CHAPTER- V

Literary Contribution of the Narowā group of sattras to the Neo-Vaiśṇavite movement after Śaṅkaradeva

The Vaiśṇavite movement gave all round impetus to Assamese way of life, literature, learning and education. The royal patronage of men and letters and of literature played an important role in development of early Assamese literature. Some literary activities based on Vaiśnavism took place in Assam even before Śaṅkaradeva and his neo-Vaiśṇavite movement. It is with Kaviratna Saraswati, Mādhava Kandali521 and Hem Saraswati who lived and wrote under the patronage of Chutiya King Durlabha Nārayaṇa of Kamatapur and Mahamanikya. This follows the efflorescence of large Vaiśṇavite literature in wake of the movement of Śaṅkaradeva. Śaṅkaradeva and his chief disciples and apostle, Mādhavadeva composed a good number of songs, dramas, verse narratives and other types of work wherein they expounded and elaborated the teaching of their faith.522 It is said as Caucer paying his tribute to Moral Gower in English literature Śaṅkaradeva pays his rich tribute to his great predecessor Mādhava Kandali as an ‘unparalleled one’.523 The literature that was born in the wake of the

521. Mādhava Kandali was a great poet, who rendered Ramayana into Assamese verse. It is acclaimed first of his kind in neo-Indo Aryan languages of course the Tamil version of Ramayana is said to be earlier than Madhva Kandali’s work.

522. B. K. Baruah, History of Assamese literature, p.23f, 44f

523. Paying his rich tribute to Mādhava Kandali Śaṅkaradeva writes,

Purva kavi Apramādi Madhava Kandali ṭādi
Tehu birasila Rāmakathā /
Hastira dekhia lāda ṭaṣṭā jena phāre mārga
Vaiśnava renaissance included many translations and adaptations of the two Epics, *Bhāgavata-Purāṇa*, the *Bhāgavata-gītā* and other *Purāṇa*.\(^{524}\) Other early group of Vaiśnava writers of this period like Vaikuṇṭhanātha Bhāgavata Bhattacharya, Śridhara Kandali, Gopāladeva, Ramcharana Ṭhākur, Daityāri Ṭhākur and Gopalacaraṇa Dwija contributed and established a different trend in forming a vigorous literary movement under the banner of *Bhakti-faith*.

It can be said with the words of Hem Baruah: Like Shelly giving wings to the philosophy of Godwin these poet preachers gave literary beauties to high philosophical truths obtained from Sanskrit āsttras; which they chiselled long Sanskrit epithets into lucid phrasings in their own language with great art and beauty.\(^{525}\) With the emergence and rapid growth and expansion of *sattras* which practically swayed the whole of the Brahmaputra valley Vaiśnava preceptors and writers had received wide recognition from royal house when *sattras, nām-ghars* and even royal court echoed with the Vaiśnавite dance, drama and music. So far as quality is concerned it is said that the 17th and 18th centuries were elongations of the literature of the 16th century only.\(^{526}\) The *Bhakti movement* is not the story of the power struggle amongst different sects and tensions between the dominant elite religion and the emerging folk religion. It is also the story of development of languages, a restructuring of linguistic activity, a continuous tension between the language of the power elite and the language of the

\[^{524}\text{CHA., (ed.), Vol. III, p. 287}\]

\[^{525}\text{Hem Baruah, the Red river and the blue hills, p.119}\]

\[^{526}\text{CHA, op. cit., p. 284}\]
people, a story of the growth of new literary cannon as and poetics to legitimize the emergence of new literary genres.\textsuperscript{527}

Śaṅkaradeva was a prolific writer of Assamese verse and a poet of high order. In order to popularize his tenets he and his great disciple Mādhavadeva turned out a vast religious literature in the current language of the people. Neo-Vaiśṇavite reformers of his time seemed to have done this work. Both of them rendered the entire life sketch of Śrī Kṛṣṇa into music, poetry and drama and contributed greatly by creating scores of literary work including \textit{Kirtan-ghoṣā} and \textit{Nām-ghoṣā} which contains epitome of the creed.

However, there is less temperance in the depths of passion in qualities like that of their predecessors’ works of such literatures of later group of writers are rich in story and poetry. The ways paved by their predecessors for the exercise of literary activity were followed by a host of writers mostly belonging to the newly installed \textit{Adhikāra} of Narowā \textit{sattras}. Dramas, songs, \textit{bhaṭīmā}, \textit{pōṭyās}, \textit{capoyas} of various genres mostly written in these \textit{sattras} are still being incorporated in prayer services and various religious occasions. In the field of medieval dramatic and biographical literature the Narowā group of \textit{sattras} has played a commendable part. It has been observed that in post-Śaṅkaradeva period centres of dramatic literature and performances have been turned around the precincts of some newly developed \textit{sattras} like Bardowā and Barpeṭā. Scholars rightly opines that \textit{sattrāyā} literary workers, specially belonging to \textit{Kāla-samhati} and to some extent Puruṣa samhati order followed the tradition of writing religious plays (\textit{Bhaonā}) imitating the \textit{Ankiyōs} of Śaṅkaradeva and carried far and wide.

\textsuperscript{527} Sisir Kumar Das, \textit{The polyphony of the Bhakti movement}, \textit{Tradition and pursuit: Some perspectives: Professor Kesavananda Devgoswami felicitation Volume}, 2003, p. 20

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the tradition of writing devotional compositions of their great predecessors. These writers are indebted to their masters not only for the imitation of their style, language and forms but for borrowing sense of the songs from their verbatim. Most of the Writer-Adhikāras of the Narowā group of sattras followed the same trend of literary style are equally indebted to early masters.

The popularity and esteem enjoyed by Ankiya nātas and music inspired many of the Adhikāras of our concern group to write dramas in the line of Bhāgavata-purāṇa, Mahabharata and Ramayana. Among the four samhatis some of the illustrious Adhikāras of Narowā's plays a major role in the cultivation of dramatic literature, devotional songs and music till the beginning of the last century. It would not be an exaggeration to say that some biographical literatures of 18th century are also the product of this particular samhati. Successive heads of almost all the Narowā sattras viz., Vāsudeu Thāān-Narowā sattra, Bardowā, Bālisattra, Kuji, Talibil, Rāmpur and Bhetiyanī composed scores of devotional plays as well as other literary works although the intensity of devotional urge and elegance of compositions are not always noticed in some of their creations. A tentative summary of literary works of various genres is made in Appendix E.

Many precious Vaiśnavite literary works, which have not seen the light of the day until today, are lying in heaps at Bardowā- Bālisattra and other related sattras. There is no doubt that the Assamese literature will greatly enrich if these are recovered and published.

1. Bardowā and Bālisattra Narowā

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528 M. Neog (ed.), Asomiya Sāhityar Ruprekha, p.175
Drama and Songs

The first ever reference to performance of a Bhōna is found at Bardowā during the time of Śaṅkaradeva in various sources. Cultivation of dramatic, histrionic and other literary activities received special attention from the time of Dāmodara Ātā and Kanakalātā and more particularly under the leadership of the Adhikāras of Narowā and Salaguri sattras. They assiduously carried this tradition of performing art and literary activities altogether cantering round Bardowā and Bālisattra. As most of the Adhikāras of Bardowā sattras also holds the Adhikāraship at Bālisattra as well, contributions of these houses have been considered a single unit for our review and discussion.

Quite a good numbers of dramas and other literary works were profusely produced and enacted under the banner of these two Narowā sattras functioning at Bardowā in 18th and 19th century. S.N. Sarma writes, one Lākṣmīdeva otherwise known as Lākṣmikānta was the most distinguished playwright of Narowā Bālisattra and Bardowā.529

Episodes for four of his plays have been taken from Bhāgavata-purāṇa and one each from Mahabhārata, Ramayana and Rudrajamāla. Lākṣmīdeva is considered to be the earliest reputed such play-writer who penned Kumara-harāṇ or Hari-Śaṅkarar Yudha and enacted the same at the Ahom court at the request of Candrakānta Sinha (1810-1818 A.D).530 While making analyses of the Post-Śaṅkaradeva literary

529 S.N.Sarma , In this comprehensive work of Assamese literature Asomiya Sāhityar samikhyatmak itibritya (p. 267) makes a critical review of the some plays of the 'Bardowā thul' (Narowā and Salaguri sattr) namely Rāwana Badha , Sītā Harāṇa, Kārṣṇa Vadha , Sindhurā Yātrā , Nṛṣinha yātrā , Gobardhana Yātrā , Janāna yātrā etc.

530 The mukti maṅgala bhaṭimā (opening benediction)of the play runs as -

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contributions, S.N. Sarma observes a slight deviation of his play from the original text of *Bhāgavata- Purāṇa*. For a unique creation Lakṣmīdeva rely on *Bhāgavata- purāṇa*, so little deviations from the original text of *'Kumar Haran'* has been seen. Two things account for its significance: this is the only available autograph copy of the drama where he painted some scenes by his own hand. The writer in one of the verses introduces him as Lakshmikānta\(^{531}\) and the original copy bears the date of its creation *(read as *'netra beda muni candra’sake’) Šaka, 1743/A.D. 1821.* S. N. Sarma highly praises the writer for its leading narrative features who has succeeded in accommodating all the merits and features of the original creations of Śaṅkaradeva.\(^{532}\)

The theme of the play is made of the romantic love story of Usha and Aniruddha and often-cited mythological episode of a war between Hari and Hara as incorporated in *Harivansha, Bishnu purāṇa and Bhāgavata-Purāṇa*. The date of its completion is also derived from one of the transcript preserved at *DHAS*.\(^{533}\) A tradition is found current at Narowā -Bālisattra of enactment of drama on the death anniversary of Damodara Atā. In this context, the date endorsed in the copy for our study is significant which corresponds the date of passing away of Damodara, falls on fifth bright moon of the month of *Kartik*.\(^{534}\) S. N. Devgoswami, writes, a transcript of the original work seemed to have completed before five days ahead of his death anniversary. The work is enriched

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\(^{531}\) *Kṛṣṇa-pada prasādena Lakṣmināthen dhimātā/
Hari-Śāṅkara yudhang nimitta susamipī / K.D. Goswami (ed.) *Arkamālā*

\(^{532}\) S. N. Sarma (ed.), *Arkamālā*, p 8

\(^{533}\) Transcript no. 195, Šaka 1784 , *DHAS*

\(^{534}\) S. N. Devgoswami , *Nātyakār Lakṣmīdeva Jivan āru Kṛiti*, p.42

(201)
with twenty-five ślokas and equal number of beautiful gitas. Out of which the writer himself composed thirteen ślokas of high merit including the nāndī sloka.

For his voluminous play ‘Rāwana Badha’, with well-developed dialogues, finely developed plot; borrowed the popular episodes of Lanśkā-kāṇḍa and Kīṣṇādī-kāṇḍa of the Ramayana. The printed version of Rāwana Badha nārī was based on an old Ms. derived from the Narowā-Bālisattrta. So far, eleven transcripts of this drama are found in different places. It proves popularity of the story among the common masses. Here the author uses forty-nine self-composed Sanskrit ślokas; thirty-two numbers of gitas and incorporates a good number of characters as per demand of the story and various sequences. The writer also pays special attention in applying different technical skills, dramatic treatments by employing highest number of accessories like masks and ‘Chos’ along with a new rāga called ‘aman Kalyān’. For lucid narration of the story, he adds 3894 ślokas and shows his confidence in fusing his own creative style with the satnryā style. Considering literary traits and standards, two of his compositions (plays) were recommended as text and reference books for students of Assamese literature in the University of Gauhati and Dibrugarh.

The plot of Gobardhana yātrā is taken from Book X of Bhāgavata Purāṇa. The writer adds here twenty-one ślokas and fourteen gitas in developing the story where he

536 S.N. Devgoswami, op. cit., p 45
537 Dhāoe Rāmacandra devarathe cari / śanaha kaveca hāte dhenu dharil
K.D. Goswami, (ed) Śankarottar Gīta-samkalana, p 58

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shows how glory of Indra is crushed by Lord Kṛṣṇa and abolishes the prevailing pujas to the god. Lord Kṛṣṇa also said here that all human beings should merely do their ‘karma’, to the best of their ability and not pray or conduct sacrifices for natural phenomenon. The villagers were convinced by Kṛṣṇa, and did not proceed with the special puja (prayer). So far two transcripts of the original work of the play are found in two different places. The plot of Janma-yātrā is taken from the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (Ch. X-1-5) which is an abridged form but without much alteration of the original work of Gopāla Ātā (1533-1608 A.D). The story unfolds with a simple narration of a dream of Kusumvarā, Saṅkar’s father to his uncle Madhava. The two key characters depicted in the play are Saṅkaradeva and his father Kusumvarā. The only transcript of this rare play is found at Bālisattra. Seventeen ślokas uses in this play give a special beauty to its literary development. So far as many as six copies of Nrīsinhha yātrā nāṭ of different composers of 18th century are found. Two such transcripts are now found at the sattra precinct and the archives of the manuscript section of the library of Gauhati University. According to some Caritas, Madhavadeva himself composed the original version of this most celebrated drama of Vaiṣṇavite era, where he himself played a key role. When the copy of the drama became scarce, Lakṣhmīdeva might have composed another version in 18th century. The plot of the play is based on the seventh book of Bhāgavata-purāṇa. It consists of twenty one ślokas and twenty one gītas, where the story evolves round the character of Bhakta -Prahlāda, depicting Prahlāda’s merit of unparallel devotion to Kṛṣṇa propounded through the popular story taken from book VII of Bhāgavata. The

539 According to one tradition Gopāla Ātā gave the first performances of his work ‘Janma –Yātrā’ at Bhabanipur within the precincts of his Kirtana-ghar in the presence of Madhavadeva. One earliest reference to this work of Madhavadeva is found in GCK, p. 205
540 S.N. Devgoswami, op. cit., p. 43

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earliest version of ‘Sindhrā-yātra’ preserved at Balisattra is enriched with series of popular battle sequences. The story is taken from the ‘Vāna-parva’ of Ramasraswati. Pāṇḍavas and the king Sīndhūrai are the prime characters of this play; where in one of its gītas the author 541 introduces him as Laksāmkānta, as a slave of Kṛṣṇa.

‘Kṛṣṇa pada madhu āse /
Kahe Laksāmkānta dāse’

This play possesses qualities of a good drama where out of sixteen ślokas, fifteen are said to have composed by the author. The last notable composition of the neo-Vaiṣṇavite writer is Hara-mohanā for which he imitated the Book -VII of Bhāgavata-Purāṇa. The focal theme of the drama is how enumerating famine charm Viṣṇu transformed himself into the form of Mohiṇī. Depiction of Mohiṇī or Divya Kanyā (celestial nymph) is a successful creation of the dramatist. Among the eleven ślokas of the play, four are taken from the Bhāgavata and other seven his own composition. S.N. Sarma in ‘A Comprehensive History of Assamese literature’ mentions Lakṣmīdeva of ‘Bardowa thul’ as a renowned dramatist of the second decades of the eighteenth century. 542 In the presidential report (reception committee) of the Asom Sahitya sabha, Dhing session also hails contributions of some Vaiṣṇavite gosāins including Lakṣmīdeva. 543

541 One transcript of the play (G.U. Library) records the name of the author as one Purṇakānta, which seems to be an interpolation made in the original folio by a later hand.
542 S.N. Sarma, Asomiya sāhityor samikshyātmak itibritiya , p.267
The other important literary works of Lakṣmīdeva which derives special mention is a metrical work called *Vaishnavadhikā*, where some *sattrāya* customs and rituals are incorporated for daily observances of a *Vaishnava*. In this theological work the author suggests some moral lessons taking notions from *Purāṇa*, *Bhāgavata-gīta* to be observed by a devotee residing within the *sattra* (celibate) and those of a householder (non-celibate).544 He also translated nine chapters of the original Sanskrit work *Nārada-Śāṅkara Samvāda* of *Sāttatva tantra* into 388 conventional verses. These are called *dulacāti*, and other rhymes forms. Making a review of the work, M. Neog highly praises its lucidity of languages and diction.545 Few other prolific writers of Bālisattra who did not remain content with mere translations of the old stories further developed some of the interesting episodes into independent and self-contained dramas and *Kāvya* were Dhañeswar alias Bhavakānta and Sivendra alias Śuracandra, the youngest grandson of Lakṣmīdeva and Gangādhār, Yogendra, Maheshchandra. Some of the literary works of the writers’ of the latter group includes *Vāmana-Vijaya*, *Bāli-Vadha*, *Draupadīr Swyamvara* and *Rāwana Badha* of Dhañeswar Ātā and one quasi historical chronicle *Śāṅkara-deva udāha adhā puruṣār Vāmśāvātī*. Works of Asit Chandra (son of Bholanath) contributes the treasure trove of Narowā with *Virāta-Parva*, *Trīsaśgkur Swarga Lāva*,(1934) *Sudhanā Vadha* and *Agni Purāṇa*.546 The *Ādyā-daśama*, a rare specimen of Vaishnavite art was found from the custody of Śivendra Ātā of Bālisattra. With its publication as *'Citra-Bhāgavata* in A.D. 1949, Harinarayan Datta Baruah has drawn the attention of the art critic and scholars.

544 S. D. Goswami, *op. cit.*, p. 118
545 M. Neog, *op. cit.*, p. 170

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Another writer and sattriya performing artiste of well-repute was Dhañeswar Átā, who penned few theological dramas\(^{547}\) and two modern works, Yuga-Dharma and Guru Sewā āru bhakti.\(^{548}\) Popularly known as Kumar Madhusudhana, Mahesh Chandra Devgoswami, son of Kandarpa Átā of Narowā-Bālisattrā was a celebrated satirist and a well-known social critic of Assam, who edited the fortnightly ‘Bihlangani’ and complied Sri Sri Guru Guqamālā and enriched the house with scores of other theological writings. In the last century also the trend of writing plays as per demand of the society continued when K.D. Goswami, the second son of Dhañeswar Átā composed three popular plays, Narakāsūra Vadha (1949), Amṛt manthan (1952) and Vṛitrāsūr Vadha (1971) which have been successfully enacted at village nām-gharas of different areas of central Assam. In most of the later such works of the Narowā sattrā the practice of writing the name of the scribe and their patrons in the colophons of manuscripts and gītas has been found.

Vansāvaolī and Bhakat-mālā

Like Carita, there is a prose work called Vansāvaolī, which gives a small account of lives and activities of Adhikāras of the sattras. In this small work entire names of the associates of the sattrā heads are found written. The Guru Vansāvaolī and the dui Mahāpuruṣar Vansāvaolī, Narowā gosāin āru Bālisattrā Vansāvaolī\(^{549}\), Kujī

\(^{547}\) Out of the six dramas of Śivendra Átā; so far transcripts of four works, Sālva Daitya—vadha, Subhadra harana and Karpa—porva have been found so far, vide; K.D. Goswami, PSVFCA, p.200

\(^{548}\) Śrī Śrī Narowā Bālisattrā camu Ittibrittya (ed.), p 16

\(^{549}\) This small work starts with a sloka which narrates an genealogical account of Adhikāras right from Ramākanta Átā to Anantarāi, Sattariyās of Barpetā and an account of cremation of Dāmodara and other incidents.
sattra Vaɪnšäv—aoli, Šaṅkaradeva uddha adha puruṣar Vaɪnšäv—aoli Carita are some of the earliest such works derived at Narowā Bardowā, Bālisattra and Kuji. Another peculiar form of literature called Bhakat-māla, like that of Madala panji of Orissa is available only at Narowā-Bālisattra. Original manuscript of Bhakat-māla of Bālisattra contains the names of the entire Narowā Adhikāras and chief preceptors, their principal associates (sangar bhakat) called ātois, dates of births and deaths of Adhikāras in chronological order and places of their cremation right from the days of Šaṅkaradeva to the latter half of the 19th century. This type of sattra chronicle might have been written by some lekhak of the sattra at the behest of the presiding Adhikāra and Dekā Adhikāra during and after their lifetime.

2. Vāsudevar Thāan-Narowā sattra

Some of the earliest Adhikāras of Narowā sattras who contributed with their writings were Ramākānta and Ramacandra, the second and the third superiors of the sattra who lived in 18th century. In the treatment of these works, they said to have given free scope often than imagination. Aniruddha, a disciple of the Narowā sattra in one such most authoritative work informs us the first dramatic work of the Narowā group of sattras- Shyamanta haranta, of Ramākānta. The plot of the play is taken from Kīrtan-ghosa of Šaṅkaradeva where the dramatist energy is directed towards evoking

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550 An undated manuscript preserved at Bālisattra.
551 Madala Panji is a chronicle of the Jagannath temple in Puri. Though the actual date of starting of Panj is not known, but it is believed that it might be started from 12th or 14th Century A.D. The book is a classic and literary master piece of the first order, parallel to which very few vernacular of India possess.
552 K.D. Goswami, PSVFMA., p. 208
553 Aniruddha’s Guru Varnana (Ms) v. 394, D.H.A.S., K. D. Goswami, SSRR, p.122
devotional fervour among the bhakatas. This undated work contains eleven gitas, where two new rāgas namely Čālengī and Rāmgiṛī were incorporated. One of the significant features of the play is that the author nowhere introduces himself; this has been found as a practice adopted by most of the earlier and some of the latter group of writers of Bhakti movement. The first reference about enactment of a bhāonā, Kamsavadha on the re-installation of the Vāsudeva statue at Narowā sattra is made in the pages of Keśava. Rāmacandra Ṭātā, the third most honorific superior of Narowā sattra showed his excellent proficiency in histrionic art forms, which composed this work to be enacted on an auspicious occasion. In the Kalyān kharmāna gita (concluding benediction) of the play a panegyric to Lord Vāsudeva is added.

The Thākur Carita narrates, how on being satisfied at the histrionic activities of Rāmacandra Ṭātā, the reigning Āhom King Siva Sinha patronized him in re-establishing the Narowā sattra in a separate location. The King further invited him and his troupe of artiste for further such enactments of satrīyā Bhāonā at the royal capital and endowed him with land grants and other valuables. From that time onwards it became customary to enact this drama at Narowā sattras of Bardowā- Bālisattra on the death anniversary of Śaṅkaradeva. What makes the play unique is that Rāmacandra introduced three new dance forms namely Nandi Bhangi, Payāna bhangi and Cālī.

554 M. Neog incorporates a quote of Aniruddha Dāsa made on Ramākānta in his work ‘Asomiyā Sāhityar Ṛuprekha (ed.), p.174
555 Keśava Carita (Ms.) a biographical work of Candacāru of Korcung sattra, We have come across the original Ms. of Sācipāt at the sattra., vide, Keśava Carita , v.116
556 Jaya Jaya sakala mangala Vāsudevāng /
Surāsura karu jāka sevama //
557 TC (ed.), v. 539-543
558 Badan Ch. Saikia, derives the names of the scribes Rāmacandra and Rāmadeva from a transcript of the play (Rāma-Vanavāsa,1917), vide; Asomiyā vasha Sāhityar BuranjX (ed.), p.51
which adds a beauty to it. Other literary works of the sattra include *Vaiṣṇava nrinaya* and *Bhakti Lakshyana* by one Rāma (Copy, A.D. 1922), some songs and *bargīta* of Rāmacandra (copy, A.D. 1899), undated copies of *bhatimās* of Ramākānta and other Vaiṣṇava writers. Two other dramatic works recovered from the same locality namely *Vana-yātra* and *Bhīṣma Parva* are now preserved at the sattra.\(^559\)

3. Kuji-Narowa

In the field of Vaiṣṇavite literature, the contribution of Vaiṣṇavpur or Narowa Kuji is no less considerable. It would not be an exaggeration to say that one of the notable biographies of the Vaiṣṇavite of the post-Śaṅkaradeva period is *Sri guru Varṇana* or *Aniruddha Carita*. On making a query, the present investigator received an information that Aniruddha, a disciple of Ramākānta Ātā completed this work staying at Vaiṣṇavpur sattra in *saka* 1791, corresponding to A.D. 1869.\(^560\) Although a different date of its compilation is found somewhere, so far no information is found about his place of living.\(^561\) It seems writer like M. Neog wrongly presumed the sattra name as Viṣṇupur, (the last abode of Caturbhujā).\(^562\) Popularly known as *Aniruddha Carita* or *Sri guru Varṇana*, this small work with 435 verses is a comprehensive account of the lives of Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva, Puroṣottama Ṭhākura, Caturbhujā Ṭhākura and Dāmodara and Ramākānta of Narowa sattra. Aniruddha, describes himself as desiring

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559 K.D. Goswami, *op. cit.*, p.128

560 A close scrutiny of the last verse 435 (Ms.no.82, *DHAS*) reveals the actual name of the sattra. The line runs as ‘*eti Śriguru Varṇśāvali pustaka samāpta, -Vaiṣṇavapura sattre likhitang sampurṇa //*, meaning writing of the book ‘*Sri Guru Varṇśāvali pustaka* completes at Vaiṣṇavapur sattra.

561 ‘beda sindhu āsāṅka śakat, phālgunar śukta pakshyata...’, v.428

562 Vide a foot note ( no.100) cited in *SHT.*, p. 18
the honey of the two feet of Ramākānta (Ramākānta -pada -dvanda -makaranda - madhu-vrata). While analysing quality of some of the earliest and authoritative Caritas of Śaṅkara, Mādhava and his followers, M. Neog refers the work a qualitative one which possesses many sober qualities of the earlier group of Caritas.⁵⁶³

Kujī sattra has drawn the attention of art critics which houses a rare and earliest genre of abstract illustrated paintings of the neo-Vaiṣṇavite period. The theme of the painting was drawn from the Vāmana Purāṇa of Śaṅkaradeva which is endowed with some important literary elements. Here scribe’s name is not incised. Three transcripts of Kāṁsa-Vadha bearing the names of Rāmacandra, Ramākānta and Ravicandra ⁵⁶⁴ composed in Kāthelī and some modern scripts, along with some undated and anonymous theological works are also found in the sattra. Only a single copy of Janmaprātikā (Horoscope) is found which was composed by Kaśikānta, an Adhikāra of the sattra.

4. Bhetiyanī-Narowā

From the purely literary point of view contribution of Bhetiyanī-Narowā, the first sākha or branch of the Bardowā-Narowā house is important. Harendranārāyaṇa, (1855-1933 A.D.) the eldest grandson of Laksṭmīdeva was a well-known dramatist who used calling the work more than a biography in the modern sense of the term, but as the closely collected record of the life of many a saints contained here provides a clear account of the whole of the religious movement literary form of language with poise and beauty and verses. As a legacy from his renowned predecessors he enlarged the

⁵⁶³ M. Neog, ibid., p. 19
⁵⁶⁴ Ravicandra is the great grandson of Viṣṇudeva, the founder of Kujī-sattra.
scope of this literary language, coined the Brajabuli for his two dramas namely ‘Babrubahanar Yudha’ and Durbaśa-bhojana. Critics observe influence of Harivara Vipra in his play Babrubahanara Yudha. Harendra introduced a new feature called ‘Swargyakta’ (soliloquy) in his Vaiṣṇavite dramas. M. Neog observes, despite presence of old forms of writing, one can feel the flavour of modern language in dramatic works of Harendranārāyaṇa. Pointing to some features of neo-Vaiṣṇavite plays S.N. Sarma says Harendra claims novelty in creating dialogues in his plays among his contemporary writers. Following the same style, his brother Maheschandra wrote two dramas, Abhimanyu Vadha and Rājasuya Yoga.

The aforesaid discussion shows that the Adhikāras, writers and biographers of the Narowā group of sattras successfully disseminated the ideals, message and tradition of Vaiṣṇavism from later part 18th to the early decades of the last century and through their writings enriches regional language and literatures and shines as foremost in their own group Puruṣa sanhāti and in the firmament of the neo-Vaiṣṇavite literature, art and culture. These writers, mostly comprises of the first group of preceptors display profound impact among the masses, laity and even royal court of the Ahoms alike through some religious dramas, Caritas, gītas and played an important role in carrying far and wide message of the bhakti cult propagated by their great preceptors. Literary activity of these sattras took Assamese language and literature to unprecedented heights of artistic excellence within the previously mentioned period. As a result, Assamese Vaiṣṇavite literature is exceptionally rich in volume, range and flavour.
5. Talibil-Narowa

Talibil sattra grew and developed as one of the new branches of Narowa sattra in later half of the 19th century when literary, devotional activities and cultural refulgence reaches more and more new areas. Tilak Chandra, (1884-1959 A.D.) grandson of Naranātha, the founder of the sattra was a popular dramatist and exponent of Bhāgavata in 19th century. His popular play Bhīṣma-nejanyā composed in Brajāwali drew attention of literary circle. In this, he adds 14 different gītas, 4 ślokas and two bhaṭīmās. His other three notable plays enriched with theological contents are Devajit or Amrīt-manthan, Khaṭāsur-Vadha and Daksya-Yaga. Dharmacandra and Hariṣcandra two of his brothers equally showed their competence in composing dramas based on religious themes. They are Meghnāda Vadha and Pāṇḍava Viśaya. Naranath Āṭa also composed a Carita of Narowa sattras. Narowā Talibil-sattra possessed a good number of mantra puṭhis and some of them containing materials of Ayurveda treatment and astrological elements for which the sattra continued to gain much popularity among its disciples until last decades of the 20th century.

6. Rāmpur-Narowa

Rāmpur-Narowa was the birthplace of the renowned dramatist of post-Śaṅkaradeva era, Laksṭmideva, the grandson of Rāmadeva. Rāmadeva, the founder of Rāmpur sattra had a son named Bhadrađeva alias Jadudeva. The only important literacy contribution of the sattra during his time was Sītā harau. The plot is drawn from Ananta Kandali’s Ramayana, which is supplemented by some beautiful gītas and verses. Many of the characters of the original work have gained new life and colour in his prolific hand. The only copy of the play is now found at Bālisattra which bears the (212)
date A.D 1884. The copy also bears the name of the author as well. One of the important features of the play is the application of three rāgas named Kau, Bhupali and ahira. In some of the gītas Bhadradeva successfully showed his poetic calibres. In one of the two transcripts so far recovered from the Narowā sattras, Lakṣmīdeva’s name is found in the epilogue of the plays. It is said, just after rendering one gīta, Bhadradeva hands over the manuscript to his son Lakṣmīdeva to complete the text. With the migration of Lakṣmīdeva to Bālisattra, his new abode turned to be a vibrant seat of literary and histrionic activities. It is difficult to analyse literary activities and contribution of Rāmpur and Bālisattra separately as both the sattras owes their origin from Bhadradeva and Rāmadeva, the two earliest preceptors of the sattrā.

A house of biographical literature

The neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement gave birth to a new branch of literature in form of Carita-puṭhis or biographical literature. Assamese biographies are of two types; the first group concentrates mainly upon the individual lives of different saints, like Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva and Dāmodaradeva etc. While the second type mainly traces the history of different sattras in chronological order dealing with lives and activities of successive heads and its historical development. This type is precisely known as sattrā-Vaṁśāvaolī which is found both in verse and prose forms. The Carita puṭhis which records the day to day incidents of the saint’s lives may be considered to be the most valuable sources of information of the Vaiṣṇava faith and movement.565

The sattrā of our concern happens to be the breeding ground of new kind of literary tradition in the neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement of Assam. It is to be mentioned here

565 S.N. Sarma, NVMSIA, p. 229
Cakrapāṇi Vairāgī Ātoi, a Brāhmaṇa disciple of Narowā sattrā turned to be a roving monk and became the first person known to be the comprehensive teller of the Guru-lore. As a petty officer (bara) of Ahoms, his father was attached to the royal dockyard at Negheriting. Cakrapāṇi is known as Śisu Vairāgī or Ṭepukiya Vairāgī who joined the service as a pāik under Ahom king and lived with in a nearby village along with his sister who advised him to lead a pious life of a Vaiṣṇavite monk. Meanwhile in his childhood he came into a close contact with one Brāhmaṇa disciple of the Narowā sattrā. This led to his initiation into the Bhakti faith under Ramākānta Ḍātā, the most honorific superior of the sattrā at that time. Following the advice of his guru, this laity of Narowā might have turned to be a great orator of the guru Carita lore, who took great pains to acquire the accounts of large variety of Vaiṣṇavite religious literatures. Cakrapāṇi true to the heritage of intellectual pursuit took notes during his interactions in different places with many Adhikāras and came back to Bardowā, where the Kathā Guru Carita (Biography of the Guru in prose) saw the light of the day. It is said he travelled widely almost all sattras in the three erstwhile states, Assam, Kāmarūpa and Koc-behār. It is said, in some cases entering deep discourse on the scriptures, he was practicing the arts and enquiring about the history of the various sects prevailed at that time. He lived in the time of Ramākānta’s son and successor Rāmacandra and was held in high esteem wherever he went as a great man of knowledge and faith to be ranked next to Śāṅkaradeva. In a small work of Candracaru among the names of disciples of Ramākānta one name Bhāgati Cakrapāṇi is found recorded at the end of the list which

66 For details of the early life and activity of Cakrapani and the origin and early development of the tradition of Guru Carita lore one can consult the preface, Maheswar Neog (ed.), GCK
67 Name of Cakrapani Vairagi Atoi is enlisted as one of the associate bhakatas of Ramakanta Ata in the Bhakat-mālā of Bālisattra.
68 M. Neog (ed.), GCK, p.141

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incorporates some lines in his praise. The first line giving the names of Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva up to Ramākanta of Narowā sattra, Anatarāya, their associates and other disciples. M. Neog greatly elucidates language and style of GCK for its remarkable features and many stands for the spoken word of pre-Colonial Assam in a characteristic way—much unlike the language of the contemporary poetry and drama, which assumed the shape of literacy dialect or dialects. Neog further observe some of its important features i.e. i) Unique prose style ii) Oral history iii) Ancient geography iv) Economic condition) Social condition vi) All India touches vii) Education viii) The performing arts ix) Political administration in North east India x) Early history of the Vaiṣṇava movement in Assam xi) Institutions of bhakti etc. It is an elegant record of the Bhakti movement initiated by Śaṅkaradeva, which gives broad picture of Assam of the days anterior to, during, and posterior to the life of the saint, Neog added. Calling the work more than a biography in the modern sense of the term, but as the closely collected record of the life of many a saints which provides a clear account of the whole of the religious movement, he also sees it as a biographical record and as a piece of prose writing.

Later on Cakrapani showed his allegiance towards Salaguri sattra and became to be known as Salaguriyā-Ātā who started living at the bhakat-bohā (residence) of the Chotta-hissā of Bardowā and alleged to have played a divisive role among the two

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569 Jaya namo Cakrapānī bāndhava Rāma, Tohmāra kārane karu Sahasra pranāma
570 M. Neog, op.cit., p.1
571 ibid., p. 143

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groups of sattras through his writings.\textsuperscript{572} Tradition informs that while coming back to Bardowa, Cakrapāṇi proudly claimed that he brought the fundamentals or essence of all the \textit{sattras} and those who wanted to share it should take it from him paying due reverence. However Ramākānta, the \textit{Adhikāra} of Narowā Bardowā and some devotees at that time refused to give him proper honour in \textit{sattrīyā} style with presentation of \textit{gāyana-bāyama} as was desired by him.\textsuperscript{573}

We have drawn the following four appendices where detailed literary contributions of the Narowā group of \textit{sattras} have been enlisted.

1. Appendix : N (Table -VI): Literary contributions of Narowā Bardowā- Balisattrā

2. Appendix : O (Table -VII): Literary contributions Vāsudeu-Thāān Narowā samāja

3. Appendix : P (Table -VIII): Literary contributions Narowā- Kuji

4. Appendix : Q (Table -IX): Literary contributions Narowā-Bheetiyānī and Talibil sattrā

\textsuperscript{572} In a metrical work of one Rāngācarāṇa (Transcript of 1284) derives from one Drona Mahanta of Barangabāri explains the origin and causes of the conflicts of Narowā and Salaguri wherein he criticizes the role of Salaguri who lends his supports towards Narowā, \textit{ibid.} p. 66

\textsuperscript{573} K.D. Goswami, \textit{PSVFMA.}, p.15