), *Upākhyānas* (anecdotes), *Gāthās* (songs) and *Kalpajoktis* (lores handed down). These characteristics, therefore, indicate the nature of the purāṇas in their earliest form. In the extant purāṇas these five-fold characteristics however occupy a very insignificant part and great importance is laid in describing religious, social and sectarian matters. New additions include *Vṛtti* (means of livelihood), *Rakṣā* (incarnations of gods), *Mukti* (emancipation), *Hetu* (*jīva*), *Apāśraya* (brahma). Gradually the purāṇas came to lose their original character and began to incorporate also chapters on rites and customs such as *Ācāra* (customs and manners). *Varṇāśramadharma* (duties of castes), *Śrāddha* (oblation to manes), *Prāyaścitta* (expiation and purification), *Dāna* (gift), *Pūjā* (worship),

3. *Ibid.*, p. 525.

Vrata (vow), *Tīrtha* (pilgrimage), *Pratiṣṭhā* (installation of deity), *Dīkṣā* (initiation). Still more embracing is the definition given by *Matsya-Purāṇa* which states that the purāṇas may deal with the glorification of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Sūrya or Rudrā with creation, preservation and dissolution of the world and with *Dharma, Artha, Kāma* and *Mokṣa.* The great importance given to the purāṇas as Smṛti works, perverted the idea of the people of later ages as to the real contents of these works. It was thought that the original five characteristics, viz., creation, recreation, etc. are meant for *Upapurāṇas,* the Mahāpurāṇas should have not less than ten characteristics relating to cosmogony, religion, and society. But really speaking the Upapurāṇas do not in general differ from Mahāpurāṇas, except that the Upapurāṇas are exclusively adapted to suit the purposes of local cults and sects. The number of Upapurāṇas are too numerous to mention, but the following eighteen purāṇas are generally regarded as the Mahāpurāṇas—(1) *Mārkaṇḍeya,* (2) *Vāyu,* (3) *Brahmāṇḍa,* (4) *Viṣṇu,* (5) *Matsya,* (6) *Bhāgavata,* (7) *Kūrma,* (8) *Vāmana,* (9) *Liṅga,* (10) *Varāha,* (11) *Pādma,* (12) *Nāradīya,* (13) *Agni,* (14) *Garuḍa* (15) *Brahma* (16) *Skanda,* (17) *Brahmavaivarta* and (18) *Bhaviṣya.*

The importance of the purāṇas for the proper study of Hindu India cannot be over-estimated. In the words of Dr. Winternitz, "They afford us far greater insight into all aspects and phases of Hinduism—its mythology, its idolworship, its theism and pantheism, its love of God, its philosophy and its superstition, its festivals and ceremonies and its ethics than any other works."[4]

II

Having given in a nutshell the origin, development, nature and characteristics of the purāṇas we now proceed to deal with the circumstances under which the purāṇas were translated into Assamese and the nature and types of literature translated or adapted from the purāṇas and finally the modes of their translation.

The devotional Vaiṣṇavite movement initiated by Rāmānuja in the South was carried over to the north by Rāmānanda who made a tremendous effort to popularize the Bhakti cult by throwing open the portal of religion to all sections of people and also by encouraging provincial dialects as the medium of religious

4. Winternitz: *H. I. L.*, Vol. I, p. 528.

teachings and expressions. His immediate disciple Kavir made a further contribution to the popularization of the provincial dialects as vehicles of religious expressions. Kavir is said to have spoken of Sanskrit as the water of a stagnant well and of the vernaculars as that of a flowing stream. But even before Rāmānanda and Kavir advocated the cause of the vernacular as the medium of the religious literature, Assamese poets of the fourteenth century boldly and efficiently translated the entire *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmiki and some episodes of the *Mahābhārata*. In case of Assamese poets of the fifteenth century headed by Śaṅkaradeva, it cannot be said that they derived their main inspiration from Kavir or Rāmānanda. It is true that Śaṅkaradeva makes a passing reference to the popularity of Kavir's songs in places like Orissa and Banaras, and it may also be true that Śaṅkaradeva in his lengthy pilgrimage of twelve years' duration in northern and southern India might have received additional impetus from the religious and literary reorientation started by Rāmānanda, Kavir and others. But the method of popularizing the religious teachings by means of popular translations from the purāṇas was not certainly derived by Śaṅkaradeva from extra-provincial sources. He derived it from Mādhava Kandali, Hema Sarasvatī and other literary predecessors who initiated the move of popular translation.

The neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement started by Śaṅkaradeva created a band of poet-translators whose proselytizing zeal was of an extraordinary kind. Ananta Kandali, a contemporary poet of Śaṅkaradeva, clearly expresses that he could compose excellent verses in Sanskrit, but he discarded that in favour of the people's dialect in order to enlighten the masses. Similarly Dāmodaradeva, another contemporary proselytizer of Śaṅkaradeva instructed his favourite disciple Bhaṭṭadeva to render the *Bhāgavata* and the *Gītā* into simple Assamese prose so that all sections of people including females and non-Brahmans could understand them. These and many other such instances, clearly evidence the zeal of the mediaeval Assamese proselytizers to educate the masses in the sphere of religion. These scholars could clearly perceive that the most fruitful source of religious literature from which they could derive materials to educate the mass was the purāṇic literature in Sanskrit, because it contains popular elements which the other branches lack. But it was not an easy job to render Sanskrit purāṇas into the provincial dialect. Firstly, the provincial language till then had not attained the status of a proper vehicle for the expression of higher ideas, and philosophical thoughts.

Secondly, the Sanskrit language by virtue of it being the Deva-Bhāṣā in popular estimation, was held in the highest esteem which the newly-born N.I.A. languages could hardly claim. Thirdly, the purāṇas occupying the position of the Smṛtis, received the highest regard and veneration, and rendering them into the provincial dialect had the possibility of being construed as an act of sacrilege on the part of the translators. There is an interesting incident narrated in *Tuṅgkhuṅgiā-Buranjī*, which illustrates the attitude of a certain section of people towards this act of translation even as late as the seventeenth century. One Deberā Barbarua was prosecuted for regicide. When asked by his captors as to why he involved himself in that nefarious act, he replied, "Have I alone translated *Daśama* (Book X of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*)? You will also do it." He meant thereby that the act of translating *Daśama* which was an act of sacrilege was not done by one person, it was the product of more than one. Early Assamese hagiographies narrate instances of complaints against Śaṅkaradeva in the royal court for his act of rendering *Bhāgavata* into the language of everyday use. So the poets had to be constantly on guard by repeatedly reminding the readers that nothing had been written in their books which the original texts did not contain.[5]

One of the important factors that contributed towards the growth of purāṇic literature in Assamese was the royal patronage received by the translators. King Durlabhanārāyaṇa of Kamatāpur (14th century), King Naranārāyaṇa of Koc Behār (16th century), the Āhom king Rudra-Siṅha and Śiva-Siṅha (18th century) are some of the notable royal personalities whose patronage greatly helped the growth of purāṇic literature and the diffusion of culture in Assam. To the courts of these kings flocked scholars and poets from different parts of the country seeking shelter and patronage. They were not only supplied with books, and other scholarly equipments but also with lands and servants. Thus the translators-cum-poets being free from economic worries could whole-heartedly engage themselves on their literary pursuit.

Another important factor was the Vaiṣṇavite Satra institution where the purāṇas were regularly read and translated. There were hundreds of such Satras scattered throughout the Brahmaputra Valley. The Satra institution voluntarily took upon itself the duty of imparting religious and moral education to the people. For this purpose a regular band of scholars was maintained whose

5. Dr. B. Kakati : *Puraṇi Assamiyā Sāhitya*, p. 83 (second edition).

duty was to read and explain the purāṇas. In order to facilitate explanation and recitation regular translations were made. Private patronage is also a factor that cannot be altogether ignored.

The translations of the pre-Śaṅkarite period mainly confined themselves to the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. With the advent of Śaṅkaradeva towards the end of the fifteenth century, translation of purāṇas with a Vaiṣṇavite leaning was undertaken. But the purāṇa which drew the attention most was *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. As a matter of fact, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* formed the mainspring from which emanated the various types of early Assamese literature. Not only was the entire purāṇa translated, its various stories and episodes supplied the basis of independent kāvyas. In the latter part of the seventeenth century, Assamese literature became more diffused and purāṇas of various types came to be translated under the patronage of the Āhom rulers. *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* with its erotic flavour was the special attraction of the court poets and in this period the Śākta element found its way into early Assamese literature.

Assamese purāṇic literature can be classified into two main types: (1) pure translations, abridged or unabridged, (2) adaptations. Verse was the usual form of translation, but occasionally the translators resorted to prose and dramatic forms also. In a few cases the purāṇic stories are seen to be expressed through a series of songs, attuned to various melodies. No hard and fast rule was followed by the poets. The translation could be free or literal according to the nature of the subject-matter and the expediency of the translator. Some of the common characteristics of the translation are noted below:

(i) The poets in order to give their writings certain popular touches introduced wherever posssible local colour. In describing marriage festivals, foods and ornaments, construction of houses and characters, the poets freely introduced local colour. This is more often resorted to in the case of adaptations than in the case of pure translations. As a result, the characters of Assamese versions have lost in many places, their original epic-dignity.

(ii) Avoidance of philosophical discourses is one of the marked features of Assamese translations. Minimum importance has been laid on philosophical disquisitions. The translations were mainly intended for the villages without an adequate background of philosophical knowledge. Therefore, what was considered to be highly abstract or contained minute philosophical discussion,

was avoided in their translations. But this does not mean that they banished philosophy altogether. Philosophical discussions or disquisitions were retained in much simpler forms where these seemed to be absolutely necessary to give a proper idea or setting of a certain story.

(iii) In contrast to the philosophical narratives, the devotional elements have secured special favour and attraction from the poet-translators. Hymns and prayers of the original versions have been translated in detail and sometimes even in an elaborated manner.

(iv) Additional narratives describing the Vaiṣṇavite ideals have been appended to every chapter of the Assamese versions. The superiority of the Bhakti cult, the greatness of Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu, the merits of singing or listening to His exploits and such other didactic descriptions have been inserted profusely. Even in the midst of the narration of a certain story the writers sometimes abruptly stop to sermonise on those topics.

(v) Though insistence upon Vaiṣṇavite ideals is predominating, yet certain attractive topics are seen to be enthusiastically depicted. For instance, the bodily charms, especially of women, parks and gardens, and of cities on festive occasions, are some of the favourite topics where the poet-translators seem to be very eloquent. The inclusion of such narratives are mainly intended to catch the popular imagination.

(vi) Another important feature of Assamese versions of the purāṇas is the constant repetition of the same set of descriptions with slight modifications here and there. For instance we find the description of Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu's bodily beauty, illustrated through the same set of similes and metaphors, repeated in different places. Similarly the description of one lake or one garden is as good as that of another lake or garden depicted in a different setting or context.

(vii) One of the favourite methods adopted by the translators to make their stories much more interesting was to introduce into the texture of one story, descriptions and incidents of the same story described in another purāṇa. For instance, they would introduce incidents of a story from *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* into the texture of the same story taken from *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. This method of blending of incidents and descriptions of different purāṇas has been frequently resorted to in case of the kāvyas partly based on translations. In case of works wholly based on translation also

this feature is sometimes noticeable. To cite one example, the translator of the Book IX of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* in course of his translation of the episode of King Hariścandra introduces certain descriptions from the same episode narrated in *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*.

(viii) Throughout purāṇic literature in Assamese, the same set of metres is seen to be used to express similar sentiments. The most commonly used metre is known as *Pada* (a metre of four lines, each consisting of fourteen syllables). This is used in ordinary narratives. An emotional or a sentimental description is generally couched in *Tripadi* metre (a *Tripadi* consists of six feet divided into two parts of three feet each, the third and the sixth feet rhyming). In descriptions of lamentations, supplications, etc., *Dechārī* or *Dīrgha-Tripadī* is invariably used. Similarly to describe duals or hand to hand fights *Jhumuri* (consisting of eight syllables in each line) is often employed. This mode of using a particular metre to denote a particular sentiment is not a characteristic of the purāṇic literature alone, it is a feature which characterizes the whole field of early Assamese literature.

Having given some of the general features of the purāṇic literature in Assamese it will not be out of place here to say a few words about the language used by the early poets. The language used by the mediaeval poets is an artificial literary language based on the spoken dialect. Because of this artificiality we do not see any appreciable change between the language used by a poet of the nineteenth century from that of the fifteenth or sixteenth century and same conventional descriptions in set words, phrases and imagery are found to be used by the poets of different centuries in describing certain topics.

III

It would not be convenient to discuss the Assamese versions in the chronological order as various parts of different purāṇas were composed at different times. Therefore, the discussion of each purāṇa, irrespective of the times in which its different parts were composed, has been undertaken in the following pages, giving priority to those purāṇas which are more popular and familiar in Assamese society.

I. BHĀGAVATA PURĀṆA

Introductory—*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* belongs to the later productions of the purāṇic literature in Sanskrit. The date of its

composition has been variously given by different scholars ranging from the 6th century to the 10th century of the Christian era. In content it is closely connected with the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. It is divided into twelve Books, and consists of 18000 slokas. Dr. Winternitz remarks about this purāṇa that "It is the one Purāṇa which more than any others bears the stamp of a unified composition and deserves to be appreciated as a literary production on account of its language, style and metre."

Assamese Versions—*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* holds the first and the foremost position in Assamese life and society. The Vaiṣṇavite creed expounded by Śaṅkaradeva and his followers gave it the supreme position in their list of *śāstras* and in the village and domestic chapels or in the monastic institutions (Satras) a manuscript copy of *Bhāgavata* is worshipped or adored in place of an idol or image. In every monastic institution of the highest rank a *Bhāgavatī* is attached whose duty it is to read and explain chapters from *Bhāgavata*. Assamese Hindus have a belief that an impending calamity, in the shape of illness and other misfortune, can be averted by a solemn vow to arrange for the recital of a few chapters from *Bhāgavata*. Besides numerous episodical works based on *Bhāgavata* there are two complete versions of this purāṇa, written in prose and verse respectively. In all these versions the commentary by Śrīdhara-Svāmī is followed.

(1) *Pada-Bhāgavata*—The translation of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* commenced from the first half of the 16th century and it was initiated by that great reformer Śaṅkaradeva himself.[6] Śaṅkaradeva could not translate the entire purāṇa, but a major portion of it was done by himself. Because of the unique position held by this purāṇa over Assamese life and society a detailed discussion of its several Books is given below.

Book I—The Sanskrit version of this Book contains nineteen chapters dealing with the origin of the purāṇa, the enumeration of twenty-four incarnations, the story of the birth of Parīkṣita, the Pāṇḍava's last journey, the chastisement of Kali by Parīkṣita and the subsequent fate of Parīkṣita in consequence of the curse pronounced upon him by a sage. The purāṇa was originally narrated by Śukadeva to Parīkṣita on the eve of his death, but it was retold in the present form by Sūta to the assembly of sages at Naimiṣa forest. Śaṅkaradeva himself translated this Book. He

6. As a separate chapter has been devoted to the discussion of Śaṅkaradeva's life and teachings, no further treatment seems necessary here.

was a scholar, a poet and a reformer all in one. In his translation of the different Books of *Bhāgavata* he has adopted a method of omission and selection. Some topics have been totally left out, others have been summarized and still others have been elucidated. The first six chapters of the Book I have been summarized indicating only the main incidents of those chapters of which the third chapter dealing with the twenty-four incarnations of Nārāyaṇa has been totally omitted. The opening benedictory stanza is also omitted because of its highly philosophical nature, replacing it by a simple devotional prayer. Of the remaining chapters, the contents of the 4th, 5th, 13th and 15th chapters have been summarized. Only those topics have been elucidated where devotional elements enjoining Vaiṣṇavite ideals are predominant.

Book II—This Book is also a translation by Śaṅkaradeva. The original Sanskrit version contains ten chapters dealing mainly with the description of the *Virāṭa Puruṣa* (the Great Being) and the process of the creation. In the Assamese version the 1st, 2nd and 5th chapters are practically omitted. The description of the *Virāṭa-Puruṣa* of the 1st and 5th chapters is replaced by a description of Kṛṣṇa's bodily grace and charm, and the discussions on *Yoga* (meditation) of the 2nd chapter are similarly side-tracked by a mere passing reference to it, and that too is discredited in the succeeding lines by emphasizing on *Śravaṇa* (listening) and *Kīrtana* (recitation) in preference to any other mode of attaining or seeking God. In the translation of the 4th chapter, Śaṅkaradeva makes reference to the different tribes of Assam, who could even attain salvation by sheltering themselves under the feet of Kṛṣṇa. The original texts in Sanskrit have been quoted below :

"*Kirāta Hūnādhra Pulinda Pukkaśā Ābhīra Kaṅka-*
Yavanākhasādayaḥ |
Ye anye ca pāpā yadupāśrayāśrayāh śudhyanti tasmai
prabhaviṣṇave namaḥ ||

—2/4/18.

(I salute Him, taking shelter under whom the *Kirātas, Hūṇas, Andhras, Pulindas, Abhīras, Yavanas* and such other sinners become pure and sanctified).

Śaṅkaradeva has replaced those unfamiliar tribes by the tribes living in Assam.

"*Kirāta Kachāri, Khāsi Gāro Miri*
Yavana Kaṅka Goāl |

Acama-Maluka Rajaka Turuk
Kuvāca Mlecha Cāṇḍāl ||

Āno pāpī nara Kṛṣṇa sevakar
Saṅgata pavitra hay |
Bhakati labhiyā saṃsāra tariyā
Vaikuṇṭhe sukhe calay ||

—2/474-75.

(The Kirātas, Kachāris, Khāsis, Gāros, Miris, Yavanas, Kaṅkas, Goālas, Acamas, Turukas, Rajakas (washermen), Kuvācas (Koces), Mlecchas, Caṇḍālas and all other sinners get sanctified in contact with a devotee of Kṛṣṇa. Attaining *bhakti* they go to heaven being emancipated from this world).

In the translation of the 7th chapter the exploits of Rāmacandra and Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa are enumerated in details, while those of other incarnations are simply mentioned.

There is another metrical version of Book II composed by Aniruddha Kāyastha in the early part of the 17th century. Aniruddha Kāyastha was the grandson of the elder brother of Mādhavadeva, and was a minister of the Koc king Raghudeva (1584-1591). It seems to be a faithful translation of the Sanskrit texts. But this work is not so popular as the one composed by Śaṅkaradeva.

Book III—The Sanskrit version containing thirty-three chapters, describes, besides cosmogonical matters, the meeting of Maitreya and Vidura and the former's religious instructions to the latter, the story of the Boar incarnation of Viṣṇu, Kapila's teaching to his mother Devahuti which include amongst others the *Sāṃkhya* doctrine. The translator of this Book is Gopālacaraṇa Dvija. From the introductory lines inserted within his work it can be gathered that he was a follower of Dāmodaradeva (1483-1598) and lived for some time in the Vaikuṇṭhapura Satra of the latter. He took upon himself the task of translating some portions of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* complying with the request of the Vaiṣṇavas of that Satra, after the demise of Dāmodaradeva. Therefore, it is probable that he translated this part of the purāṇa in the later half of the seventeenth century. Gopālacaraṇa Dvija was not probably an immediate or direct disciple of Dāmodaradeva. In his translation of *Harivaṃśa*, Gopālacaraṇa introduces himself as the disciple of Gopāla Miśra, a disciple and colleague of Dāmodaradeva. In this connection he also refers to Baladeva,

another close associate of Dāmodaradeva who succeeded the latter in the Vaikuṇṭhapura Satra. The lines run thus:

Gopāla gurura pāve praṇāmiyā mane |
Baladeva vākya śire dhariyā yatane |[1]

Iṣṭadevatār dui dhariyā caraṇe |
Padacaya bhaṇe dvija Gopālacaraṇe ||

(Saluting the feet of his guru Gopāla, carefully abiding by the words of Baladeva and holding the feet of the tutelary deity Gopālacarana composes these verses).

So far, three works composed by Gopālacaraṇa viz., the 3rd and the 8th Books of the *Bhāgavata* and the *Harivaṃśa* have come to light. Gopālacaraṇa respectfully refers to Śaṅkaradeva as the pioneer reformer and poet in two places[7] of his translation.

The first four chapters of the Book III have been briefly summarized by Gopālacaraṇa as the contents of these chapters have been elaborately dealt with by Śaṅkaradeva in his *Anādi Pātan* and in *Vaikuṇṭhaprayāṇa* episode of *Kīrtana*. The translator himself adduces the above reason for summarizing these chapters.[8] The remaining chapters have been faithfully rendered into Assamese verses with occasional elucidations here and there. It should be borne in mind that this Book is one of the most abstruse and philosophical in nature specially the cosmogonical portions and the teachings of Kapila to Devahuti. Naturally profound scholarship, with no less poetical genius, is necessary to render these portions successfully. Gopālacaraṇa fulfils these conditions. He gives full scope to the poet in him in the description of Vaikuṇṭha (*Bh.*, Chapter XV) or in the narration of the fight between Barāha and Hiraṇyākṣa (*Bh.* Ch. XVIII), but he is sober and disciplined in rendering the teachings of Kapila. But everywhere, be it philosopical teaching, or cosmogonical speculation, the emphasis is laid on devotion towards Viṣṇu.

Book IV —The original version in thirty-one chapters describes the sacrifices of Dakṣa and its subsequent molestation by the followers of Śiva, the self-immolation of Satī, the stories of Dhruva, Vena and Pṛthu and Purañjana. This Book was translated by four poets. The first chapter which describes the genealogy

7. Srimad Bhāgavata: Book III, verses 692 and 1899 (H. N. Dutta Barua edition).
8. *Ibid.*, V. 767.

of the daughters of Manu has been translated by one Jayrāma who introduces himself as the disciple of Gopālacaraṇa,[9] possibly the translator of the third Book. Chapters 2-13 containing the stories of the sacrifices of Dakṣa, and of Dhruva, Vena and Pṛthu are narrated by Kalāpacandra, who wrote under the inspiration of King Naranārāyaṇa (1540-1580 A.D.). Kalāpacandra is a poet of some eminence as is evidenced by his flawless translation of the above twelve chapters. *Rādhā-Carita* by Kalāpacandra is another important contribution to Assamese literature. His rendering of the above stories is free and faultless, with minor deviations here and there. The narratives of Dakṣa's railings against Śiva, the molestations of his sacrifice by Vīrabhadra and of the city of Alakā are some of the notable descriptions, where Kalāpacandra's poetic genius finds expression.

The episode of Dhruva has been treated separately by another poet of the same period. He introduces himself as Viṣṇubhārati, the son of one Kaviratna. Though nothing is definitely known about him it may be presumed that he is the same Viṣṇu Bhārati as is mentioned by Rāmānanda Dvija in his biography of Vaṃśīgopāladeva as a devout Vaiṣṇava and of whom the biographer Rāmānanda is the grandson. If this assumption is correct then the date of the composition of this part of Book IV can be reasonably fixed towards the early part of the seventeenth century. It is also a free but faithful translation of the original texts without any deviation in matter. A very beautiful description of the royal city decorated on the occasion of Dhruva's coronation ceremony is the special feature of this episode.

The last important episodes of Book IV are the allegorical story of King Purañjana and his subsequent change of sex and the story of Prācīnavarhi and the ten Pracetas. These two episodes have been translated by Ratnākara Miśra, who has to his credit two other works, viz. *Gītā-Kīrtana,* and *Brahma-Gītā.* Nothing is definitely known of this Ratnākara Miśra. Probably he can be identified with Ratnākara Kandali, the celebrated writer of *Ghunucā Kīrtana* and a favourite disciple of Śaṅkaradeva. In the latter case, the work is a composition of the sixteenth century. Ratnākara Miśra makes a faithful and simple rendering of the original Sanskrit version. The only case of deviation is found in his translation of the narratives about ten Pracetas where he introduces the story of the conflict between Dakṣa and Śiva.

9. *Ibid.*, Book IV, vs. 1979.

There is another Assamese version of the last seven chapters of Book IV, translated by Aniruddhadeva, the founder of the Māyāmarā sect. The following account of his life is found in the biography and genealogy of Aniruddhadeva. Aniruddha's ancestor's name was Mahipāla who was a local chief at Nārāyaṇpura on the north of the Lohit (Brahmaputra) river. Mahipāla had four sons of whom Goṇḍāgiri, the father of Aniruddha was the youngest. Aniruddha is supposed to have been born in 1553 and died in 1623 A.D. In addition to this work of Book IV, Aniruddha is credited with the composition of *Bhāgavata,* Book V and a book of religious songs. As has been noted above, Aniruddha composed the last seven chapters of Book IV, which depict the episodes of Purañjana and the ten Pracetas.

Book V—Book V of *Bhāgavata* contains twentysix chapters. It begins with an account of Priyavrata, Nābhi, Ṛṣabha, Bharata and his genealogy. It then gives an account of the several *Varṣas* (regions) and vindicates the superiority of *Bhāratavarṣa*. Towards the end it gives an account of the fourteen *Lokas* (worlds) of the Universe with a description of hell. The translator of this Book is Aniruddha Kāyastha. But he should not be confused with Aniruddha spoken of in connection with the previous Book, although the latter also composed the fifth Book. Aniruddha Kāyastha was the minister of King Raghudeva (1584-1596) of the eastern Koc kingdom. In the introductory lines of his translation Aniruddha respectfully refers to Śaṅkaradeva and humbly presents himself as the grandson of Dāmodara, the elder brother of Mādhavadeva.[10] Aniruddha's father's name was Rāmacandra. He composed this work under the inspiration of king Raghudeva, and completed it in the year 1602 A.D. (1524 Saka).[11]

Book V of the Sanskrit version is mostly written in an ornate prose style, full of long compounds and imagery. Aniruddha has admirably translated it into lucid Assamese. His lucid exposition of chapter XIII containing an allegorical description of the world (*Bhavāṭavi-varṇana*) bears testimony to his scholarship. He has fully dealt with the story of Jaḍa-Bharata describing it to the minutest detail, but reticently summarizes the latter part of the Book wherein are described the various regions and positions and movements of the planets and stars. He has completely omitted

10. *Ibid.*, Book V, verses 4302-4306.
11. *Ibid.*, verses 5176-77.

the last chapter (Chap. XXVI) where the horrid description of hell is narrated.

Two more Assamese versions of this Book, approximately of the same age, are to be found. One of a work of Aniruddha of the Māyāmarā sect and the other one is composed by Harideva. The latter hailed from Hājo and composed his work at Barpeta when Dāmodaradeva was still living there. He gratefully refers to Śaṅkaradeva also.

Book VI—Out of nineteen chapters of Book VI translation of fourteen chapters is found in Assamese. No translation of chapters 4, 5, 6, 8, 19 has come to light so far. But the two most important episodes of this Book, viz., the stories of Ajāmila and Vṛttrāsura have been fully dealt with. The first three chapters of the original text describes how Ajāmila, a confirmed sinner, ultimately attained salvation by uttering the name of Nārāyaṇa at the moment of his death, though that was the name of his son only. The story emphasizes the glory and efficacy of *Hari-nāma.* Śaṅkaradeva is the translator of this episode. This same episode in a summary form finds a place in his *Kīrtana* also. Śaṅkaradeva begins his translation with a vivid description of hell which however forms the subject-matter of the last chapter of the previous Book, and ends with an eulogy of the Vaiṣṇavite ideals. As it comes from the masterly pen of Śaṅkaradeva, it reads like an original work.

The second episode runs from the seventh chapter till the end of the seventeenth chapter. It describes the cause that led to the birth of Vṛttrāsura as the rival of Indra and his ultimate death in the fight. From the fourteenth to the seventeenth chapter the previous life and deeds of Vṛttrāsura as king Citraketu have been narrated. Ananta Kandali alias Candra Bhārati, one of the most powerful and voluminous writers of the Vaiṣṇavite period, is the translator of this episode. He has appended a short history of his family to this composition from which we can gather that his real name was Haricaraṇa given by his father Ratna Pāṭhak who was a renowned scholar and expounder of *Bhāgavata* at the Mādhava temple at Hājo. Haricaraṇa was a prolific writer and gained many literary distinctions and acquired titles like Candra Bhārati, Bhāgavata Bhattāchāryya and Ananta Kandali.[12] Junior in age, he was a close associate of Śaṅkaradeva and most probably was a disciple also. Ananta Kandali is the author of several works of

12. *Ibid.*, Book VI; verses 5821-5830.

which *Bhāgavata*, Book X (part II), the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Kumārharaṇa-Kāvya* deserve special mention.

Vṛttrāsura-badha episode of Ananta Kandali is literally faithful to the original texts, only the didactic portions appended to each chapter and the description of the appearance of Viṣṇu to the supplicating gods in all His divine glory and charm are his own innovations. But certain unexplained allusions in the original version have been fully elucidated by the Assamese poet for the convenience of the readers. The story of Dadhīci's selflessness and truthfulness in his dealing with the twin-gods Aśvinīkumāra may be cited in support of the statement. The story has been fully dealt with by the Assamese poet, whereas this anecdote has been simply alluded to without being illustrated in the Sanskrit version.

Book VII—Book VII contains fifteen chapters of which the first ten chapters exclusively deal with the famous story of Prahlāda and the Man-lion (*Nara-Siṃha*) incarnation of Viṣṇu; remaining five chapters describe and enjoin different types of *Dharma* (duties) to be followed by peoples of various castes and *Āśramas* (stages of life). Keśava Kāyastha, the grandson of Bangañāgiri, a brother of Śaṅkaradeva, is the translator of this Book.[13] From the manner of treating the philosophical topics, Keśava Kāyastha seems to be a scholar of some eminence. He has fully dealt with the story of Prahlāda without omitting anything. But the last five chapters of the Book have been summarized in a nutshell, as the materials of this portion are lifeless didactic teachings.

Book VIII—This Book containing twentyfour chapters treats mainly of the following topics: (i) *Grāha-Gajendropākhyāna* (wherein are described the fight between the grāha (the alligator) and the gajendra (the king of elephants) and their ultimate emancipation; (ii) *Amṛtamanthana* (the churning of the ocean by gods and demons for nectar); (iii) *Balichalana* (wherein is described how Bali the king of demons was outwitted by Vāmana, the Dwarf incarnation of Viṣṇu). The above three episodes practically cover the entire Book excepting the first and the last chapters. Three different Assamese versions of the first episode composed by Śaṅkaradeva, Gopālacaraṇa Dvija and Keśava Kāyastha respectively[14] are known so far. Śaṅkaradeva's version is incorporated

13. *Ibid.*, VII, verses 10046-10052.
14. For biographical sketches of Gopālacaraṇa and Keśava Kāyastha, see discussion on Books III and VII.

in his *Kīrtana* and therefore deserves separate treatment. Gopālacaraṇa's version is more detailed. Besides translating the first four chapters containing the accounts of four Manvantaras and Grāha-Gajendropākhyāna with minute details, Gopālacaraṇa gives a rapid survey of the contents of the next ten chapters, viz. the Amṛtamanthana episode and finally concludes with an account of the different Manus narrated in the fourteenth chapter.[15]

The second episode, viz., Amṛtamanthana episode, runs from the fifth to the thirteenth chapter of the original version. The Assamese version is composed by Śaṅkaradeva. It is a free rendering of the original abounding with poetical, as well as popular touches, as such it partakes of the nature of an original work but for the retention of the original narratives and descriptions in the midst of his own descriptions. Wherever the story element predominates, his imagination finds its full scope. The story of a snake and a mouse (*Sarpa-muṣika Kathā*), the entry of gods into the audience chamber of Bali, and the reception they received therein, the emergence of Lakṣmi from the ocean and her choice of husband, the beauty of Mohinī and the ludicrous behaviour of Śiva towards her, the graphic and pictorial beauty of the Upavana, are some of the narratives and descriptions, which bespeak of the poet's genius and originally.

The Balichalana episode runs from the fifteenth to the penultimate chapter, and is a translation by Śaṅkaradeva. Like the previous episode, this one also contains many original descriptions though there is no vital deviation in matter from the original. The order of the development of the story and the incidents thereof are entirely taken from *Bhāgavata*. The elements from *Vāmana Purāṇa* which the poet has acknowledged to have introduced is negligible.[16] The description of *Sutala* (the nether world) towards the concluding part is the only conspicuous element of *Vāmana Purāṇa*. The vivid description of *Amarāvatī*, the abject and pitiable plight of gods in their exile and a few more descriptions of the Assamese version are original.

Book IX—This Book of the original version consisting of twenty-four chapters relates the history and genealogy of the solar and lunar dynasties with the exploits of some of the nota-

15. As I have not got the opportunity of going through Keśava Kāyastha's version, details could not be supplied.
16. Chapters 23-31 and 76-95 of the extant *Vāmana Purāṇa* narrate the *Balichalana* episode.

ble kings. The following are some of the important episodes narrated in this Book—(i) The story of Sukanyā, (ii) the story of king Ambariṣa and Durvāsā, (iii) deeds of the notable kings of the family of Ikṣāku, (iv) exploits of Kārtavīryārjuna and his conflict with Paraśurāma, (v) the story of Yayāti, Devayānī and the genealogy of Puru. Keśava Kāyastha already mentioned in Book VI, entirely translates this part of *Bhāgavata*. His translation is faithful and literal as far as practicable. Only on few occasions he has deviated a little from the original texts. The notable deviation occurs in narrating the story of King Hariścandra. Here immediately after describing the incident of Hariścandra's human sacrifice to Varuṇa to grant him a son, the poet goes on to narrate the episode of Hariścandra's gift to Viśvāmitra and his subsequent fate, culminating in his servitude under a Cāṇḍāla. The latter episode does not form a part of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa;* it has been introduced from *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*. In narrating the story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* described in the tenth chapter of the original the poet takes more liberty. Similarly references to Nahusa's turning into a python, the curse pronounced by Kaca upon Devayānī, have been adequately illustrated or elucidated in the Assamese version. But the uninteresting genealogies have been briefly passed over.

Book X—This is the most important and popular part of *Bhāgavata*. Its popularity can be imagined from the fact that the entire *Bhāgavata* is sometimes popularly, though erroneously, called *Daśama*. The principal cause of its immense popularity is that in this Book the life and deeds of Kṛṣṇa, the one and the only adorable, God of Assamese Vaiṣṇavites, have been depicted. It is imperative for an Assamese Vaiṣṇava to recite some portions of the Book as a part of his daily devotional routine.

The original text contains ninety chapters depicting the life and deeds of Kṛṣṇa to the minutest detail, from his birth till the end of his mortal career, the actual death is shown in the next Book. Synchronizing with three stages of Kṛṣṇa's life, this Book has been translated in three parts, i.e. (i) *Ādi-Daśama* (*Daśama*, Part I), (ii) *Madhya-Daśama* (Part II) and (iii) *Śeṣa-Daśama* (Part III), by Śaṅkaradeva and Ananta Kandali, respectively.

Ādi-Daśama covers the contents of the fortynine chapters of the original version beginning from the birth of Kṛṣṇa, till the episode of Gopi-Uddhava-samvāda. It comes from the facile pen of Śaṅkaradeva. This part of *Bhāgavata* by Śaṅkaradeva truly reflects his poetic genius by its wealth of details, mastery of style,

adequate and proper illustrations, homeliness of language and effective creation of atmosphere. He has amply demonstrated here his power of selection and omission of details found in the original version, without any vital deviation. The emphasis on the Vaiṣṇavite ideals, supremacy of the Bhakti-cult, glory and charms of the Adorable One, frequent use of prayers and hymns, and homeliness of atmosphere are some of the important features of his translation. A tendency to avoid abstruse philosophical elements could be discerned in his translation, but those which seem to him unavoidable have been made lucid as far as possible. The following translation placed alongside the original texts will be helpful to get an idea of his translation.

Ekāyanaḥ asau dviphalastrimūlaḥ caturasaḥ pañcavidhaḥ ṣaḍātmā |
Saptatvagaṣṭaviṭapo navākṣa daśacchadī dvikhagaḥ ādi bṛksaḥ |

10/2/27.

(This primal world-tree has one stem, two fruits, three roots, four kinds of juice, five differentiations, six vital elements, seven kinds of coverings, eight branches, nine eyes or holes and ten leaves having two birds on it).

The Assamese rendering runs thus:—

Prakṛti āśrayī āche ādi bṛkṣa
sukha dukha dui phal |
tini guṇa mūla artha cāri raṣa
śiphāye indriya val |
chaya ūrmi ātmā sāta dhātu chāla
śākhāye āṭha Prakṛti |
daśa vāyu pāta Iśa jīva dui
pakṣī thāke tāta niti ||

(*Ādi-Daśama*, Vv. 10489-10490).

(This primal world-tree resting upon Prakṛti has two fruits in the shape of happiness and misery. Three *guṇas* (*Sattva, Raja* and *Tama*) are its main roots, four ideals of life (*Dharma, Artha, Kāma* and *Mokṣa*) are its juice or sap and the senses are its offshoots of the roots, six elements (sorrow, death, hunger, thirst, etc. known as *Ūrmis*) are its soul or vital organ; seven *Dhātus* (skin, blood, flesh, fat, bones, marrows and semen) as its coverings, eight *Prakṛtis* (five gross elements, mind, ego and intellect)

are its branches, ten types of winds (*Pāna, Apāna, Vyāna,* etc.) are its leaves. In this world-tree always reside two birds—the finite and the infinite soul (God). [Sometimes, with a view to adding a lustre to the original picture Śaṅkaradeva is seen to add a few more striking metaphors or images in the translation. A specimen of such a description with added gleam is quoted below, along-side the original lines.

evaṃ sanmohayan viṣṇuṃ vimohaṇ viśvamohanaṃ |
svagaiva mayayājō'pi svayameva vimohitaḥ ||
tamyāṃ tamovannaihāraṃ khadyotarccirivahani |
mahatītaramayaiśyaṃ nihantyātmani yuñjataḥ ||
—10/13/44-45.

(Thus trying to enchant or bewilder Viṣṇu who is devoid of all ignorance or illusion, but on the contrary keeps the world in illusion, the creator Brahmā got himself puzzled and bewildered by his own magical or illusory power. O King, just as a few atoms of fog cannot envelop the darkness of the night but rather got itself enveloped by the latter; just as the gleam of fire-flies cannot express itself in the broad daylight, because of the powerful rays of the sun, similarly an attempt to outwit a greater personality by a lesser one reacts upon the latter adversely).

The Assamese version runs thus:—

eko sāra nisāra napānta mane guṇi. |
Kṛṣṇaka mohante moha bhailanta āpuni ||
niśabada vidhi buddhi smiriti ṭuṭila |
āpōnāra śare yena āpuni phuṭila ||
mahantaka māyā kari āponāka nāśe |
Sūryya āge yena jui-āngani prakāśe ||
Sāgarara āge kṣudra nadī kare caṭi |
bāḍaba agnira āge yena phiringati ||
pracaṇḍa vāyuka rodhe śimalura tulā |
Meru parvatara āge yena ũiculā ||
Māśalara āge daṇḍi kare uḍuphāli |
siṃhara āgata yena muṣe mele tāli ||
sehi mate Brahmā māyā kariyā Kṛṣṇata |
bhailanta āpuni pāce smṛti buddhi hata ||

(Trying to outwit Kṛṣṇa, Brahmā himself became bewildered. He could not make out what was real and what was unreal. The intellect and memory having failed, the creator was at a loss;

words failed him. He was as it were pierced by his own arrows. He undid himself by attempting to deceive the Great One. Like a piece of tiny burning fagot trying to outshine the midday sun, like a streamlet trying to outbid the mighty ocean, like a piece of cotton trying to prevent a heavy gale, like a tiny spark before a wild fire, like an ant-hill before the Meru mountain, like a tiny fish challenging a *mahāśal* (a powerful fish) and lastly like a mouse trying to rend a patch in the very presence of a lion, Brahmā similarly attempting to overpower Kriṣṇa by his *māyā,* got himself bewildered and stupefied, lost his memory and intellect).

The childish pranks of Kṛṣṇa with his mother and playmates the frightful image of Kāli-nāga, the allegorical description of the beauty of the rainy and autumnal seasons, the portrayal of the erotic dalliance of Kṛṣṇa with the milk-maids and the latter's intense grief at separation from the beloved one, are some of the rare gems of early Assamese literature, which speak of the genius of the translator.

Madhya-Daśama and *Śeṣa-Daśama,* i.e., the middle and last portions of *Bhāgavata* are the productions of Ananta Kandali. The incidents narrated in chapters 48-81 of the original Book come within the scope of *Madhya-Daśama* and the contents of the remaining chapters come within the purview of *Śeṣa-Daśama.* In the concluding lines of *Śeṣa-Daśama,* Ananta Kandali gratefully remembers Śaṅkaradeva, who was no more in this world when he completed this work.

āchila kāyastha Kṛṣṇa-kiṅkara Śaṅkara |
teho Bhāgavata-kathā racilā sundara ||
yāta hante bhailā Kṛṣṇa kathāra prasiddhi |
jānileka lòke bhakatise nava nidhi ||
siṭo mahantara kata kahibo mahata |
yāra Kṛṣṇa kathā gīte vyāpile jagata ||
nāmata kāyastha mahā Harita bhakata |
Kṛṣṇa smari mari sthita bhailā Vaikunṭhata ||

(There was a servant of Kṛṣṇa, Kāyastha in origin, Śaṅkara by name. He composed in beautiful verses the legends of *Bhāgavata* and from whom the deeds of Kṛṣṇa became popular, and the people became aware of the inestimable value of Bhakti. How can I express the greatness of that noble one whose songs and compositions spread far and wide? Kāyastha in name only, he was a great devotee of Kṛṣṇa and meditating on Hari breathed his last).

Śaṅkaradeva died in 1568 A.D. and hence Ananta Kandali must have finished his work in the latter part of the 16th century. The immediate inspiration and help for composing the *Bhāgavata* came from one influential man of Hājo, Kusuma Dalai by name, whom the poet has described as the 'servant of Keśava' and his relation with the pious beings was like that of the full-moon to lilies.

Ananta Kandali also followed Śaṅkaradeva's mode of translation. A few examples of his deviations and elucidations are noted. The story of Revatī's marriage with Balarāma is narrated in the 9th Book of the Sanskrit *Bhāgavata*. It does not form a part of Book X. But Ananta Kandali in course of his narration of the different marriages of Kṛṣṇa describes the marriage of Revatī with Balarāma also. The Rukmiṇī-pariṇaya episode of Ananta Kandali narrated in chapters 52-54 of the tenth canto bears certain influences of Śaṅkaradeva's *Rukmiṇīharaṇa Kāvya* wherein elements from the *Harivaṁśa* are introduced. The birth of Pradyumna which immediately follows the narration of Rukmiṇī's marriage in the original source, has been pushed back to a subsequent place instead of immediately describing it after Rukmiṇī's marriage. The language and narration of his Syamantaharaṇa episode has also a certain resemblance with Śaṅkaradeva's description in *Kīrtana*. In the Pārijātaharaṇa episode the poet following *Harivaṁśa* introduces war between Indra and Kṛṣṇa singularly absent in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Then again in his treatment of the Uṣā-haraṇa episode the poet takes recourse to *Harivaṁśa* by introducing Nārada, who initiates Citralekhā into the mystery of a magic by means of which she could fetch Aniruddha from the well-guarded city of Dvārakā unobserved. In the translation of the Rājasūya episode (original 10/70-75), Ananta Kandali, freely introduces descriptions from the *Mahābhārata* described in the Sabhā-Parva. The description of the procession of Yādavas from Dvārakā to Indraprastha, the decoration in the city of Indraprastha to receive Kṛṣṇa, words exchanged between Kṛṣṇa and Jarāsandha on the eve of the battle, the detailed descriptions of the rituals of the Rājasūya sacrifice, the birth story of Jarāsandha, Śiśupāla's vulgar and uncontrolled words against Kṛṣṇa during the sacrifices, are some of the incidents where Ananta Kandali deviating a little from *Bhāgavata* introduces his own elements as well as from the *Mahābhārata*.

Śeṣa-Daśama of Assamese poets includes the last nine chapters (82-90) of the original *Bhāgavata*, of which, the incidents narrated

in chapters 82-85 dealing with Kṛṣṇa's pilgrimage to Kurukṣetra, his reunion with Nanda and Yaśŏdā there, the description by the wives of Kṛṣṇa about their respective marriages and the recall of Daivakī's seven dead sons from the nether region by Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, are collectively known as *Kurukṣetra*. The extant *Kurukṣetra* is the composition of Śaṅkaradeva. It is generally supposed that Ananta Kandali being aware of this work of Śaṅkaradeva left it out of his scheme of translation. Nowhere in the published *Kurukṣetra* portion of the Assamese *Bhāgavata*, the name of Saṅkaradeva appears, only his usual epithet *Kṛṣṇara kiṅkara*, expressive of his humility appears in two places. On the other hand it will be a wrong supposition if we consider that Ananta Kandali dropped this episode from his scheme of translation only because Saṅkaradeva had handled it previously. In that case he would have avoided many other episodes treated by Śaṅkaradeva. Tradition supported by mediaeval hagiographies speaks that Ananta Kandali translated entirely the second and the third part of Book X. Most probably Ananta Kandali's translation of this part of *Bhāgavata* went out of vogue because of the popularity of Śaṅkaradeva's version. The extant and published *Kurukṣetra* episode deals in greater length the contents of chapter 83 of the original version. Here several wives of Kṛṣṇa have narrated their marriage episodes in the presence of Draupadī and other women of the Kuru dynasty. But the next few chapters (chapters 86-90) have been translated by Ananta Kandali. In the Subhadrāharaṇa episode he again freely introduces incidents and descriptions from the Ādi-Parva of the *Mahābhārata*.

There is one more metrical version of Book X, composed by Pītāmbara Kavi in the middle part of the sixteenth century.[17] Pītāmbara translated this part of the *Bhāgavata* at the instance and under the patronage of Prince Samara Siṅha, son of king Viśwasiṁha of Koc-Behār. Prince Samara Siṅha was no other than Śukladhvaja who secured that title on account of his martial qualities. Prince Śukladhvaja, the patron of the poet, died near about 1570 A.D.; it seems therefore this work must have been begun before the above date. Early Assamese hagiographies have mentioned Pītāmbara as a contemporary poet of Śaṅkaradeva. He was a resident of Kamatāpur, within the state of modern Cooch

17. Ms. No. 58, Cooch-Behar State Library (Assamese and Bengali Section).

Behar. Pītāmbara's version of Book X never came to be popular in Assam, because of the existence of Śaṅkaradeva's version.

Book XI—Book XI consisting of thirty-one chapters describes mainly the self-destruction of the Yādavas, discourses between Kṛṣṇa and Uddhava on religious and philosophical topics, and Kṛṣṇa's death. Śaṅkaradeva has translated chapters 1-7, 10-13, 29-31 in toto without any omission, while chapters 8, 9, 14-28 have been practically omitted. These chapters contain discussions on various topics which are not in conformity with the *Bhakti* cult preached by Śaṅkaradeva. For instance, discourses on *Sāṁkhya, Yoga, Dhyāna, Saṁnyāsa* and *Karma* described in the above chapters are useless from the point of view of a Vaiṣṇavite reformer and hence these chapters have been practically left untranslated. On the other hand there are certain matters in the Assamese version which we do not find in the Sanskrit original. The Sanskrit version of Book XI concludes with the death of Kṛṣṇa and the subsequent events regarding his wives and parents are not related there. The Assamese version relates in detail the grief of Arjuna when he comes to rescue from the flood-affected city of Dwārakā the old and infirm men and women, the death rites performed by the wives of the Yādavas at Prabhāsa, the forcible abduction of the wives of Kṛṣṇa by the uncivilized cowherds from the protection of Arjuna, sorrows of the Pāṇḍavas hearing of the fate of the Yādavas and their last journey to heaven, the meeting of Uddhava and Vidura on the banks of the Yamunā and the latters' journey to Badarikāśrama with Gāndhārī and Dhṛtarāṣṭra to meet Maitreya as suggested by Kṛṣṇa before his death. These subsequent events are taken from Book I/13 and III/1-5 and have been incorporated here to give a complete history of the Yādavas and their relatives, so that nothing may be left to the imagination of the readers about their ultimate fate. The forcible abduction of the wives of Kṛṣṇa by the Ābhīras and their self-immolation are inserted perhaps from the Muṣala-Parva of the *Mahābhārata*.

Śaṅkaradeva's translation of the first chapter of this Book is more graphic and vivid. A beautiful specimen for proper appreciation is given below side by side with the original slokas from *Bhāgavata*:

te veṣayitvā strīveśaih Sāmbaṃ Jāmbavatīsutaṃ |
eṣā pṛcchati bho viprā antarvatnyasitekṣaṇā ||

praṣṭum vilajjatī sākṣāt prabrūtamoghadarsanāḥ |
praśoṣyantī putrakāmā kiṃsvit sañjanayiṣyati ||

evaṃ pralabddhā munayastānūcuḥ kupitā nṛpa
janapiṣyati vo mandā muṣalaṃ kulanāśanaṃ ||

—11/1/15-16.

(Having bedecked Sāmba the son of Jāmbavatī with womanly garb they (Yādavas) approached the sages and asked, "O Brahmans, you who are endowed with true vision please tell this pregnant black-eyed lady who in spite of her intense desire, feels certain delicacy to ask whether she would give birth to a male or a female child." The sages being enraged at this cunning behaviour told them that she would bring forth a pestle which would bring destruction to their family).

Śaṅkaradeva paints this incident more realistically and vividly by introducing popular elements into it:

Jāmbavatī-suta Sāmba nāme kumāraka |
strī kāce kacāi maṇḍileka śarīraka ||

pindhāilā pravandhe dhari divya neta śārī |
bāndhilā ucchala khopā puṣpacaya āri ||

jvalai gaṇḍasthale cāru karṇara kuṇḍale |
hātata balayā śāṅkha sātesarī gale ||

kaṅkālata mekhalā unnata stanabhāra |
ophandāiḷā peta garbhāvatīra ākāra ||

śikhāta sindura pāve pindhāilā nūpura |
saghane bhojana kare tāmbula karpura ||

madhya kari yāi yata yādava kumāra |
hānthibāka napāre garbhara yena bhāra ||

māthāta oḍanī atiśaya lajjāvatī |
lahu lahu gamana gambhīra gajagati ||

katākṣa nayane cāve kari layalāsa ||
katokṣaṇe pāila ṛṣi samajyāra pāśa ||

nāhi hāsi rasa yena save suvinīta |
jānu śire praṇāmilā pariyā bhūmita ||

praṇāmiyā garbhāvatī parama hutāśe |
māthāta oḍanī laiyā railā ekapāśe ||

pāce Yadugaṇa avanata kari kāya |
karayoḍe bole ṛṣi samajyāka cāi ||

tumi save mahā mahā muni sarvajān |
cāri veda caudha śāstra karichā vyākhyān ||

dekhiyoka iṭo strī āsi āche kāje |
āpuni nosodhe kathā tomāsāta lāje ||

sodhāve āmāra mukhe śuniyo samprati |
pūrṇa daśa māsa iṭo nārī garbhāvatī ||

upajive śiśu kivā kahio bicāri |
putra abhilāse tomāsāta sodhe nārī ||

kivā haibe putra kivā jīu haibe jāta |
gaṇi paḍhi ṛṣisava kahiyo āmāta ||

(Prince Sāmba, the son of Jāmbavatī having been dressed with womanly garb, was further decorated in his person in the fashion of a girl. He was made to put on a beautiful silken sari and his artificial braided knots of hair were decorated with flowers. His cheeks were adorned with beautiful ear-rings hanging from the ears, his hands and neck were adorned with bangles and necklaces. He was attired with a mekhalā and had protruding breasts. The abdominal portion was made to look like that of a pregnant woman. He had vermilion marks on the parting of his hair and anklets in his feet. He was constantly chewing betelnuts, walked with a leisurely gait, due to the pressure of the womb, as it were, amongst the princes of the Yādava clan. With a veil over the head he feigned delicacy befitting a woman, and walked with a slow gait. After sometime, they reached the assembly of sages. Casting aside light-heartedness and with due humility they saluted the sages with bended knees. The pregnant woman also after due salutation stood aside with her veil drawn off. Then the princes with bended body and folded hands began to address the assembly of sages in the following way: "You are all great and omniscient sages and you have interpreted and explained the four Vedas and fourteen scriptures. Behold, there is a woman, who though eager to know, yet out of womanly modesty has not ventured to ask you what she intends to know. She is carrying a child of ten months in her womb and is desirous to know the sex of the child she is carrying. Kindly let us know whether she would give birth to a male or a female child.")

The specimen will show to what an extent popular touches were introduced to enliven the descriptions.

The Assamese translation of the second to the fifth chapter of Book XI is known as *Nimi-Navasiddha Saṃvād*, and has been

popularly treated as a separate work, as it were. The reason for assigning it a separate and independent place is the predominance of the elements of *Bhakti* illustrated through the discourses between King Nimi and nine saintly sons of Ṛṣava.

Book XII —The twelfth Book comprising thirteen chapters of various topics, including the genealogy of the Lunar race, the duties to be observed in different ages, the origin and classification of the Vedas and the purāṇas, the description of *Vyūhas,* the number of slokas in various purāṇas and a short review of *Bhāgavata* as a purāṇa by way of retrospection.

It is translated into Assamese by Śaṅkaradeva and like the two previous Books most probably composed between 1550 and 1568 A.D. Chapters 1, 7, 11 and 13 of the original text has been omitted in the Assamese version. So far as the translation of other chapters is concerned, there is a slight deviation in the case of the 5th chapter. In this chapter the death of Parīkṣita by snake-bite has been described, and in course of this description, the conflict between Kāśyapa, a Brahman physician, expert in curing snake-bite, and Takṣaka a dreadful serpent, is narrated in details, probably taken from the *Mahābhārata* (Ādi-Parva). The conflict is hinted at in the *Bhāgavata,* but the details are lacking.

Lastly, Śaṅkaradeva seems to have avoided purposely the description of the *Caturvyūhas* (Chapter 11) as the *Vyūhas* have no place in the theology of Assamese *Vaiṣṇavism,* and facts narrated in other omitted chapters are also unnecessary from the point of view of the *Vaiṣṇavite* reformer.

II. *Kathā-Bhāgavata* :

In the preceding sections we have discussed the metrical version of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa.* There is another important version in prose written in the sixteenth century. Prose as the medium of literary expression is rarely to be found in the mediaeval religious literature of India. But in Assam prose is being used as the medium of literary expression, consistently and continuously from the sixteenth century onwards. *Kathā-Bhāgavata* or the Bhāgavata in prose is the pioneering work in this respect. In Assamese popularly *Kathā* means speech whereas in Sanskrit it means a story written in prose. Any work written in the syntax of the ordinary speech was termed *Kathā* in Assamese.[18]

18. In Jain literature also, prose works are termed *Kathās,*

The founder of Assamese prose literature is Bhaṭṭadeva, who by his prose translations of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Bhāgavata Gītā,* and *Ratnāvalī* paved the way for the future development of religious prose in Assam. Bhaṭṭadeva's real name was Vaikuṇthanātha Kaviratna Bhāgavata Bhaṭṭācāryya. He was born about the year 1558 A.D. and died towards the fourth decade of the seventeenth century. He was the most devoted disciple of Dāmodaradeva, the founder of the Dāmodarī sub-sect of Assamese Vaiṣṇavism. Bhaṭṭadeva was a renowned Sanskrit scholar and has left a Sanskrit work called *Bhakti-Viveka* on the doctrines of Bhakti, besides a few other works in Assamese prose and poetry. Prose translations of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Gītā* and *Ratnāvalī* were made by him at the request of Dāmodaradeva, his spiritual guide. The work of translating *Bhāgavata* was begun in 1593 A.D. and finished in 1597 A.D.

The prose employed by Bhaṭṭadeva in his translation of *Bhāgavata* is not the spoken language of the time. It is an artificial literary language, being a blending of spoken and artificial forms, similar to the language employed in the metrical translations. The diction is overloaded with Sanskrit words and the language is far less homely and occasionally verges on the point of obscurity. But considering the nature of the work and the absence of a model prose before him Bhaṭṭadeva's pioneer attempt cannot but be admired. Though his language is marked by the predominance of Sanskrit words, yet he tried his best to make his sentences simple in construction avoiding complex or compound sentences as far as possible. The sentences of *Kathā-Bhāgavata* are not only well-balanced but rhythmic as well.

Kathā-Bhāgavata is the product of the one single writer, as such its treatment is more systematic. Unlike the metrical version where many chapters of the several Books have been omitted, Bhaṭṭadeva has not omitted or left out any chapter of the original Sanskrit version. Throughout the entire purāṇa he has followed a summary process of translation by avoiding lengthy details and focusing only on the principal matters. Sanskrit slokas which have incorporated the main contents of each chapter have been faithfully and literally translated, and nowhere extra-devotional elements have been allowed to predominate.

III. *Summaries and Digests of Bhāgavata Purāṇa* :

(a) *Kīrtana* : The most important summary of Bhāgavata is *Kīrtana* composed by Śaṅkaradeva in the earlier part of his religious and literary career. According to Daityāri Ṭhākura, the celebrated biographer of Śaṅkaradeva *Kīrtana* was composed when Śaṅkaradeva was living at Bardowā, where he spent the early part of his life, and hence the date of its composition can be safely placed in the first half of the sixteenth century. Originally *Kīrtana* was not a single book as at present, its different episodes were treated as separate works, having the same style of composition. After the death of Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva, his favourite desciple with the help of his nephew Rāmacaraṇa Ṭhākura collected the different episodes of *Kīrtana* from various places and arranged the different episodes in a systematic order to give the stamp of one book. Thus the present *Kīrtana* is a composite work having several independent episodes. The only connecting link between the different episodes is the style of composition. *Kīrtana* as the very name suggests is written for chanting in the congregational prayer and hence each chapter invariably contains a refrain (*Ghoṣā*) followed by narrative couplets. The following are the episodes incorporated within *Kīrtana* :

1. *Caturviṃśati avatāra varṇanā* (a brief description of the twenty-four incarnations of Nārāyaṇa).

2. *Nāmāparādha varṇanā* (offences against chanting the names of Hari).

3. *Pāṣaṇḍa mardana* (chastisement of heretics).

4. *Dhyāna varṇanā* (description of Kṛṣṇa and of the celestial region).

5. *Ajāmilopākhyāna* (the story of Ajāmila from Book VI of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*).

6. *Prahlāda Caritra* (the story of Prahlāda from Book VII of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*).

7. *Gajendropākhyāna* (the story from Book VIII of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*).

8. *Haramohana* (the story from Book VIII of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*).

9. *Bali-chalana* (the story from Book VIII of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*).

10. *Śiśulīlā* (early exploits of Kṛṣṇa from Book X of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*).

11. *Rāsa-Kṛḍā* (Kṛṣṇa's dalliance with milkmaids from the 10th Book of *Bhāgavata*).

12. *Kaṅsa-badha* (Killing of Kaṅsa from 10th Book of *Bhāgavata*).

13. *Gopī-Uddhava Saṁvāda* (message of Uddhava to the milkmaids, 10th Book of *Bhāgavata*).

14. *Kujīr Bāñcā-puraṇa* (fulfilment of the hunchbacked girl's desire, 10th Book of *Bhāgavata*).

15. *Jarāsandha-Yuddha* (From the 10th Book of the *Bhāgavata*).

16. *Kāla-yavana Badha* (the death of Kālayavana, 10th Book of the *Bhāgavata*).

17. *Mucukunda-stuti* (Mucukunda's prayer from the 10th Book, *Bhāgavata*).

18. *Syamanta-haraṇa* (the rape of the Syamanta jewel, 10th Book, *Bhāgavata*).

19. *Nāradara Dvārakā-darśana* (Narada's visit to Dvārakā, 10th Book, *Bhāgavata*).

20. *Vipraputra-ānayana* (revival of the dead son of a Brahman, 10th Book, *Bhāgavata*).

21. *Vipra Dāmodarākhyāna* (story of the Brahman named Damodara; 10th Book of *Bhāgavata*).

22. *Veda-stuti* (hymns by the Vedas, 10th Book, *Bhāgavata*).

23. *Daivakīr Putra Ānayana* (Bringing back to life the dead sons of Daivakī; 10th Book, *Bhāgavata*).

24. *Līlā-mālā* (a review of the exploits of Kṛṣṇa described in the 10th Book of *Bhāgavata*).

25. *Śrī-Kṛṣṇar Vaikuṇṭha-prayāṇa* (the return of Kṛṣṇa to Vaikuṇṭha; 10th Book, *Bhāgavata*).

26. *Sahasra-nāma-vṛttānta* (the origin and efficacy of the thousand names of Viṣṇu from *Padma Purāṇa*).

27. *Oreṣā-Varṇana* (the description of the origin of the Jagannātha temple from *Brahma Purāṇa*).

28. *Ghunucā Kīrtana* (the story of Kṛṣṇa's visit to Ghunucā (Guṇḍica), the daughter of Indradyumna, from *Jagannātha Purāṇa*).

Excepting 2, 3, 26, 27 and 28, all other episodes are taken from *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the second part, viz., *Nāmāparādha Varṇanā* is taken from the Svarga Khaṇḍa of *Padma Purāṇa* and the part three is a gleaning from different sources. The twenty-sixth (*Sahasranāma Vṛṭṭānta*) and the last part (*Ghunucā Kīrtana*) are not the compositions of Śaṅkaradeva. Perhaps these were later on incorporated into *Kīrtana*, keeping in view the similarity of form and motif. *Sahasra-nāmavṛttānta* from *Padma Purāṇa* is the composition of Ratnākara Kandali, a Brahmin disciple of Śaṅkaradeva. This part of Ratnākara Kandali like other parts of *Kīrtana* composed by Śaṅkaradeva, is marked by the lucidity and dignity of style. But *Ghunucā-Kīrtana* composed by Śrīdhara Kandali, the celebrated poet of Kāṇkhowā, lacks the dignity and devotional fervour which characterizes the other parts, and hence it is not considered by the orthodox section of the Vāiṣṇavites as a genuine part of *Kīrtana*. This episode of Vīṣṇu visiting the house of Ghunucā, as stated by the writer, is taken from *Jagannātha Purāṇa*, perhaps an upapurāṇa written for popularising the cult of Jagannātha at Puri. This same episode is also found in the *Utkala-Khaṇḍa of Skanda Purāṇa*. The *Oreṣā Varṇana* episode of *Kīrtana* composed by Śaṅkaradeva has for its source the chapters 44-51 of *Brahma Purāṇa*. It describes the legend about the origin of the Jagannātha temple at Puri. Assamese translation avoids lengthy details of the original as far as possible.

From the above accounts it is clear that *Kīrtana* barring two or three episodes or parts, is a summary, of the principal episodes of *Bhāgavata* legends. This work of Śaṅkaradeva excels all his other writings in popularity. The loftiness of ideas, the lucidity and dignity of expression and the devotional fervour rank it above all other religious works of the mediaeval period.

(b) *Guṇamālā* : It is a gist of the 10th Book *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. It enumerates as briefly as possible the principal exploits and deeds of Kṛṣṇa and is intended for daily recitation. In conformity with the littleness of its volume the metre employed here is also of short measures each consisting of six syllables. There is a story narrated in the mediaeval biographies about the origin of this little volume. The Koc King Naranārāyaṇa (C. 1540-1580) one day asked the scholars of his court to bring the next day an elephant within a small basket. This puzzling behest put the whole band of scholars in bewilderment. Śaṅkaradeva who was also present on that occasion brought on the next day a handy gist of the 10th Book of *Bhāgavata* contained in a small basket with a

picture of an elephant painted on the surface. This ingenious device of Śaṅkaradeva greatly pleased the king who thereupon made Śaṅkaradeva the leader of his court-pundits. From the story it can at least be inferred that the work was composed towards the latter half of the sixteenth century.

(c) *Bhāgavata-Ratna*: It contains the summary of each chapter of *Bhāgavata* in two or three lines and thus gives in a nut-shell all the legends of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. The poet begins with the legend about the origin of *Bhāgavata* and then describes Śrīdharasvāmī's contribution towards the spread of the teachings of the purāṇa.

Kali kāle Śrīdhara Svāmīra prasādata |
bidita bhaileka iṭo Bhārata madhyata ||
āno budhagaṇe āra ṭīkāka karilā |
Svāmīra tīkāse sarvadeśe pracārilā ||
sehi Svāmīdevara ṭīkāka anusari |
Bhāgavata bakhānanta śaṅkā parihari ||

(Through the grace of Śrīdhara, *Bhāgavata* became known throughout India. Others have written commentary on it, but only Śrīdhara's comentary found ready acceptance in all countries. Following his commentary *Bhāgāvata* is being explained without diffidence).

The writer of this gist of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is Viṣṇu-Bhāratī who also translated the episode of Dhruva of Book IV.

(d) *Kathā-Sūtra*: This work also contains a comprehensive index of the whole of *Bhāgavata*. It summarizes briefly all the twelve Books and states briefly all the different topics explaining here and there the important and difficult passages and writing notes on such words as are considered to be difficult. It is written in Assamese verse. The author introduces himself as the disciple of Harideva, who was the founder of the Haridevī sub-sect of Assamese Vaiṣṇavism. Bhāgavatācārya by which name the author speaks of himself is most probably his epithet. His father's name was Hari Miśra. In the closing lines of his work he mentions two other works, viz., *Sātvatatantra* and *Gītāsāra*, composed by him. Harideva, the spiritual guide of Bhāgavatācārya flourished in the sixteenth century and hence the date of this work may reasonably be placed in the early decades of the seventeenth century.

IV. *Kāvyas based on Episodes of Bhāgavata*:

The Vaiṣṇavite poets did not remain content with mere translations of the *purāṇas*, they further developed the interesting episodes into independent and self-contained kāvyas. In the treatment of these episodical kāvyas we find the Vaiṣṇavite poets giving free scope to their imagination. In the portraiture of characters and in the creation of proper setting or back-ground, national traits and local colours were freely introduced with a view to catch the popular mind. The most important kāvyas based on the episodes of *Bhāgavata* are (1) *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa* by Śaṅkaradeva, (2) *Rājasūya* by Mādhavadeva, (3) *Kumara-haraṇa* by Ānanta Kandali.

(a) *Rukmiṇī-haraṇa*: It is one of the most widely read kāvyas in Asasmese. According to medieval biographies of Śaṅkaradeva it is written in the early part of his literary life. This statement of the biographies can be supported also from the internal evidence of the kāvyas. Here Śaṅkaradeva describes in detail the history of his family with a certain pride and gusto which we naturally expect from a youthful writer; but in his later works he is very reticent about his personal history. Its style is marked by youthful vitality having a special bias for imaginative details. Considering these, its composition may be placed in the first half of the sixteenth century.

Rukmiṇī-haraṇa Kāvya derives its principal materials from the 52-54 chapters of the Book X of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Besides the contents of the above chapters certain descriptions from the Rukmiṇī-haraṇa episode of *Harivaṃśa* have also been introduced. The influence of *Harivaṁśā* may be specially discerned in the description of the coronation ceremony of Kṛṣṇa performed by the king of Kośāmbī to undo the evil design of the assembled kings at Vidarbha who had decided not to offer any seat to Kṛṣṇa as he was not a king. These incidents of the coronation of Kṛṣṇa are narrated in the *Harivaṁśā*, 2/48-50.

The importance of the *kāvya* lies in its life-like characters, lively dialogues and brilliant descriptions of various scenes. Assamese life and manners are cleverly reflected in this poetical composition of Śaṅkaradeva.

(b) *Rājasūya Kāvya*: Mādhavadeva (1489-1596), the able and faithful disciple of Śaṅkaradeva composed this kāvya mainly deriving his materials from the chapters 70-75 of the 10th Book of *Bhagavata*. He has faithfully followed the sequence of events as described in the above chapters of *Bhāgavata*. But so far as the details are

concerned, the poet has taken recourse to other sources also, The most important of these sources is the *Rājasūya* episode narrated in the *Sabhā Parva of the Mahābhārata*. Certain traces of Māgha's *Śiśupālā-badha* could be discerned in the details of the *Rajasūya kāvya*. The description of the procession led by Kṛṣṇa from Dvārakā to Indraprastha, the fight between Bhīma and Jarāsaṅdha, Śiśupala's railings against Śrīkṛṣṇa are some of the best specimens of Mādhavadeva's descriptive genius. But one defect of this kāvya is that its plot lacks the unity of impression. There are many descriptions which have no direct connection with the central theme. Of course the poet's aim was not to produce an excellent kāvya, but to illustrate through the medium of the story the main principles of Vaiṣṇavism. Another cause of the above defects is its faithful adoption of the sequence of events narrated in *Bhāgavata*.

Most probably this kāvya was composed at the inspiration of the Koc king Naranārāyaṇa and his brother Śukladhvaja. The panegyrical lines towards the close of the kāvya point to no other conclusion than this. From this panegyric it can be inferred that when this work was finished, Śukladhvaja was then still living. Śukladhvaja died in the neighbourhood of 1570 and Mādhavadeva came into contact with the Koc king near about 1560. Therefore this must have been written within these two limits.

(c) *Kumara-haraṇa:* Another important and highly popular kāvya is *Kūmaraharaṇa* by Ananta Kandali alias Śrī-Candra Bhāratī.[19] The kāvya describes the romance of Uṣā and Aniruddha narrated in the chapters 62-63 of the 10th Book. The contents of the above two chapters have been fully developed and illustrated by giving flesh and blood to the none-too-clear characters of the original source by introducing humorous touches, and local colours here and there and lastly by detailing the erotic sentiments of the hero and heroine in union and separation. The date of its composition may be reasonably placed in the latter half of the sixteenth century.

Besides the works discussed above there are a good many early religious dramas where episodes from the *Bhāgavata* have been dramatized. As a separate chapter has been devoted to the discussion of early Assamese dramas, no further discussions on the same topic seem necessary here.

19. *Vide*. discussions, Book VI.

2. VIṢṆU-PURĀṆA

Introductory—The next important purāṇa for the Vaisnavites is *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. In this purāṇa, Viṣṇu is praised and glorified as the highest Being, as the one and only God. It belongs to the *Pañcarātra* sect and is the best representative of the whole class of sectarian purāṇas, since it is purely Vaiṣṇava in its teachings from beginning to end. It consists of six sections or Books and the entire purāṇa has been told by Parāśara to his pupil Maitreya. Book I gives an account of the creation along with numerous mythological narratives, allegories and legends of ancient kings and sages. Book II gives a fantastic description of the world with seven continents and seven oceans. In this connection the legend of the origin of the name *Bhāratavarṣa* is described in detail. Next follow the descriptions of heaven, hell and the nether world. Book III gives an account of the *Manus* (primal ancestors of the human race) and *Manvantaras* (ages) over which they ruled. Then follows a discussion on the Vedas and their classification by Vyāsa and the origin of the various legends connected with the mythical king. Book V gives a detailed biography of Kṛṣṇa and the last Book by way of prophecy describes the evils of the *Kali Yuga* and the various dissolution (*Pralaya*) of the universe.

It is not possible to assign any definite date of its composition or compilation. C. V. Vaidya and Farquhar endeavour to prove that *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* is not earlier than the 9th century A.D. But Dr. Winternitz and following him many other scholars also, are of opinion that it is certainly earlier than the 9th century, but cannot be pushed back beyond the 5th century A.D.

Assamese Versions:

(i) *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* holds a position of esteem amongst the Vaiṣṇavas of Assam. The first Assamese translation was made in the early decades of the seventeenth century by Bhāgavata Miśra, who also translated into metrical Assamese *Sātvata Tantra*. Bhāgavata Miśra in the colophone of *Sātvata-Tantra* introduces himself as the follower of Dāmodaradeva:

śunā sarvaloka mora nija guru
Dāmodara kṛpāmaya |

tāhāna mahimā kaiyā napāo sīmā
ananta guṇa ālaya ||

achileka eka dvija śuddhamati
tāna mukhya pāriṣada |

mahā Bhagavata mahā guṇavanta
nāhi yāta lobha mada ||

rūpa manohara gaura kalevara
sakalo loka rañjana |

bhakti pravartāyā dīna daridraka
pālilā yiṭo sajjana ||

(Listen all of you, gracious Dāmodara is my spiritual preceptor. He was the repository of countless virtues — as such I cannot express the depth of his nobility. There was a Brahman of stainless mind, who was his (Dāmodara's) chief attendant. He was a great *Bhāgavata* having great qualities and devoid of egoism and covetousness. Beautiful in appearance, fair in complexion and liked by every body, that noble Brahman preserved the weak and the poor by establishing the path of devotion).

The brief account of the life of Bhāgavata Miśra as found in the concluding chapter of his *Sātvata Tantra* (verses 372-375) says that Bhāgavata Miśra was a disciple of Dāmodaradeva and used to recite and explain the *Bhāgavata* in the Govindapura Satra of Bhagavānadeva, another prominent disciple of Dāmodaradeva. According to the mediaeval biographies of Dāmodaradeva, Bhagavānadeva was entrusted by the former to propagate Vaiṣṇavism in the northern Kāmarupa and accordingly he established himself at a place called Nimiśā. His Satra was named as Govindapura. Bhāgavata Miśra was the Bhāgavatī of that Satra and under the inspiration of Bhagavānadeva he composed several works. In the introduction of the printed *Sātvata-tantra* edited by S. C. Goswami, Bhāgavata Miśra's real name is given out at Raghunāth Miśra and he is described as the brother of Govinda Miśra, the celebrated translator of the *Gītā* into metrical Assamese. But Govinda Miśra and his family belonged to Harideva's sub-sect and not to Dāmodara's sect. This inconsistancy has not been explained away in the above introduction by the learned writer of the introduction.

It is not definitely known whether Bhāgavata Miśra translated the entire *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* or only a section of it. The published portion of his work in *The Typical Selections of Assamese Literature* deals with the details of hell, and the Sañjamaṇipura of Yama which is a part of *Yama-gītā* narrated in the first section

of *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. Bhāgavata Miśra probably composed this work in the first half of the seventeenth century.

(ii) The second episodical translation of *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* is *Yama-gitā* by Kālidāsa. Nothing is known about him, nor can the date of the composition be ascertained with any amount of certainty. But this much can be said that it is comparatively a later work. The language bears certain traces of the dialects of the westernmost districts of Assam. Here are described the four gates to hell. Men who are virtuous enter the capital of Yama by the eastern, western and northern gates but those who are vicious enter by the southern gate. Then it enumerates virtues and vices and rewards and punishments of actions. It is a literal translation of the Yama-gītā chapter in the first section of *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*.

(iii) A complete translation of *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* with its several sections was made in the first half the nineteenth century by Paraśurāma Dvija under the inspiration of one Candrasena of Tezpur. The translation was made in 1758 Saka era (1836 A.D.). Paraśurāma Dvija has left behind him a complete translation of *Dharma-Purāṇa*, probably an Upapurāṇa of later origin. His translation of *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* is voluminous and covers the entire episodes and narratives of the original version. His translation is literal and does not contain any deviation from the original, but his style lacks the spontaneity and lucidity of earlier Vaiṣṇavite poets. Unlike the Vaiṣṇavite poet-translators of the earlier period, Paraśurāma lacks in the power of judicious selection of topics; as a result his work has not become accessible to the average readers. His language is terse and devoid of any popular touch, the chief attraction of the masses. It appears from the translation that the translator was a scholar, but he was not a poet. Inquisitive readers have got to plod their way through none-too-interesting narratives written in an unattractive style. But one important virtue of this work is that it is not a fragmentary or piecemeal translation. This purāṇa preserves the specimen of the language used by the poets of the early nineteenth century, who continued the tradition of the Vaiṣṇavite poets by imitating the latter's language and literary forms though such imitation betrays modernism, off and on, throughout their works.[20]

20. Ms. No. 444, Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Gauhati.

3. HARIVAMŚA

Introductory.—Though the orthodox Indian tradition regards *Harivaṃśa* as an appendix or supplementary part of the *Mahābhārata,* yet strictly speaking it is an independent work having all the characteristics of a purāṇa. The connection of *Harivaṃśa* with the *Mahābhārata* is purely external and is limited essentially to the fact that the same Vaiśampāyana who is said to have recited the entire *Mahābhārata* to Janamejaya is also credited as the reciter of *Harivaṃśa.* Besides this, in a few verses at the beginning and the end, the praise of the *Mahābhārata* including *Harivaṃśa* has been sung. But as far as the contents are concerned *Harivaṃśa* has little in common with the *Mahābhārata.*

Harivaṃśa consists of three sections. The first entitled *Harivaṃśa-parvan* begins in the manner of the purāṇas with an account of the creation and all sorts of mythological legends such as of Dhruva, Vena, Pṛthu. Then it describes the kings and their exploits of the solar dynasty (Sūrya-vaṃśa). Next follows the genealogy of the lunar dynasty (Candra-vaṃśa) with detailed accounts of Pururavas, Nahuṣa and Yayāti. The history of the Yādavas culminating in Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa is also narrated.

The second section of *Harivaṃśa* entitled *Viṣṇu Parvan* deals exclusively with Kṛṣṇa and his deeds and exploits similar to Book X of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa.* Kṛṣṇa is honoured and adored here as the Supreme Being, a full incarnation of Viṣṇu. The third section called *Bhaviṣya Parvan* is a loose collection of legends and prophesies. Herein are described different creations, the horse sacrifice of Janamejaya, ultimately abandoned; the incarnations of Viṣṇu as a Boar, a Man-lion, and a Dwarf. The slaying of Paundra by Kṛṣṇa and the humiliation of the two Śiva-worshippers Haṃsa and Ḍimbhaka at the hands of Kṛṣṇa and many other legends common to all purāṇas.

The date of *Harivaṃśa* is generally fixed between the 4th century B.C. and the 4th century A.D.

Assamese Versions—Though *Harivaṃśa* is held by the Assamese Vaiṣṇavites as one of the sacred scriptures, and though they frequently drew their materials from it, yet a complete translation of it is not found in Assamese. The second section of *Harivaṃśa,* viz. *Viṣṇu Parvan* received exclusive attention from the poets, the other two sections were more or less neglected. As has been already stated Vaiṣṇavite poets on many occasions inter-

mingled the narratives of the *Harivaṃśa* with that of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa.* The following are the main Assamese translations of *Harivaṃśa*:

(i) The earliest translation of *Harivaṃśa* is *Uṣāpariṇaya* (marriage of Uṣā with Aniruddha) kāvya by Pītāmbara Kavi. Pītāmbara Kavi flourished in the early part of the sixteenth century and was a contemporary of Śaṅkaradeva. Early Assamese hagiographies also mention him as the contemporary of poet Śaṅkaradeva. He was a resident of Kamatāpur, within the district of modern Cooch-Behar in Bengal, and composed this kāvya in the year 1533 A.D. Prince Śukladhvaja, the son of the Koc king Viśva Siṁha (1517-1540) has been referred to in his translation of *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* as his patron.

The romantic episode *Uṣāpariṇaya* is narrated in chapters 116-128 of *Viṣṇu-Parvan* of *Harivaṁśa.* Pītāmbara has faithfully translated the important verses of *Harivaṃśa* keeping intact the sequences of events narrated therein. But the details of the several incidents have been supplied by himself. The predominance of the erotic and secular elements distinguishes it from other religious kāvyas of the same period. Another important characteristic of this kāvya is that the emotional descriptions have been expressed through songs attuned with classical *Rāgas* (melodies).

(ii) The next important episodical translation of *Harivaṃśa* is *Pārijātaharaṇa* by Gopālacaraṇa Dvija, whose biographical information has been given in connection with the discussion of the 4th Book of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa.* The date of the composition of this work therefore, can be placed in the concluding decades of the sixteenth century.

The work gives an account of the death of Narakāsura, the king of Prāgjyotiṣapura and then it relates how Kṛṣṇa defeating Indra, the Lord of Gods took away the divine flower plant *Pārijāta* with a view to making it a present to his beloved wife Satyabhāmā. This episode is narrated in the chapters 63-75 of *Viṣṇu-Parvan* of the original Sanskrit version. Gopālacaraṇa in his translation introduces certain descriptions from *Bhāgavata* and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa.* This is evident from the following lines.

eke Harivaṃśa kathā āti sucarita |
Tāte Śrī-Bhāgavata karibo miśrita ||
Śrī-Viṣṇu Purāṇaka karibo jaḍita |
Tini mili haiba āti svāda biparīta ||

(The stories of the *Harivaṃśa* are good by themselves, but then, facts from *Śrī-Bhāgavata* and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* have also been introduced. The three together would certainly produce an uncommon flavour).

For the treatment of this episode Gopālacaraṇa is indebted to Śaṅkaradeva to a considerable extent. The secular touch and the characterization of Śaṅkaradeva's drama *Pārijātaharaṇa* have greatly influenced the descriptions of Gopālacaraṇa Dvija. The quarrel between Satyabhāmā and Śacī narrated by Gopālacaraṇa is nothing but a reproduction of the quarrel described in the drama of Śaṅkaradeva. Assamese writers vulgarized the dignified description of the Śaṅskrit Purāṇa.

(iii) During the reign of the Ahom king Rajeśwarsiṇha (1751-1769 A.D.) the second section, viz. *Viṣṇu-Parvan* of *Harivaṃśa* was rendered into Assamese by one Kaviśekhara Vidyācandra Bhaṭṭācārya. The poet acknowledges the patronage of the princess Premadā, wife of the prince Cāru Siṃha, son of Rājeśwar Siṅha.

The work gives an account of Kṛṣṇa's birth and his subsequent doings and exploits amongst cowherds at Gokula and Vṛndāvana. But one noticeable feature of the work is the presence of Rādhā as the mistress of Kṛṣṇa. In the original Sanskrit version, the *Rāsa-krīḍā* of Kṛṣṇa at Vṛndāvana with the milkmaids is described in the twentieth chapter of *Viṣṇu Parvan*, but the name Rādhā is singularly absent there. The Assamese poet in course of his description of the *Rāsa-krīḍā* episode, narrates the pangs of separation and wistfulness of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa when they saw each other for the first time. The introduction of Rādhā as the principal mistress of Kṛṣṇa, was perhaps done at the influence of *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* which gained popularity in the contemporary Āhom Court.

There is yet one more version of *Harivaṃśa*, predominated by the Rādhā-motif, composed by one Bhavānanda, son of Śivānanda. The Bengali recension of this work was published a few years back under the auspices of Dacca University. The language of this work bears the stamp of the dialect of the westernmost districts of Assam.

4. PADMA-PURĀṆA

Introductory: The present *Padma Purāṇa* has come down to us in two distinct recensions—the North Indian and the South Indian. The former recension consists of five Books arranged in the following order: (1) *Sṛṣṭi* (2) *Bhūmi*, (3) *Svarga*, (4) *Pātāla*, (5) Uttara and the South Indian recension contains six Books, viz.

(1) *Ādi*, (2) *Bhūmi*, (3) *Brahma*, (4) *Pātāla*, (5) *Sṛṣṭi* and (6) *Uttara*. *Padma Purāṇa* is a Vaiṣṇavite work. It is a loose compilation, the parts of which belong to different periods; as such a definite period cannot be ascribed to its composition. It is recited by Sūta Ugraśravā. The *Sṛṣṭi Khaṇḍa* deals with the story of the origin of the Purāṇa, the accounts for the term *Padma* so called after the lotus in which the God Brahmā appears at the creation. After the cosmological and cosmogonical myths are narrated the genealogies of the Solar and the Lunar dynasties have been narrated. It also contains many myths and legends glorifying Viṣṇu and Brahmā. One of the principal parts of this Khaṇḍa consists of the description of the lake *Puṣkara* sacred to *Brahmā*. The *Bhūmi Khaṇḍa*, i.e., the section of the earth, gives a description of the earth and contains numerous legends which are intended to prove the sanctity of various *tīrthas* or holy places. Not only sacred places, but persons such as the father, the mother, and the chaste wife can be a *tīrtha*. In this connection the story of the chaste wife Sukalā has been narrated in detail. Through the story of Puru and Yayāti it has been illustrated how a virtuous man can also be a *tīrtha*. The *Svarga-Khaṇḍa* or the section of the heavens gives descriptions of the various worlds of the gods. In course of these descriptions, the legends of Duṣyanta and Śakuntalā and of Pururavā and Urvaśī have been narrated. It contains instructions about duties of castes and of the *āśramas*, about the modes of Viṣṇu-worship. The *Pātāla Khaṇḍa*, i.e., the section of the nether world describes the subterranean regions particularly the Nāgaloka. A few chapters dwell upon the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa legends and also upon the Viṣṇu-cult and the sanctity of the *Śālagrāma* stone. The *Uttara-Khaṇḍa*, i.e., the last section mainly illustrates and describes various ceremonies and rituals, connected with the Viṣṇu-cult. It enumerates various observances to be performed in the months specially *Māgha* and *Kārtika*, sacred to Viṣṇu. There is an appendix to the *Uttara-Khaṇḍa* known as *Kriyāyogasāra*. The main thesis of this part is that Viṣṇu should be worshipped not by meditation but by pious acts and pilgrimages to sacred places and rivers and by celebration of Vaiṣṇavite festivals.

In the Southern recensions there are two more sections, viz. the *Ādi-Khaṇḍa* and the *Brahma-Khaṇḍa*. But the contents of these sections do not differ materially from that of the *Svarga-Khaṇḍa* of the Northern recension. In fact the *Svarga-Khaṇḍa* of the Northern recension is nothing but a combination of the *Ādi* and the *Brahma-Khaṇḍa* of the Southern recension, with slight variations here and there.

Assamese Versions:

I. The earliest Assamese translations of *Padma Purāṇa* are a few chapters in *Kīrtana*. They are *Nāmāparādha Varṇanā* by Śaṅkaradeva and *Sahasranāma Vṛttānta* by Ratnākara Kandali, a contemporary of Śaṅkaradeva. The former is taken from the *Svarga-Khaṇḍa* and the latter has for its source the *Uttara-Khaṇḍa* of *Padma Purāṇa*. These two fragmentary translations belong unmistakably to the first half of the sixteenth century.

II. In the *Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts* by H. C. Goswami, a prose translation of some chapters of the *Uttara-Khaṇḍa* has been referred to. The contents of this translation have also been given in the above work. The following contents as given in the work will give an idea of the scope.

"It describes the benefits of wearing strings of Rudrākṣa beads, and of offering Tulsī leaves to God, of venerating the cow, of respecting *Pipal* tree and of bathing in the Brahmaputra river. The merits of observing fasts during *Ekādaśī* and *Janmāṣṭamī* is then described. Then follows a description of the terrible journey of a sinner to hell. It then states the effect of taking in the early hours of the morning. In the month of *Kārtika*, every evening men should offer lights in the sky as well as in the front of the sacred *Tulsī* plant. Then there is a description of Jagannāth at Puri. Next follows the description of a godly man and an ideal king. The process of meditation, the mystic effect of uttering the names of Hari, the religious duties to be performed every month bring the work to its conclusion."

As mentioned above the work is written in Assamese prose. The language is dignified without being artificial like that of *Kathā-Bhāgavata*. Probably it is a work of the eighteenth century. No mention of the writer is to be found anywhere of the work.

III. The next important translation of *Padma Purāṇa* is the *Mādhava-Sulocanā* episode narrated in the fifth chapter of *Kriyā-yogasāra* appended to the *Uttara-khaṇḍa*. The story is narrated with a view to showing the merits of bathing in *Gangā-Sāgara Saṅ-gama*. It is a romantic story describing the love of a pair of lovers, Mādhāva and Sulocanā through many a vicissitude until they are united, and finally liberated by bathing in the confluence of the Ganges and observing pious vows. The work is a faithful rendering of the original version. Even the imagery and descriptions, and alaṅkāras of the original version have been retained in the Assamese translations as far as practicable. It is written in the style of *Kīrtana* by Śaṅkaradeva.

The translator of this romantic story has introduced himself in the colophon as *Dvijabara*. It is certainly not his name. Most probably this *Dvijabara* is no other than Kavirāja Cakravarti, the court-poet of the Āhom king Rudrasiṅha (1696-1712 A.D.). Kavirāja Cakravarti has also introduced himself as Dvijabara in all the colophons of his *Gīta-Govinda*. There is one more Assamese version of the same episode supposed to be written by one Śiva Śarmā.

IV. There are two more works popularly known as *Svarga-Khaṇḍa*, composed by one Sārbabhauma Bhāttācaryya. One is called *Saru-Svarga-Khaṇḍa*, i.e., the lesser *Svarga-Khaṇḍa* and the other is *Bṛhat-Svarga Khaṇḍa*, i.e., the greater *Svarga-Khaṇḍa*. Both these works are not in any way connected with *Padma Purāṇa*, but are biographical accounts of Śaṅkaradeva in the form of prophesies.

5. BRAHMAVAIVARTA PURĀṆA

Introductory: *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* is considered to be one of the latest of the extant purāṇas. The nucleus of this purāṇa may be very old but the purāṇa in its present form is not earlier than the 10th century. It consists of four parts, viz. (1) *Brahma Khaṇḍa*, (ii) *Prakṛti-Khaṇḍa*, (iii) *Gaṇapati-Khaṇḍa*, and (iv) *Kṛṣṇa-janma Khaṇḍa*. The first Book deals with the creation by Brahman, the first Being who is no other than Kṛṣṇa. The second Book, the *Prakṛti-Khaṇḍa*, deals with Prakṛti the original matter, which resolved itself at the command of Kṛṣṇa into five goddesses (Durgā, Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Sāvitrī and Rādhā). The third Book, the *Gaṇapati-Khaṇḍa* relates the legends of the elephant-headed god Gaṇeśa. The fourth and the most extensive Book the *Kṛṣṇa-janma-khaṇḍa* deals not only with the birth of Kṛṣṇa but with the entire life of Kṛṣṇa. It lays special stress on the amorous dalliance of Kṛṣṇa with the milkmaids, of whom Rādhā, being Kṛṣṇa's energy, stands foremost. In this purāṇa Kṛṣṇa has been depicted as the god of gods, He is even greater than Viṣṇu.

Assamese Versions:

I. It has already been remarked in the general observation on the purāṇic literature in Assamese that with the change of the literary centre from Koc Behār to the Ahom court in the beginning of

the 18th century, the tone of Assamese literature also underwent a change. Books with the predominance of the erotic sentiment came to attract more and more attention. As a result, *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* having erotic predominance was translated for the first time. The first Assamese translation of *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* was undertaken by Kavirāja Cakravarti under the orders of the Āhom King Śiva-Siṃha (1714-1744 A.D.) and his queen Pramatheśwari, also known as Ratnakāntī. Kavirāja Cakravarti was the court-poet of three successive Āhom monarchs and his real name was *Rāmanārāyaṇa Cakravarti.* He composed a few more works of which *Śakuntalā Kāvya, Śaṁkhacūḍa-badha,* and *Gītagovinda* are noteworthy.

Kavirāja Cakravarti's work is not a complete translation of *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa,* it is the last but nevertheless the most important part of the Purāṇa. It gives a faithful rendering of all the important episodes of Kṛṣṇa's early life described in *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa.* He vividly describes the *Rāsakrīḍā* episode with all its erotic descriptions and suggestions. One noticeable feature of his translation is that it is too faithful to the original without a slightest variation. But too much adherence to the original narration has not, however, deprived it of literary beauty. The work ends with usual panegerical lines in favour of king Śiva-Siṇha and his queen.

II. There is another version of the *Kṛṣṇajanma Khaṇḍa* written towards the latter part of the eighteenth century.[21] The translator's name is Balarāma Dvija who was seventh in descent from Hari-Bhāratī a contemporary of Vaṁśī Gopāladeva (1548-1662?). His family originally hailed from Hābung, somewhere in the North-Lakhimpur district of eastern Assam.

This work of Balarāma Dvija is a translation of chapters 83-110 of the Sanskrit version, and as such it is not a complete translation of the entire *Kṛṣṇa-Janma Khaṇḍa.* It gives a description of heavenly abode of Kṛṣṇa and then recounts why it was necessary for the Lord to take his birth in this world. It describes the duties of four castes, *āśramas,* preceptors, householders, widows, etc. Then it narrates a few episodes of Kṛṣṇa's life from his *upanayana* ceremony till the conclusion of his marriage with Rukmiṇī.

Balarāma Dvija's translation is literal, but his grasp over the language seems to be limited.

21. This work was published by the Assam Sahitya Sabha, but the chapters have not been properly arranged, in conformity with the original text,

(III) There is a translation of the *Prakṛti-Khaṇḍa* by Durgeśwar Dvija who was one of the court-poets of one of the later Āhom kings. The following colophon speaks of his connection with the Āhom court—

Indra-vaṁśī nṛpatira sabhāra pandita dhīra
Devagrāme yāra vāsabarī |

yāhāra upari vaṁśa Kauśika munira aṁśa
Sadāśiva daula adhikārī

siṭo dvija Durgeśvare ehi chabi-chanda kare
Purāṇara artha anusari |

(Durgeśvara Dvija, who is a court-poet of the king sprung from the dynasty of Indra, who has his abode at Devagrāma and whose ancestors of the *Kauśika-gotra* were in charge of the temple of Śiva at Devagrāma, composes this work in conformity with the meaning of the purāṇa.)

It is not definitely known which of the Āhom kings patronized Durgeśvara. The temple of Śiva at Devagrāma was first constructed by Pratāp Siṃha in the seventeenth century and in the later-half of the eighteenth century Rājeśvara Siṃha built another Śiva temple at Negheriting a few miles from Devagrāma. Bhūdhar Agamācārya, the ancestor af Durgeśvara was brought from Kanauj by Pratāp Siṁha to be in charge of the temple dedicated to Śiva at Devagrāma. Durgeśvara Dvija most probably flourished during the reign of Śiva or Rājeśwar Siṁha.

Durgeśvara was a scholar of repute. He has admirably translated the Sanskrit verses without reducing the literary flavour of the original. He seems to have wonderful command over language and vocabulary. A comparative study of his translation with the original Sanskrit version will convince the readers about his scholarship and poetical genius. The work begins with the discription of the origin of principal goddesses who have been described as embodiments of different aspects of Kṛṣṇa's energy and ends with the death of Śaṃkhacūḍa, the husband of Tulasī.[22]

(IV) The episode of Saṃkhacūḍa and Tulasī of *Prakṛti-Khaṇḍa* has been dealt with also by Kavirāja Cakravarti the

22. Ms. No. 295, D.H.A.S., Gauhati.

court-poet of Śivasiṃha. The poet expresses his indebtedness to the king and his queen in the following panegyrical lines :

Saumāra pīṭhara Śiva Śiṃha mahāmati |
Hari Hara caraṇata sadā yāra mati ||
.. ..
tāhāna āchilā jāyā Phuleśvarī nāma |
patnīgaṇa madhye śreṣṭha guṇe anupāma ||
.. ..
hena nṛpa mahiṣīra ājña śire dhari |
Kavirāja Cakravartī mati anusari ||
parama sundara Brahma-vaivarta Purāṇa |
Vyāsadeva bāndhi āche nānā upākhyāna ||

(The noble-minded king Śiva Siṃha of Saumāra Pīṭha, whose heart was constantly at the feet of Hari and Hara, had a wife Phuleśvarī by name. She was the greatest of the king's consorts by virtue of her admirable qualities. Under the orders of such a royal couple, Kavirāja-Cakravarti has translated this episode from *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* composed by Vyāsa, according to his capacity).

Like his previous translation of *Kṛṣṇa-janma Khaṇḍa* this work of Kavirāja Chakravarti cannot claim any originality. It is a faithful and more or less literal translation of the Sanskrit version. The work begins with the birth of Tulasī and then gives a detailed account of her marriage with Śaṃkhacūḍa the demon king and the exploits of the latter. The rape of Tulasī by Kṛṣṇa, the fight between Śaṃkhacūḍa and Mahādeva and the ultimate death of Śaṃkhacūḍa and his metamorphosis into a conch-shell, all these incidents have been described in details without deviating from the original source.

(V) A complete translation of the entire *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇā* was accomplished in the first-half of the nineteenth century. It is a joint product of four scholars engaged by Prince Hayanārāyaṇa of Darrang. But the three-fourths of the work was done by Ratikānta Dvija alone and the remaining one-fourth was contributed by Nandeśvar Dvija, Narottama Dvija and Khargeśvara Dvija. Ratikānta alone translated the *Brahma-khaṇḍa, Gaṇapati khaṇḍa, Prakṛti khaṇḍa* and some portions of the *Kṛṣṇa-janma khaṇḍa* also. The entire work contains nearly five thousand *padas* (couplets), and was completed in 1717 (Saka era). The poet speaks of his patron king in the following colophon :

Śiva-vīrya Viśva Siṃha bhailā sat-rājā |
putravate pālilanta tāna nija prajā ||
tāna putra Malladeva pradhāna nṛpati
Bhāratara kichu pada teho karāilanta ||
tāna vaṃśe Hayanārāyaṇa ṇrpabara |
mahā dānī mānī rājā Nārāyaṇapara ||
tehe ājñā karilanta pada bhāṅgibāka |
pada bhaile bujibeka yata prajājāka ||

(The noble king Viśva Siṃha, son of Śiva ruled his subjects like his own sons. His son Malladeva, the greatest of kings caused some scholars to translate some verses of the *Mahābhārata*. Of his dynasty the honoured king Hayanārāyaṇa, a great devotee of Nārāyaṇa, ordered to translate the Purānic verses so that illiterate persons could understand the implications of sacred texts).

This is perhaps the latest Assamese translation written in the traditional style. It marks the last limit of the period of puranic translations inspired by royal patrons. It appears from the published pieces of the work that the translators faithfully followed the original Sanskrit texts.

Ratikānta Dvija is credited with another work, viz., *Darrang Raj-Vaṃśāvalī* i.e., the chronology of the kings of Darrang.

One Yaśodhara Dvija translated a few chapters from the *Prakṛti Khaṇḍa* dealing with the legend of Manasā Devī. It was completed in 1739 (Saka era).

6. MĀRKAṆḌEYA PURĀṆA

Introductory.—Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa is considered to be one of the earliest purāṇas. "Special evidence for the great antiquity of those sections which contain the old purāṇa is found in the circumstances that in them neither Viṣṇu nor Śiva occupies a prominent place, that, on the other hand Indra and Brahman are much in the foreground and that the ancient deities of the Veda, Agni, Sūrya are glorified by hymns in a few chapters, and that a large number of Sun-myths are related."[23] The oldest part of the purāṇa, according to Pargiter may belong to the third century A.D. or even earlier.

The purāṇa actually commences with Jaimini, a pupil of Vyāsa, who approached Mārkaṇḍeya asking him for the answers

23. Winternitz—*History of Indian Literature*, p. 560.

of a few questions which the *Mahābhārata* left unanswered. Mārkaṇḍeya however did not answer these questions, but referred him to four wise birds (*dharma-pakṣī*). These four wise birds tell a series of legends in reply to Jaimini's questions. In course of their reply to questions put by Jaimini, the wise birds narrate the story of king Hariścandra, and of the noble king Vipaścit (the wise) whose mere presence in the hell releases the sinners, and of the chaste woman Anasūyā, who by the force of chastity caused the sun not to rise, and many such legends.

A work complete in itself but inserted later on into *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* is the *Devīmāhātmya* section, i.e., the glorification of the goddess Durgā. This purāṇa takes its name from the ancient sage Mārkaṇḍeya who is credited with manifesting it for the first time.

Assamese Versions:

(i) *Hariścandra Upākhyāna* by Śaṅkaradeva is the earliest translation of this purāṇa. According to biographies of Śaṅkaradeva, the translation of this episode of *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* is the earliest literary attempt of the great poet-reformer. It is difficult to assign an exact date to its composition, but it can be said with some amount of certainty that this work was composed between the last two decades of the fifteenth century and the first two decades of the sixteenth century A.D.

This episode of king Hariścandra, who being unable to fulfil his avowed promise of gift suffered endless sorrow and humiliation at the hand of Viśvāmitra, until his final salvation, has been narrated in the chapters 7 and 8. The 9th chapter of this purāṇa has narrated the fight between Vaśiṣṭha and Viśvāmitra who assuming themselves forms of a wild duck and a crane fought with great vehemence. Śaṅkaradeva has not only translated the story of Hariścandra narrated in the 7th and 8th chapters, but he appended to his work the contents of the 9th chapter also, though there is no poetical justice in introducing the narratives of that chapter. Śaṅkaradeva seems to take a wide latitude in his translation of those chapters. In depicting various incidents, situations and characters Śaṅkaradeva is seen to introduce his own elements in oder to give realistic touches. But so far as the plot development is concerned he has not introduced any new incident.

(ii) *Mārkaṇḍeya Caṇḍī* by Pītambara Kavi is another episodical translation of this purāṇa. *Pītāmbara* was a contemporary poet of Śaṅkaradeva. He composed this work in 1602 A.D. (1524 Saka) under the inspiration of Prince Samara Siṁha who is no other than Prince Śukladhvaja, popularly known as Cilārāi. Prince Śukladhvaja the patron of the poet died in 1570 A.D.; it seems, therefore, that the composition of *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* was begun by the poet sometime about the year 1570 and it could be finished after an interval of thirty years. "Pītāmbara's work is a free translation of the Sanskrit *Markaṇḍeya Caṇḍī* dealing with the episodes of the Goddess Caṇḍī's war with the demons and the destruction of the latter.[24]

(iii) The *Mārkaṇḍeya Caṇḍī* episode was translated by three more poets towards the latter half of the eighteenth century. The first and foremost of these three versions is by Rucinātha Kandali, who flourished during the reign of Rājeśvar Siṁha (1751-1749). He was sixth in descent from Ratna Kandali who lived at Nārāyaṇpura of North Lakhimpur Sub-Division. Rucinātha's father Kṛṣṇācārya established himself at Sibsagar under the patronage of king Rudra Siṁha. It is stated in one of the colophons that he translated *Kalki Puraṇa* into Assamese before he undertook the task of translating this episode of *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*.

Rucināthā takes the help of (i) *Kālika Purāṇa* (ii) *Vāmana Purāṇa*, and (iii) *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* (*Prakṛti Khaṇḍa*) to fulfil the gaps or deficiencies, in the story narrated in *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*. From *Kālikā Purāṇa* the poet has narrated the legends about the birth of the goddess Durgā, and the sacrifices of Dakṣa. From the same Purāṇa have been incorporated the legends of three incarnations of Devi, viz., Ugracaṇḍā, Bhadra-Kālī and Durgā with eighteen, sixteen and ten hands respectively, into the texture of his translation. The story of the king and the merchant narrated in *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* has been further amplified with materials from Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa. Lastly, the stories of Mahiṣāsura, Śumbha and Niśumbha and Raktabīja have been supplemented by narrations from *Vāmana Purāṇa* (chaps. 19-20).

Rucinātha's translation is literal and simple.

(iv) The next translation of *Mārkaṇḍeya Caṇḍī* goes to the credit of one Raṅganātha Chakravartī, who introduces himself as an inhabitant of Nīlācala, i.e. Kāmākhyā hill. He gives a long

24. Ms. No. 8, Cooch-Behar State Library (Bengali Section).

genealogy of his family appended to his work from which it can be gathered that Śiva Candra the ancestor of his family was a contemporary of Dharmapāla who reigned over Kāmarūpa in the twelfth century. The date of his composition cannot be definitely ascertained but the language unmistakably proves it to be of later origin. He makes a free translation of the Sanskrit texts with elucidation on certain incidents here and there. The description of the hermitage of Medhasa may be cited as an example of his elaboration.

There is one more Assamese version of the above episode by one Madhusūdana Miśra.

7. VĀMANA PURĀṆA

Introductory—The extant *Vāmana Purāṇa* according to scholars in the Upapurāṇa mentioned as such in *Kūrma* (1.1.9) and *Garuḍa Purāṇa* (1.227.19). The original *Vāmana Purāṇa* included in the list of mahāpurāṇas is perhaps lost. The text begins with an account of the incarnation of Viṣṇu as a dwarf whence it takes its name. A considerable part of the work is devoted to the descriptions of sacred places and to Śaiva and Śakta legends.

Assamese Versions—No attempt was made to translate this Purāṇa systematically. Some of its descriptions or accounts are seen to be utilised in supplementing the translations from other Purāṇas. For instance, Śaṅkaradeva introduced certain accounts of this Purāṇa into the translation of the Book VIII of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and in his *Anādi-Pātana* cosmogonical account from this Purāṇa are seen to be introduced. The only work which is supposed to be a regular translation from *Vāmana Purāṇa* is Hema Sarasvatī's *Prahlāda Carita*. Hema Sarasvatī flourished during the time of king Durlabhanārāyaṇa, who probably reigned towards the end of the fourteenth century. Hema Sarasvatī in the colophon of his *Prahalāda Carita* refers to himself and to his work in the following way:

Kamatā-purara Durlabhanārāyaṇa
nṛpavara anupāma |
tāhāna rājyata Rudra-Sarasvatī
Devayānī kanyā nāma ||
tāhāna tanaya Hema-Sarasvatī
Dhruvara anuja bhāi |
padabandhe teho pracāra karilā
Vāmana Purāṇa cāi ||

(In the kingdom of Durlabhanārāyaṇa the uncomparable king of Kamatāpura, lived one Rudra Sarasvatī, who had a daughter Devayānī and two sons, Dhruba and Hema Sarasvatī. The latter rendered into Assamese verses this episode of the *Vāmana Purāṇa*).

But in the extant version of the Sanskrit *Vāmana Purāṇa*, the account of the Man-lion incarnation of Viṣṇu and the episode of Prahlāda's early life are absent. Adventures of Prahlāda in his mature life and accounts of his pilgrimage are only to be found in the extant version. Hema Sarasvatī describes the early life of Prahlāda as tyrannized and oppressed by his own father and the subsequent death of Hiraṇyakaśipu in the encounter with the Man-lion incarnation of Viṣṇu. As the extant Sanskrit version of the *Vāmana Purāṇa* does not contain the above episode, Hema Sarasvatī must have derived his materials from the *Vāmana Purāṇa* of the mahāpurāṇa category which is irrecoverably lost.

Hema Sarasvatī's *Prahlāda Carita* is a simple narrative account, betraying archaic and early forms and expressions.

8. SKANDA PURĀṆA

Introductory—*Skanda Purāṇa* in the existing form is one of the most voluminous purāṇas. This purāṇa is named after Skanda, son of Śiva and commander of the celestial army, who is said to have narrated it. At present *Skanda Purāṇa* consists of seven *Khaṇḍas* with several sections within each *Khanda*. These seven Khaṇḍas are (1) *Maheśvara*, (2) *Viṣṇu*, (3) *Brahmā*, (4) *Kāsī*, (5) *Avantya*, (6) *Nāgara* and (7) *Prabhāsa*. Though this division of *Skanda Purāṇa* is supported by *Nāradīya Purāṇa* (1.104) its real division originally seems to have been into six *Saṃhitās* sub-divided into fifty *Khaṇḍas*. These Saṃhitās are (1) *Sanat Kumārīya*, (2) *Sūta*, (3) *Brāhmī*, (4) *Vaiṣṇāvī*, (5) *Śaṅkarī*, (6) *Saurī*. The latter division is found even in the body of the texts. But all the *Saṃhitās* are not extant today, only some of them are available still. *Skanda Purāṇa* is predominantly a Śaivite Purāṇa, though Vaiṣṇavite and Śākta elements are not negligible. Another noticeable feature of this purāṇa is the overwhelming mass of *Māhātmyas* of different holy places in India. The upper limit of the date of the present *Skanda Purāṇa* has been fixed at 700 A.D.

Assamese Versions—*Skanda Purāṇa* is not a very popular purāṇa in Assam. So far only two fragmentary translations are

known to have been done. One is a translation of *Utkala khaṇḍa,* or *Puruṣottama Kṣetra-māhātmya* belonging to *Viṣṇu Khaṇḍa,* and the other is a translation of the *Brahma Gītā,* a part of *Sūta-Saṃhitā.*

(i) Puruṣottama Kṣetra (Purī) is held by Assamese Vaiṣṇavites as the holiest of holy places. Śaṅkaradeva himself composed *Oreṣa-Varṇana,* from *Brahma Purāṇa* describing the origin of the Kṣetra. *Utkala-Khaṇḍa* also deals with the same topic. It gives an account how Indradyumna, the king of Avanti, at the bidding of the creator and with the help of Viśvakarmā carved out from a piece of sacred log, the images of Jagannātha, Balarāma and Subhadrā and finally installed them with due ceremonies. The original Sanskrit *Utkala Khaṇḍa,* in addition to the legend of the origin of Puruṣottama Kṣetra and its sacred images, describes various *māhātmyas* connected with that sacred place and ceremonies and rites to be observed on various occasions. The Assamese version has not dealt with these in detail, but greater stress is laid on the stories and legends.

The translation was done in the year 1667 A.D. by one Candracūḍa Āditya. The language of the work is slightly different from the language used by contemporary Assamese poets. A few Bengali forms are discernible, here and there, in his work.

(ii) *Brahma Gītā* by Ratnākara Miśra is a translation of the topic of the same name belonging to the second part of *Śūta Saṃhita* of *Skanda Purāṇa.* Like *Bhāgavata Gītā* it is also narrated by *Kṛṣṇa* to Arjuna. Brahma has been described here as the ultimate reality. But unlike *Brahma-Gītā* of the original Sanskrit version which has a Śaivite leaning, the Assamese version leans towards Vaiṣṇavism.

9. BṚHANNĀRADĪYA PURĀṆA

There are two purāṇas bearing the same title, *Bṛhannāradīya* and *Nāradīya* respectively. The former is called *Bṛhat* (great) in order to distinguish it from *Nāradīya,* an upapurāṇa. But though traditionally *Bṛhannāradīya* is included in the list of mahapurāṇas, it does not deserve to be counted among the major purāṇas being purely a sectarian work lacking all the characteristics of a mahapurāṇa. Śūta Ugrasravā narrates here the conversation between Nārada and Sanat Kumāra, regarding *Viṣṇu-bhakti.* Nārada appears here as the founder of *Viṣṇu-bhakti.* It describes the Vaiṣṇava feasts and ceremonies, illustrated by various legends

and contains chapters on the glorification of the Ganges, the duties of castes and *Āśramas,* the funeral rites and ceremonies, and so forth. Devotion to Viṣṇu is declared repeatedly to be the only way of salvation. It was probably written near about the 9th century A.D.

Assamese Version—The entire *Bṛhannāradīya Purāṇa* was translated into Assamese by one Bhuvaneśvara Vācaspati Miśra.[25] The poet probably an inhabitant of the Brahmaputra valley composed his work under the patronage of a Kachāri queen Candraprabhā whose husband Tāmradhvaja ruled in Khāspur (1706-1708 A.D.). The poet refers to his patron in the following lines:

Tāmradhvaja mahārāja chilā mahābhāga |
sarvaloka sadā kare yāra anurāga ||

tāna putra rājā Suradarpa mahāśaya |
Candraprabhā nāme devī tāna mātā haya ||

Kavi Vācaspati tāna vākya anusāra |
Nārādīya kathāmṛta racilā payāra ||

(There was a great king Tamradhvaja, loved by all persons. He has a noble son, king Suradarpanārāyaṇa whose mother's name is Candraprabhā. The poet Vācaspati, under her orders, has composed *Nāradīya Kathāmṛta* in Assamese verses).

Though the poet has called it *Nāradīya-Purāṇa,* it is really a translation of *Bṛhannāradīya Purāṇa* consisting of forty chapters. *Nāradīya Purāṇa* the same topics, contains one hundred and twenty-five chapters. The details of the Assamese version tally with those of *Bṛhannāradīya Purāṇa,* and not with *Nāradīya Purāṇa.*

As the work was composed far away from the centre of Assamese language and culture its diction bears slight traces of local speech.

The work was concluded during the reign of Suradarpanārāyaṇa, who ruled at Khāspur from 1708-1721 A.D. It should be remembered in this connection that Tāmradhvaja, the father of Suradarpanārāyaṇa was installed on the Kachāri throne by the Āhom monarch Rudrasiṅha, and during that period there was bound to be frequent intercourse between these two kingdoms.

25. Ms. No. 208, D.H.A.S., Gauhati.

Bhuvaneśvara Vācaspati Miśra might have gone there during this period of Āhom-Kachāri relationship.

10. DHARMA PURĀṆA

There are two purāṇas bearing the same title *Dharma Purāṇa*,[25a] of which one is called *Bṛhat-Dharma Purāṇa* or *The Great Purāṇa of the Duties*. Both of them are upapurāṇas. In the list of upapurāṇas, to be found in *Bṛhat-Dharma-purāṇa* (1.25. 19-26), both these purāṇas, i.e., *Dharma Purāṇa* and *Bṛhad-dharma Purāṇa* are mentioned. Therefore, it is erroneous to consider them as identical. Of course the same topics are considered in both the works. As the very name suggests *Dharma Purāṇa* primarily describes the various duties of a man and the merits and demerits, accruing from the observance or non-observance of those duties. The duties towards parents, preceptors, Brāhmaṇas, etc., the duties to be performed by wives and widows, the merits of performing *Śrāddha* and *Tarpaṇa*, the virtues of taking ceremonial baths, and of observing different *Vratas*, the glorification of the *Tulasī* plant and of *Rudrākṣa* beads and such other duties, observances, ceremonies are narrated in the purāṇas with appropriate legends and stories.

Assamese Versions: There are two Assamese versions of the *Dharma Purāṇa*. The first one was composed by Kavicandra Dvija in 1735 A.D. (1657 Śaka era) under the joint inspiration of Śiva Siṃha, Ambikā and Ugrasiṃha, of the Āhom royal dynasty. The following prefactory lines of the poet deserve to be quoted here:

tāhāna tanaya jyeṣṭha paṇḍita buddhita śreṣṭha
Śiva-Siṃha nāme mahīpati |
guṇavanta madhye sāra samāna nohave yāra
lāvaṇya rūpata Ratipati ||
yāra yātrā samayata sainya pada saṃsparśata
bhūmita utthita reṇucaya |
gagana laṅghiā yāi bhāskaraka lāga pāi
ḍhākia ratrīka dekhāvaya ||
bhaileka mahiṣī tāna sākṣāte Ratira thāna
svāmīra ballabhā Śānti āti |
Ambikā nāmata khyāta cetiyā vaṁśata jāta
svāmīra sevāta yāra rati ||

25a. According to Dr. R. C. Hazra *Dharma Purāna* was composed in Kamarupa and *Bṛhaddharma Purāna* was composed, later on, in Bengal. See The Gauhati University Journal, vol. VI. p. 245ff.

tāhāna tanaya bhailā Ugrā-Śiṃha nāma thailā
paṇḍitasakale śāstra cāi |
Tipāma deśara pati śiśukāle dhīramati
dekhi save ānandaka pāi ||

hena Śiva-Siṃharāi Ugrasiṃha śiśukāyi
Ambikā jananī Jagamāo |
tinio janara vāṇī śirogata kari māni
Badha nāme śobhana svabhāvo ||

rājāra sevaka bara pada Dharma Purāṇara
Karāi likhāilanta manohara |
sapta vāṇa rasa candra śaka vatsarata grantha
samāpata bhailā rucikara ||

(His (Rudrasiṃha's) eldest son king Śivasiṃha is learned and intelligent. No body is equal to him in virtue and he is as beautiful as the husband of Rati. Dusts raised by his marching soldiers envelop the sun and make the latter invisible, and then the days appear like nights. Born of the Cetia family, devoted to her husband, resembling Rati in beauty and beloved of her husband is his queen Ambikā by name. They have a son, whom the scholars, consulting scriptures, named as Ugrasiṃha. Though placed in charge of the Tipāma region even at his boyhood, everybody is pleased with his sober and dignified mien. Badha, an officer of unblemished character, respectfully carried out the joint orders of such a king Śivasiṃha, young prince Ugrasiṃha, and of queen Ambikā by having caused this *Dharma Purāṇa* to be translated into Assamese verses in the year 1657 of the Śaka era.)

The Āhom royal families newly converted into Hinduism took keen interest in the propagation and popularization of the Hindu religious ideas and beliefs. The translation of *Dharma Purāṇa* might be due to this religious zeal of the royal patrons. It is a voluminous work replete with didactic and moral stories, some of which such as the origin of the Ganges, the fight between Andhakāsura and Śiva, the quarrel of Kadru and Vinatā, the stealing of nectar by Garuḍa, etc., are to be found in many other purāṇas also. There is an interesting reference to the distribution of non-Aryan tribes in and around Assam. Garuḍa, the king of birds, devoured through mistake a Brāhmaṇa along with some *Mlecchas*. But unable to digest him he had to vomit them all out, in course of his flight through various regions of Assam:

sambudhiā vacana bulilā Garuḍaka |
sattvare bajhāyo bāpa ito brāhmaṇaka ||

bājha kariyoka ehi candālagaṇaka |
Lauhityaka madhya kari cārio diśaka ||

araṇyara madhye keho parvatara mājha |
diśe diśe karā iṭo mleccagaṇa bājha ||

piṭṛra ājñāka dhari śirogata kari |
jhāṇṭe bājh karileka thāi thāi kari ||

adhyāpio prithivīta isavaka dekhi |
śuniyoka sisavara nāma kaho lekhi ||

Guñja nāme ache yiṭo pūrva pradeśata |
nāhi dāḍhi gumpha tāra keśa sulalita ||

agni pradeśata Nagna āchaya yateka |
birala birala keśa dekhiya pratyeka ||

dakṣiṇata Kachāri Kuvāca buli yāka |
go māṃsa bhunje punu prānira hiṃsaka ||

naiṛta diśata Garo ādi samudāi |
gomaṇsa nabhaile tāra dineka nayāī ||

Vipraka badhite tāra kicu śaṃkā nāi |
paścimata Kharppara buliyā loke kay ||

pāpa hena bulisiṭo najāne janmata |
dekhile mātrake yāka buddhi have hata ||

vāyavya diśata āche Turuka yavana |
go-māṃsa bhunjiā dine santoṣita mana ||

aśvata caḍiya phure yuddhaka bicāri |
dekhi bhayāṅkara baḍhāi āche gopha dāḍi ||

uttara diśata Bhoṭa ādi mlecchagaṇa ||
parvate thākiā kare samaste bhakṣana ||

aiśanyata āche Miri, Mallaka niścai |

(Addressing Garuḍa he (Kasyapa) spoke: "Please immediately vomit out this Brāhmaṇa and also these *Candālas* along the surrounding regions of the river Lauhitya and in the hills and deep forests of the different directions." Accordingly Garuḍa immediately vomitted out all the *Mlecchas* in various places; they could be seen even to-day in this world. I am enumerating them, please listen. In the eastern region the *Guñjas,* with beautiful hair but without beards and moustaches, inhabit. In the south-east, reside the *Nagnas* with scanty hair. In the south, the *Kachāris* and *Kuvācas* live. They take beef and do violence to all kinds of creatures. In the south-western region the *Gāros* live; not a single day they can spend without beef, and they do not feel any scruple to kill even a Brāhmaṇa. In the west the *Kharpparas* reside. They do not know what is a sin, their very appearance makes one shudder. In the north-western direction the dreadful *Turukas* with long beard and war-like appearance riding on horses move in pursuit of war. Beef is their favourite meal. In the north the *Bhoṭs* and *Akās* live on mountains and eat anything and everything. The *Miris* and *Mallakas* inhabit in the north-east).

There are one or two more local references which certainly do not form parts of the original Sanskrit version. There is little that can be truly called literary or poetical in his work.

(ii) The second version is a later production. It is a work of Paraśurāma Dvija, the translator of *Viṣṇu-Purāṇa.*

11. KALKI-PURĀṆA

The deeds of Vīṣṇu in the future age at the close of the Kali-Yuga are described in *Kalki Purāṇa.*[26] The Assamese version begins with a description of the people of the Kali-Yuga illustrating their propensity towards evil doings. Viṣṇu having been informed of this by the creator, promises to take his birth towards the close of the Kali-Yuga in the house of a Brāhmaṇa to redeem the world by purging out the evils from the surface of the earth. Riding on a snow-white pony, he will destroy the *Mlecchas* (heretics) and will inaugurate a new world of peace and happiness based on virtue and truth.

This purāṇa was translated in the nineteenth century by Ghanaśyām Khārghariā Phukan (1795-1880). He was an officer of some distinction during the reign of the last Āhom monarch and in the early part of the British administration he served the latter in various capacities.

12. PURĀṆIC TRANSLATIONS OF DOUBTFUL ORIGIN

Besides the genuine translations discussed in the preceding sections, there are in Assamese a few works of various dimensions

26. The manuscript copy of the Assamese version is profusely illustrated with coloured paintings, preserved in the Library of Kamrup Anusandhana Samiti.

which claim relationship with some Sanskrit purāṇas, real or fictitious. Thus the voluminous work *Vyāsāśrama,* alleged to be written by Rāma Sarasvatī, claims as its sources the various purāṇas and Saṃhitās. The work mainly depicts various exploits of Bhīṣma of Mahābhārata fame. Those exploits are neither to be found in the great epic, nor in any of the known purāṇas. *Kurmavali-Badha* by Sāgarkharī Daivajña refers as its source to *Kumuda Purāṇa* hitherto unknown. There is a small kāvya in Assamese entitled *Kālikā Purāṇa* describing the marriage between Mahādeva and Pārvatī. It is full of secular touches, and reflects Assamese social life and habits. The skeleton of the episode might be derived from the Sanskrit *Kalikā Purāṇa,* but its treatment has nothing to do with the Sanskrit texts. Another small kāvya titled as *Agnī-Purāṇa* was written by Prince Madhunārāyaṇa, son of king Raghudeva of the eastern Koc kingdom. It describes how a living man made havoc in the land of Yamarāja. Though it has been titled as *Agni-Purāṇa,* the Sanskrit purāṇa does not contain that story. There are a few more minor works claiming relationship with some untraced and unfamiliar purāṇas. It is doubtful whether those purāṇas did ever exist.[27]

In conclusion, it would not be out of place here to refer to three versions of *Padmā-Purāṇa* which deals with the glorification and exploits of the snake-goddess Manasā. Though written in the provincial language, *Padmā-Purāṇa* has many similarities with Sanskrit purāṇas. The snake-goddess Manasā was received into the Hindu pantheon at a time when the N.I.A. languages had replaced Sanskrit as the literary medium and the practice of writing purāṇas in Sanskrit practically went out of vogue. But in spite of the fact that it is written in the local language, *Padmā-Purāṇa* is regarded by the people as any other purāṇa and its popularity is immense. These three versions of *Padmā-Purāṇa* were written by Mankara, Durgābara, and Sukavi Nārāyaṇadeva between the fifteenth and the seventeenth century of the Christian era.

27. In the Catalogue of Assamese books and manuscripts compiled by Kanaklal Barua and Ramakanta Barkakati in 1895 A.D. under the auspices of the Assamese Students' Literary Club, Calcutta, manuscript copies of a few more purāṇas are mentioned. But those have not yet come to light.

ASSAMESE VERSIONS OF THE GĪTAGOVINDA

BY

S. N. SARMA

I

The exquisitely lyrical Kāvya *Gītagovinda* of Jayadeva occupies an exalted place in the history of Sanskrit literature. Jayadeva is said to have flourished during the reign of the last Sena king Lakṣmaṇasena of Gauḍa in the latter part of the twelfth century of the Christian era. In a verse occurring in the work itself, we are informed that he was the son of Bhojadeva and Ramādevī and the name of his wife was probably Padmādevī. He was born at a place known as Kenduvilva, modern Kenduli in the district of Birbhum.

The fame of *Gītagovinda* has never been confined to the province of its origin. It has innumerable commentaries all over India and more than a dozen imitations. Not to speak of other provinces, in Assam alone, there are three Sanskrit commentaries and three Assamese versions written between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries of the Christian era. The source of its so much popularity lies in the elegance, clarity and music of its diction, as well as in the felicity and richness of its sentiments. It has for its theme the divine love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, so popular in mediaeval India, depicted in a humanised form. The following appreciation of the work by an eminent scholar of Sanskrit literature deserves to be quoted here to give an idea of its poetical merit.

"The literary form in which it is presented is extremely original. The work calls itself a Kāvya and conforms to the formal division into cantos, but in reality it goes much beyond the stereotyped Kāvya prescribed by the rhetoricians, and modern critics have found in it a lyric drama (Lassen), a pastoral (Jones), an opera (Levi) and melodrama (Pischel) and a refined Yātrā (Schroeder). As a creative work it has a form of its own, but it defies conventioal classification. Though cast in a semi-dramatic mould, the spirit is entirely lyrical; though modelled perhaps on the prototype of the popular Kṛṣṇa-Yātrā in its choral and melodramatic peculiarities, yet it is far removed from the old Yātrās

by its want of improvisation and mimetic qualities; though imbued with religious feeling, the attitude is extremely secular; though intended and still used for popular festival where simplicity and directness count, yet it possesses all the distinctive characteristics of a deliberate work of art."[1]

The popularity of the Kāvya does not entirely depend on its poetical merit, however high it might be. Its popularity may be ascribed to a considerable extent to its affinity with the subsequent vernacular poetry. It does not strictly follow the Sanskrit tradition, but bears closer resemblance to the spirit and style of Apabhraṁśa or vernacular poetry. The musical padāvalīs really conform to the vernacular manner of expression and employ rhymed moric metres. Scholars therefore consider Jayadeva's work as the precursor of "Mangala-lyrics" of the later period.[2] Though some have tried to show that *Gītagovinda* with its erotic Rādhā-motif could not impress the Vaiṣṇavas of Assam, the fact that it was translated in spite of the existence of the Rādhā-motif by a devout Vaiṣṇava like Rāma Sarasvatī, with certain modifications, speaks eloquently of its popularity. Of the three commentators, one Ratna Kandalī, is definitely known to be a follower of Śaṅkaradeva. Even in one song of *Keligopāla-Nāṭa* of Śaṅkaradeva, an echo of Jayadeva's song "*Candanacarccita nīla Kalevara....*" is audible. His *Daśāvatāra-stotra* is also very popular amongst all sects of Assamese people. In the following pages translations of *Gītagovinda* have been discussed.

The number of manuscript commentaries and versions show the great popularity of *Gītagovinda* in Assam. The first of the three versions was composed by Rāma Sarasvatī the renowned translator of the *Mahābhārata*. That *Gītagovinda* is a later composition of the poet can be ascertained from the following lines of the version itself.

pūrvata racilo pada āti anupāma
Udyogara ādyakathā bhāgavata nāma
Bhīṣmaparva nibandhilo Bhīṣmara niryāna
pāce Ghoṣa-yātrā vanaparva yāra nāma

(Before this, I composed the first part of *Udyôga-Parva* containing Hari's name; and then I composed *Bhīṣma-Parva,* after which I composed *Ghoṣa-yātrā,* named as *Vana-Parva*).

1. *History of Bengal (Dacca University)*, p. 370.
2. S. K. Sen: 'Mangala lyrics', G. U. Journal, Vol. II.

The poet's reference in his version to the patron king Dharmanārāyaṇa (1613-1629 A.D.) points to the approximate date of the composition of the version. It should be noted in this connection that Rāma Sarasvatī passed the latter part of his life in the court of Dharmanārāyaṇa. He introduces himself in his version of *Gītagovinda* as the priest and preceptor of Dharmanārāyaṇa.[3] So the date of composition of his *Gītagovinda* can safely be placed in the first quarter of the 17th century.

Rāma Sarasvatī's *Gītagovinda* is not exactly a literal translation of Jayadeva's kāvya. His version is an admixture of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and *Gītagovinda* of Jayadeva. Jayadeva's kāvya is not at all based upon *Bhāgavata Purāṇa,* rather it has got certain fundamental similarities with *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* with its Rādhā legend and exuberant development of the erotic sentiment. But the Assamese poet in order to make his Kāvya fit in well with the Vaiṣṇavism of Assam where *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* holds a supreme position, blends the Rāsa-krīḍa incident of the above Purāṇa with Jayadeva's description. The poet himself admits this in the introductory lines of his version. In the chapters 29th to 33rd of the 10th Canto of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* the Rāsa-krīḍā of Śrī-Kṛṣṇa is described. To show to what extent the story of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* has been introduced in the Assamese version a summary of the latter is given below:

Having heard the melodious note of the flute of Kṛṣṇa in an autumnal moonlit night all the Gopīs including Rādhā left their home at dead of night for Vṛndāvana. Kṛṣṇa with a view to testing their sincerity of love and devotion for him, questioned them about their errands and asked them to return home reminding them of the duties of virtuous ladies. But subsequently, having ascertained the firmness and sincerity of their love, he fulfilled their desire by performing Rāsa-krīḍā with them. Kṛṣṇa by his magical power transformed the autumnal nature of Vṛndāvana to a luxuriant vernal state. Thus while Rāsa-krīḍā was in progress Rādhā who desired Kṛṣṇa exclusively for herself, went away with two of her confidants with wounded sentiment. In the meantime Kṛṣṇa came to know of it and began to feel and pine for her. Then follows a long and detailed description of the pangs of their separation conveyed to each other through Ratnāvalī and Sukaṇṭhī, the two confidants of Rādhā. At long last they were

3. *Gītagovinda*, p. 6 (K. R. Barua edition; 1290 Bengali era); *Gitagovinda*, edited by S. N. Sarma, 1956.

united; but hardly had they realised the joy of the reunion, when the other Gopīs in quest of Kṛṣṇa scented their whereabouts. Kṛṣṇa feigning like an ordinary paramour fled to the deep forest with Rādhā. This time Rādhā's pride got the upper hand and thinking herself the favourite mistress of Kṛṣṇa began to treat him with scant courtesy. As a result Kṛṣṇa disappeared, forsaking her in a bewildered state when the other Gopīs in quest of Kṛṣṇa found her alone. Finding no clue of Kṛṣṇa they returned to the bank of the Yamunā and in an ecstasy of love for him began to imitate his actions and thereby tried to seek consolation. Kṛṣṇa realising their distress and their profound love for him appeared again.

The above story of the Assamese version is exactly similar to the incident narrated in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* speaks of autumnal and not vernal Rāsa-krīḍā as described by Jayadeva. Rāma Sarasvatī seeks to bridge this difference by taking resort to Kṛṣṇa's wonderful magical power by which he engrafted vernal beauty on the autumnal nature. In *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* the name of Rādhā does not occur at all, but mention is made of a certain Gopī with whom Kṛṣṇa disappeared from the midst of other Gopīs. Rāma Sarasvatī has assigned to this favourite Gopī the role of the Rādhā of Jayadeva. The two confidants of Rādhā acting as go-between have been named as Ratnāvalī and Sukaṇṭhī in the Assamese version. These two names also are not to be found in Jayadeva. From this account it is evident that Rāma Sarasvatī interwove the description of Jayadeva's *Gīta-govinda* into the texture of *Bhāgavata,* with additional borders of Vaiṣṇavite touches wherever necessary. The cause of introducing the *Bhāgavata* element is not far to seek. Assamese Vaiṣṇavism is conspicuous by the supreme position of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the absence of the Rādhā legend with its amorous motif. So whenever the Assamese poets had to introduce Rādhā they did it with certain modifications. As a result the character of Rādhā loses much of its prominence as found in the original Kāvya of Jayadeva. But in this attempt to change the colour of Rādhā's character, Rāma Sarasvatī has not been able to change her altogether; in many places her character as described in *Gītagovinda* or in *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* remains intact. For instance, in *Brahma-vaivarta Purāṇa* Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are described as embodiments of Prakṛti and Puruṣa and it is implict in *Gītagovinda* also. The Assamese poet also states categorically in more than one place that Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are nothing but embodiments of Prakṛti, Īśvarī, Vidyā, Bhagavatī in different places.

One of the noticeable features of Rāma Saravatī's version is the detailed description of Rāgas and Rāgiṇīs employed by Jayadeva. Jayadeva's Kāvya consists of twelve cantos divided into twenty-four songs. Rāma Sarasvatī while translating the songs into Assamese *payāra* and *tripadī* has not kept the division of Jayadeva intact. He has incorporated within each chapter two or more songs of Jayadeva. Along with the translations of the songs he describes the general characteristics of the *Rāga* employed in each song. These *Rāga-lakṣaṇas* are taken from musical treatises in Sanskrit. As specimens, the following descriptions of *Vasanta* and *Karṇāta Rāgas* placed side by side with the Assamese versions may be useful for better appreciation:

(I) Sanskrit (*Vasanta-Rāga*):

śikhaṇḍī-barhocchaya-baddha-cūḍaḥ puṣṇan pikaṁ cūta-latāṅkureṇa |
bhraman mudā vāmamanojñamūrtir-mātangamatta sa Vasanta Rāga ||

Assamese (*Vasanta Rāga*):

Vasanta rāgar śunā imata lakṣaṇa |
pramatta puruṣa goṭa dekhite śobhana |
mayūrara pucche cūḍā bāndhi manohara |
paridhāna bastra bṛkṣa pallava patrara ||
sundara subeśa mūrti gati manŏrama |
esava lakṣaṇe rāga vasanta uttama ||

(V. 59-60)

(II) Sanskrit (*Karṇāṭa Rāga*):

kṛpāṇa-pāṇi gaja-danta-patramekaṁ bahan dakṣiṇa-karṇa pure ||
saṁstuyamānaḥ suracāranoghaiḥ karṇāṭarāga śikhikan-ṭhanīlaḥ ||

Assamese (*Karnāṭa*)

nīlabarṇa puruṣara mandirā hātata |
cāri hastīdanta jvale dakhiṇa karṇata |
stuti kare devatā asura gaṇe mili |
isava lakṣaṇe karnāṭa rāga buli ||

(V. 151)

I have not given the English translation of the pieces as the Sanskrit versions are simple enough to bring out the meaning. In

some cases, as in that of *Gāndhāra* and *Mālava,* the poet in addition to those *Rāgās,* describes their families including *Rāgiṇīs* and indicates the appropriate tune and time for singing those Rāgas and Rāginīs.

In Jayadeva the erotic possibilities of the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa legend have been elaborately worked out; and the Bengali poet presents Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in a vivid background of great sensuous charm. In the Assamese version of Rāma Sarasvatī this erotic emphasis has not all been minimised although here and there Vaiṣṇavite leanings are obvious. The hero (Kṛṣṇa) and the heroine (Rādhā) are described with elaborate technical details that are to be found in Sanskrit treatises on poetics and erotics. In describing the different stages of the erotic theme towards its conclusion the Assamese poet on many occasions makes an addition to Jayadeva's erotic description. Some of these additions are his own, and others are mainly culled from Sanskrit sources. Thus while describing the places where the lovers should meet the poet gives the following description which is approximately a vernacular rendering of similar lines of Viśvanātha's *Sāhityadarpaṇa* (Chap. III):

kṣetraṁ bāṭī bhagna devālayo dūti gṛham vanam |
mālayañca śmaśānañca nadyādīnām taṭī tathā ||
evaṁ kṛtābhisārānāṁ sumścalīnāṁ vinodane |
sthānanyaṣṭau tathā dhavantācchanne kutracidāśraye ||

Gīṭagovinda (Rāma Sarasvatī):

āṭha thāi krīdā kare kāminī samasta |
śuniyoka tāhāra nirṇaya yata yata ||
khetra bhūmi bārī āru bhagṇa geha |
nirjana ghara āru araṇya biśeṣa ||
nija sthāne nadī tīre jalata namāi ||
veśyā gaṇe krīḍibāka ehi āṭha thāi ||

(V. 108-109)

Similarly while describing the mental afflictions of Rādhā in her separation, the poet incidentally narrates the conditions of women in pangs of separation. This description being absent in Jayadeva bears close resemblance to the following lines of *Nāṭya Śāstra*:

Devatānamalaṁ-kuryāt dadyā-valibhuje valiṁ |
likhet kānta prati-kritim pāṭhayet śuka sārikāḥ ||

gaṇayeccābadhi dinaṁ gītam gayettadamkitaṁ |
evamcidhabinōden nayet kāla biyoginī ||

Gīṭagovinda (Rāma Sarasvatī):

birahinī kanyā save birahara thāne |
citra karma kari tebe patiyāve mane ||
kato birahinīye devaka pūjā kari |
kato gīta gāvanta svāmīka mane dhari ||
śuka sārī parhāvanta pālatāve mane |
ehi mate kāla bañce birahinī jane ||

(V. 183-184)

In certain places the Assamese poet has supplemented the description of Jayadeva with a view to giving a complete picture. Thus he has rendered into Assamese not only the vernal beauties of nature depicted by Jayadeva but has also supplemented it by introducing an additional description showing the influence of the vernal season upon the animate and inanimate things of the world. In certain places description from *Bhāgavata* has also been translated.

It is clear from the above account that Rāma Sarasvatī's rendering of *Gītagovinda* cannot be called a literal and faithful one. He has inserted the beautiful erotic description of Jayadeva without following the order of his plot. But it should be remembered also that Rāma Sarasvatī being a devout Vaiṣṇava has not lost sight of his Vaiṣṇavite ideals. Without affecting the poetical beauty he has laid stress upon the Vaiṣṇavite ideals wherever possible.

III

After the disintegration of the Koc kingdom the centre of literary activity shifted from Koc Behār to the capital of the Āhom kingdom at Sibsagar. With the change of literary centre the traditional ideal of literature also underwent a certain change. The literary outlook of the Āhom court was to a certain extent secular. Literature predominantly of an erotic type such as *Brahmavaivarta Puraṇā, Gītagovinda, Śakuntalā* found favour with the court poets. The Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa story entered into the lyrics supposed to be composed by Rudra Siṁha and Śiva Siṁha, some of which were written in Sanskrit in imitation of Jayadeva's verses. Under the patronage of king Rudra Siṁha (1696-1714 A.D.). Rāmanārāyaṇa Cakravartī, better known as Kavirāja Cakravartī, translated *Gītagōvinda* into

Assamese verse. Kavirāja Cakravartī, introduces himself in certain places of his work as Dvijabara. Under the royal patronage of Rudra Siṁha and his son Śiva Siṁha, Kavirāja Cakravartī composed *Gītagovinda, Kṛṣṇa-janma Khaṇḍa Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa, Śaṁkhacūḍabadha-kāvya* and *Śakuntalā.*

Unlike the version of Rāma Sarasvatī, this version closely follows the original of Jayadeva. This version no doubt lacks the original flavour of Rāma Sarasvatī's version, but it is more faithful to the original. As usual, Kavirāja Cakravartī has translated the original songs and narratives in the *payāra* or *pada* metre of Assamese, without adhering strictly to the original division into cantos and songs; but he has demarcated the several songs by appropriate reference to the initial lines of each song. But the noticeable feature of the manuscript preserved in the Kāmarūpa Anusandhana Samiti, Gauhati, is that it is profusely illustrated, so much so that there is not a single folio left unillustrated. Similar paintings of the scenes depicted in *Gītagovinda* are also seen in South Rajasthan and Gujarata. The painter's name in the manuscript is not mentioned. *Śaṁkhacūḍabadha Kāvya,* by the same poet is similarly illustrated. It may be presumed therefore that the poet himself supplied the illustrations. There are a few illustrations depicting the court of King Rudra Siṁha. The paintings are not so brilliant and natural as those of *Hastīvidyārṇava* where the influence of Mughal painting is clearly discernible. The painter whoever he might have been portrays the *Rāgas* in approximate conformity with the classical precepts. There is a vignette of Jayadeva at one corner of each folio-painting; the poet, as it were, watching scenes of his imagination.

So far as the language and description of Kavirāja Cakravartī are concerned, they lack the flavour of Rāma Sarasvatī's independent outlook, but are more faithful to the original. It is impossible to retain the elegance, music and assonance of the original version in a translation, but it cannot be denied that the Assamese poet has been to a great extent successful in maintaining the spirit of the Sanskrit texts. This has been possible because of the retention of words used by Jayadeva, as far as possible.

The third version was composed by one Dharmadeva Bhaṭṭa in the year 1796 A.D. He introduces himself as the grandson of one Gopāla Bhaṭṭa (*Gopālabhaṭṭātmaja-tanaya*) in the concluding colophon of the work. The influence of Rāma Sarasvatī's version on his translation is apparent, not only in the language and description but in contents too. The introduction of *Rāsa-Krīḍā* episode from *Bhāgavata* is also a marked feature of the work and descriptive feature of Rāgas employed in the original Sanskrit text, bear close resemblance to those of Rāma Sarasvatī's version. But too much insistence on Vaiṣṇavite ideals and frequent harpings on didactive elements have reduced the literary flavour of the work. That the translator also kept before him the Sanskrit version, is evident from the original lines quoted in the beginning of every chapter and the presence of descriptive passages which could be traced back in the original version of Jayadeva only.

This version incorporates the traditional life-story of Jayadeva, according to which the great poet due to the influence of inexorable fate committed rape on his mother and killed a Brāhmaṇ and a cow in a drunken fit. Life became unbearable for him when he realised all these after the intoxication was over. To expiate the sins thus committed he went to the temple of Lord Jagannātha but was repelled by the keepers. He therefore repaired to the back of the temple and began to sing the glories of the Lord in a most heart-rending tune. Ultimately the Lord took pity on him and the entire temple with the Lord within is said to have turned back to listen. Being favoured by the Lord, he came back and became the court poet of Lakṣmaṇa Sena of Gauḍa.

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