CHAPTER VI

Cultural Contributions

1. Paintings

The history of painting reaches back in time to artefacts from pre-historic humans, and spans all cultures. Indian art is a collective term for several different schools of art that existed in the Indian subcontinent. The paintings varied from large frescoes of Ajanta to the intricate Mughal miniature paintings to the metal embellished works from the Tanjore School, Gandhara–Taxila and Nalanda School of art etc. Initially serving utilitarian purpose followed by imperial, private, civic and religious patronage, Eastern and Western painting later found audiences in the aristocracy and the middle class. The Hastividyåvnama of Sukumar Barkaith is one of the best earliest known illustrated manuscripts of Assam. Commissioned under the patronage of King Sivä Sirīha (1713-1744 C.E.) and his Queen consort, Phuleswari, by Sukumar Barkathi it deals with the management and care of elephants in the royal stables. 574

Sattras have always been zealous repositories of a distinctive culture with an emphasis on the arts, both the performing and the visual. 575 More important for our purposes here, the sattras developed a style of painting that moved beyond the borders of Assam, bringing in its wake not only a flow of ideas but also a circulation of painters and material goods such as those needed for painting: colours, dyes, brushes, clay pots for holding dyes and so on. The sattras of pre-colonial Assam can be regarded as a local

574 H. Goswami, Descriptive Catalogue of Assamese manuscripts, Foreword, p. xvii
variant of the modern museum and archive because of the way they fostered, preserved and archived artefacts of various kinds.

**Early Traditions of art**

Although much has been written about Assam’s architectural and sculptural traditions of the colonial Assam references to paintings in Assamese literature are very limited and scattered. It is only by piecing together the literary references and combining them with a sculptural index that a picture emerges of a plausible form of painting, which corresponds to the paintings that are preserved in the archives of sattras, and in the royal and private repositories.576

The earliest reference to painting in Assam is found in the pages of the *Harṣa Carita* of Bāna.577 Books written on strips of bark of the sāci tree (*Aqualia Agaloccha*) were presented in the seventh century to King Harsha of North India by the messenger of Bhaskar Varmana, King of Kāmarūpa. Some critics say the Assam heritage of painting was different. It seems to have come from much older, established networks, and it continued till a much later date. Assamese paintings have no stylistic relation with those of the Pala paintings or with paintings from Orissa. It seems, therefore, that this particular style did not owe lineages to the painting tradition of eastern India.

Some scholars of repute like Rajatananda Dasgupta made a critical study on the miniature paintings of Assam and placed the paintings of Assam within the following schools: i) the Ahom School ii) the Sattriya School iii) the Darrang School (iv) the

576 B. Hazarika, *The world of Sattriya schools of paintings Assam*, Rila Mukherjee (ed.), *Pelagic Passageways, The northern bay of Bengal before colonisation*, p.427

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Garhāgon School (v) the new provincialized Mughal style, and (vi) a School akin to Garhāgon.578

The Uniqueness of the Satṭriyā School of Art

Among the above-mentioned Schools, satṭriyā is a religious art form that achieved prominence through the illustration of various editions of the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa. Some modern historians designate this school as the apabhraṃśa (corrupted) style of painting, which penetrated into Assam through the apabhraṃśa dialect ‘along with neo-vaishnava Sufi thought from Bihar.’579

In colonial Assam the art of painting developed in tandem with manuscript illustration as a direct outcome of the Bhakti movement and neo-Vaishnavism ushered in the practice of illuminating religious texts with small illustrative paintings. With unparalleled skill Śaṅkaradeva pressed into service all the prevailing art forms in such a manner that they served as the vehicle of propagating his faith and at the same time the forms themselves were devised as the media of communication between devotees and God. Thus an unprecedented awareness of art percolated at individual, social and institutional level.580 On one occasion Śaṅkaradeva himself is said to have painted the seven Vaikuṇṭha on tulāpāt, or ginned cotton paper. On another occasion, he painted the picture of an elephant with vermilion and yellow arsenic and pasted it on a wooden

578 R. D. Choudhary, Tejbir Singh (ed.), Text, The Assam School of Manuscript Paintings
bookcase to be presented to his patron Koch King Naranarayana. His famous books Kīrtan Ghoṣā and Ādyā Daśam Bhāgavata contain about 322 miniature paintings with descriptions of Lord Kṛṣṇa’s childhood and youth. To popularize neo-Vaiṣṇavism and thereby to attract his disciples, Śaṅkaradeva used the illustrated paintings of religious books. The urge to create the art of painting can therefore be explained by the evolution of the cult of neo-Vaiṣṇavism in Assam only. Śaṅkaradeva’s school variably called sattriya School preserved the Pala tradition, the figures in Silhouette, the faces always in profile, against strong red backgrounds and carved arches.

The Sattra as Atelier

The artistes employed in the copying, illustration and painting of manuscripts in the sattras of Assam were termed khanikars. They were initially associated with the work of copying manuscripts and making transcripts. Interestingly, they were also involved with dramatic performances as make-up artistes employed in greenroom.

There were two classes of people engaged in manuscript preparation: the likhak (copyist) and the khanikar (sculptor), especially engaged for copying works and renowned for their skilled and artistic penmanship which have two varieties, viz., i) decorative, and ii) thematic. In the former, the borders of each folio were painted with various floral types and decorative designs. For the latter, the story described in the manuscript was illustrated in vivid detail.

581 M. Neog, Śaṅkaradeva, p.58.
583 H. Goswami, op. cit., For details see S.K. Bhuyan’s Foreword
It is seen, like much of great art, the sattriya paintings too grew out of a primarily religious milieu.

There are reasons to believe that there was a close liaison between the court and the sattras with regard to the cultivation of the fine and aesthetic arts. The art of manuscript painting was cultivated profusely in the royal court of the two Ahom King Rudra Sînha (1696-1714 A.D.) and Siva Sînha (1714-44 A.D.) who were an ardent patron of art and architecture in pre-colonial Assam. Although two types of materials, the tulāpāt and the sācipāt, were widely used for painting manuscripts, the sattra khanikars preferred the latter. E.A. Gait in his History of Assam gives a detailed process of preparing sāci bark widely used in Assam.

The two common vegetable colours used by the artiste in manuscript paintings were vermillion (hîṅgul) and yellow pigment (haitāl) which reflected the distinctive local conditions in Assam, that is, its various qualities of flora.

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584. E.A. Gait's description runs as -

'A tree of about 15-16 year's growth and 30-35 inches in girth, measuring about 4 feet from the ground, was selected. From this the bark was removed in strips, 6-18 feet in length and 3-27 inches in breadth. The strips were rolled up separately with the inner or white part of the bark outwards and the outer or green part inside, and were dried in the sun for several days. They were then rubbed by hand on a board or some other hard substance, so as to facilitate the removal of the outer or scaly portion of the bark. After this they were exposed to dew overnight. The next morning the outer layer of the bark (nikāri) was carefully removed, and the bark proper was cut into pieces of a convenient size, 9-27 inches long and 3-18 inches broad. These were put into cold water for about an hour and the alkali was extracted, after which the surface was scraped smooth with a knife. They were then dried in the sun for half an hour and when perfectly dry, were rubbed with a piece of burnt brick. A paste prepared from mātimāh (phaseolus radiates), a kind of pulse was next rubbed in and the bark was dyed yellow by means of yellow arsenic. This was followed by drying in the sun again, after which the strips were rubbed as smooth as marble. The process was now complete, and the strips were ready for use.' E.A. Gait, A History of Assam, p.357

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A Very Distinctive Style

Bardowa, the earliest site of Śaṅkaradeva’s activity, was a major Centre of the neo-Vaiṣṇavite faith and culture. It was in 1936, Harinarayan Dutta Barua, a Vaiṣṇavite scholar and missionary who extensively toured most of the Vaiṣṇavite shrines saw the earliest copy of the ‘Daśama Skandha of Bhāgavata’ traditionally known as Adi-daśama, the earliest and most venerable manuscripts in house of Śivendra Deva Goswami, Ācārya of Narowā- Bālisattra. Local tradition claims it to be the original one painted by Śaṅkaradeva himself which was later on inherited by the members of the Narowā varṇa of Bardowa-Bālisattra.

The original manuscript contains 156 folios, illustrations on both sides having a total of 312 pages, out of which 19 pages are reckoned with scanty narrations of the episode. Texts are usually found in 17 lines around the illustrations. Folios, which are found without pictures; contains eighteen lines of textual narration. The first folio is measured with 19\( \times \) 8.5\( \times \) 11\( \times \) depicts lucidly Śukadeva (son of Vyāsa) in the typical pose of vyākhāna mudrā, is seen explaining Bhāgavata before King Parikṣhit (grandson of Arjuna of Mahabharata). In another folio, pictorial description of Rāsa-līlā of Sri Kṛṣṇa, is rendering in 4 lines. The various postures of figures found in other painted folios look like present form of sattriya dance style. The printed version of the work is named ‘Sacitra Bhāgavata’ or ‘Citra-Bhāgavata’ contains 252 illustrations narrating

585 We have studied some original illustrated manuscripts preserved in Bālisattra, Kujj, Assam State museum ‘Kamarupa Anusandhana Samīttee’, and the Library of the Gauhati University from 12-6-2009 to 30-12-2009. Selected illustrated folios have been appended in 4 plates.

586 Please see the two folios (1and 90-B) of BSBP in the plates-5 and 6

587 The name of the work is first coined as ‘Citra Bhāgavata’ by H. N. Dutta Baruah.

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the early life and exploits of Lord Kṛṣṇa based on Śaṅkaradeva translation of the book-
X or Daśama Skandha Bhāgavata-Purāṇa in three languages, Assamese, English and
Hindi.

Until its publication, painting tradition of Assam was scarcely the subject of
discussion among scholars outside Assam. Moti Chandra was the first art historian who
enquired and drew the attention of scholars in his review of the Citra-Bhāgavata
highlighting the existence of the Assamese school of painting and commented: ‘hitherto
Assam with its rich cultural heritage had not yet yielded documents, which could have
proved the existence of some local school of paintings there.588 In Assam, M. Neog
remarks there are quite a few specimens of such illuminated manuscripts painted by pre-
Śaṅkaradeva poet like Harivarā Vipra etc.589 However, the discovery and publication of
the Citra-Bhāgavata found at Bālisattra (abbreviated BSBP),590 constitutes a problem in
its chronology for some art critics.591 Noting the main features of BSBP Painting,
Chandra places the work in the seventeenth century or in the early eighteenth century; a
view that is supported by Karl Khandalavala and some others scholars who place it to a
later period. M. Neog, supporting similar views, says that the original copy (folio 156,
in colophon) which bears the date Samvat śaka 1461 (A.D 1539) seems to be too early;
the work may suitably be dated to seventeenth century. He further holds that the original
manuscript was painted earlier and presumed that a later hand must have inserted the

588 Dilip Kumar Basu cited some important observation on sattrīyā paintings made by Moti
589 M Neog points out that these two manuscripts were reproduced in the Aspects of Early
Assamese literature published by the Gauhati University.
590 Bāli sattra Bhāgavata Purāṇa or Bhāgavata Book X
591 Dilip Kr. Basu and Dāyani Kowshik, ‘Bālisattra Bhāgavata Purāṇa, a problem in chronology’
a research paper reproduced in S.N. Devgoswami (ed.) Kṛtirāsya, pp.175-191
date in the present copy. However, Basil gray,\textsuperscript{592} J. P. Losty \textsuperscript{593} and R. Dasgupta agrees with the date of its execution found written in the folio no.156.

K. K. Handique, an orientalist and a renowned litterateur of Assam in his foreword to \textit{Citra Bhāgavata} mentions about some of the distinguished features of this earliest painting.\textsuperscript{594} He makes out that ‘the Assamese manuscript dated A.D. 1539, the earliest known date of this genre of painting is significant in view of the paucity of known examples of Rajput painting earlier than the seventeenth century A.D. and calls it essential for a detailed study of the original pictures for a correct appreciation of their technical traits and the aims and methods of the Assam school of painting and its relations to folk art. In Eastern Indian Manuscript Paintings, Rajatananda Dasgupta singles out the Assamese style as unique amongst the eastern school of paintings. In \textit{Manuscript Paintings from the Kāmarṭīpa Anusandhan Samitee}, R.D. Choudhary and Naren Kalita explain the style and techniques executed in two distinguished paintings of the sattra-sabhā, i.e. the \textit{Git-Govinda} and the \textit{Ānanda Lahanī}. Both the scholars notes that prior to the changes in technique in the early part of the eighteenth century A.D.

\textsuperscript{592} Basil Gray was an art historian and the keeper of Oriental antiquities at the British Museum (1946- 1969 A.D).
\textsuperscript{593} J. P. Losty was a curator of Indian visual materials in the Asian Department of the British Library. He has published extensively on illustrated Indian manuscripts and paintings in India.
\textsuperscript{594} K. K. Handique makes out the following distinct features of the painting:
- ‘Arched panels, monochrome red, blue, gray or brown backgrounds, angular figure drawings, arched eyebrows and fish-shaped eyes, pointed noses, sloping foreheads, narrow waists, simple landscapes with blue skies and decorative trees, hills indicated by piles of arches, male costumes of dhoti, dupatta, turbān, and the occasional jāmās, and the female costume of sari and bodice are some of the distinctive features of the paintings, as observed by Chandra in his review.’
the sattriya institution developed a regional school of painting."\textsuperscript{595} In fact, Assamese rendering of the aforesaid works are an advancement of the style of BSBP.

Some of the significant features of the painting as observed by noted art historian R.K. Dasgupta are: Human figures and superhuman being are drawn in anthropomorphic forms, in particular episodes like Govardhana dhārana scene, where Kṛṣṇa's personality had to be magnified; he is shown far larger in size; the lack of expression in the human faces are supplemented by effective mudras called abhanga and a few in tribanga so forth.\textsuperscript{596} The various poses of figures look like those in the sattriya dance style that flourished in the sattras.\textsuperscript{597}

We come to know that facsimile edition of the BSBP with English rendering and Roman transliteration of the original verses is to be released shortly by the Indira Gandhi National Centre of Arts, (IGNCA) New Delhi compiled and edited by K.D. Goswami.

Calligraphy

The Assamese script developed four distinct types of calligraphy during the execution of illustrated manuscripts. These are Gadgayā (Garhgayā), Bāmuniyā, Kāitheli and Lahkari. The Kāitheli script, according to M. Neog, originated with the Kāyasthas of Assam\textsuperscript{598} and was used by them in official documents and in books of

\textsuperscript{595} R. D. Choudhary (ed.), Manuscript Paintings from Kāmarūpa Anusandhan Samiti, p.2.
\textsuperscript{596} H.K. Barpujari (ed.), CHA, vol III, p.385
\textsuperscript{597} ibid
\textsuperscript{598} Kāyastha, a writer class had developed their own method of writing, there scripts came to be known as Kāitheli or sometimes Lahkari in Assam, the former style is more prevalent than the latter.
accounts. The Assamese script is derived from the Kufila style prevalent in Northern India from the 6th century. This style and script with some modifications might have been practiced by Śaṅkaradeva himself in Assam.\(^{599}\)

The manuscripts of the sattras of the Bardowā-Narowā group of our concern are mostly enriched with this type of calligraphy. We have earlier mentioned that the illustrations found preserved in the folios contributed to the growth of a school of painting local to Assam. In this way, illuminated manuscripts and their calligraphy are valuable testimonials for the particular style of painting pertaining to a school as also the social groups with which a particular script was associated.\(^{600}\) The manuscripts are thus a part, with great importance as sources for the reconstruction of cultural History of Assam.

_Guru-Carita_ narrates an incident where Śaṅkaradeva had to leave Bardowā leaving the copy of the manuscript of Kīrtana over which he had toiled so many years, so he returned to take the manuscript and re-joined his friends and relatives in their flight at great risk to his life.\(^{601}\) This episode testifies to the existence of the very earliest tradition of manuscript writing and painting at Bardowā area where later on Narowā sattras originated. However it was only with the reclamation of Bardowā around A.D. 1656, some of the dying traditions and customs originated with him revived. The Bardowā Narowā group of sattras thereby evolved into one of the great regional nodes for the propagation and circulation of this very distinctive culture, in at least two locales: the local and the regional, and both these zones of circulation

\(^{599}\) M. Neog, _SHT._, p. 308

\(^{600}\) D.K. Basu ; D. Kowshik, _op. cit._, pp. 173-192

\(^{601}\) H.C. Goswami, _op. cit.,_ p XIV

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generated, in their turn, rather distinctive networks that cut across each other occasionally. The illustrated manuscripts of the post-Śaṅkarite era such as *Anādi-pātan*602, *Pārijāta haran*, *Kumar-haran*, etc. are the most celebrated. Together these works are considered as the core of the *sattrāyā* school of Painting of Assam. To members of this school, the *Bālisattra Bhāgavata-Purāṇa* (BSBP) was the *locus classicus*. It apparently provided the model for almost all the later works including the *Gītā Govinda* and unpublished manuscripts like *Lava Kuśar Yudha*, *Ānanda Lahari* and some others from the eighteenth century.603 For the creators of other venerable manuscripts produced in other different *sattras*, the *Bālisattra Bhāgavata-Purāṇa* was the most authoritative source. The style set forth in the Citra-Bhāgavata was called *sattrāyā* which significantly owes its origin in a Vaiṣṇavite *sattrā* group. It appears that *sattrāyā* was attributed to the style of painting because of the existence of the manuscript in the precinct of a *sattrā* and scholar like D.K. Basu of the California University also refers it as *BSBP* with the prefix Bālisattra, its find place. This title is appropriate one as we come to have few copies of illustrated Bhāgavata in different places of Assam.

As has been noticed elsewhere *sattrādhikārs* also took to the writing of dramas and painting of manuscripts, either by their own hand or employing *Khānikars* of the *sattrā-sabhās*. This tradition of manuscript writing and illustration helped in producing numerous manuscripts of drama and religious texts of repute. The Vaiṣṇavite pontiffs were required to prove their calibre in the field of fine arts such as dance, music and

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602 *Anādi-pātan* is one of the earliest illustrated manuscripts of Assam based on the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa book III, mixed with *Vāman-purāṇa*. It deals with the Hindu theory of creation and describes the cosmology consisting of seven heavens and seven hells and then goes on to tell of the places man goes to after his death depending on his deeds and how one is tortured in hell for misdeeds during his earthly life.

603 D. K. Basu, D. Kowshik, *op. cit.*, p. 25
painting at the prevailing time. Lakṣmīdeva of our concern was such a versatile artiste *sattrādhikāra* of well repute.

One of the earliest paintings of this period which also represents the *sattrīyā* style, initiated the style of *Citra-Bhāgavata* is *Anādi-Patan* of Narowā Kuji *sattrā*. The original illustrated work on hand-made Cotton is now housed at the Assam State museum containing 25 folios, dating from the first half of the eighteenth century. Of all the texts of manuscript paintings, the *Anādi-Patan* occupies a distinct place considering its merits of the art with abstract designs reflected in the paintings. Art critics are of the view that the work, of an unknown artiste of another Narowā- *sattrā*, went ahead of the style of the *Citra-Bhāgavata*, where the artiste showed his excellent penmanship in the abstraction of some scenes with the application of plastic elements. The last and the most noteworthy contribution of this *sattrā sabhā* was the *Pārijata haran* of Aibheti-Na-*sattrā* continues the same trend.

Some other celebrated *sattradhiṇāra* of Narowā group, Ramākānta, Ramācandra Lakṣmīdeva and two of Salaguri *sattras*, Śaśadhara and Ananta displayed versatile quality and excellence in penmanship, calligraphy, and in the performing arts. Sridhara Ātā, *sattrādhikāra* of Korcung *sattrā*, and Śaśadhara Ātā, of Aibheti *na-sattrā* were known as the creators of another important illustrated works, viz. *Bhāgavata-Pūrāṇa* (Book- X) and the *Pārijāta harana nātā*.

Lakṣmīdeva Ātā of Narowā had to his credit seven theological dramas which included most celebrated *Kumar-haran* enriched with illustrations of some folios. Lakṣmīdeva Ātā is said to have painted the autograph copy on a *mugā* (Mulberry) cloth;

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was a finest specimen of the sattriya paintings of eighteenth century. \footnote{After a close scrutiny of a fragile folio (from the autograph copy) the year of its composition is derived as Śaka 1743 /A.D 1821.} Paintings executed on the canvas measured 2.75m, with small divisions and towards the end the portrait of Aniruddha, the central character of the play was brilliantly depicted. This MS. exhibited the original features of the sattriya art heritage, has now drew attention of scholars. It proves that a thin stream of activity of sattriya artiste continued in this house until the early 19th century. These paintings were also structurally closer to the style of the Citra-Bhāgavata. \footnote{S. D Goswami, Lakshmīdeva Jīvan āru Kṛiti, p. 37.} An attempt has been made here to elaborate some of the folios of the artiste. His Kumara- Haran, the most celebrated illuminated paintings with 12 no of paintings, the date of its execution is found as netra -veda muni dui which stands for 1743 A.D. \footnote{N. Kalita (ed.), An alphabetical index of illustrated manuscripts of Assam, p.128} The play was enacted at the court of the Ahom king Candrakanta Sinha on the 26th day of the month of māgha (January- February) of that year. Observing its certain traits, art critic N. Kalita rightly says, Lakṣmīdeva successfully maintains here a distance from his predecessor, the artiste of Citra-Bhāgavata in handling different plastic elements and tries to create more modelled forms, a style of his own. He defines his composition summarily retaining the sattriya tradition on conventional and motifs, colours and their hues. \footnote{M*.p.129}

In Anādi-pātan, 25 handmade Cotton folios are used as base material and scripts are in Kāthelī. The treatment of Mount Meru painted in one attractive folio had its parallel in Jaina paintings and the influence of Jaina paintings on the sattriya painting of that period is significant. In this manuscript the artiste employs various forms by the
juxtaposition of different coloured shapes which has elevated the paintings from realism of naturalism to a kind of abstract surrealism, says S. Baruah. Average size of the folio is 32 " × 14 " with all abstract forms pictorial description, which is almost a rare phenomenon of this class of work. In one of the significant pictorial folios (no.10, reverse side, figure 2) Mount Meru is encircled by four lesser supporting hills which are identified as Suparvā, Kaumuda, Meru Mandapa and Mandara. The manuscript bears a date in 1704 Śaka suggesting its execution was done in A.D. 1782. Some critic say, the artiste of Kujī sattra gives the most successful paintings in terms of dexterous applications of plastic elements. Art critic, Samiran Baruah believes that the artist while executing the work must have studied the philosophy of the work thoroughly, after understanding the meaning only he could paint the scenes with minute details. In fact we get some elements of abstract art for the first time. About three other versions of Anādi Patan, critic observes that the copy of the KAS is profusely decorative while Kujī sattra’s work is more restrained and sober in nature. In depicting the great deluge, the most referred folio of the painting so far, artiste use bold lines in white emerging from the clouds like water falling from a spring create a most evocative spectacle of downpour of rains, and with many cursive lines, the rhythm of water in the ocean balancing the verticality of the downpour is shown beautifully.

609 Please see plate 7 for the abstract folio 10 (reverse) of Anādi Patan, entitled ‘Mount meru encircled by four lesser mountain chains.
611 R.D. Choudhary (ed.), op. cit., Preface
612 ibid.
613 Samiran Baruah, ‘Of gods heroes and kings, illustrated manuscripts from Assam’ Anna P. Dallpicolla, (ed.) Indian painting, New Delhi, 2011, p.35-37
significant about the painting as Samiran Baruah and some others observe that no such illustrated examples of the third book of the Bhagavata have yet come from any part of India.\textsuperscript{615}

Art historians and critics point out that there developed a close liaison between the court and the \textit{sattra-sobha} with regard to the miniature form of paintings, which were discernible from the eighteenth and early decades of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{616} To quote S. K. Bhuyan, the Āhom kings not only patronized and supported an army of clerks and copyists under the supervision of an officer named Likhakar Barua, which literally means the superintendent of scribes, but also constructed a set of apartments called \textit{Gandhiyā–bharāl} (storehouse) for the preservation of royal manuscripts, records and letters to the royal palaces.\textsuperscript{617} In this context Naren Kalita who works on \textit{sattrīyā} paintings remark: "this new trend developed in the late eighteenth century in which elements of some paintings of the \textit{sattrīyā} school marched to the royal court of the Ahom Kings Rudra Simha (1696-1714 A.D) and Śiva Simha (1713-1744 A.D)." The style continued in a somewhat degraded form, at times assimilating new idioms and motifs, in the later illustrated manuscripts coming from the \textit{sattras}.

\textbf{The Decline of the School}

The rise and fall of the dynasties in Assam, outside intervention, regional political shifts and invasions, the apathy of the masses and natural calamities are some of the major factors for the gradual decline of the painting culture of Assam from the

\textsuperscript{615} ibid, p 14
\textsuperscript{616} N. Kalita (ed.), \textit{op. cit.}, p.40
\textsuperscript{617} H. C. Goswami, \textit{op. cit.}, Foreword, p. xix.

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end of the eighteenth century of the Christian era. The first jolt came with the outbreak of the Moamoriya rebellion in A.D 1769. The Moamoriya rebellion dethroned the kings and demolished the edifices of the court atelier.

Although the impact of the Moamoriya upheaval was felt in the Satrîyâ circles, the pace of creativity did not abate until the end of the nineteenth century. Despite these disturbances Šaśadhara Ātā, a Sattrâdhikâra of Āibheti-Nasattra, executed the Pârijâta haran, a transcript of Šâṅkaradeva’s drama of the same name, in A.D. 1836. This proves that the tasks of manuscript copying and illustrations by the khanikars of the sattrasabhâs were not much hampered in some sattras during this period of turmoil that rocked the state.

Since the later part of the nineteenth century, the painters of Assam gradually lost patronage and suffered even more with the Burmese invasions that created further unrest. In addition to this, hundreds of manuscripts were lost due to recurrent floods, devastating fires and external invasions. Foreign invaders took away numerous valuable manuscripts. A Sanskrit sloka generally added to the end or the beginning of many of the old manuscripts makes the point:

'Caurat rakshā, jalat rakshā rakṣhā samślah vândhanat /
akhubhâya narahastebhâya ebam vadati puṣtikâ // 618

Finally, for lack of scientific preservation and for lack of patronage, as well as the ignorance of the custodians, many such manuscripts were either damaged or lost.

618: Thus speaks the book (puthi) itself: protect me from theft, from water, through a measured wrapping, from men, and protect from the hands of invaders.
The study of the painting tradition as well as an enquiry into the heritage of the manuscripts of Assam gains significance with each passing day. Of late, an early Assamese paintings and manuscripts have received wide acclaim from various circles. The National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM) proclaimed the illustrated copy preserved at the manuscript section of the Gauhati University Library as the Vijjānan-nidhi manuscripts treasures 619 of India in 2007. This manuscript narrates the story of the eight book of Bhāgavata (Amrit manthan) contain 24 folios and 12 illustrations presumed to be painted by some artiste of the Bardowā group of sattras following style of the Citra Bhāgavata.620

By designating the manuscript as Vijjānan-nidhi, the NMM seeks to pay homage to landmarks in Indian intellectual and creative history and hopes to highlight their value and signal their unique contribution to India’s life and history, encouraging greater efforts to preserve the manuscripts in their physical form. Sometimes a manuscript’s value may simply lie in the history it represents, i.e. in recording an indigenous tradition and cosmology. In short they are repositories of the knowledge of that period without which life would have been substantially different for the present generation.621

619 Manuscripts declared as Vijjānan-nidhi are selected for their contribution to Indian life, to the development of Indian thought, and for the preservation of India’s diverse, yet composite, culture. Indeed they are celebrated for their outstanding value to humanity.

620 Our spot survey (November, 24, 2011) reveals that the Ms. (acc. no. 524), which is now preserved in the K.K.H. Library, G.U was obtained from one Dinakānta Adhikāry of Salaguri sattra, Bardowā.

621 Information derived from the sources of the Press and information Bureau (PIB) New Delhi, in February 13th, 2007
We observed that the art of illustrating religious manuscripts became prominent during the Vaiṣṇava renaissance of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Assam. Artist-artisans took to the art of painting under the patronage, largely, of the sattra-sabhās and the royal court; these introduced a distinct indigenous style that developed in the next three centuries. Scholars have observed that Assam was the last refuge of the manuscript tradition, and sācipāṭ texts in elaborate size and of this indigenous style are found even at a later date. Assam can rightly boast of having innumerable copies of such manuscripts preserved at numerous sattras and royal repositories from the middle of the sixteenth century.

The aforesaid discussion tries to provide an account of a now forgotten school of art tradition that straddled the pre-colonial Assam. The Assam school of painting developed more particularly on its own was primarily the Vaiṣṇava renaissance in Assam, which manifested itself through the art of painting, a fact that has escaped the attention of the mainstream art historian. We have observed that Assamese paintings have no stylistic relation with the Pala paintings or with the Orissan paintings. Nor do they have any affinity with the folk paintings of Madhubanī in Bihar. Surprisingly, 'some elements though from the Rajasthani, Mughal and Pāhārī schools can be seen in them, they are profoundly controlled by the local traits which relegate these high styles in the background are submerged by the local style.'622 Thus, we may safely attribute the status of a separate school for the Assamese paintings within the panorama of the Indian manuscript painting tradition.

The unique tradition of writing and painting of manuscripts introduced by Śaṅkaradeva and the legacy continued and followed by his descendants till the end of

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622 R.D. Choudhary and C. Nandagopala, op. cit., p.10

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the 19th century, and traces of an earliest sattriyā painting from a small sattra of Narowā-Bālisattra in 20th century demands more attention from academia for a detailed study of its origin and history.

2. Woods craving

The art of creating elaborate designs in wood by hand, with the help of various carving tool is known as wood carving. Wood carving may vary from floral and traditional motifs to geometrical or abstract patterns and varies greatly between cultures. Wood carving has been practiced by humans since the earliest civilizations and has been found widespread throughout the globe. In India, wood carving has a long and distinguished history is a traditional art which is passed on by master craftsmen through the generations. Carving involves shaping wood to make objects of utility and chiseling parts of wood to form intricate designs, with the help of hand tools. The sattra institution of Assam was the main centres of wood craft during the pre-Colonial period.

Under the Ahom government, there was an officer known as Khanikar Barua who was in charge of the Artisan known as khanikar or Bādhai. Harakanta Baruah Sadar Amen records that the royal secretariat had a separate department for collecting good quality timber from the forests under the supervision of an officer called Kath Baruah. The wooden appearance of an image of Harihara from Deopani, datable to C.9th century A.D. indicates the practice of preparing images in wood in ancient period also. The method employed by the sattra artisans was one of deep incision inside the wooden panel is called Charāikhuliya (bird and carving) or wood peckers style. It is seen

623 B.C. Handiquie, Purani Asomar Silpa, p 45
624 B.N. Mukherjee, East Indian Art styles: A study in parallel trends, p.23

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Carvers of *sattra* practiced an extremely primitive carpentry with a limited number of tools comprising an axe, knife and a few chisels of various types.\(^{625}\)

Structurally a *sattras* complex generally consists of a prayer hall (*Kīrtana-ghar*) sanctum (*maṇikya*) and a gate house (*bāt-corā*). The sanctum and prayer hall of the *sattras* are remarkable for wood carving. The *Kīrtana-ghar* (*nām-ghar*) is usually embellished with carved wooden doors (including their jambs and linter) windows, brackets, pillars, beams and wall surfaces. Figure of divine, semi-divine and human beings demons, botanical and zoomorphic motifs and illustrations from the epics and *purāṇas* embellished the panels. On the sanctum there may be wooden sculptures of Viṣṇu and his incarnations and of others like Garuḍa and Hanumana.\(^{626}\)

Bardowā in general and Narowā *sattra* of our concern in particular is a rich repertoire of wooden objects where a considerable amount of artefacts probably belonging to 18\(^{th}\) century were recovered in fragile condition and uncared state by N. Kalita, a researcher and art historian in the last quarter of the last century.\(^{627}\) Most of the exhibits are now kept at the Mini museum of Bardowā. These artefacts were collected from the site of Bardowā Thāān and some of its adjacent *sattras* of Nagaon and Morigaon districts. Among the various sculptures and wood crafts, the following artefacts of the Narowā *sattras* are found:

1. Effigies (Pillars)

2. Idols

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\(^{626}\) K.K. Dasgupta, *Wood Carvings of Eastern India*, p.36

\(^{627}\) N. Kalita, *op. cit.*, p.39

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3. Door-panel

4. Simhäsana

5. Various type of utensils and other items

Among the exhibits of Bardowa; seven interesting effigies (Pillars) of Viṣṇu, Balarama, Śiva Ganeśa, Brahma, Nārada and Garuḍa are found to be most attractive in nature. The standing figure of Nārada is perhaps the best being marked by an easy flowing physical contour. Excepting Ganeśa all are frontally conceived and executed. The image of Ganeśa has a bold and dignified expression and the four curves of his body bespeak the and anatomical sense of the artiste who fashioned it.

Among the objects which may be included within the orbit of sculptural art or in its border area are items mostly made of using wood. To this category belong the doors or litters of different types found in the entire group. The Kirtana-ghar of Bardowa was the nerve centre of various artistic activities since the time of its re-establishment in 17th century. Some Adhikāra of the Narowā and Salaguri like Lakṣmīdeva, Bhadradeva and some sattra khanikars were expert painters and wood-carvers. One such attractive exhibits of Bardowa is an idol of Viṣṇu artistically engraved in a wide piece of Mango wood by some khanikars. The idol measured at 75cm × 14.5 cm can be seen as a masterpiece of early satrīyā art where the artiste employed maximum iconographic details and succeeded in illustrating contemporary and local idiom. Sattra tradition claims it to be the work of Bhadradeva, an Adhikāra of Narowā sattra of the later part of the 18th century. Supporting the view Kalita tries to call it a perfect magnum opus of an

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628 N. Kalita, Bardowār Silpa Bastu, p.p. 10-15
artiste-sattradhikāra which is enriched with fifteen different traditional and local elements like Kerumoiji, Kirités, mālāmoni, Jonbiri. Vaṇamālā, riḥā, gāmkhārū, napur etc. He also holds that it endowed with elements like Kapālī-torana, makarikā and byāl, might be carved out imitating some old statue of the sattrā. Kalita’s conjecture is proved to be correct when during our study a statue of Vāsudeva-Viṣṇu was discovered at the Narowā-Bālisatra. It has got some striking similarities with that of the wooden image, might be presumed to be a work executed in the same sattrā.

The walls of Kīrtana-ghar of Bardowā before its demolition and reconstruction were found well decorated; at least with four decorated panels with episode of Ramayana translated into the medium of wood. Among the recovered panels, the Kāliya-damana is the lone specimen belonging to prayer hall of Bardowā where sattrā, carvers artistically and inventively made holes in the negative spaces to facilitate air and light.

In execution of door panels of the sattrā, the carvers allowed their tools to travel deeply inside the wooden plank of the jambs and door lintel so as to provide the figures with round contours pleasing to the eyes. In one panel, with a length of 217.5 cm and breadth of 27 cm. represents gopī, dancing Kṛṣṇa. Nṛsīṁha adorned with Kīrtimukh, Kapālī toran are some of the unique elements of the panel. Another panel (166 c.m x 35.5 c.m) is primarily found decorated with some magars in both sides and a scene in which peacock biting a snake. Theme of another such panel having its upper large curve of 190 cm x 27 cm. has depicted Śisulīlā part of Lord Kṛṣṇa where creepers and a

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629 ibid., p.42
630 ibid., p.41
631 Loc. cit
magars are treated as its main attraction. These door panels are known as mehraji door in sattra circle for its arched shape of upper part.

Among the pillar statues which were once worked as the row posts of the old Kirtana-ghar are Brahma (90 cm.) and Nārada with a Vīnā (87.5cm.) in his hand are important. Although the name of the engravers is not found Kalita tries to associate the name of one Rangai Āl-dhārā as the prime sculptor of these statues quoting some local sources excepting two. It is to be mentioned here Rangai Āl-dhāra was a disciple of Narowā sattra and a close associate of Laśmīdeva Ātā and some sattrāyas also agrees with this view. We come across Banuā Rajkhowa ātoi and Bhavarama baquā whose names are incorporated in the list of the associates of Lakṣmīdeva and his younger son Naranātha.632 Name of these two manuals suggest that the sattra maintained an atelier of artists for carrying out artistic activity.

Interior of the Kirtana-ghar is sometimes replete with a large number of sculptures in the round. Of all the sculptures, the most significant one is the colossal figure of Garuḍa, a semi-divine winged god; in the kneeling posture. The sattrā artists developed the form of Garuḍa as a hybrid one with a prominent beak and wings of a bird. Its face with a curved beak is emphasized by the deeply furrowed lines creating the eyelids and the brows. The carver maintains the cylindrical feature of the medium in carving in the pot-belly and closely knit limbs in the figure. Rhythm of line creates movement in the figure and endows it with a sinuous contour of round and sensitively modelled plastic volume.633

632 Bhakat-māla of Bālisattra
633 N. Kalita, op. cit., p 44

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The earliest such statue of the sattra a Garuḍa measured with 178 cm was carved out by one Dhawal Atoi, an expert engraver in śaka 1755 corresponding to A.D.1833 is a masterpiece of wood carving of Bardowā. 634 When wings of the Garuḍa were broken Rangai of Narowā sattra mentioned above engraved another such image with a height of 157 cm. The specific designs made on the crown of the aforesaid statues are called braja and holes made on the negative space of the door panels are called Kundrākṣa 635 in Bardowā. In comparison with other sattras, Bardowā is richer in respect of avatāra (incarnations) figures. The carvers derived their themes from the Bhāgavata-purāṇa and Ramayana engraved several such images of avatars like Kurma (28 cm × 28 cm), Narasimha (35 × 31 cm) Parasurāma (28 cm × 26 cm) Halirāma (38 cm × 28 cm), Buddha (31 cm × 28 cm) and Kalki (39 cm × 28 cm).

Among other such objects which may be included within the orbit of sculptural art or its border area items made using wood is Simhāsana or tired seat. One of the primary attraction of wooden sculptures in a Vaiṣṇavite sattra is the throne intended for holding the X book of the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa (as the main object of veneration) in the sanctum. The throne consists of vertical rows square or rectangular tiers of gradually and uniformly decreasing surface area. There are animal motifs at the four corners; the throne is called Simhāsana or lion’s seat. 636 Each of the tiers has at its four sides the picture panels called lekhami-pat for display of paintings and accessory designs of flowers and meandering creepers. Sometimes the picture panels contain carved images of different incarnations of God and narrative compositions. Among the Simhāsana we

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634 Carver’s name is found incised at the pedestal of the idol.
635 Eye holes in the shape of tentacles resembling the Kundrākṣa flower, hence the style is called Kundrākṣa.
636 K.K. Dasgupta, op. cit., p.31
have encountered at least two elegant Simhāsanas of the Narowā sattra, one at Bardowā-Narowā and one at Kuji. The seven tired Simhāsana of Kuji sattra, an impressive wooden work of the sattra is measured at 3.33 m×3.69 m. One significant feature is that the sculptor (carver) raised this huge construction without using any nail. One four armed wooden Vāsudevea (29 cm.) image of the sattra kept at the manikuṭa which may easily draw the attention of any visitor. Other similar objects comprise seven thogās (script stand) four gacās (earthen lamp stand), four sarāī, one Ural (wooden mortar) and a Barperā (Big wooden box). One replica of a beautifully carved door panel of Kuji sattra can be seen in the southern bāt-cora of the Bardowā Thāān speaks about the artistic heritage prevailed in the sattra. The guru-Āsana (145cm × 35cm.) of Narowā Vāsudeva Thāān is of recent origin, where one wooden sarāī (56cm× 45cm.) and image of a Garuḍa are found.637

Another category of wood object is dolā (litter) of different sizes and shapes. One such litter (1.8m×3.4 cm.) called kekurā-dolā is found at the Narowā-Vāsudeu Thāān with a long ore (4.54 m) believed to be used by the Adhikāras during their travels. Two stools, (pirā) one ornamented (H =18 cm., C=77.5cm.) called Cakpirā, (H= 33.5 cm., C=346 cm.) an Ural ( H=31cm., C=77cm.) artistically made by Lakṣmiṇideva Āṭā are now found in fragile condition at Bālisattra. One can see a super structure called āmahi-ghar, for keeping sacred scriptures at the top of the seven tiers Simhāsana at different Narowā sattra. One such beautifully carved āmahi ghar (L=39 cm × B= 36cm. × H=16 cm.) is seen at Bālisattra where the worshipping statue

637 During our filed survey physical verification of almost all the available wooden objects preserved at repositories of the Narowā sattras are verified and measured.
Vaikunthanatha and mala-bāṣṭu (rosary) of the Adhikāra were kept. A small pair of door (L = 12 cm. × B = 10 cm.) with an engraved creeper adds beauty to the object. It has been observed sculptures are mostly age-old in character, jejune in style, lacking in perspective and can be more aptly called folk-art.

Carving traditions of sattras received a set back from 19th century onwards due to several reasons, although, the tradition did not completely die out. Local schools at Bardovā Bālisattra and more particularly the style developed at the Caraikhuliā sattra with the help of local expertise continued their activities down to the 19th century.

3. Minor artefacts and crafts

As in Sanskrit tradition, upakarana or accessories is equally important in Vaiṣṇavite sattra tradition. Ahārya (decoration) mentions in the Nātya-Shāstra are made of four classes. These are measured by i) body movement (angavinaya) ii) Speech (Vacikabhinaya) iii) Expression of feeling and sentiments (samanyabhinaya) and iv) accessories (ahāryabhinaya). Some artisans with their expertise are traditionally found

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638 Informants are Dr. S.N. Deva Goswami (67) and Prabhat Devgoswami, (60) of Narowā Bālisattra.

639 Caraikhuliā is a branch of the Dighalī sattra of Purusa sanhāti group located south-west of Bardovā is also known as Dighali Caraikhuliā. The sattra perhaps derived its name for the technique it developed and employed by the carvers who were expert in wood carvings. Some of them are still engaged in activities of wood carving like making of holy altar and idols.

640 The Natya Shastra (Sanskrit. Nātyaśāstra, नाट्यशास्त्र) is an ancient Indian treatise on the performing arts encompassing theatre, dance and music. It was written incorporating 36 chapters during the period between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D. in classical India and is traditionally attributed to the Sage Bharata.
engaged in various minor art and crafts for preparing accessories required in occasional and annual dramatic performances held at the Vaiśṇavite sattras in Assam.

In this context, accessories which form a part of decoration (in nepalīya) in Bhāonā are subdivided into four groups. Traditional Assamese accessories include effigies (Sk. puṭa) or Assamese ‘Cho’ and Saijivas of the Indian stage were widely used in neo-Vaiśṇavite sattras in general and Narowā group of sattra of our concern in particular. Accessory which forms a part of decoration in a sattriya Bhāonā is divided into four different groups. According to Nātya shastra, model works mask (mukhā), ornaments (Alakārā), Saijiva forms the main accessories of Indian theatre.641 Saijiva include masks of animals, birds, fish, arms and accoutrements made of light wood or bamboo are in general use.642 In Indian tradition, the mask are usually highly exaggerated and formalised, share an aesthetic with the carved images of monstrous heads that dominate the facades of Hindu and Buddhist temples.643

The puṭas were used in Assamese sattriya performance called Bhāona are made of bamboo and canes and covered with leather or cloth called sandhimā in Sanskrit. khanikars of sattras of our sattra group created different types of accessories in ateliers. The variety of masks that used in Bhāonā which forms a striking feature of Assamese acting may be classified into three types 1) those representing grotesque form or hideous persons such as Rāwana, the king of Raskhasa, Kumbhakarṇa etc. ii) Secondly the different animals Garuḍa, Kāliya serpent, boar, monkeys, Jáṭāyu-bird and such

641. Nātya-Shastra, Ch. xvi
642. Kaliram Medhi (ed), Ankāvati, p. XLI
643 By John Emigh, Masked performance: The Play of self and other ritual and theatre, University of Pennsylvania

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actors iii) Comic forms of the buffoons and the jesters. In many performances elaborate life size effigies are indispensable particularly in Rawana Badha, a life size mask with ten heads are used. The buffoons wear small masks from clay clothes, roughly prepared from clay, cloth tree barks, bark of plantain is also used to serve temporary purposes.

To that effect the earliest ever references of usage of first mask or 

mukhā in Assamese bhāona was dated back to Śaṅkaradeva time when ‘Cihna-Yārā’, the first dramatic representation was produced at Bardowā. On that occasion one mask of Garuḍa, the vehicle of Viṣṇu was worn by an actor Sarbejaya by name. The earliest reference of usage of a huge effigy of a Kāliya serpent at Narowā Sattra is found in Aniruddha Carita when Kaliya damana bhāona was enacted at the time of Ramākānta Ātā, the second superior. On Bhāona day, one Rāmacarana, a sattra khanikar made a huge ‘Cho’ of a Kali which was worn by one Kālarāi -Bangarāi, a comic character of the sattra. The mask was so real that the audience were made to believe that Kāli nāga, the serpent regained its life and started fleeing following hue and cry. We shall try to explain it to be an attempt at reality made by an expert artiste bestowing credit to the khanikar and who craved such monstrous Cho and the actor who played the role so brilliantly that led to the episode. Another such comic character like Kālarāi Bangarāi of Narowā sattra was Bhumuk Bahuā who once came out with the musical troupe of the sattra when Gaurinath Sinha visited the Narowā sattra -Vasudeu Thāān. Following the tradition Lakṣmīdeva, the erudite playwright an satrīyā artiste of high calibre

644 B.K. Baruah, 'The Father of Assamese drama and stage', B. P Chaliha (ed.), Sankaradeva studies in Culture, p.27
645 Aniruddha Carita, vv.371-390
646 S.K. Bhuyan (ed) ,Tungkhungya Buranji, p.98
designed some model works for various characters portrayed for his plays like Nṛsinha Yātra, Rāvana Vadha and Kumar harana. With bamboo sprinkles he created a huge pusta of Nṛsinha and some wooden masks of different shapes covered with clothes for characters of bear and monkeys. The actor who put on such ‘Cho’ made the illiterate masses surprise the character suddenly appeared from a hidden spot. Rāvana Badha of Lakṣmīdeva became a much admired and popular play for maximum usage of huge and attractive effigies and masks of various shapes. For his most celebrated play Kumara Haran, various traditional and local techniques were employed for drawing attention of the audience. The play demands various ‘Cho’ and ‘mukhās’ for animals characters created by Citralekha through her illusion and called them in the stage narrating the story before sage Narada. Very often the actors are found playing the roles of animals (saḻiva) by wearing huge but light weighted ‘Cho’ designed and prepared by the sattra khanikars by bamboo splinters, clothes, jute fibres and painted with various vegetable colours. Sometimes upper mask are carved out of light woods. For characters of bear and snake coats (jalam) were made of clothes to which were stitched hanging fibres of jute, for their movement in the show where black thread was used. For the play Govardhana Yātra, the chief attraction, Govardhaṇa hill was built by bamboo and piths on which man could even stand and requisites of worship could be kept. Vyajma (those made by mechanical process and those covered only with clothes (Vestima) include chariot heavenly tress, larger snake are also produced and used in some dramas of Lakṣmīdeva and other dramatist of Narowa sattra. It is said Lakṣmīdeva himself

647. A long coarse robe like garment usually worn by a buffoon, vide; Hemkosh
648. Some villagers of Bālisatra and Carikhulya sattra informs us about this traditional craftsmanship of the sattra; S.N. Devgoswami, Natyakar Lakshmidev Jivan aru Kriitti, p.53
649. Natya-Shastra, XXI -57
supervised the kārkhaṇā of these greenroom articles, the tradition for which the sattras are still acclaimed. The tradition continues till sixties of the last century. Among the mask artiste Bhuban Ch. Goswami and Durlav Devagoswami of Narówā Kujī and one Malakhu Sattradhāra of Kobāikotā were well known who continued the tradition of creating mask and accessories required in presentation of Bhāonā in village nām-ghars and sattras till 20th century.

Apart from pustas elements required for Angaracanā (decoration of body) and Alankāra (ornaments) Sattriyā-Khanikars of our concern sattras played a major role. H.N. Dutta Baruah points out to one such earliest practice of preparing and procuring gunpowder (one basic element) by Kāyastha gosāins (Adhikāra) who were expert in this art. For creating colourful lights at Bhāonā pandal (rabhā) and giving an attraction to different sequences of the play Cengali, Cakravana, mahatā were procured traditionally from gun-powder. In some of the sattras the monks were specially trained and appointed for preparing masks, while others engage themselves on the work out of pleasure. There used to be khanikars, painters and workers of earthen models, who were responsible for the tasks. The Bhakat-mālā of Bālisattra records one such Khanikar Sariānanda, a close associate of Rāmadeva Ātā. In pre-colonial Assam we find some references in Copper plates of Ahom period about special permission of king to procure gunpowder to some of the sattrā functionaries for dramatic performances. For procuring gun powder locally called khār-bārod, some conventional but interesting

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650. Gangadhar’s Narowā Gosain āru Bālisattra Varisāvali, (Ms.)
651. Silpukhur, Souvenir, Morigaon district Sahitya sabha, 2005, p.8
652. H.N. Dutta Baruah, PKKSI, p.16
653. Cited in SHT, p. 271, vide Ch. Xi of Tungkhungi Buraṇji, entitled the gradation of sattrā functionaries
654. M. Neog, PS. (ed.) vide; C P. 10, 12, 13, 17 and 27

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methods were employed in Narowā sattras. In the first place, fungus produced from the Cow-dung and cattle urine are mixed and put into a bamboo tube (cungā) and allowed to drop down in a plantain leaf placed below. Next, the watery mixture is made to boil, when it cools down sulphur is produced. In another method, the cowshed plastered with cow dung liquid and floor had to be remaining unused for three days. After that sulphate began to spring up from the floor. The sulfur thus collected is allowed to dry in sunlight and mixed with different ingredients for producing various kinds of fire items. In Narowā group of sattras dramatic entrance called pravesha of some charterers like King, Asura and animal are accompanied by exploding locally made many indigenous fireworks. One Jogendra gosāṁ, of Telahi-Narowā satra was an expert in this practice.\(^{655}\) The aforesaid methods are said to have employed at Narowā Bālisattrā till early decades of the last century. For preparing one such most commonly used fire work, Cengali 46.66 gm. Sulphur, 17.49 gm. charcoal-dust of bhekuri (phlogocnthus tube flours) and bāhak (Justicia-Adhatoda) are put in a small bamboo tube which produces bright light when it is ignited. Cakravāṅ is one such fabulous arrow said to have been used by heroes of yore in Bhāonā.\(^{656}\) It is an eye catching fire items consisting of wheel fixed on upper end of a stick and when ignited revolves on the stick and scatters fire all round. Lighting stick one such common decorative items are said to have prepared with the following ingredients namely saltpetre, sulphur, and charcoals of bāhak tree, iron dust and lemon juice.\(^{657}\) We have come across a pair of old stone

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\(^{655}\) K.D. Goswami, Agyāya Bhāonā , p.79  
\(^{656}\) Hemkosha, Assamese dictionary  
\(^{657}\) A bamboo torch where wicks of clothes are sucked in mustard oil or other vegetable oils. The person who holds the torch at Bhāonā is called 'Ānā dharā.'
grinder at the Kirtana-ghar of Narowal-Balisattra and people claims that earlier it was used by khanikars to grind some ingredients required for procuring gunpowder.

For illuminating the Bhāonā-ghar or nām-ghar and clear vision; at least one āriyā, few cautāras 658 and many dalā-cāki are used. For this purpose another items like bhatā, (a big lamp) cāki (earthen lamp) mahata, Agnigarh (arched shape light-stand) are traditionally used.659 On the Bhāonā night- Agnigarh, prepared by two bamboo sticks of lights is raised just inside the entrance to the prayer hall. Small lighted torches are placed in holes drilled at the top of the bamboo arch. One such item put up at Bardowā Kirtana-ghar had been visualized by Farely Richmond when he writes ‘a bridge between the physical and spiritual world or merely the point of transition between the māya of the real world and that of the drama’.660 Richmond believed such elements are not to be found anywhere in India.

In later times some of the sattra artisans earned their livelihood by preparing greenroom accessories for Bhāonā, and working as a makeup artist and sometimes imparting training to gāyana bāyana troupe and actors in different villages.661 In fact services of expert gosāins and artisans who excelled in dramatic arts were sometimes requisitioned. By organizing occasional training of dance and acting in village nām-ghars and other adjacent sattras they managed to earn some money and foodstuff. The materials for paintings of actors by sattra-khanikars on the stage were generally vermilion (hengul) yellow arsenic (hāitāl), chalk or dhal, brown ochre (gereu), lamp

658. A metal made wide lamp stand where four lamps —wicks can be lighted at a time for generating bright light.
659. P.D. Goswami, Sattriya Utsavar parcai Tatpajra, p.267
661. K.D. Goswami, op.cit., p.80
black, (*teli-cāi*), colleyrium, mica, some of which were used in painting other decorative artifacts of *sattras.*

Two other minor artisans of our *sattr* group include *kuhilā-kath* (mattress) makers and whisker cap makers. *kuhilā-kath* (mattress) is one of the main handicrafts item of the Bardowā, dating back to the time of Šaṅkaradeva on which one artisan family originated. In early times, *kuhilā* (pith) is traditionally cultivated at Bardowā and its adjacent low lying marshy fields. The portion of the reed that remains below the water is utilized. The fibrous outer layer is scrapped with a knife and then dried in the sun. It is then cut length wise into small pieces and these are then woven on a simple loom like gadget made of wood, bamboo poles, earlier in *sattr* hāti-bohās of Bardowā the practice of manual weaving was prevalent. The items which are now commercially produced include holy seats, mats, dolls, cushions, chain etc. One large whisker cap is preserved at the Śrimanta Šaṅkaradeva research Centre, which speaks about the creator, an unknown artiste of Narowā Kuji *sattr* and existence of a strong tradition of handicrafts which becomes obsolete from the last century only.

After returning from Germany Jyoti Prasad Agarwala visited Bardowā Thāān in 1931 and became astonished at the structural design of some engraved pillars at the *nām-ghan* of Bardowā. He discerned similarity of the Simhāsana embellished with paintings with that of cubist design where elements of impressionist and some symbolist were blended. Puffed with arrogance on getting Western education Jyoti

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662 M. Neog, *SHT.*, p.273
663 *Ubana and Bangaya* are known to be the earliest two artiste of pith culture.
664 Rupkonwar Jyoti Prasad Agarwala (17 June 1903–17 January 1951) was a great Assamese playwright, song writer, poet, and film maker from Assam. He was considered as Assamese cultural icon, deeply revered for his creative vision and output and is popularly called the *Rupkonwar.*
Prasad's mind was shattered into pieces on that day when he could see some marvels of artistry of Śaṅkaradeva at his own place. The art critics believed that eminent sculptor of contemporary time Epstein's designs might have greatly influenced by some Indian sculptures. After analysing the sattra architecture of Bardowā Jyotiprasad convinced that the observations made by the western art critics were true. His observance of neo- Vaiṣṇavite art had profound impact on the mind of intellectual section of Assam. Till than the custom was to look at Śaṅkaradeva's contributions from religious angle and was confined within the ambit of bhakata's circle.666 It has to be mentioned here that what Jyoti Prasad saw at Bardowā was only legacy of Śaṅkaradeva's artistic contributions, as sculptors of Narowā and Salaguri group of sattras were the real creators of those marvels.

4. Dance, Drama and Music

Dance, drama and Music come within the purview of the term known as performing arts. Starting in the 6th century B.C., the Classical period of performing art began in Greece, ushered in by the tragic poets such as Sophocles. Origins of the theatre go back for into the past to the religious rites to the earliest communities. Throughout the history of mankind there can be found trace of songs and dance in honour of a God, performed by priest and worshippers dresses in animal skins, and of a portrayal of his birth, death and resurrection. Theatre began in ritual. Ritual needed technique to become

665 Sir Jacob Epstein (1880–1959 A.D.) was an American-born British sculptor who helped pioneer modern sculpture. He was born in the United States, and moved to Europe in 1902, becoming a British citizen in 1911. He often produced controversial works which challenged taboos on what was appropriate subject matter for public artworks. He also made paintings and drawings, and often exhibited his works.

666 H. Gohain (ed.), Jyoti Prasad Rachanavali, p. 468

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effective when the artiste of theatre began to practice technique for its own sake, than
the ritual became an art. When it became an art it maintained the same main spring that
it had when its function was purely ritual.\textsuperscript{667} In India, Bharata's \textit{Nāṭya Śāstra} (believed
to be penned between second century B.C. and second century A.D) regarded, as the
fifth Veda is the earliest available treatise on dramaturgy. Indian drama and theatre has
a long history alongside its music and dance. Kalidasa's plays like Shakuntala and
Meghaduta are some of the older dramas, following those of Bhasa.

Importance attached to dances in early Assam in the reign of Bhaskara Varmana
of Kāmrūpa (7th century. A. D) is found when Hiuen Tsang was regularly entertained
with music and dance in his court. Information on earliest performing art forms of
Assam is found in the Tezpur Copper plate of Vanamālā Varmadeva through which
the king of Kāmarupa made an endowment of land and men endowed with references of
some dancing maids and youths.\textsuperscript{668}

The \textit{Kendukalai legend} \textsuperscript{669} still in current in the temple of Kamakhya at
Nilachala eloquently speaks that dance and music were an inextricable part of daily and
regular worship of the Devi. According to the legend a devoted priest named Kendukali
could see the goddesses Kamakhya dancing in nudity at the time of her midnight
worship.\textsuperscript{670} Various references to music, musician and musical instruments are found in
early Assamese literary works like Ramayana of Mādhaiva Kandali (14\textsuperscript{th} Century) where

\textsuperscript{667} Eli, Rozik, \textit{Introduction, The roots of theatre: rethinking ritual and other theories of origin},
Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002
\textsuperscript{668} D. Sarma (ed.) \textit{Kāmrūpa Śāsanāwaol\textit{f}, p.176
\textsuperscript{669} S.K. Bhuyan (ed.) \textit{Kamrupar Buranj\textit{i}, p.1
\textsuperscript{670} G. Adhiwary, \textit{Kendukalai legend of Kamakhya temple: a rejoinder, Proceeding of NEIHA,}
ed.) 2010, pp.55-65 , After analysing its historicity Adhiwary says that the legend was invented
some time in 13th and 14th century not in 18th century as stated earlier.

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we come across nāṭa, natinī and bhāt, the three classes of performing artiste existed in pre-colonial Assam. From the time of Śaṅkaradeva, under whose leadership Assam was made to use the fullest use of diverse type of creative and artistic media had endowed with rich heritage in three different forms of art and culture like rāga linked devotional songs called Bargīt, a refined dance form called sattrīyā nṛtya a rich tradition Āṅkāyā nāṭ and its related simplified dramatic performance commonly called Bhāonā.

The Ahom King Rudra Simha, his son and successors Siva Simha and Rajeswar Simha were great patrons of art and culture. Even Phuleswari Konwari, queen of King Siva Simha who was also a Bar-Raja for a time was a nāṭī (meaning a dancer) of the Negheriting Siva temple in the present day Golaghat district of Assam. Some dancing girls (nāṭī) were brought from the temple of Negheriting at Dergaon during the reign of Siva Simha and were assigned to the temple of Hayagriva Mādhava and Parehareswara. King Rudra Simha, Siva Simha and contemporary Koch Kings were also known for their generous patronage for development of art and culture. Even Śaṅkaradeva and his apostles who in the last phase of their life spent in the Koch

671. For details, see Ramayana of Madhava Kandali, Book –VII-(Laṅka-Kānda), published by P.L. Chowdhary, 1941
672. Sattrīyā nṛtya emerged from the sanctum of sattras. The nṛtyas of Śaṅkaradeva’s time perhaps be classified into two groups i) nṛtya ii) nṛta The sattrā circle distinguishes mainly three forms of dances which are called sattrīyā nṛtya. It moved from the monastery to the metropolitan stage in the second half of the 19th century. The Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA), New Delhi under the chairmanship of music maestro, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika finally gave its due recognition as one of the classical dance forms of India, alongside the other seven forms on 15 November, 2000.
673 H.C. Sarma, M.N. Sarma and S.C. Choudhary, Dubi Parehareswara devalayar itivṛtta, p.37
674 Gait, A History of Assam, p.52

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Kingdom enjoying all sorts of patronage towards the neo-Vaishnavite movement, resulting a creation of a large number of Bargī, Ankīyā nāts, Bhāonā and satṛyā nṛtya etc. Saints, Shurs and bards of the neo-Vaishnavite movement of the period of our study (a part of the Bhakti movement) of medieval period used songs and dramas to propagate their religious ideals. Dāmodaradeva, Nārāyana Ṭhākura and some early preceptors and followers of the Bhakti-dharma of Śaṅkaradeva were attracted to the faith by the prayers held daily at his place. Reference may also be made here to Bhāgavata –muktayaksha gāṇa of `south India and such other institutions of other parts of the country by which in all probability Śaṅkaradeva was highly influenced to utilise dance, music and other performing arts forms like Bargī or devotional songs, Ankīyā-nāṭ, as strong devices for propagating the faith. His first ever dramatic production Chihna Yātrā show, rendered with dance, music and songs. S.K. Bhuyan cited one incident occurred during the Āhom-Mughal wars when an Assamese captain


677 M. Neog., op. cit., p. 277

678 To the vast indigenous theatre of India, the contribution of South Canara is the ‘Yaksha Gana,’ the Kannada cognate of the ‘Kathakali’ of Malabar, the ‘Yaksha Gana,’ the street-play, and the ‘Bhagavata-mela-nataka’ of Tamilnadu and Andhra ; the ‘Yatra’ of Bengal etc. The ‘Yaksha Gana’ is an old type of traditional, popular vernacular drama of South India, a name common to the three linguistic areas of Tamil, Telugu, and Kannada and absent only in Malayalam.
utilized his artistic skill and escaped a bid on his life by adopting a peculiar dance feat.679

The \textit{sattriyā} style of dances is believed to be introduced by the two great maestros of the movement. The tradition was continued until the last century in an uninterrupted way almost all the \textit{sattras} of Assam in general and the Narowā group of \textit{sattras} in particular. The following lore, which is still is current in the Narowā group of \textit{sattras} and Bardowā, the head quarter of it indicates the dominance of three Narowā \textit{sattras} in three in different sorts of performing arts -

\begin{quote}
"Bālisattrar Bāyan Bardowār gāyana /

Kujīr naṭuwā kone pāra ghatuā,"
\end{quote}

Meaning, one can’t simply defeat the Bāyan (drummer) of Bālisattrā, Gāyan (singer) of Bardowā and Naṭuwā (dancer) of Kujī \textit{sattrā}. In case of creation of one new and independent dance form mention may be made of Rāmacandra Ātā, an artiste of reputation who employed three different dances in his dramatic composition entitled \textit{Kamsa-vadha} namely i) \textit{Nandi-bhangī} ii) \textit{Payāṇa bhangī} and \textit{cāli} or Rāma cālīr ṇāc. Besides he employs some \textit{tālas} including \textit{unjjyoti}. He is said to have introduced few more units of new \textit{tālas} for some of the characters of a \textit{Bhāonā} including \textit{Sutradhārī}, \textit{Gosāi praveṣa}, \textit{gopi} or female characters, Rāja or kings of different categories, \textit{yuddhā} or fighting (with different weapons), \textit{Prasthānār nāc} (exit of a character), \textit{Riśi–maṁ̄ţr nāc} (of sages) \textit{Bāndar} (of monkey), \textit{dutar} (messengers) and \textit{Bhangī Bājāna} (music) and \textit{Bhangī nāc}. There are few more units of dances which are incorporated to be played in

\footnote{S. K. Bhuyan, \textit{Studies in the History of Assam}, p. 63}
the musical prelude called Dhemāli (puvaranga). The Rām-dhemāli is believed to be a unique creation of Rāmcandra Āla.

A copy of a small manuscript of Narowā Bālisattra mentions names and usages of 29 kinds of bhari-mān (foot works) used in the Bardhemāli part of the yorā of Gāyana-Bāyana recital or preliminaries of a Bhāonā. Names of these are coined in the local tongue but experts have found similarities with those incorporated in the Nātyaśāstra of Bharata (200 B.C.). Another remarkable contribution of the sattra is the nāmsāmarār nāc-concluding dance of an institutional prayer) performed on the occasion of the concluding ceremony of the holy month of the Bhādra. This group dance is performed only by the male members of the sattra irrespective of age with cymbals in their hands. This peculiar dance form is not found in any other sattras.

It is to be noteworthy that for each of the bhaṅgi a particular ghoṣa is prescribed. Following are the twelve such different and unique dance postures performed at the Nāmsāmarār nāc by the male artiste of Narowā-Bālisattra with the accompanying ghoṣās, (refrains).680

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Bhangi (posture)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Accompanying ghośā (refrain)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Uthā khojmāna</td>
<td>‘Nārāyaṇa ehe hari ehe jaya rāma...’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Ciral citikā (dance)</td>
<td>‘Jaya Jaya Rāma, Parama mangal...’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Saru-juṭi</td>
<td>‘Śrimanta Śāṅkarara Hari bhakatara ...’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Epokiyā –citikā</td>
<td>‘Dayēvanta santa Śītalā swavāba ...’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Bar-Juti</td>
<td>‘Nṛiguṇa Kṛṣṇara guṇaka prakāsha ...’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Dupakiyā– citikā</td>
<td>‘Kṛṣṇa hari a he rāma ...’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Khubali- picalā</td>
<td>‘Sahajānanda hari Swarupānanda...’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Sarucalā</td>
<td>‘Govinda Govinda dvāvāki naḍdana...’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Āḍ- juti</td>
<td>‘Gopāla Jaya rāma govinda...’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) Bahî cîral</td>
<td>‘Madhusudhaṇa madhusudhaṇa ...’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11) Bagalî -Khūtiwā</td>
<td>‘Jagajivan rāma Jagajiva rāma ...’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12) Khubali picalā nupur caluwā</td>
<td>‘O hari he hari he...’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ramacandra’s great grandson, Lakṣmīdeva who was the most talented artistes of Narowā composed and incorporated some new dance forms, viz., **Mohini jirnc** (dance of Apsara) and **Chitralekha-nāc** (dance of a legendary painter) in his dramatic compositions entitled **Haramohaṇa** and **Kumar-harana** respectively. For Mohini bhangi he combines **Hājowaliyā bājānā** (a kind of concert prevalent in Hajo area of Kāmrūp

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681 Ghośās are cited in a work Nāmar Pankti (Ms) of Śivendra Ātā of Narowā Bālīsutra

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district and some dance gestures of the Devadāsi of the Hayagrva Mādhava temple of Hajo).

At Narowā sattra Behār guvā (git) and Behār-nacuva nāc are considered to be two special functions performed only in the holy months of Bhādra and Phalguna.682

It is interesting that in this group, male members of a particular family play the role of a Sutradhāra in Bhāona hereditarily since long. For instance at the Kujī sattra, the character is played by Ranjit, Thanuram, and Anadara for three generations.

A new sutradhāra incumbent of Narowā sattra is usually instituted by offering nirmali as per existing sattra tradition during a Bhāonā performance of the sattra.683 During the preliminaries, drummers (Bāyana) are paid highest honours because people believe ‘khol’ to be a sacred instrument. In this process Adhikāra crowned each of the drummers with bakula flowers fastened together to make small circular garlands, followed by cymbalist (Gāyana) on that occasion.684

Drama

Some earliest biographers vividly describe how Śaṅkaradēva organized and performed his first ever-dramatic presentation Cīhna-yātrā. He realized that his medium of visuals which was not till than crystallised could draw the illiterate masses and might be able to make direct impression about basic tenants of his new cult. It is

682 Reference is found from the following lines ‘besāra rasat jānā bhāwa upajanta...’ meaning he is Rāmacandra, the grandson of Dāmodara who absorbed in devotional ecstasy in behār and rāsa.,Thākur Carita (ed.), v. 508
683 Farely Richmond, The Vaiṣṇava Drama of Assam, Educational Theatre, vol. 26, No.2 Hopkins University Press, 1974, p.15
684 Ibid., p.10
claimed that the great maestro painted *Sāt-Vaikunthas* (seven heavens) on seven canvases to make an illusion on the demand of the performance and he was greatly successful for which a large number of people attracted to his faith for the first time. Commenting on some characteristics of traditional *Bhāonā* of Assam Kapliā-Vatsyana, a great critic of Indian dramaturge calls it as a typical cultural phenomenon clearly distinguished from *Chau* of Bengal and Orissa because of its literary content and characteristics.\(^{686}\)

In Assam Vaiṣṇavism, no *sattra* superior could justify his appointment without writing a drama in the fashion of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva; this gave rise to a wide current of dramatic literature in Assam.\(^{687}\) A wave of refulgence with some variations endowed with new and reformed literary activities of writing and enacting dramas found expression at Bardowā area from the time of the Narowā *Adhikāras* beginning from the latter half of the 18\(^{th}\) century. The tradition of staging *Bhāonā* and other such activities continued unabated till latter half of the 20\(^{th}\) century.

It is said during post Śaṅkaradeva era the neo-Vaiṣṇavite dramatic activities have once again revitalized in a new way under the Narowā *sattras* where most of the *Adhikāras* were well-known playwrights and performing artiste of well repute. *Aniruddha Carit* portrays a detailed account of the enactment of *Kālīya- Damana nāt* at

\(^{685}\) *Vaikuntha nagara* patata lekhiyā 
anā karālaqtā tārā /

*Dhemālira ghośā* prathame lekhiyā 
dvītyā sūka racilā //

*Sutra bhāṭimāta* gitak kariyā /

*Cihna save bibhāgila // Śaṅkara Carita- v.1474*

\(^{686}\) Kapila Vātsayana, *Traditional Indian Theatre*, p. 107

\(^{687}\) CHA, vol.III, p.285
Vasudeu Thāṭh-Narovā sattra on the occasion of the death anniversary of Śaṅkaradeva in early part of the 18th century. According to its description, unlike the other sattras, just after chanting of nāma-Kīrtana under Rāmakānta, the presiding Adhikāra starts the dhemāli or preliminaries being played by a troupe of sattra orchestra led by Raghubāpu, and Rama-Kṛṣṇa Bōyana (drummers) alias Kṛṣṇā or Arjuna, Satānnada, and Dwij Rānagacaraṇa as Gāyana (singers and cymbalists). The main characters of the play were Sutradhāra, Jośodā, King-Nanda and Kṛṣṇa. The roles being played by Boloram, Nārāyana, Raghubāpu, Menakā Atoi and Daivagya Śrīrāma. One of the central characters of the presentation was Kali-nāga, the serpent King, and it was played by one Kalarāi-Bāngarāi, one comic character of the sattra. It is believed however the Bhaona remained unfinished with a mystic incident when the serpent or the Kāli-nāga became alive and rose in original feat terrorizing the audience which prompted them to flee from the site following great hue and cry. Although the narration of Aniruddha-carit is an exaggeration, the Narowā group refuses to enact Kāliya-Daman till today afraid of this superstation. Another earliest instance of enactment of Bhaona at Narowā sattra during Rāmakānta Āṭā’s time can be gleaned from Harinārāyana’s account. This Carit narrates that Rāmacandra Āṭā, brother of Rāmakanta and the most celebrated artiste of the group once organized a Bhaona at the invitation of the Āhom king Śiva Sinhā, who also arranged a session of bar-nāma (a great congregational prayer) on that occasion. Prosperity and importance of Narowā sattra began to enhance as soon as Siva Sinhā invited Rāmacandra Āṭā many a times, to enact another Bhaona at his capital Rangpur. Satisfied with the performance of his troupe the king constructed a

688 Airuddha Carita , v. v. 375-393
689 TC (ed.), v. 543, p.165

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Bar-nāmghar for the use of the sattra and blessed Rāmacandra with a huge amount of valuables.  

Some of the transcripts of the dramatic compositions of Ramākānta Ātā are found in different places and copy of his popular play Sindhurā parva nāta is now preserved at the Library of G.U.  

When the family of the Adhikāra migrated from Lakshimpur to Bardowā scores of high quality dramas were produced under Adhikāras of ‘Bardowa thul’ and the seat of music also shifted to Bardowā and regular enactment of Bhāonā was organized from the latter half of 18th century. Among the prolific dramaturges of this group was Lakṣmīdeva, grandson of Ramākānta of Bardowā-Bālisattra. He was invited and honoured by Ahom king Candrakānta Sirīha (1810-1818 A.D) when he dramatized Kumara-Haran or Hari-Śaṅkarar Yuddha nāṭ in the premises of the royal house. The date of its execution has been deciphered as saka 1743. One of the fragile illustrated folios of the play suggests that Lakṣmīdeva might have embellished and painted the second transcript with twelve illustrations after a gap of nine years from the enactment of the play. As there has been a tradition of writing and enacting of a self-composition is almost compulsory for a sattrādhikāra incumbent of this Narowā groups of sattras numbers and volumes of such plays grew in comparison to other group of sattras.

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690 *ibid.*, v. 538,p.  
691 The copy contains 41 pages (21cm x 17cm) ; with 20 lines in each folio.  
693 N. Kalita (ed.), *An alphabetical index of illustrated manuscripts of Assam*, 2009., p.128
Rāwana-Badha happened to be the longest play of Lakṣmīdeva enriched with a well-developed plot and dialogue in which he pays special attention in applying some technical skills and added one new rāga ‘aman Kalyāṇ’. He introduces a new dance forms Mohiṇīr nāc and depicts the character of Mohiṇī or a celestial nymph for Hara-mohana nāc and another dance Citralekha-nāc. His other plays include Gobardhana yāṭrā and a different treatment of the plays namely Janma-yāṭrā, Nṛsīṁha Yāṭrā and ‘Sindhura-Yāṭrā’, copies of these are now scattered in various places. These plays possess the qualities of good dramas of the post-Śaṅkaradeva era which were greatly instrumentalised to spread the glory and prosperity of the Narowā sattras. The successors of Lakṣmīdeva Dhaneswar Āṭā, Śivendra Āṭā, Yogendra, Mahesh Chandra, Asit Chandra and some others also contributed in the same way by their literary works and plays viz., Vāmana-Vijay, Bāli-Vadha, Draupadīr Swamvara, Virata-Parva, Trīṣaṅgkur Swarga Lāva, Sudhanā Vadha and Kirāṭa Parva etc. Dhaneswar Āṭā composed a song in Tiwā vernacular for Asit Chandra’s play Kirāṭa Parva which showed his expertise also in local dialects prevailed at that time. Harendranārāyana of Bhetiyam and Tilak Chandra of Talibil-Narowā sattra also composed some such plays during within this period. A transcript of Harendranārāyana’s Putanā Vadha, a dramatic representation of the well-known episode entitled killing of Putanā by child Kṛṣṇa is

694 A transcript of the work of Lakṣmīdeva is found at G.U. Library, contains Twenty five folios (3.2 × 8.5), in folio no. 3 the date of composition is recorded as Śaka 1673 (A.D 1751) some years before the birth of Lakṣmīdeva, hence it lead us to think if ‘Hara Mohana’ was composed by some other sattradhikāra of Narowā also.

695 A Transcript of Nṛsīṁha yāṭrā is found at the G.U. Library contains 32 folios.

696 K.D. Goswami, Early history and development of the puruṣa sarhhati satras in Assam Vaisnavism, Sanakardeva pora Śivendradevaloi (Ms), p.152

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now found at K.K.H. Library of G.U. Mukhā Bhāonā (a mask play) is rare dramatic exercise being pursued in some neo-Vaiśnavite satras. It is significant to note that a single specimen of a play entitled mukhā Bhāonā composed (7 Folios) by Harendranārāyaṇa, an erudite dramatist of Narowā group has been found at Narowā Bhetiyāni sattra only.

A close look at the plots of the plays composed by Narowā Adhikāras shows that like their great predecessors their primary consideration was to impress on the audience the supremacy of Kṛṣṇa and evoke in them a sense of complete submission to Him. We may say that dramaturges took extraordinary care to see that all this was done in a theatrically appealing way.

Music

An earliest presentation of nāma-kīrtana as a way of worship to a deity in Assam is found in 5th century A.D. When they used it as medium of propagating their creed under the neo-Vaiśnavite movement of Assam, this universal practice of nāma Kīrtana in worship was popularised among the common people irrespective of caste and creed by Śaṅkaradeva and his followers. The universal practice of singing of nāma -kīrtana in Assam had been heard even at the far distance of Rajputana. Lachit Barphukan’s antagonist Raja Ram Sīhā, the invading Mughal commander of the Mughal forces received letters from his mother and wife with an warning against the ‘impious’ character of a war against Assam where nāma -kīrtana was so much in

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697 S.N. Sarma enlisted a transcript (29 cm × 11cm.) of this play Putana Badha in DCAM. It was composed in modern Assamese in Bhaskarabda 1340. (A.D 1933). One Narahari Mahanta of Bhetiyāni-Narovā sattra handed over the copy to G U. library.

698 D. Sarma (ed.), Kāmarūpa Sasanavali, Hari Hara inscriptions of Deo-Pani, 1 and 2 , p.254
vogue. In reviewing the introduction of various ragas of Bargits, and other musical compositions of this 'Nama-dharma' a great relation is noticed with the songs known as Cāryas or Cāyāgiti which seems to have been filtered into eastern India in general and Kāmrūpa in particular, became a fertilizing soil for the growth of the later Buddhists. The Vaiśnava music of Assam is rich and remarkable in its tone and variety. Melodies in the Durgavara Kāyasṭha and Pitambara, the two contemporaries of Śaṅkaradeva mentioned the prevalence of Hindustani Music in Assam from 13th century A.D. if not earlier. Śaṅkaradeva praises his father, Kusumvara, as a Gandharva in person (gandharva sakhyāta) in his Ruknīni-harasa Kāvyā. He employs different types of prayer songs in his compositions, which are called Bargīta, aṅkar-gīta, kirtana-ghosā and Bhatīmā. The Vaiśnava reformers of Assam adopted songs as one of the mediums for transmission of their message of faith. Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva use 34 different rāgas in their nātas and Bargīta. Later on, along with Puruṣottama, Ramākānta and Lakṣmīdeva of Narowā sattras added four more rāgas namely Bhupāli, Ramgiri, Cālengi, Jayshri and Amat Kalyān or Eman Kalyan. Thus

699 S. K. Bhuyan, op. cit., p.63
700 Literally mean 'colour, hue' but also 'beauty', melody'; also spelled rāag, rāga, rāgam, Sanskrit rāga राग, Tamil rāgam இராகம், Kannada "Rāga" ರಾಜ, Malayalam rāgam രാഗം. In his six Ankāya nātas Śaṅkaradeva employs 29 (twenty nine) different rāgas. Later on Mādhavadeva incorporates another five new rāgas.
701 M. Neog., op. cit., p. 280
702 ibid., p. 277
703 S. K. Bhuyan, op. cit., p. 62

(263)
total number of sattriya rāgas reached forty one which included the four mentioned above.\textsuperscript{704}

Earliest singing pattern of hymns embellished with sattriya rāgas of Narowā Ātās could be gleaned only from the Thākura Carita of Dwij Harinarayana. It narrates how Ramākānta Āta exercises some gītas in congreational prayer. Sometimes when he was found deeply engrossed in silent prayers and sometimes in playing cymbals. The melodies employed in the songs of Bhāonās composed by the Narowā Ātās are widely found. Ramākānta introduced two new rāgas in his play Šhyamaṇta haraṇa namely Cālengi and Rāmārī.\textsuperscript{705} References of 35 such gītas composed by Ramākānta, Rāmacandra and Lakṣmīdeva, the Adhikāras of Narowā sattras have been found. Fourteen different melodies (sattriya rāgas) which added beauties to these gītas are enlisted in the Appendix F.

Some of the popular gītas of Lakṣmīdeva which are still current and sung by laities are 'ai prāṇa mādhava he...', 'kelata duhe mohana muruṭi dwawal śhyama...', 'basantar āgate kūkilara rāo suni...',\textsuperscript{706} 'bhaja mana mukujda murārī...' and 'Batađrava thāān Varṇānār gī...'.\textsuperscript{707} In a sattrā, a particular gīta can be sung in

\textsuperscript{704} Atul Ch. Hazarika(ed.), Wanc/ hacia, p.43. In this work we find the number of rāgas counts at 41, however, we don't find the uses of the remaining four rāgas
\textsuperscript{705} ibid, p.42
\textsuperscript{706} 'Narowā gosāins and Bālisattra Varhśāvālī', informs that Ātā composed most of the popular gītas at the tender age of thirteen.
\textsuperscript{707} As the Composer of the song, (description of Bardowā Thāān) in some accounts, both the names Purusottama and Lakṣmīdeva or Lakṣmikānta are found. S.D. Goswami opines that Lakṣmīdeva composed the gīta as his name was frequently found in chronicles and other literatures of the Bardowā thul at that time.
different tunes in different *prasanga* of the day. We have discussed elsewhere about some of the *gita* incorporates in daily and occasional prayer services. At Bālisattra one can be astonished to listen how illiterate woman folk of sattrā can perform difficult *gita* in congregational prayers. Women folk of the sattrā while performing *Pāceti* or *Nandutsava* sing flawlessly a very complicated *gīta* ‘*hārase gopini pusaye ghare...*’, which is difficult to render even for other male singers or expert *gāyana* not belonging to the sattrā school of music. In this context S.K. Bhuyan says that songs of *gurus* (of neo-Vaiśānavite religion of Assam) and some composed by unlettered villagers relayed from mouth to mouth throughout the country.

On the festive occasions, two *rāgas* are executed in the forenoon *yorā* or *khol*, *prasanga*. Accordingly, two *bargīt* and a *ghośā* are also sung. The second *bargīt* and a *ghośā* are presented in *rāga Kalyāna* or Puravī. One peculiarity is that on the occasion of death anniversary of Śaṅkaradeva, the longer *guru-ghāṭ* is played only at Narowā-Bālisattra. In the same way there are two sets of concluding *bājana* played at the end of the forenoon *yorā* or *khol-prasanga*. Playing of longer one indicates that there will be no *Bhāona* performance at night and the shorter one indicates the *Bhāona* to be performed at night. This peculiarity is not seen usually any other sattras, (even at Narowā-Bardowā).

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708 *Sattrīyā anusthānat surar bhumikā*, Journal of the University of Gauhati, (ed.), 1960
709 S.K. Bhuyan, op. cit., p. 61
710 Details of the activities are recorded in a Ph. D. thesis of S.D. Goswami, D.U.
711 Informant is an elderly *bāyana* of Bālisattra
Lakṣmi-deva Ātā introduced some new prayer items in the Narowa group of sattras namely Yoriya Kirtana and Hirā-nām.\textsuperscript{712} In later part of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, two well repute gāyanas were Dhani of Bardowā and Dhani of Bālisattra. Other three sattriya artistes of that time were Geru, Jili, and Hābi of Bhetiyānī Narowā sattrā. Geru and Jili were expert in beating and Habi showed his calibre in flawless singing. Another such learned singer Bihuram of Bardowā. Some other performing artistes of Bālisattra were Mathan Bhuyan, Madhavram Bhuyan, Krishanapad and Aniram. Aniram was an expert nātuvā of the Narowā group. All of them were expert in sattriya style of music and dancing who received their training under the guidance of Dhansewar Ātā of Bālisattra. Among the last recognised expert Adhikāra in this line was Purṇachandra Devgoswami, of Narowā-Bardowā who showed his proficiency in dancing, beating and singing \textsuperscript{713} till 21\textsuperscript{st} century.

Amongst the sattriya musical appliances Kālī, a unique wind instrument is an integrated part of orchestra of the gāyana-bāyana. The role of Kālī-bādak (piper) was once considered as most integral part of gāyana bāyana at Bardowā, which is now lost forever. One of the last such reputed Kālī bādak (piper) was Hurāi Kālīyā of Narowā-Kujī sattrā.\textsuperscript{714}

\textsuperscript{712} Details of these activities are incorporates in a unpublished Ph.D. thesis of S.D Goswami, 'Lakṣmi-deva: his life and works, Dibrugarh University.
\textsuperscript{713} Atul Ch. Hazarika, op. cit., pp.42-46
\textsuperscript{714} Silpukhuri, Souvenir, Morigaon jilā sahitya sabha, 2005, p.7