CHAPTER-II

Changes after Śaṅkaradeva

1. Political

In 16th century A.D. the west of old Kāmarūpa went in the hands of Koch tribes, the east corner of it became a ruling ground of Bhuyān, Kachāri, Chutiya and the Ahom Kingdoms, all of which were representation of some or other tribal communities. Koch King Nar Narāyaṇa (1540-1584 A.D.) found the neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement convenient for his expansionist policy to bring the whole of Assam under his suzerainty. The sword and the Bhāgavata, says A. Guha both served a common purpose in this time which enabled different tribes together and wield them into an integrated social order. In the pages of the Guru Carita Kathā, we find frequent mention of ‘tini-rājya, the three states prevailed at that time. The two Koch states of Koc-behar and Kāmarūpa are referred to here as Bar-dewan and Chota-dewan.81 The ruling dynasty, the Āhom and the Koch who was initially hostile and indifferent to the neo-Vaiṣṇavite concept but gradually felt the need of winning it over to their side together and wield them into an integrated social order.82 Suklengmung (1539-1552 A.D) or Gaḍgaya Raja alias ascended the Ahom throne in A.D. 1539 and made his capital at Garhgaon. During his reign, both Kachāris and Ahom were at loggerheads, leading to the subjugation of the former. With the rise of the Ahom power, the Kachāris had to eat humble pie in almost every territory held by them. During the reign of his predecessor Suhungmung (1497-1539 A.D) or

81 M. Neog (ed.), GCK, Introduction, p.146
82 A. Guha, Neo- Vaishnavism to insurgency : Peasant uprising and the crisis of feudalism in late 18th century Assam, p.8
Dihingia Raja whole of the Kachāri possession situated north of the Kalang River in Nowgong district came under the control of Ahom. In eastern side Ahoms also subjugated the Chutiyas and strong measures were taken against the Nagas and the most important achievement was shattering the backbone of the Kachāris. He placed Marangi Khowā Gohain to administer the lower valley of Dhansiri and the greater part of Nowgong district. During the reign of Suklengmung, Bhuyān chieftains occupied the Kopili valley, putting some hindrances to the process and as such they were transported to a place nearer the headquarters so that they would be under strict vigilance. The political history of Assam is full of turmoil and confusion.

In eastern Assam, Suklengmung was succeeded by Sukhāmpha or Khora (1552-1603 A.D) and fresh invasions from the west started under the Koches. The Koch general Chilari himself took the field and defeated the Ahom when the King fled to Charāikhurang in Namrup. The Ahoms acknowledged Koch supremacy with cession of considerable territory in the north bank. The Koch King Nar Nārāyaṇa realized the need of resuming the older friendship with the Ahom then under Sukhāmpha. However, Naranārāyaṇa following a defeat with Padshah of Gaur advocated a policy of friendship with the Ahoms mainly to avert further attack of the alien force. The political primacy was shifted from the Koches to the Ahom, who were fast becoming the strongest in the Brahmaputra valley by their conquests. In the east the Ahom established their empire in firm footing and had many civil wars with the local tribes and other minor powers that they ultimately subjugated. The Ahom dynasty went through many internal disturbances and external invasions too. For one, the Ahom rulers had to involve in wars against the mighty Mughals from time to time. As they grew in power and extended their territory

83 E. A. Gait, *A History of Assam*, p.96

(34)
westwards the place the entire territory came to be known as Assam after the name of the ruling tribe Ahom. Founded their dynastic role under the great kings like Pratap Simha, the political power of the Koch was receding rapidly in the western part of the land.

The Koch power weakened from hostile contact with the Muhammadens of Bengal and as the *Ain-i-Akbari* has its Naranārāyana made a demonstration of submission to Akbar by the offer of 54 elephants and other valuable presents. In the course of second expedition against the Gauḍa, a neighbouring kingdom Chilarai had a severe attack of small pox that died in A.D. 1571. Soon after this Raghudeva, Chilarai’s son rose in revolt against Naranārāyana and the old kingdom got divided into two in A.D 1581. The *Guru Carita* refer to this bifurcation as Behar and Kāmarūpa, while Muhammadan writers call them Koch Behar and Koch Hajo. From this time onwards, Assam’s political relations with the Mughals began through Koch Bihar. Mutual interest between the Koche and Mughal played a major role in drawing them together. The division of Koch Kingdom prepared ground for foreign invasion. On account of mutual ill-will and rivalries, both of them sought foreign intervention. If the weak western state or Koch Bihar turned to the Mughals in the west for help the comparatively stronger eastern state, Kāmarūpa sought allies in the east i.e. Ahoms. Finally both became prey of Mughal aggression. The quarrel between Naranārāyana’s son Lakshminārāyana (A.D. 1584-1622) and Raghudeva’s son Parikshit Nārāyana (1603-1613 A.D.) led to the invasion of Navab of Decca in A.D 1612 and its annexation to Delhi Badshah in A.D. 1616 as far as Barnadi. Parikshit’s brother Balinārāyana (1615-1637 A.D.) fled to the

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84 M. Neog, *SHT.*, p.62
85 H.K. Barpujari (ed.), *CHA*, vol. II., p p.95-96
Ahom territory and was cordially received by the Ahom king Susengpha or Pratap Simha (1603-1641 A.D). The independent rule of the Eastern branch of the Koch dynasty came to an end with the death of Balinarayana in 1637 A.D. The status of his successors was gradually reduced to that of a Zamidar. Later on, Bengal army was signally defeated and Balinarayana was installed by the victorious Ahoms as tributary Raja of Darrang with the title Dharmanarayana. In Ahom Kingdom Pratap Simha was succeeded by Surampha or Bhaga Raja (1641-1644 A.D) and Sutyinpha or Nariya Raja (1644-1648 A.D). Their periods were uneventful.

2. Religious

The History of Assam Vaiṣṇavism is one of many conflicts and incidents of persecutions. Renaissance which had the beginning in the activities of Śaṅkaradeva has wrought itself fulfilment in many ways.

In Assam, Śaivism and Śaktism exerted their influence upon the Tibeto-Burman people to a great extent which continued and remained even to the Śaṅkarite period. Śaivism from the earliest time has been a dominant cult. Some of the oldest Siva temple was Kedareswar temple at Hajo, Sukreswar temple and Umanada temple at Guwahati. Śaktism remains a prominent cult of Assam prior to the emergence of Śaṅkaradeva, and after him it regained most of its valour as earlier. Assam had been a place of various non-Aryan tribes where matriarchy reigned supreme and full of female deities who were referred to as ‘Kairataja’. Goddess Kāmakhyā has been the most dominating deity in

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86 Gait, op.cit., p.345
87 ibid.
88 "siddhesi yogini pithe dharmah kairatajah matah"-Yogini Tantra (2/9/13)
the religious history of the region from at least 12th century A.D.; if not earlier.\textsuperscript{89} The name of Kāmākhya finds mention for the first time in the \textit{Kālikā Purāṇa}. The \textit{Yogini Tantra} goes on saying ‘\textit{anyatra birala Devi Kāmarūpe grhe grhe}’ (v.2/2/60). Śaṅkaradeva, the great antagonist of Śakṭism himself was born in a family that had a long Śaiva–Śaktī tradition. In the house of Śaṅkaradeva’s father a stone image of Caṇḍī was installed and found to be worshipped by Kusumvara.\textsuperscript{90} His great grandfather Caṇḍīvara was given the title Devīdāsa by king Durlabhanarayan (14th century) for his deep devotion to goddess Caṇḍī.\textsuperscript{91}

Same was the case with Koch, Chutiya and Kachāris ruling at that time who were true devotees of Śakṭism and mother goddess. Among other smaller cults which have been prevalent in Assam during and after Śaṅkaradeva, the worship of snake goddess \textit{Manasā}, who is considered as a manifestation of Śakṭi was also very popular in Western Assam.

The orthodox cult of neo-Vaiṣṇavism has witnessed several changes following the death of Śaṅkaradeva. After him the principal and most trusted disciple Mādhavadeva was nominated as the head of the pantheon. Following the principles of the Orthodox pantheon he carried on the proselyting activities as well as the cultural tradition. The patronage extended by Koch King Laksminārāyaṇa helped a great deal in furthering the cause of the faith under their dominion.\textsuperscript{92} Meanwhile Śaṅkaradeva’s Brāhmaṇ disciple Dāmodara, seceding from the original order remodelled his institution

\textsuperscript{89} G. Adhikary, \textit{History of the Temples of Kamrup and their management}, p.24
\textsuperscript{90} U.C. Lekharu (ed.), \textit{KGC}, p.20
\textsuperscript{91} M. Neog, \textit{Purani Asomiya samajaru Samskriti}, p.18
\textsuperscript{92} S. N. Sarma, \textit{NVMSIA}, p.32
at Patbausī near Barpeṭā with the support of Brahmana followers. Vaikunṭhanāṭha Bhatta Deva introduced many Brāhmanical rites and ceremonies who also replaced Holy Scriptures and installed image of Viṣṇu with other paraphernalia of worship. Thus, schism started within the neo-Vaiṣṇavism. Over a slight difference in practice with the original cult; Mādhavadeva also started his own school Nikā sanhāti, a rigorous in nature. Like Śaṅkaradeva his two successors, Mādhavadeva and Dāmodaradeva, heads of Nikā and Brahma sanhātis had to face persecutions in the hands of the eastern Koch Kings Raghu Dev (1581-1603 A.D) and Parikshit Nārāyaṇa(1603-1613 A.D). Both were expelled from their territory for their alleged revolutionary religious ideas and beliefs. In the face of great odds and opposition from the Buddhist Trantric preachers of Eastern Assam, Varṇṣīgopāladeva who expanded Brahma Sanhāti succeeded in establishing a large number of Vaiṣṇava sattras, first at Kalabari and then at Kuruābāhī. Gopāladeva, of Bhowānipura, a devout follower Mādhavadeva at last disagreed with his master on ideological principles started a separate school called Kāla sanhāti at Kaljhar, near Barpeṭā, which characterized by catholicity and democratic outlook and freedom from the tyranny of creeds. Aniruddha Bhuyan (1553-1626 A.D), a nephew of Śaṅkaradeva and the leader of the Mâyāmarā was the main preceptor. The Mâyāmarā group particularly thrived and acquired

94 Daityari Ṭhākur’s Śaṅkaradeva Mādhavadeva Carita, pp.347-359 quoted in S.N. Sarma, op. cit., p.249
95 The Cultural Heritage of India, p.208
96 The Mâyāmarāyas were notable for their fanatical devotion to their gurus and uncommon exclusiveness in their observances of rituals. Mayāmarā Gosāins were looked upon with jealously and suspicion by the Ahom monarchs right up from the times of Pratap Simha (1603-1641 A.D) down to the last days of the Ahom rule which made the laity into a war like race.
large followings in north eastern part of Assam with their predominately Tibeto-Burmese population and reclaimed large scale of people from animistic practices.

Sattras of Brahma samhati received a remarkable boost when the Ahom kings came forward to receive initiation from the Vaisnāvite preceptors.

After Mādhatavadeva, Rāmacaran, his sister’s son and Mathuradāsa were left in charge of the sattrā built at Sundaridīyā and in Barpeṭā. It was Jayadhavaja Sinha (1643-1663 A.D.) who first accepted Hinduism formally by taking initiation from Niranjana-deva, who has been installed as the first Vaisnava abbot of Āuniṭī sattrā and from Vaṇamālī-deva, abbot of Vaisnava sattrā of Dakṣināṭa. Some Ahom nobles followed the example of the king and thus paved the way for an interaction. The patronage offered by Naranārāyaṇa and Chilarai in Koch kingdom helped the order to sustain itself a great deal. During the life time of Mādhatavadeva, Lakshminārāyaṇa recognized his creed as state religion. But very soon the heyday of Vaisnāvism and patronage began to decline when their successor and descendant Prānārāyaṇa and some later Koch kings became harsh to Vaisnava leaders under his territory. It led to the activities of the second generations of Vaisnava leaders like Badula Padma Āṭā, Vaiṣṇīgopālī-deva and Yadumāṇī-deva descended towards Ahom territory.

The popular belief in the teaching of the cult called Vaiṣṇavism, an esoteric form of Buddhism could not be extricated from Assam even after the long lasting wave of reformation movement. During early period it could not be extricated totally and

Oppression and persecution over the Māyamaṛa Gosāins and their disciples ultimately drove them to an open rebellion from 1770-1795 A.D. For details see S.N Sarma, NVMSIA, pp.119-125

97 M. Neog (ed.) GCK, Introduction, p.158

98 ibid.
remained in one form or other. There are reasons to suspect the influence of esoteric sects upon the religious sects, such as *Sahajiyā, Digambari, Rātikhuā, Gopi-dharā* etc. Many of its critics say that the neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement was a reformist one only at the ideological level. It is to be noted that with all their forceful utterances against Tantricism, the neo-Vaiṣṇavite reformers could not root out the Tantrik rites and rituals from some areas. This was mainly because of the failure of the latter group of preceptors who got divided into four *samhati* and failed at total detribalization. In this context, Ananta Kandali, a Brāhmaṇa disciple of Śaṅkaradeva described how some conceited Vaiṣṇava were airing their various doctrines. Śaṅkaradeva himself cautioned his disciples against such doctrines. They read and listen to the Gīta and the Bhāgavata day and night. But in secret, they worshiped other gods. In his life time, Śaṅkaradeva himself, with all his teachings of love and humility, showed explicit contempt towards them and referred to the people who practiced such rites as demons and great fools etc. With the propagation of neo-Vaiṣṇavism the debased Buddhism or Tantricism of Vajrayana form almost lost its ground.

Practice of Śaivism among ethnic tribes and among some other followers of Vaiṣṇavas continues as it earlier. Several temples and places assigned to worshipping of Siva have been mentioned by the *KP* and the *Yogini Tantra*. Some of the famous Siva temples of Assam are Kedereswara (Hajo) Singari (Gopeswar), Biswanath, Negheriting and Dubi where Śiva is worshipped in Bhogi and Yogi Forms. The race of Koch

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100 Kapata vaisnava kato ase nāmamātra Rātri dine padesune gīta, Bhāgavata
Gupta kari kare anya devaka pujana nāhi sito vaisnava jāniba sadhāna
(Śrīmadbhāgavata, Book-VI- v. 5826)
101 H. K. Barpujari (ed.), *CHA*, vol. III, pp.241-242
102 S.N. Sarma, *op. cit.*, p.5
kings beginning with Viswa Sirhha was sought to be reclaimed to Śaivism by calling
him progeny of Siva.\footnote{M. Neog (ed.), op. cit., p 150} Reference of worshipping of Siva by Koch people by
sacrificing ducks, pigeons, pigs, buffalos, cocks, goats and by offering wine and cooked
rice are found in different accounts. In such occasion the priest of the ritual, the
Deodhani danced to the rhythmic beating of the Mādl.\footnote{N. N. Vasu (ed.), Social History of Kāmarūpa, vol. II , pp 61-62}

Among other smaller cults, worship of serpent deity, goddess Manasa was
prevalent mostly in districts of Goalpara, Kamrup and Mangaladoi subdivision. The
worship of snake goddess is considered as another popular form of manifestation of
śakti. The Hindu month Śrāvṇa is considered the best for performance of the worship
of Manasa where Ojā-pāli and Deodhani nṛtya are essential part.\footnote{Manasa Kavya (ed.), Preface, p.17}

The neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement after passing away of Mādhavadeva during this
period can be more appropriately called sattra Vaiṣṇavism.\footnote{S.N. Sarma, op. cit., p.33} According to S.N. Sarma
the most important development of this period was the expansion of different groups of
sattras with its projecting branch nām-ghar in every village which carried the torch of
Vaiṣṇavism to every household in Assam within two hundred years of the advent of
Śaṅkaradeva.\footnote{ibid., p.30}

3. Economic

\footnote{103 M. Neog (ed.), op. cit., p 150}
\footnote{104 N. N. Vasu (ed.), Social History of Kāmarūpa, vol. II , pp 61-62}
\footnote{105 Manasa Kavya (ed.), Preface, p.17}
\footnote{106 S.N. Sarma, op. cit., p.33}
\footnote{107 ibid., p.30}
Pre-colonial Assam in 16th century A.D. was, as it today, a peasant’s land per
excellence. The existence of a strong and well organised central authority put up by
the Ahom kings contributed a lot to make the country rich and self-sufficient. The
economy of Assam was mainly rural cum agricultural and villages were largely self-
sufficient. Each village was self-sufficient, in the sense that it contained men of
different castes and professions. Hiuen Tsang in the long distance of 7th century A.D.
wrote that the land lies low but is rich and regularly cultivated. It seems to be true
even in the 16th century A.D. also. After passing away of Śaṅkaradeva a monastic nature
properly emerged in the functioning of the sattra institutions when certain new elements
introduced to the village life of Assam. Villagers obliged to show their allegiance both
to the king and the head of the sattra, the guru. In the meantime he was to work with the
rigorous of the Paik system; and was to give his manual service to the state and a
religious tax to the guru. As there was little circulation of money at that time the
paiks usually paid their dues in kinds in the form of produce or personal labour. From
this period Ahom monarchs made considerable revenue free grants of land to religious
and charitable purposes which are classified into three categories i) Brahmottara ii)
Dharmottara and iii) Devottara. All the lands were divided into divisions, such as Rupit,
Patit, (fallow), Bāotalī, Bastī (land for house), Pharingati or Tangāni (dry land), Jalāh
(low land filled with water).

108 S. L. Baruah, Comprehensive History of Assam, p. 431
109 Samuel Beal, The Life of Hiuen-Tsang, BK. II. p.404
110 Ibid
111 A.K. Dutta, Maniram Dewān and The Contemporary Assamese Society, p.29
112 W. Robinson, A Descriptive Account of Assam, pp.202-207
GCK refers various professional classes of that time. Population groups were Dvaiväja or astrologer, the snake charmer or Jogī, Bej-Sajaliyā or medicine men, the Banīyā or goldsmith cum Silversmith, Kumar, Potter using the wheel and the Hirā, (a kind of potter), the Camār (Cobbler) , the Kamār (blacksmith) , the Mukhi burning shells for lime, the māch-mariyā (fisherman), the dhobā (washer man), the Teḷi (Oilmen), the Silk rearer or Jogī (Kātani), the Tānti (weaver), some working the bānac or place meal payment, Hāṭīghāhi, (fodder gather for elephants), the Ghorāghāhi (fodder gatherer for horses), the Māhout (elephant keeper), the Baḍhoi (Carpenter), the Pahārī (woman shopkeeper), the Duniyā (reaper), Bar-Dhuliyā (drummer) etc.113 Some of the professional guilds of the prevailing time were Kherkatiyā, the Mājī (boatmen), the Jāloā (fisherman), the Dorjī (tailor). In Koc-Behar the following professions called dokani, (shopkeeper), mahaliya and Sadāgar (traders), natas and bhats (professional musicians).114 The Muhammadan and Chinese travellers record various types of sills available in Assam viz., Pat, Endi and Muga.115 The cultivation of mulberry silk worms was a monopoly of the community known as Kätani or Jugī.116 Names of various professional classes of that period can be gleaned from pages of Caritas of the neo-Vaiṣṇavite saints. GCK refers to various kar or duties like jālkar, (taxes on fishing) hātkar, (market tax) ghāi-kar, (tax collected at river post) and dān, sales etc.

The Ahom and Koc states minted their own coins, Nārāyaṇī the Koc coin, were well circulated over the Ahom territory also. Cowries formed the small currency.

113 M. Neog (ed.), op. cit., p.147
114 Ibid. p.148
115 Gait, op. cit., p.271
116 W. Robinson, op. cit., p.234
However in general barter system was prevalent as commodities of daily use could readily exchange for each other. Some contemporary sources eloquently speak about evidence of cultivation of rice of three main varieties Śāli, Bāo and Āhu. Rice both summer and winter, mustard, pulses mātimāh, magumāh, kalāmāh, ginger, turmeric, onion, garlic, banana, betel nut, sugarcane were some of the chief agriculture products.\textsuperscript{117} Coming from Ālipukhurī, Śaṅkaradeva raised the first nucleus of a sattra at Bardowā in a mustard field of Kuśumvara, his father.\textsuperscript{118}

Although there were no big projects of irrigations yet it cannot be said that the people were quite ignorant about it. While Śaṅkaradeva found people living by Tembuwānī stream of Bardowā, was troubled by the surcharging water he once constructed a dam across it.\textsuperscript{119} Mention of some of the professional castes (vr̥tiya), Baniyās, or goldsmiths, the Suras or carpenters, the Camrakāras, the Candalas, the Kumārs, the Kumbhakāras, and the Nats are frequently found in different accounts. Among the earlier group of followers of Vaiśṇavism, Kamalāpati and Kṛṣṇa were oilmen, Haridasa was a baniya. Other such professions were Marals, Kamaras, Camāras, Hirās, Kumārs, Candalas or Carāls.\textsuperscript{120} Before joining formally in the movement, Nārāyan das alias Bhabananda was a trader, Mathurā dāsa worked as the head of the weaver’s guild; Dāmodaradeva had twelve apostles of weavers.\textsuperscript{121} Some people are engaged in Kāyasthikā or Kāitheli vidyā which includes book keeping, accounts and writing. Boatmen, fuel sellers, alkali sellers and Khariāys were some other

\textsuperscript{117} F. Hamilton, \textit{An Account of Assam.}, p.58
\textsuperscript{118} U.C. Lekharu, (ed.) \textit{op cit.}, p.38
\textsuperscript{119} \textit{Ibid.}, p.38
\textsuperscript{120} M. Neog, \textit{SHT}, p.76
\textsuperscript{121} \textit{Ibid}, p.9
professions who were not included under these castes. In latter period, we come across some devotees belonging to professional classes like Barbar, Goldsmith, Cobbler, Astrologer, milk-man and Cowman among the associates' bhokatas of Lakṣhmīdeva Ātā of Narowā sattra. Amongst them Madhu and Jināram were Barbar, Manuram and descendants of Kendāi Pathak Bora belonged to washer-men, Ghanashyam and Gaṅak Ātoi belonged to goldsmiths and astrologer respectively. In the Bhakat-mālā of Bālīsattrā we find names of two Śīc, (Harivallabva and Sarbāi) belonging to the professional community of Sonāri (Goldsmith). The entire Ahom Kingdom was looked upon as something like a paradise for merchants where all valuable commodities could be procured at low prices. Traders generally used boats and river Brāhmaputra and its tributaries which afforded cheap and convenient routes. KGC refers to some preceptors involved in trades like Mādhavadēva and Bhavnānanda who carried out their trading activity in some areas of Kāmarūpa, Asama, Gaḍgāon and Baṇḍukā. Certain inscriptions of Ahom period provide us a list of commodities like rice, ghee, oil, and pulse in worshipping in different temples of Assam. Currency was though not unknown, the traders of Assam exchanged mainly by Barter system. Exchange was made for Silk, Lac, muga cloth, Pepper, Cotton, ivory, bell metal, vessels, mustard seeds etc. with salt, ghee, sugar, jewels, glassware and Copper etc. E.T. Dalton in his note gives an account of the sattra economy prevailing in 19th century Assam. In western Assam, members of the Puruṣa and Nikā sanhāti sects,
Dalton writes, were mostly traders cum cultivators. Their boats laden with agricultural produce, pottery, etc. were to be found every creek of Assam and as far down as Sirajganj.\textsuperscript{128}

4. Expansion of Sattra institutions and development of Samhati

The later phase of neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement is full of references to the development of Samhati, which is synonymous to another word schism.\textsuperscript{129}

The word is most frequently used about religious divisions that occur with a religious body with a defined organization and hierarchy is schism.\textsuperscript{130} The term sanghati or samhati or samhati was employed in the sense of groups of Assam Vaiṣṇavism of the schism of the order. In early biographies the division was never termed as Sampradāya or simply Sampradā instead of samhati.\textsuperscript{131} Dāmodardeva, (1489-1598 A.D) upon whom Śaṅkaradeva entrusted to initiate Brāhmaṇ disciples, administered the first schism. According to some accounts, Śaṅkaradeva before setting out his second pilgrimage asked Dāmodara to manage the sattra ceremonials and to

\textsuperscript{128} E.T Dalton, ‘Mahapurushiyas’, a sect of Vaishnavas in Assam’, Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1850, Calcutta, pp.455-469


\textsuperscript{130} The word schism (from the Greek skhisisma, from skhizo, ‘to tear, to split’), that occurred soon after passing away of Šaṅkaradeva means a division or a split, usually in the original order or organization.

\textsuperscript{131} K. D. Goswami, op. cit., p.35.
initiate persons specially Brahmans to the faith. One day Śaṅkara-deva said to him, 'you please begin initiating Brahmans, nobles and kings without any difference,' to this Dāmodara replied: you are burdening me with a noble responsibility when your own self is present.\textsuperscript{132} It is a possibility after Śaṅkara's return that Dāmodara established the first sattra at Pāṭhausī on his own. Immediately after the death of Śaṅkara-deva, Dāmodara-deva and Harideva (1489-1598 A.D.) who had so long been cooperating with Śaṅkara-deva seceded from the orthodox section led by Mādhava-deva. They are said to have declared independence and separate identities of their own which is not borne out by the \textit{Carita puthies} of Śaṅkara-deva as well as those of Dāmodara-deva and Harideva.\textsuperscript{133} The first schism was more important as it ultimately divided the house into two distinct groups. It was the rejection of communion with the authorities of the main order, and this term has historically been applied to the break when there was no dispute about doctrine. During the first break no dispute occurred about the original doctrine of neo-Vaiṣṇavism propounded by Śaṅkara-deva. The main cause of discontent that led to the schism was Dāmodara being one of the principal followers naturally expected to succeed Śaṅkara-deva to the pontifical position in the Vaiṣṇava order. But when this expectation was belied by the nomination of Mādhava-deva; he found it difficult to regard him. He considered Mādhava as an erstwhile colleague not as his superior. However it was not a solitary event that marked the breakdown. Some other factors relating to this is found in the biographies of both the gurus. It is narrated in \textit{guru-Carita} that Dāmodara-deva did some modifications to accommodate smārtta rituals in the Vaiṣṇavism and even accepted his fold a few persons who were expelled from the

\textsuperscript{132} \textit{Dāmodara Carita}, p 71 , as quoted in S N. Sarma, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 102

\textsuperscript{133} \textit{CHA}, vol. III, 2nd ed., p.239
order by Mādhavadeva. When Mādhavadeva called for an explanation, Dāmodaradeva is said to have replied ‘though I have deviated from the original preaching of Bhāgavata, I consider Bhāgavata to be more authoritative than Śaṅkaradeva. Further I do not owe any explanation to you (Mādhavadeva) as I am not a member of your order’.¹³⁴ Dāmodara’s refusal to attend the śrāddha ceremony disowning Mādhava’s leadership strained the relations further between him and the followers of the orthodox order. Daityāri Ṭhākur’s Carita narrates another episode, which said to be helpful in creating a gulf between the early apostles. It says after the passing away of Śaṅkaradeva, Haricaraṇa refused to accept the financial aid offered by Dāmodara when he said that the sarana (initiation) system of Dāmodara had some way different from that of Śaṅkaradeva. Mādhavadeva being an ardent follower of Śaṅkaradeva simply sacked him from the order. However, it can be gauged that owing to the critical socio-political situation of that period Dāmodara might have slightly altered his path of devotion. It is said Dāmodara could clearly see that the wholesale abolition of Brāhmanical rites and rituals would not only estrange the sympathy of the Brāhmans but the opponents of the Bhakti movement would make a capital of it by interpreting the movement as a revolt against the Vedas.¹³⁵ This modification helped in gearing up the proselytising activities of the new order with growing number of Brahmin disciples and setting up good number of sattras. The total number of sattras affiliated to the sub-sects of Dāmodara, known as Brahma Sanhathi exceeds one hundred in the entire Brahmaputra valley and the number of disciples is larger than that of any other sub-sects. According to some scholars, earliest apostles of Brahma sanhathi, one of the

¹³⁴ Rāmacarana Thakur’s Śaṅkara Carita, p. 305. Daityāri Śaṅkaradeva Mādhavadeva Carita, p.299, KGC., p 229
¹³⁵ S N. Sarma, op.cit., p.p.103-104
largest denominations in neo-Vaiṣṇavism, found it difficult to believe that Śaṅkaradeva 
divinely ordained Mādhavadeva as his successor. The debate and controversy as to what 
if any arrangements Śaṅkaradeva made for a successor have continued to this day. 
Nilakantha, the biographer of Dāmodara says that Mādhavadeva performed the śrāddha 
ceremony of Śaṅkaradeva at Rangiyāl-ghar of Barpeṭā with Ramānanda. Dāmodaradeva 
separately performed the same with Haricarana at Pāṭhaṭāi, where Śaṅkaradeva’s family 
was living. So the controversy relating to the śrāddha ceremony should not be taken 
into account as a matter of disregard of Dāmodara. It is evidently related with the 
customs of śrāddha ceremony only. If he was free from any spiritual tie with 
Śaṅkaradeva, then why did he perform the death anniversary? However, it can be 
safely concluded why Śaṅkaradeva nominated Mādhavadeva as his successor, instead of 
nominating one of his sons or a Brāhmaṇ disciple. The spiritual accomplishment, 
personality, organising zeal and skill that the Master observed on him prompted to take 
the decision. Besides, Mādhavadeva was acknowledged as the second in rank in the 
order while Śaṅkaradeva was alive.

KGC narrates an event of Śaṅkaradeva’s time which indicates the future division 
of the religion. It says that ‘one day when Puruṣottam, the grand child of Śaṅkara tore 
up leaves of Daśama into three pieces, he asked Mādhava why the baby (parama-
brāhma) did so? While Mādhava could not reply properly; Śaṅkaradeva explained the

126 Sri Sri Damodara Devar Carita of Nilakantha (ed.), v.v., 457-464
137 Bapchandra Mahanta, op. cit., p.141
133 S. N. Sarma, op. cit., p. 103

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matter thus- 'after our departure; our religion would be divided into three pantheons—niguna (brahmaghati), kewala (nikaghati) and bhagawati (kalaghati).

Santa Sampradāya, a work of Govinda Dāsa composed during the reign of King Rudra Simha refers to the word sanīhati first. Ācārya sanīhati, a Sanskrit work also speaks of the four sanīhatis. The earliest mention of this fourfold division of the Vaiṣṇava order seems to occur clearly in Aniruddha’s Guru Varnāṇā (v.312-f) where Dāmodara successor of Caturbhujā is made to explain to King Jayadhvaja Śirīha that all these four sanīhatis follow Śaṅkara’s faith by worshipping Krṣṇa, abstaining from the cult of older deities and celebrating nāma-kirtana. The ideal, with which Śaṅkaradeva and his immediate successors carried the Vaiṣṇavite movement and created the sattra institution, soon started melting in a more pronounced way after Mādhavadeva. Three more sub sects originated after him within the main body. An early biographer presents an account of the prevailing situation on the eve of the death of the Master like this ‘When the end of Mādhavadeva was approaching, bhakatas asked him as to who would lead the order after him. It is said after maintaining three days of silence he told in the assembly that he saw nobody fit for guruship and that those desired would find him in his work Nāma-ghoṣa. Observing this, Daityari perhaps says that guruship is applicable to none but Śaṅkara and Mādhava only.’ Following his death in A.D. 1568, Mādhava’s creed developed certain sectarian divisions within itself and within a short period ranging up to a few decades of the next century four separate branches cropped up under different heads belonging to his Brähmanical followers and his descendants.

139 KGC,(ed.), p.618
140 M. Neog, op. cit., p. 153
141 ibid, p.133

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Dāmodara seceded during the lifetime of Mādhavadeva. Nārayanṭhākur, the friend and colleague of Mādhavadeva was then too old to shoulder the responsibility of wielding together the different sections of the devotees. Naturally, therefore the disciples found themselves in three sections under the leadership of Gopāla Āta, Puruṣottama Ṭhākur and Mathuradāsa respectively.\footnote{S N. Sarma, op. cit., p. 93} Sivanath Barman states, ‘it was the towering personality of Śaṅkaradeva that binds the devotees of Vaiṣṇavism of different caste and creeds during his life time, but germs of divisive forces entering into it following his death.\footnote{Sivnath Barman, Srimanta Śaṅkaradeva and terār Utar Suri Sakal, p. 101} In the third stage of the tradition of Gurubād; we find new fissures that follow fourth, fifth and the sixth divisions in due course of time. It seems the apostles of the post-Śaṅkarite period were of in firm conviction in maintaining two principles viz. guru āgya (guru’s enjoin), Vamśāṅukrama (inheritance) on the basis of which the tradition built-up and further extended.

The table shows how the preceptors of neo-Vaiṣṇavism after Śaṅkaradeva has commanded and retained the religious tradition following two phases - guru’s enjoin and order of succession. This is the third stage of tradition of Gurubād, when the religion of Śaṅkaradeva formed four cleavages or samhāti under the control of his immediate successors.
Sankaradeva

Madhavadeva

(Associates of Ramrām guru, Nārāyaṇa Thākur, Satānanda and others)

Dāmodaradeva

(Associates Harideva and others)

I. Puruṣottam Thākur
II. Badula Ātā
III. Mathurā Dās Ātā, Gopāl Ātā

Caturbhuj Thāku

Ātās of Koch Behār, Kāmarūpa and others.

About the origin of the four *samhati*; we find some fantastic and mythological accounts incorporated in different *Caritas*. The *Kathā Guru Carita*, the most trustworthy source gives an elaborate account of the Vaiṣṇavite faith and movement and throws many lights on the organizational aspects of the Vaiṣṇavite movement, the nature, the structure of later group of *sattra* institutions, method and hardships undergone in its propagation, history of schism and accounts of different sects. According to some the Brahma *samhati* is so called because it originated from Brahma, the creator. The *Puruṣa samhati* derived its names from Puruṣa Nārāyaṇa who is supposed to be its first initiator in this way. However, according to S.N. Sarma, they try to explain the designations attributed to different sub sects without any logical basis.  

Dvarikā Nath Dwija (1734-1786 A.D) has first tried to present the history of evolution

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144 S.N. Sarma, *op. cit*, p.95
of *samhati* in a mythological way. Sarma gives a rational explanation of the emergence and origin of the *samhati*. He explains, 'It is because of the predominance of Brähmāṇical elements, the sub sects of Dāmodaradeva and Harideva have been known as *Brahma samhati*. The origin of the term has nothing to do with *Brahma sampradāya* of Mādhava acārya, as has been explained. As regards the term *Puruṣa samhati*, he holds, the sub sect is called *Puruṣa* because Puruṣottam Thākur, the eldest grandson of Śaṅkaradeva, founded it. He refused to accept the generalised explanation in which the term is said to have derived its name from Mahāpuruṣa, the honorific titles applied to Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. He asserts this sub sect had not existed at all during the times of Śaṅkaradeva. With information that he received from Mitradeva Mahanta Maheswar Neog, claims that this *samhati* have retained the original features of Śaṅkaradeva’s faith and therefore to be considered as the main *samhati*. The Bardowā, *Bar-bāra-jaṇīyā, Sarubāra-jaṇīyā* and *Kanakā-bāra-jaṇīyā* groups emerges out of the *Puruṣa samhati* which falls under this community. This group of *sattras* gives much emphasis on Śaṅkaradeva as the only *guru* and lays special importance on *nāma-Kirtana*. That does not however mean that there is any sense of disregard of the *samhati*

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*M. Neog, SHT, p. 155*

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145 Santāvaoti narrates thus-

'Ekhani sukutā Candratāpa manohara/ jagatjuriyā pare deśar upar / v. 10

*Brahma, Kāla, Puruṣa*, *Sahighati nāma devā, Candratāpa ārhi cāi sakalo karibā / v. 11 p. 276*  
Meaning, a beautiful *chandratāpa* (a celestial hood-cloth) covering the horizon falls all of a sudden on earth; it divides into three parts -white, red and black. The white part remains hanging; the red gets divided into two; the black piece again got divided into many pieces. One day Mādhava; had dreamt a dream in which a Brāhman instructed him to parcel out the Mahāpurusīyā religion into three parts on the divisions of the *candratāpa* as — *Brahma, Kāla* and *Puruṣa*.

146 M. Neog, *SHT*, p.155

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towards Mādhavadeva. Both of them are usually considered equals and the popular term ‘dujanā guru’ (the two gurus) is generally used to mean them.

It is said that Śaṅkaradeva’s tolerance had enabled Dāmodara and Hariladeva to work united for the spread of the new cult, but after Master’s demise they found Mādhava too rigid and therefore they declared independence and this section is commonly known as Brahma sanhāti. On the other hand Caturbhuj Thākur who headed the Puruṣa sanhāti order after Puruṣottama Thākur, held Śaṅkaradeva as the only guru, resulted in a difference of opinion with the bhakatas of Barpeta sattrā. Caturbhuj admitted that he only followed Mādhavadeva and Puruṣottam’s edict in maintaining the tradition of gurubāda or guru paramparā.

Santāvaoḷi provide the following account -

Listen brother, after Śaṅkaradeva; we don’t have any guru; there is no body to advise us. Mādhavadeva himself tells this. Take the proof of this notion from Ghośā-puthi.147 Supporting the view the Bardowa group of sattras and other institutions affiliated to it claim and believe that Mādhava nominated Puruṣottam Thākur as his rightful successor.148 This view was supported by a considerable number of associates and disciples of the above two Thākurs and that led to the growth of a different group Puruṣa sanhāti. It is generally accepted that Gopāla Ātā and Mathurādās Bhrā Ātā were appointed by Mādhavadeva, the forerunners of the Mahāpuruṣiyā order. They took up the cause of their new sect with zeal and enthusiasm and in a few years grew

147 ‘Suniyuka bhai kaho sare sara / śaṅkarata pare guru nāhikaïya āra //
Upadeśa dātā śaṅkarat pare nāi / (v.648) āponi Mādhave mota kahise dahāi //
Śaṅkarar pare guru nāi nāi nāi / laiūka pramaṭa tān ghoṣa puṭhi cāi i{l(v. 649)}’
148 M. Neog , op.cit., pp 153-154
remarkably in power and began tarnishing others. Members of a particular *samhati* might have felt their own salvation or easing number of converts from other groups; adherents of a given fraction might have believed that for the achievement of their own religious goods their internal opponents own religious project their internal opponents must be purged. It was not the religion that caused it to fall but rather the moral and ideological degradation that caused it to fall apart. The idealistic differences that cropped up among the *ācāryas* and followers of various groups for petty reasons had damaged the very fabric of the religion. Personal jealousy and weakness, conventional social rituals and customs, lack of far-sightedness, complex sociological situation and above all the influence inserted by the royal houses from time to time compelled the Vaiṣṇavite apostles to think differently. This led to the separation of most of them from the universally acclaimed tradition and ideals of *guruship* propounded by Śaṅkaradeva. Proselytising methodology of the apostles of post Śaṅkarite period seemed to differ as they tried to spread *nāma-dharma* amidst various ethnic groups of Assam by applying different methodology. This resulted in differences of opinions that led to the formation of four *saṅhati*.  

Pioneer of neo-Vaiṣṇavite studies like Maniram Dewan, Lakshminath Bezbarua, Banikanta Kakati, Maheswar Neog, Satyendra Nath Sarma, Bapchandra Mahanta, Sivanath Barman, Anil Roy Choudhary and some others offer a penetrating and incisive evaluation of secessionist ideology, with a clear eye to the priority of apostolic history of succession and its development during that period. The principal source on which the analysis is made certainly on close scanning of some *Carita puthis*, the source which is

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149 Bāpchanda Mahanta, *Āthihāshik patabhumit Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva*, p.140
150 Ibid, p.139
151 Anil Roy Choudhary, *Asamiya samaj aru Nava Vaishnavbad*, p.12
worthy of exploitation' with proper scrutiny. Most of the critics in a mood of embarrassment call the situation as 'guru biparjaya '(crisis of religious heads) and to which some spurious literatures of that period added fuel to fire. They observe that deliberate attempts were made in this period to interpolate even the existing early works and to write some new ones both in prose and verse. K.D. Goswami opines, 'some composers have made serious departure from the early authorities and, therefore we shall have to consider these works with much caution in making study of the Carita puthis of later period.' M. Neog has already referred about the apocryphal works and dubious authorship of some of the Caritas.

The sub-sects grew after the death of the masters created a network of sattras throughout the entire Brahmaputra valley. This division weakened the old unity and strength of neo Vaiṣṇavite movement but it created a force within each of the sects to compete each other for expansion of its own organisation in different parts of the state. The rapid growth and development of various sub-sects and proselytising activity of newly appointed heads of various sarhati practically converted more than half of its population to Vaiṣṇavism. The history of sub-sects has not mentioned any friction between the different sub-sects of Vaiṣṇavism in Assam. Rather a spirit of co-operation and harmony marked the relation between the different sub-sects throughout the history of Vaiṣṇavism.

D. Nath, stated that the growth of schism leading to the multiplication of the sattras, expansion of the Ahom political power over the Brahmaputra valley and formation of kind of national monarchy with a comparatively peaceful and secured situation, created a new condition that paved the way for the growth of a good number

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152 K.D. Goswami, op.cit., p.18
of sattras in Aḥom Kingdom and established institutional form, giving reality to the already conceived idea of Śaṅkaradeva under protection of the Aḥom rulers. With this socio-political background, it soon became apparent that most of the sattras would grow in different places of Assam, particularly in upper Assam significantly under the Aḥom patronage, which remained outside the spell of neo-Vaiṣṇavism till the close of the sixteenth century. The District gazetteer of Assam, 1905 have recorded two hundred eighty eight (288) sattras including many branches of them spreading over the entire Brahmaputra valley all of them are not in uniform in size and affluence but there marked by the some fundamental characteristics. Feudal administration of the Aḥom and Koch rulers and subsequently under the imperial British, sattras gained fertile ground to grow in their own way. It is worth noting that in the beginning when the schism materialized, the differences between the sects were acute but did not take the form of a dogmatic and doctrinaire rigidity as is clear from the fact that the Vaiṣṇavism by and large agreed that preaching of Bhakti-dharma in the simplest form was the highest ideal as it is the characteristic of a neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement. These sects and sub-sects tried to establish their own identity but in cardinal principle there is practically little or no difference amongst them. Despite that relation of some of the groups was discouraging; viz. Puruṣa sāṅkhāti always maintained some distances with Kāla sāṅkhāti. S.N. Sarma, has observed the later history of the neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement in the following words-

153 D. Nath, Satras in Colonial Assam: their response to the emerging socio-political issues, p.4
154 Assam District Gazetteers, 1905 ; Goalpara p.53; Darrang p.93; Kāmrūp, p.95 ; Nowgong, p.96; Sibsagar, p.95; Lakshimpur, p.123

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“In spite of the complex socio-political situations, the sattra institution with its root in the entire Brahmaputra valley still considered as the traditional institution of the Assamese society. With the passage of time and changed conditions, attitudes and approaches among samhatis began to more soften, doctrines becomes flexible and the sectarian outlook to liquidate. No doubt, the schism weakened the old unity and strength of neo-Vaishnavite religion but it seemed to develop a force within each of the sects to compete with each other for expansion of its own organisation, in different parts of the state. Distortion or deviation in the name of neo-Vaishnavism was however few …”

155 S.N. Sarma, NVMSIA, Ch. X, pp.262-275