PART I

INTRODUCTION
The Assamese version of the Rāmāyaṇa (the inner five kāndas) by Mādhava Kandali, probably belonging to the 14th century A.D., is of much historical and cultural value. It is one of the earliest renderings of the Rāmāyaṇa in modern Indian languages. It is possibly also the earliest available specimen of distinctly Assamese literary work. Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa has influenced some of the Rāmāyaṇa writers of later times. He was an excellent poet. The greatest ever Assamese writer, Śaṅkaradeva, pays a warm and high tribute to this predecessor of his as was paid by Shakespeare to 'that noble shepherd', Christopher Marlowe. Śaṅkaradeva calls him one of the "unerring predecessor poets" (pūrva-kavi apramādī mādhva kandali ādi).\(^1\) Professor K.K. Handiqui attracted our special attention to the importance of Mādhava Kandali's vernacular version in the text-critical study of the original Rāmāyaṇa as early as in December, 1937 in his Presidential Address to the 17th Session of Asam Sāhitya-Sabhā.\(^2\) Indeed, Kandali's work can act as an effective testimonium in the matter as it is one of the earliest renderings in Modern Indo-Aryan languages.

\(^1\) Śaṅkaradeva, Ro, Uttara-kānda, p. 472; Maheswar Neog, 'Assamese Literature before Śaṅkaradeva', Aspects of Early Assamese Literature, ed. Banikanta Kakati, Gauhati, 1952

\(^2\) Bhāṣanāvalī (Asam Sāhitya-Sabhā), vol. II, p. 99
But Professor Handliqui's words scarcely inspired anybody to make a critical study of Kandali. It was again, in the form of Presidential Address to Asam Sāhitya-Sabhā that another scholar, Dr Maheswar Neog, laid special stress on the science of textual criticism as a whole and particularly in the context of a historical study of old Assamese literature.¹ He also made a special reference to the subject of study of Mādhava Kandali's text.² It is these words of the learned that have inspired me to take up the present task of critical study of the Rāmāyaṇa of Mādhava Kandali. As the Rāmāyaṇa is quite a considerable work consisting of 5,226 verses³ in the five kāṇḍas that even though I have collected the whole text from a total of twenty eight manuscripts, I am presenting here only four of the cantos, Ayodhya-, Aranya-, Kiṣkindhya- and Sundara-kāṇḍas.

In an old biographical work, Guru-carita-kathā, an important issue, involving text-critical matter, regarding Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa has been recorded. It goes on to narrate how a contemporary of Śaṅkaradeva, Ananta Kandali, set out to plagiarise Mādhava Kandali and how Śaṅkaradeva, in order to save his predecessor from the peril of

1. Sabhāpatir Abhibhāṣana, 41st Session of Asam Sāhitya-Sabhā, pp. 47-51
2. Ibid., p. 50
3. This computation is according to the printed edition of Dattabarua, Nalbari, 1952
destruction by plagiarists, in association with his disciple Madhavadeva tried to make the Ādi-kāṇḍa and the Uttara-kāṇḍa to be prefixed and suffixed to Madhava Kendall’s work, and to re-set Madhava Kendall’s text particularly by adding advice (upadesā) of bhakti at the end of different sections while this element of bhakti did not find a place in the original work of the pre-neo-Vaiṣṇava poet, Mādhava Kandali.¹

This is a serious matter from text-critical point of view, but we can scarcely expect to find a manuscript of Mādhava Kendall’s work in its pristine form, devoid of the bhakti upadesās. It is precisely for the action taken by Saṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva that Mādhava Kendall’s text came to be preserved in the archives of the neo-Vaiṣṇava establishments, called sattras, where the book would naturally be kept in its newly adopted form as approved by the guru for the prayer services.

Hitherto four different popular editions of Mādhava Kendall’s Rāmāyaṇa, furnished with Mādhavadeva’s Ādi-kāṇḍa and Saṅkaradeva’s Uttara-kāṇḍa have been printed and published. The credit of bringing out Kendall in print for the first time goes to Madhavchandra Bardalai, Sub-Divisional Officer at Barpetā, who published it from Barpetā in 1899.² In his introduction (Pātanī), he makes the

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¹ Guru-carita-kathā, ed. M. Neog, art. 234
² (Sampūrṇa) Asamīyā Sāt-kāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa, com. & ed. Madhavchandra Bardalai, Barpetā, 1899, ed. 1
statement: "This book was copied in such early times by the scribes that owing to their fault the text appears to have become corrupt in places. Moreover, all the seven kāṇḍas are never available together in one place. ... ... Even then when two manuscripts of the same kāṇḍa are compared, they vary in many places. I have depended on the best of my ability and on the help that I could get from scholars. I have tried to ascertain the original text. Even after that, the meaning of many words and lines was not clear to me, I have kept these words and lines as I found them in the manuscripts."¹ But Bardalai has not registered any variant readings, which probably means that he has arbitrated in the case of variations. He has put it in record that in the copying from manuscripts and in the preparation of the press-copy, he obtained the help of the fraternity of monks (sāmuh bēpu-sakal) of the Sundarīdyā-sattra in Barpeta.² On the whole, Bardalai's edition does not acquire the value of a critical text. Even from his statement it appears that his text is at least in places conflate reading. But this edition, published in the final year of the last century, has a unique value as commanding the text of the three consequent printed editions, brought out in the current century.

². ibid., p. xvi
Kanakchandra Sarma Kāvyatīrtha brought out the 
Rāmāyaṇa from Bebejīā (Nowgong, Assam) in 1941. ¹ Even 
though he calls the work 'edited' (sampādita), he has 
scarcely made any change in the text afforded by 
Madhavchandra Bardalai. In his preface he regrets that 
although Bardalai printed the Rāmāyaṇa 42 years back nobody 
had cared to take up the work after him. ² He says: "Even 
though help from manuscripts has been obtained, most of the 
text of the Rāmāyaṇa has been taken from the late Bardalai."³ He 
pays a homage of gratitude to Bardalai's departed soul 
on this account and admits that there are quite a few 
printing mistakes from place to place in his own edition.

Prasannalal Chaudhuri's edition followed 
Kāvyatīrtha's in the very same year.⁴ Chaudhuri offers a 
little criticism of the Kāvyatīrtha's edition in his preface 
(Prakāśākar Nivedana): "It is to be regretted that in 
Kāvyatīrtha's edition the mistakes of the late Bardalai 
persist, while printing mistakes, on the average from 5/6 
to 9 per page, have crept in."⁵ He provides quite a sizable 

¹. Rāmāyaṇa, ed. Kanakchandra Sarma Kāvyatīrtha, Bebejīā 
(Nowgong, Assam), 1941, ed. 1
². ibid., p. xivi
³. ibid., p. xv
⁴. Asamīyā Sāt-kāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa, pub. Prasannalal Chaudhuri, 
Barpetā, 1941
⁵. ibid., p. iv
list of Kanakohandra Sarma's mistakes. He points it out too that even in Bardalai there have been left many mistakes in quite a number of places and that particularly in the Laṅkā-kāṇḍa verses have been left out. Chaudhuri ascribes this to the fact that Bardalai collected his text through the bāpus (monks) of the Sundarīdiyā-sattra. Speaking about himself, he writes: "Although for the convenience of printing, I have taken the Rāmāyana text of the late Bardalai, I have compared it with manuscripts in the Barpetā-sattra, have corrected the whole thing, tried to remove the mistakes so far existing and have restored the missing verses in the Laṅkā-kāṇḍa according to these manuscripts."

Harinarayan Dattabarua, while presenting his text in 503 Śaṅkarābda (ca A.D. 1952), does not make any mention of his source, but it is clear that he has not gone beyond Madhavchandra Bardalai's printed edition and his edition appears to be just a reprint of Bardalai with slight changes in the shape of some words.

Kanakohandra Sarma, in the preface to his edition states that there is in the Calcutta University Library a printed book called Kavivara Mādhava Kandalir dvārā bhanīta

2. ibid., p. iii
3. ibid., p. iv
Adi-kāṇḍa Rāmāyana, published by Ganeshram Agarwalla in 1819 Śaka (ca A.D. 1897) but that this work does in no way differ from Mādhavadeva's Adi-kāṇḍa. In the Typical Selections from Assamese Literature (Assamiyā Sāhityar Chāneki) an excerpt supposed to be the handiwork of Mādhava Kandali, was included, but this also does not differ from Mādhavadeva's text. It is clear that Agarwalla and Hemchandra Goswami, the compiler of the Typical Selections were only confused with the name (Mādhava), found in the text and ascribed to Mādhava Kandali what was Mādhavadeva's.

In all these modern editions the orthography of the text has been mercilessly given modern form in violation of whatever structure existed in the old manuscripts and whatever such structure was germane to the period of Kandali's writing.

1. Rāmāyana, op.cit., p. xi