CHAPTER-V

RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS

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I. Causes, nature and effects of the conflicts:

In the forgoing pages it has been discussed that the religious life in pre-colonial Assam before the rise of neo-Vaisnavite movement followed largely the traditions of the earlier period but showed at the same time a considerable deviation from them. The Brahmanas were still the guardians of the Hindu Society but instead of making religion a dynamic force in the life of the common people, they made it a secret lore obfuscated by elaborate ceremonialism. Man therefore sought his consolation in magic, incantation and all kinds of left handed practices. This was however, not an isolated phenomenon in Assam. Indian society, in general, was in a state of chaos till the religious reformers of the Bhakti movement gave a new orientation to the spiritual and social outlook of the people. Before the wave of the Indian Bhakti movement reached Assam, Saivism and Saktism were the dominant cults in the Brahmaputra valley.¹

Originally the tribal god Śiva continued to receive homage from both ruling families and the tribal communities. The fertility goddess worshipped by the tribal communities was accepted by the Brahmanas as Sakti since the early times as Assam had been an important centre of Sakti worship.² There are reasons to believe that the Sanskritised Kāmākhya were originally a tribal deity, Kāmakhi, or kāmalakhi of the Bodos or Kāmoi or Kāmet of the Austries.²ᵃ

The early Koch kings, including Naranayan were worshipper of Durgā. A tribal goddess called Mārāi, Hinduised as Manasā, was also worshipped in an elaborated way in some parts of the country in time of pestilence and disease. Another tribal deity Hinduised as Sitalā was Āi, the goddess of small pox, who adored with songs called Āi-nām.²ᵇ

We have already discussed earlier that the heterogenous sects and beliefs were prevailed in the Koch Kingdom during the period under study. The non-Hindu tribals

1. M. Neog; Religions of the North East, Delhi, 1984, Pp.4 ff
2. MGK. P.33.
2a. Ibid, P.38.
2b. CHAB, Pp. 443-444

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worshipped their deities and performed their religious rites according to their own ways without any interference from the royal house. Hinduisation till then was mainly confined to the ruling families or to a certain areas, usually in the neighbourhood of the capital cities. It is found that among the heterogenous sects and beliefs there were the followers of Śiva, the popular deity of the Koch Kingdom and also the entire Brahmputra Valley. Śiva was worshipped in his various forms both in tribal and Brahmanic forms. Alongside the premordial male deity, the tribes also worshipped a premordial female deity as a fertility goddess in her various forms. In the Brahmanic forms as Durgā, Pārvati, Kāli as the consort of Śiva. Besides, the traces of Vaisnavism which existed in Assam as evidenced by epigraphic references and literary sources are also found during the period of our study. It is said that Biswa Singha had patronised this cult with gift to its votaries. The sect of Tanticism a queer mixture of monistic philosophy, magic and erotics, with an admixture of Buddhist ideas, in association with Saktism was prevailed among the people. Another sect prevailing in the society was Nāthism, which is believed to be sub-sect of Saivism. The contemporary literary sources testify, to the prevalence of the sect under the Koch rulers. The worship of Guru Gorakshanātha supposed to be the progenitor of the Nātha sect of Koch Behār and its neighbouring region. There also prevailed certain other minor cults like that the worship of a snake goddess called Manasā or mārāi. She was worshipped as Bisahāri or remover of poisons among the tribes. It is to be believed that the cult of goddess Manasā developed out of both Aryan and non-Aryan beliefs on snake worship. It is discussed else where how Chilarai worshipped this goddess by reciting the mantras to get the mother of the Pādshā of Bengal recovered from a snake bit. The tribes, Hinduised or not worshipped a number of deities, both male and female. Hinduised Koches of North Bengal worshipped certain female deities like Bhāndāni, Pathāni and Tistū Bhārī (river tista) and male deities like hūdūmdeo, Rishi Kistho, Ballīādra Thākur, Grāmi, Kārtic and Mashār or Mashān etc. Apart from these, there was wide

3. DRV; VV. 131; HAG. P. 49
6. DRV, Vv. 536-527
believes in magic and incantation. The *KGC* describes how one Khahata Sannyāsi had performed certain magic rites over an effigy of Chilarai.⁸

Although, all these heterogeneous sects and beliefs were prevailed in the Koch Kingdom, the followers were co-existed peacefully without any conflicts up to the ascendance of King Naranarayan. However the Brahmanic Hinduism was in the topmost position. The Brahmanical Hinduism played a dominating role in the society. The Brahman priest attempted to consolidate and expansion of Purānic Hinduism by converting a number of ruling families to Hinduism by the way of divinization of the founders of the respective dynasties as well as by accepting and recognizing the premordial tribal god and goddesses, to the Hindu god and goddesses, which we have been discussed earlier. The rulers also allowed liberty to his subjects and never restricted nor interfered in their religious beliefs. Hence the peaceful co-existance took place among the various religious sects and beliefs throughout the Koch kingdom during the reign of its founder King Biswa Singha.

It is seen that the religious conflicts began from the later part of 15th century in the Brahmaputra Valley. When Sankaradeva preached and taught the people of the valley about his new findings on religion in the form of neo-Vaisnavism a conflict primarily began between the a section of Brahmana and Sankaradeva’s followers. The neo-Vaisnavite movement in Assam was a part of the all India Bhakti movement started by Rāmanuja in the eleventh century and a host of preachers such as Mādhavacārya, Ramānanda, Kabir, Chaitainyadeva and others. In the subsequent periods in Assam the movement was started by Sankaradeva and his followers such as Mādhavdeva, and Dāmodaradeva. Born in an aristocratic Bhuyān family of present day Nagaon District,⁹ Sankaradeva in his thought and action inherited the family background of being the ruler of a chieftdom. Besides on the fact of having a family background, he had also possessed on elitist character of the time and could very well read and write both vernacular Assamese and scholastic Sanskrit.¹⁰ By the tenet of his neo-

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10. *KGC* pp. 34 ff, *SHTN*, p.102

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Vaisnavism Sankaradeva not only tried to simplify elaborate ritualism of the contemporary Barhmanical Hinduism, but also tried to abolish Brahmanical priesthood that was then much exploiting to the people at large. Born to a similar Bhuyan family, his chief apostle Mādhavdeva was also a great scholar and well-versed in religious scriptures. The Kāyastha Bhuyan were a ruling feudal class whose power was crushed by the raising Āhoms in the upper Brahmaputra valley and in lower Brahmaputra valley by the Koch king Biswa Singha of the newly established Koch Kingdom, as well as their territories were annexed. The Bhuyans were as a whole, an elite class in the contemporary society and also economically sound. Under this circumstances, the Bhuyans were disliked by the Brahmanas who did not like to share their sacred knowledge with the Bhuyans, and feared that they would attack upon the profession of priesthood. In the Āhom kingdom they were also feared by the Āhom rulers as they suspected the neo-Vaisnavite movement a kind of attempt for political revival. Hence as a matter of fact, Sankaradeva, Mādhavdeva and their followers were considered as unfriendly by both the Āhom rulers and the Brahmana orthodox class.

Sankaradeva, however, was not much attracted to the material professions of the Bhuyans. He went out and travelled throughout the country to acquire a first hand knowledge of the Bhakti movement of India, by realising the senselessness of the existing religious systems then prevailed in the Brahmaputra valley. Spending twelve years outside at different holy places of India including that of Puri (Orissa), Sankaradeva was deeply impressed by the principles of Bhakti movement there carried on by Rāmānuja Mādhavāchārya, Rāmānanda and others. At his return to Assam about 1493 A.D. he introduced his creed of neo-Vainavism in the valley. In fact it was naturally adhering to the main principles of Bhakti which indeed, revolutionised the entire life style and religious beliefs of the people of the Brahmaputra Valley. The doctrine of Vaisnavism as propagated by Sankaradeva is well known as the doctrine of Bhakti which denotes devotion of one supreme god. That is why it is known in Assam as

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11. *Ibid.* p. 78; Daityari. ch. 15. Vv. 7-8; *SHTN.* pp. 122 ff
13. *SHTN.* p. 106; NSAS, p. 10

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Eksaraniya dharma. Since the sect derives its roots from the Bhagavata Purana it is also known as Bhagavata Dharma. The practice of the cult is simple, it involves simply the devotion to God by chanting his name called Nama, a fact which has given to it another name called Nama-Dharma. As the name Eksaraṇa implies, Sankaradeva's Vaisnavism was the religion of one's complete surrender to one Supreme God who was no other than Lord Visnu. In his sect the most favorite incarnation in which Visnu is to be worshipped is Kṛṣṇa. He is to be realised through bhakti and not by Sādhanā. Sankaradeva shows the devotion to Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Lord and the Supreme Preceptor. The most important features of Sankaradeva’s faith was that it preached against any sort of sacrifice and Idol worship. For the follower of his faith, the worship of other gods and goddesses is strictly prohibited except that of Visnu (Kṛṣṇa). There is a very popular saying in Assam about this sect which runs as — “Ek deo, ek seu, ek bine nahi keo;” meaning one God, one to be worshipped and none to be worshipped except that one. He laid much emphasis on Nāma-Kirtana or divine services in the form of prayer meaning to listen (sravana) and to recite (kirtana) with the strong interdiction of the worship of other Gods which the undivided bhakti of Visnu demanded, there was great cutting down of Brahmanical rituals to a minimum. The practice of blood sacrifice specially to Devi in her different forms, was greatly challenged by Sankaradeva. Moreover Sankardeva’s faith allowed every one irrespective of caste and creed to chant the name of Hari. Earlier this was practise only by the highborns and the intricacies of chanting Harināma was kept in secret by the Brahmanas. Sankardeva brought every one to know about this secret and allowed equal right to everybody. It is therefore composed by Mādhavadeva in his Nāṅghosā that ‘Parāma amulya ratna/harire nāmara perā,/ ati gupta svarupe āśhila/ lokak krpye hari,Sankara svarupa asi/ muda bhangi samastake

14. MGK. P. 72; CHAB. P. 448; NSAS. P. 41; SHTN. P. 362
15. Guru Charit by Rām Chāran Thākūr, Vv. 2184-2186; SHTN. pp. 108 F; NSAS. p. 26; CHAB. P. 448
16. NSAS. P. 58; CHAB. P. 448
17. KGC. P. 168; Ramcharan, Vv. 2175-2177; SHTN. P. 215
18. R.M.Nath, (ed), Bhakti Ratnakara, Shillong. 1950. ch. VII. V.1
19. KGC.P.85;Rāmcharan.Vv.2199-2200; Bhusana, Mahapurusa Sankaradeva. P. 754; Bordowā Gurucharit. Pp. 82 ff
20 Folk saying as prevelent in the social life of Assam
21. SHTN. PP. 218 ff
22. Ibid. PP. 360 ff
dila meaning Hari himself came down to earth in the incarnation of Sankardeva and distributed the wealth of Harinama to every one which was kept in secret for long by the Brahmans. This aspect of the bhakti cult was particularly disliked by the Brahman priests who feared the Sankaradeva’s bhakti would destroy the very profession of priesthood.

The social condition of that time of the Brahmaputra Valley was far from satisfactory. Dignity of man and women, specially of lower classes was not recognized, they had no honourable place in the society believing on Brahmanical Hinduism which is based on the caste system. But Sankaradeva with an all embracing religion of love, laid emphasis on the unity of Godhead and fought against caste prejudices and stressed on the equality and brotherhood. His bhakti or devotion is the way open to all irrespective of any caste barriers give the same religious hospitality to the Brahmans and the Chandala alike. He taught equality of all human beings and accepted disciples from amongst the tribesmen and the Muslims and placed them all in equal footings. Mādhavdeva in his Nāmaghosa refers to the acceptance of Nāma-dharma (Vaisnavism) by the people of Gāro, Bhutiyā, Muslim, Miri (Mising), who were still the time of Sankaradeva, lay outside the place of Hinduism. What is more interesting is that his followers usually assembled and dine together with the offerings of prasada like milk and banana and even with fried rice. It was through the Nāma-Kirtana, i.e. congergation prayer and Nāmghar (Prayerhall) that he brought the principles of mutual co-existence into a reality. This system of community prayer hall created a community feeling among the devotees and the village Nāmghar acted as a parliament and prayer hall of the village. This formed the nucleus of the moral and cultural life and brought a new orientation to the society. This practice of human equality in neo-Vaisnavite faith in the face of strict caste distinction of the spiritual plane subsequently had a profound impact on the socio-political life of the people. Hence as

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22a. Nāmaghosa. V. 100.
23. SHTN. PP. 368 ff
24. Ibid. P. 111; KGC. PP. 122, 167; NSAS. P. 63
25. KGC. P. 155; SHTN. P. 369. (The names of these bhakatas—Govinda, a Gāro; Paramānanda, a Miri; Narahari, a Āhom; Jayarāma, a Bhutiyā, Chāndsāi, a Muslim; and Bhattadeva, a Brahman. For details of them one may consult, vide, SHTN, Pp. 369 ff.)
27. Daityari. p. 751

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a matter of fact naturally affected the social status of the Brahmanas. As because upto this
time the Brahmanas had a status of superior class of men and they had unequal faith as the
only spiritual and intellectual class. To a considerable extent the social and religious life of the
Hindu was governed by the smrtis as interpreted and modified by the later digest writer of the
early medieval period. A galaxy of smrti scholars of Kāmarūpa like Dāmodara Misra,
Nilāmbaracārya, Vedacārya, Pitāmbara Siddhāntavāgisa and others who flourister between
the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries of Christian era, propounded in smrti nibandhas mainly
the rites and rituals of the Hindus, especially of the upper castes. The works of these smrti
nibandhakāras were considered authoritatives in respect of observing Brahmanical rites
and rituals in western Assam till today. The prevailing caste ladder of the period the Bhamanas
enjoyed the topmost position in the society. Hence the upper caste used to observe the
principal sacraments and purificatory rites enjoined by the smrti. The Kāmarūpa school of
smrti manuals reigned supreme till the eighteenth century. However towards the beginning of
the eighteenth century the smarta rites modified by Raghunanda Bhattacarya of Bengal, which
were adopted by a section of Brahmanas of Kāmarūpa school. It is to be noted that due to
the prevailing caste barrier the mass people could not involve themselves in any of the major
religious faiths without the intermediary service of Brahman priest or religious gurus. As a
result, the common ignorant people could not drive the pleasure of the sense of direct
participation in religious observances. This absence of the sense of direct of participation was
removed by Sankardeva by his new creed of neo-Vaisnavism introduced in the early decades
of the sixteenth century. Hence, the Brmanas soon came into conflict with the act of social
equality preached by the Vaisnava preachers.

28. S. N. Sarmāh, pp. 208, 219
29. Ibid. p. 219. (In this context we may quote, '.........a section Brahmanas due to the influence of
Krsnārām Bhattācarya alias Parbatiya Gosālīn, who as the spiritual guide of successive Āhom
rulers of the 18th century introduced the smarta rituals and codes of the Bengal schools in the
observance of religious rites by the kings, nobles and the Brahmins connected with the Āhom
administration. The same system was also introduced in worshipping deities of some temples
including the famous temple of Kāmākhya'. Vide. S. N. Sarmāh)
30. Ibid, p. 208
This was why the Brahman priests developed an environment of hatred against Sankaradeva and his followers. In upper Brahmaputra valley, i.e. in Ahom Kingdom, the Brahman priest who were gradually improving their lot under the shadow of the Ahom kings, soon instigated the rulers to act against the Vaisnava preachers who had reduced the importance of the Brahmanical rituals, lessened the caste barrier and had translated the Sanskrit sacred books into vernacular language. This one of the allegation levelled against Sankaradeva by the Brahmanas in Ahom kingdom was that he encouraged assimilation of castes without honouring the traditional distinctions.  

31. Sankaradeva’s *Ekasarana*, became an open challenge to the existing religious sects of Assam with predominantly Brahmanical and tribal biased practices.  

32. The orthodox Brahmanical priesthood, therefore, became openly hostile to Sankaradeva’s faith. Sankaradeva and his vaisnava followers therefore had to leave for shelter under King Naranarayan of Koch Behar hastily.

He found a comparatively safe protection at Patbæusi then within the Koch Kingdom of Naranarayan who was then a stunch devotee and worshipper of Devi. But he was an Aryanised tribal prince having such regard for sanskrit beamings and religious scriptures.  

34. However, Sankaradeva along with his followers did not get rid of the harrastment created by the priestly class of Brahmanas. The fact of growing popularity of the new faith immediately invited hostilities from the Brahmanic priestly class in the Koch kingdom. They could not tolerate Sankaradeva’s teaching and popularity, abused the Koch King’s ears with exaggerated accounts of Sankaradeva’s practices. The Säktas particularly got alarmed at the rapid progress made by Vaisnavism. Thus, the Säktas tried to instigate the ruling chief Naranarayan against Sankaradeva. The objections of the Säktas Bramanas lodged against

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31. *HAG. P/59; SHTN. P. 111; ABGB. P. 75*  
32. H.Barua, *Assamese Literature*, New Delhi. 1965. P. 50. (In this context we may say that even the Ahom king Rudrasimha punished a Mahanta i.e a follower of Sankaradeva when he failed to show any old scripture where in it is written that a Sudra can give sarana (initiation) to a Brahmana, while another Sudra was hacked to death for the crime of organising a Barsabahi i.e a great congregational prayer. Vide. S.I. Barua, *Comprehensive History of Assam*, Pp, 289-90; S.K.Bhuyan (ed), *Tungkhungta Buranji*, Pp, 30-31.)  
33. *Bordowa Gurucharit. PP. 90 ff; HAG. P. 59; SHTN. P. 111*  
Sankardeva may be Surmised as follows- (i) That Sankardeva being a Sudra was giving Sarana (initiation) to Bramanas which is not admitted by the Hindu Sāstras in general and that the Sarana Koumudi of Pitāmbarā Sidhāntavāgīsa; (ii) That after getting initiation the followers of Sankara denied the age old ‘Varna’dharma leading to a socio-economic chaos; (iii) that Sankara instigated only to chanting Harināma and hence denied the srāda-karma, pujā etc., leading to the starvation of the priest; (iv) that if Sankara allowed to continue in his way the number of Eksarana might rise to that a huge number who might be capable to challenge even the royal orders relating to maintenance of the society and economy.

Naranarayan himself was a devoted votary of Devi Kamakhya. It was during his reign that the existing temple of the goddess Kamakhya was completed. He also made rich endowments for the worship of the goddess. Hence the Saktas now approached Naranarayan and complained against Sankaradeva saying that he was persuading men not to worship the goddess Kamakhya. Being thus incensed by such disturbing reports from the priestly class Naranarayan became very angry and at once sent his Garmāli (policeman) to arrest the Vaisnava teacher.35 However the king’s brother Chilarai was favourably inclined towards the Vaisnavas. He was indeed a well wisher of Sankardeva. It was through his interest that Sankaradeva’s son Ramānanda was appointed to a government post. Chilarai also married Sankara’s nice Kamal Priya the daughter of Rāmārai Atā.36 Hence he became a very close relative to Sankardeva. Moreover in the meantime Chilarai got initiated to Sankardeva’s new faith.37 As a matter of fact Chilarai got alarmed at the king’s order to arrest Sankara and played secret role to save him from the royal torture. Chilarai sent immediately one Takei Mazi to bring Sankara secretly to his house before the kings man reached Sankara,38 and hence Sankara was saved from the arrest at the hands of kings Garmāli. Thus Chilarai was well ahead of Naranarayana that Sankardeva was a saintly person, with all goodness in him. So he took such a great risk, not only in protecting Sankardeva from the wrath of the

35. NN Vasu, P. 105; KGC, P. 225. (Naranarayan expressed his dissatisfaction in the following words that “Sankarā calle mo dhol siyām, hāre re dāmā bājām” meaning the skin of Sankara would be used to make a dhol (a drum) and the bones would be used to bit that drum. Vide. KGC, P. 233)
36. KGC, P. 137
37. Ibid, P. 138
crooked Pandits and Naranarayana, but also provided shelter to him in his own palace premises. Only a man of character and extraordinary personality could do such act, and that was Chilarai. Though as a “Chota Rājā” or Yuvarāj cum Dewān and commander-in-chief, Chilarai enjoyed tremendous royal authority, he was never ambitious or authoritarian. In this case he had done against the royal order to just save the life of a holy saint from the political crisis.

But Sankara’s two disciple—Narayandas and Gokulchand were arrested who were then severely tortured by the king’s order. When they were taken before the king, the two disciple began to sing the name of Hari. Being confirmed about that they were concealing where, Sankara was, the king than immediately ordered his man to put them to the severest torture. The kings man tortured them accordingly in very many ways but yet no information about Sankara could be found from them. Then they were again put infront of the king. And they were asked a number of questions about Sankara and his religion, and found that they did not approved the worship of Durgā. The king inflamed with raged and ordered them firstly to bow to the goddess. The Bhakatas (deciples) however remained obdurate, and spoke to the kings face that they worshipped Kṛṣṇa only and never band their knees before any other divinity. The king was now beside himself with rage and ordered to give them sound thrashing. Accordingly his order was carried out and they were mercilessly belaboured. Narayandas was so severely beaten that one of his arm was fractured, but still the Bhakatas behaved themselves in a dignified manner and continued to chanting the name of Hari. Being astonished at their behaviour and devotion to Hari the king ordered his men to cease torturing and to sell them to the Bhutiyās. Both of them were sold to some Bhutiyās, who however were impressed by their godliness soon released them. They were taken back again to the king by two Gar荂mali, who became converts to Sankaras faith and the prisoners were released by the royal order atlast. Very soon Sankardeva’s shelter at Chilarai’s house reached

39. Ibid. Pp. 103-105
41. Daityari. 712 ff.s
the king's ear how Chilarai manage to wrest Sankara from his doots and how he had been kept hidden in his own Pälace. Hence, one day drawing everyones attention in the royal court, the king Naranarayana commented in a loud voice:

"It is good to that my 'nonu' (brother) by befooling me has brought Sankara to his Pälace. Now it would be better if 'nonu' would send Sankara here; I also want to meet Sankara and am keen to have a good discourse with him; I have heard that he is a scholar on many sästras; has himself composed a large number of songs, bhotimās, poems and sāstras and that nobody has even been able to defeat him on his views."42 Then the king asked a guard to go and inform his brother Chilarai, the wish of the king that Sankara be sent to him. Also, nonu should clearly informed not to think that the king had any design of a different kind. As räjdoöt informed Chilarai about the kings message he reacted:

"If I recollected, what things are told me by the king himself about Sankara, my mind and heart shrining in apprehension; So, let the king send one of his dearest person to me; and only after keeping that man in my custody, I shall send Sankara to meet the king. If my brother causes any harm to Sankara, I shall then get that kings man beheaded."43

On being informed of the message of his brother the king immediately send one of his dearest person to his brother and conveyed a message through his envoy:

"I have said on oath that I shall not cause any harm to Sankara. I have heard many things said about Sankara, that he is very scholarly person. Otherwise, why so many people would accept and honour a person coming from Asom as a refugee? On the otherhand, many Pandits have termed him as an uncultured scoundrel; Therefore I have an intense desire to have a look at this person. So kindly send this person to my royal court. I desire to see him atleast ones. I have no intension to punishing in any manner. Donot be suspicious of my bonafides and send Sankara."44

43. Ibid
44. Ibid P-69

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Then Chilarai became reassured of the safety of Sankara, on hearing the assurance with a promise from the king and told the envoy that he would send Sankara to the royal court on next day. Accordingly in the next day Chilarai after keeping the King’s man in his custody sent Sankara with proper escort to see the king. And to keep him informed about the details of the meetings of the king with Sankara, he also engaged some experts cavalrymen as informers.45

Hearing about the Sankara’s visit, the king convened his royal court and summoned the complainant the Brahmanas also. When the Vaisnava reformer present at the court and approached to the throne and stopped, king Naranarayana was so much struck by his calm and peaceful appearance that he got down from his throne and asked Sankara to climb up the steps and be near to him. The royal throne was established at the top of a storied foundation.46 Sankardeva at the request of the king started climbing the steps gradually, chanting a Hymn (Totoy) to the lord Hari, which he composed and sang consisting of nine stanzas:

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\begin{align*}
Madhu \text{ dānava dārana deva baram}, \\
bora Bārija lochana chakra-dharam; \\
Dharani dhārṇa dhyeya Param, \\
ParamarthaVidyāsubha nāsakaram. & 47
\end{align*}
\]

(eglory be to the supreme God - the destroyer of demon Madhu, who is offered prayers by all other Gods, the Holder of the great lotus-like eyes, the one who holds the chakra (the flying disc), also the holder of Goverdhan mountain the God of all the gods and the destroyer of the evil designs of the crooked.)

47. KGC, Pp. 235; *Sri Sri Sankardeva*. P. 105; GCHTR, P. 70.
Being heard the hymn in a most charming way in praise of the almighty, the king was totally spellbound and simply wondered. The king welcomed him with utmost reverence, asked for a proper seat to be provided. Sankara then sang a song to the almighty again:

"Nārāyan kāhe bhakati karu terā ....."

and showered blessings on the king by chanting another hymn:

"Jaya Jaya Malla Nripati Rasa-vān.
Jākeri guna-gāna nāhike Samān" 48

(Let there be victory, glory to the wise, humourous Malla king, whose virtues and fame remain unparalled.)

King Naranarayana himself was a learned scholar from Benāras, he composed and translated the eight slokas (verse) into prose. And having been greatly impressed by the hymns of Sankara he showed that to Sankara. In compliance with the royal dietary, Sankara explained the same by giving the eternal interpretations. 49 The king was highly pleased with the explanations. It is said that at that time in the kings chamber nobody was offered a carpet or blanket to seat in front of the king. But Sankardeva was offered that honour, as because the king Naranarayan was instantaneously overpowered by the saint's radiating personality, effulgent culture manifested in the sweet measures of a sanskrit hymn and some laudatory verses. The king now wanted to know what he could do for the holy guest. Then Sankara replied that all he wanted from the king was that he should try to verify the allegations against him. This was however deferred till the next day and dismissed Sankara with kind words. In the next day the Brahmana scholars were summoned to hold a debate with Sankara. The king accordingly given opportunity to Sankara to giving grounds for his faiths in a full dress debate with the Brahman scholars, equipped with heaps of manuscripts, where Sankara was eventually rose triumphant 50 KGC mentions that in the second day the saint sung the hymn -

"Vandu govinda gopiyanamānanda." in the third day - "Hāshi Sabhāsada Karu vahu—

49. Ibid P. 236; Ibid; SHTN. P. 119  
50. Daityari. 774 ff.
Then the king highly pleased and impressed by Sankar's depth of knowledge and his saintly holy character, immediately granted him a secured place for propogation of his religion there. According to KGC Naranarayana also gifted a piece of land at Bheladung to establish a Satra which later on became known as Madhupur Satra. Here arises the question if Naranarayana did not think over the utility of the Sākta cult? or Saiva cult for continuation in his region? or Did he had been taught about the secret of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa which may be instrumental to keep the 'people and the state together'? It is said that the king now come to have so much regard for Sankardeva that he even wanted to be initiated into Vaisnavism himself but the reformers did not agree to this stating that it was not his principle to give initiation to a king. As we have mentioned somewhere earlier that the king Naranarayana was educated in Benāras the most celebrated centre of Brahmanical learnings hence he was naturally awar of the influence of Lord Jagannātha upon the subjects of Orrisan kingdom. The Orrisa kings for administrative utility declared that Lord Jagannātha was the defacto king of Orrisa and the king was his parthiva, i.e. earthly representative. This philosophy was too much useful in maintaining of peace and order as well as of the economic prosperity of the Orrisan kingdoms. Naranarayan might have the desire to be a desciple of Sankardeva for attracting the mass population and his high officials towards this creed, for its philosophy 'ek deva ek seva, ek bine nāhi keva'. If this is to accepted by the mass population, then the subjects were expected to remain submissive only to the king himself.

51. KGC. Pp. 236-238; Sri Sri Sankardeva, Pp. 105 ff.
52. DRV. V. 608; KGC. Pp. 235 ff.
53. KGC. P. 252
54. Ibid, P. 281; RāmeRām. Vv. 3755-3756.
54a. Kapileswara's Inscriptions in the temple of Lord Jagannātha shows that the king treated the deity as the Supreme Lord of Orissa and himself as representative. He used to bring to the notice of the Lord important facts relating to the administration of the kingdom. Even for granting charities or inflicting punishment the king used to seek permission of the Lord. Vide, Kapileswara's Inscription, JASB, 1893, Pp. 100-103.; Reproduced in Orissa Review, July, 2003, Article, Thākura O Thukara Rājā in Orrisa kingdom, by, J. Choudhury.
Under this circumstances having royal patronage Sankardeva and his neo-Vaisnavite school found a most secured footing in the Koch kingdom in the western Brahmaputra valley where the faith tried vigorously. But the saints did not survive long, he breathed his last in 1569 A.D. It is to be remembered although Sankardeva and his Vaisnava disciples got the absolute patronisation from the royal house of Koch kingdom to preach the new faith among the subjects, even then he had to face some confrontation of the priestly class of Brahmanas for several times. However Sankardeva won over them in every time for his depth of knowledge and his ironic personality.

Neo-Vaisnavism had many institutional aspects. The influence of which are exercising even today in the socio-cultural and religious life of the people of Assam. Satra and Nāmghar are the two major aspect as an institution of the neo-vaisnavite faith. The Satras were like Buddhist monasteries and the first Satra was established in the Āhom kingdom by Sankardeva at Bardowā in present day district of Nagaon. Later on Satras grew up at all places where Sankardeva stayed during his movement from Āhom kingdom to Koch kingdom. It was however the two great disciples of Sankardeva namely Mādhavadeva and Dāmodardeva gave a definite shape to the Satra institution in Pātbsūsi and Sundaridīyā. Moreover Mathurādāś Āta gave a fully developed form of a Satra at Barpетā. Later on after the death of Sankardeva differences of opinion arose amongst the followers particularly between the Brahmāna and the non-Brahmāna Satra followers, which gave rise of the several sub-sects or Samhatis and the large number of Satras were established in different part of the country under the banner of each sub-sects or Samhatis.

To educate the disciple in religious doctrines the satras played an important role. The satras were the centres of learning and education and guardian of religion and Morality, which also imparted spiritual education to villagers through the agency of Nāmgharas. The Nāmghara thus became the centres of religious life of the villagers which prompted their

intellectual and cultural activities. Although, the Vaisnavite movement thus was patronized by the great Koch rulers, the Brahmanic rites were not disturbed much. The annual Durgā pujā was continued at Kāmākhyā. Even Mādhavadeva paid a visit to the place of Kāmākhyā at Nilāchala with Asurāi Bhattacharya. He offered mony and other presents to the guiding panda of the sacred place. He however did not pay homage and worship on the Yonipitha. However the contents of the religious text so long confined to a selected section of the society, henceforth, came to be recited even by chandālas or untouchables. Further, as a result of its propogation blood sacrifices and other Vāmačāra practices associated with religion were greatly reduced. The English travellers Ralf Fitch, who visited Koch Behār during the reign of Naranarayan, found that the people of the capital had much abhorence to animal killing. However, in the Koch kingdom some of the rites and rituals, fairs and festivals associated with the Sāktas and Saivas viz; Durgā Pujā (without animal sacrifice) and Śivaratri attracted the mass people who not only enjoyed participating this festivals at the royal household, but also made all sorts of contribution. In fact it is found that the Koch rulers throughout their reign did not give up their traditional beliefs and practices the devotion to Śiva and Sakti (Durgā), though they fully patronise the Sankaradeva’s neo-Vaisnavism. Worship of Śiva and Durgā in their Linga or Yoni form remained popular to some extent as it was earlier. Moreover at the event of a revolt of the Koch army against a verdict of the king allowing Brahmanas to be the prist in all the temples of Koch kingdom during the reign of Naranarayan, the king had to revise his order and made it clear that the Koches and other tribal races were at their liberty to worship their own Gods and Goddess according to their own custom and tradition which admits animal sacrifice and wine. On the other hand in the temples of south bank of the Brahmaputra the daily and regular worship be done according to Brahmanical prescription. Hence it can be Surmised that the Koch rulers although offered full patronage to the spread of neo-vaisnavism, they adhered their old traditional religious beliefs themselves and showed honour and respects to the priestly class as well as the Brahminical Hinduism of Vedic customs.

56a. KGC, Pp,432-33. Daityari, V, 1212. (In this context Mādhavdeva advanced his argument for not worshpping the Yonipitha in the following words: ‘ḥeva kon pāṭiste māṭira Yonipitha’ meaning, it is most heinous sin who desires to see the genital part of his or her own mother.’) 

57. D. Nath, P. 176
II. Role played by the Koch rulers:

The rulers of the Koch kingdom during our period of study seems that they were great patrons of education, literature, music, dance, culture, art and architecture. Their rule synchronised with the introduction of the neo-Vaisnavite movement launched by Sankaradeva and his great disciple Madhabdeva and Dāmodaradeva, which opened a new chapter of cultural progress in Assam, having the active patronage from the Koch kings. The Koch kingdom as we have seen had grown up basically within the locality of both Aryan and non-aryan habitation of the lower Brahmaputra Valley. The Koche themselves even rose to the power from a tribal origin and gradually dominating the feudal and organised Bhuyans and other petty tribal chieftaims covered a vast area in the lower Brahmaputra valley which later got shape as Koch Kingdom. At the time of their rise, we have seen that the Brahmanic Hinduism was a leading religion of the valley. However the heterogeneous sects showed great inclination towards their traditional beliefs and practices as well. Majority of the tribal people were remained outside the pale of the Hinduism performed their religious rites according to their own ways without any interference from the royal house.

Brahmanical Hinduism till then was mainly confined to the ruling families or to a certain areas usually in the neighbourhood of the capital cities. Bisu the founder of Koch kingdoms as we discussed earlier had immediately after having the power accepted the Hinduism and were elevated to the status of Kshatriyas by the Brahmin priests and assumed the Hindu name Biswa Singha. He immediately after the conversion became the great patron of Hinduism. He himself worshipped Śiva and Durgā but as well as he patronised the worship of Visnu and gave gifts to Vaisnava priest and astrologers.58 It indicates that Biswa Singha followed a liberal religious policy and it does not seem that he tried to impose his own belief upon his subjects. In fact he brought the learned Brahmanas from Kanauj, Mithilā, Navadeep, guada and Benāras,59 and settled them in his kingdom to preach the Brahmanic Hinduism but never interfered the beliefs of his subjects. The Brahmanas of Kāmrīpa could not affect more

58. DRV. V. 131; HAG. P. 50; ABGB P. 41
59. ABGB. P. 41; KBI. P. 95
the peculiar customs of the Mecha and the Koch tribe.\textsuperscript{60} The people of the country, however, had grown favourable inclined towards them during the ascendancy of the Bhuyans, the influence of the Brahmanas had already spread in Kāmarup. Biswa Singha too had great regard for the Brahmanic faith. But still he clung to the time-honoured customs of his race.\textsuperscript{61} Like his father King Naranarayana also extended patronization to Brahmanic Hinduism at the very beginning of his reign but as well as followed a liberal outlook in the matter of religion. He himself honoured both the aryan and non-aryan religious customs and beliefs of his subjects. It is evident from his act taken at a time of war against the Āhoms. \textit{DRV} mentions that at his expeditions against Āhoms, Naranarayan halted at a place on the bank of the Sonkosh river where he organised all the Mech-Kachāri people and obtained their support. He then encamped at a place called Temātumāni in the present Mongoldoi sub-division where twelve groups of the tribal people submitted to the Koch king. In another place called Chandikā Behār near Bhairav-Kunda, Naranarayan ordered for construction of a temple of goddess Durgā and a hill fort. As image of goddess was installed in the temple and a Kachāri was made its priest.\textsuperscript{62} He further instructed as have been pointed elsewhere the Mechas and Koches living to the north of the Gossāin Kamal Āli to follow their tribal customs, but in the territory south of this road as far as the Brahmaputra, Brahmanic rites were to be continued.\textsuperscript{63} However, behind such acts of Naranarayan, there must certainly be a diplomatic motives, by which he not only secured the support of all the tribes of the region but also the help of some Brahmans of Nārāyanpur. His reigns also witnessed the spread of neo-Vaisnavism. During the reign of Lakshinarayan the son and successor of Naranarayan, the religious beliefs of the people of the Koch kingdom were to some extent changed. In fact after the death of Sankaradeva the Brahmana Vaisnavas of Assam grew very influential. King Lakshinarayan was initiated into Vaisnavism by Damadaradeva.\textsuperscript{64} In the Sankaradeva’s time the Āhom kings were not favourably disposed towards the vaisnavas but their descendents were initiated into this religion.

\textsuperscript{60} N. N. Vasu. P. 47
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{62} DRV. Vv, 329-334.; KBI. P. 107.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid. Vv. 336-337; Ibid
\textsuperscript{64} KBI. PP. 151-152 ; NN Vasu. P. 139

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by Gopaladeva and other Brahmana disciples of Dāmodaradeva. The Brahmanas thus became Gurus of the kings ruling the country from the eastern Assam to the further end of the Koch Behār and as such their power became very great. Though Dāmodaradeva and Gopaladeva were such followers of Sankaradeva and looked upon him as an incarnation of God, yet his Brahman followers were not disposed to show him so much honour and respect. Though all the Vaisnava sects of Assam regarded Sankaradeva, Madavdeva and Dāmodaradeva as equal, yet Dāmodara's followers have given him the highest place among the Vaisnava teachers of Assam. One of them, Krishnacharyya, the author of Santa-Charitra, has gone so far as to maintain in this work that Dāmodaradeva was one of the Sixty four disciples of Sri Chaitainya.65 With the influence of Mādhavadeva and Dāmodaradeva the neo-Vaisnavism spread vigorously throughout the Koch kingdom and as a result of which the neo-Vaisnavism got the position of almost a state religion along with the Brahmanic Hindu religion during the reign of Lakshinaraayan. Lakshinaraayan was too much inclined towards this faith that he even stop the animall offerings at the royal adoration paid to god.66 However he had the soft corner to his traditional tribal customs which is indicatd by his act of rebuilding and removation of Lularkeswar Śiva at Lularkunda, and also reorganising the worship fo Śiva at Jalpeswar Śiva temple.67 But in latter period shows that their successors were stunch follower of Saiva and Sakti. They did not even gave up their traditional customs of worshipping Śiva and Durgā and also patronised both Brahmana and Vaisnava learned personalities and were appointed as their court scholars. The worship of goddess Durgā celebrated annually at the capital in autumn with animal sacrifice, justified the discussion which is still prevalence even today and which was borrowed to the Āhom capital by king Pratāp Singha from Koch Behār.

The line of the kings of Eastern Koch Kingdom, i.e. Koch Hājo were stunch follower of Brahmanic Hinduism. King Raghudeva was vaisnava by faith, he rebuilt the Hayagriva Mādhava temple at Hājo but as well as he patronised the Brahmanic Hinduism also. His sson

65. N.N Vasu. p. 139
66. KBI. P.151
67. Ibid.
Parikshitnarayan offered his full patronage to Brahmanic Hinduism and restricted the activities of the Vaisnavite preachers. He even drove out the neo-Vaisnavite preacher Dāmodaradeva from his kingdom. Another great disciple of Sankaradeva, Mādhavdeva also had to take shelter at Koch Behār leaving Koch Häjo. Likewise Balinarayan alias Dharmanarayan was also a staunch devotee of Śiva and Devi and followed the Brahmanic Hinduism. On the other hand the mass people of the valley from eastern Assam to the further end of the Koch Behār being influenced by the neo-Vaisnavism where the Brahmāna and Chandālas were treated as equal and as well as where there were no caste distinction, accepted the new faith freely.