CHAPTER-VIII
CONCLUSION

Some scholars of repute including S.N. Sarma was of the opinion that the activities Narowā group of sattras which were grown after Śaṅkaradeva was stale and lifeless.776 Owing to various historical and sociological factors the sattras lost much of their progressive dynamism and developed strains of blinkeredness that have led to their decadence. But our discussion made in the foregoing pages evidently show that the Narowā group retain so much of rich heritage and assessment of the various aspects of sattriyā art and culture could go a long way in revitalizing the institutions in the service of carrying inheritance of neo-Vaiśṇavite movement. On the question of division took place at this time among the sattras and group of sattras, D. Nath rightly observes that these divisions weakened the strength of neo-Vaiśṇavism, but created a force within each of the sects, to compete with each other for expansion of its own organization, in different parts of the state.777 It was therefore natural that each of the divisions took number of steps to improvise the sattriyā culture and literary activities to a great extent.

From our study we may now convince to draw our following conclusions:

1) The Mughal invasion of Koch Behar and Assam under the stewardship of Abdus Salam in A.D. 1635 compelled Āi Kanakalatā, the daughter in Law of Śaṅkaradeva and her cousin Dāmodara to sail up to Guwahati and then to the capital Garhgaon. The Barbaruah at Guwahati and the Ahom King Jyadhavaj Simha extended all patronages to them in unearthing Bardowā, the lost site of

776 S.N. Sarma, NVMSIA, p.138
777 D. Nath, Satras in Colonial Assam, p.3

(290)
Śaṅkaradeva for two fold benefits i) to reclaim new fields of cultivation of agricultural products and ii) to legitimize the Ahom administrative system in the territories lying around Bardowā on the south bank of Brahmaputra without an armed engagement with the inhabitants ruled by petty kings of 'pācurajīyās' and 'sāturajīyās' belonging to different ethnic groups like Tiwā, and Bođo - Kacharis.

2) Since the desertion of his ancestral site Bardowā by Śaṅkaradeva in A. D. 1516, the territory were lying vacant for more than one and quarter of centuries and was covered under dense forest. After the death of Śaṅkaradeva many legends were invented by the followers of the great saint relating to his birth place and place of his early activities. The discovery of Bardowā by Kanakalatā and Dāmodara brought into light the historical truth. M. Neog therefore rightly opines 'if Bardowā would haven't been reclaimed it would have remained as legend.'

3) The crave for power and prestige and love of wealth which gradually tended to replace simplicity and sincerity of later group of sattras was conspicuously less in Narowā group of sattras. Economic condition and materialistic wealth of these sattras were not so good in comparison with some of their counterparts. However as the establishments of great grandsons of Śaṅkaradeva they were honoured by the people and laities despite their insolvent economic condition. Courtly atmosphere were also not found in their functioning and behaviours as most of the sattras were functioning in far off places from the Capital and the heads were not in constant touch with the court. A relation between the guru and
laities remains intimate and sincere in this group where direct approach to Adhikāra without an intermediary persists.778

4) The Narowā group of satras is the originator of the Assam school of painting popularly known as sattriyā style of painting or miniature illustrated manuscripts. All other paintings developed in Assam even in the royal court except the Hastividarnva admits authority of the earliest most painting a proud possession of a Narowā-sattra Ādi daśam or ‘Citra Bhāgavata’ and follow the style and textures set forth in that painting.

Among all the illustrated manuscripts, the painting of the Anādi-Pātan of Narowā Kuṭī sattrā 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, based on book X of Bhāgavata went ahead even of the style of the Citra-Bhāgavata, where the artiste showed his excellent penmanship in the abstraction of some difficult scenes with the application of plastic elements. What is more significant about this painting is that no such illustrated examples of the third book of the Bhāgavata have yet come from any part of India.779 Thus the sattriyā school of painting developed more particularly on its own under the Narowā group of satras of our concern was primarily manifested itself through the art of painting—a fact that has escaped the attention of the mainstream art historian till now.

5) The Guru-Carita-Kathā is an excellent example of this genus of literary activity of the Vaiṣṇavas and is indeed a great book by way of covering the cultural history to Assam of a vital period in its various aspects - social, religious, ethnic, economic, political

---

778 Dutta Baruah (ed.), PKKSI, p.119
779 Anna P. Dallpicolla, (ed.), Indian Painting, p.35-40
and administrative, fiscal, artistic, etc., in a fair way. Its central subject is the early history of Assam’s Vaiṣṇava church in the shape of detailed biographical accounts of the two Gurus, namely, Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, chief saints - the two Ṣhākurs (grandsons of Śaṅkaradeva), the nine Ātās (Holy fathers-Sri Rama, Harihara, Bar-Viṣṇu, Gopala of Bhavanipur, Mathuradasa, Kesava-carana and Badula Padma Ātā) and fourteen other Mahantas. Maheswar Neog calls this task of narration of the tales GCK as one of the most important in the history of Assamese culture which encompasses a vast account of Assam from latter part of the fifteen century to 17th century. Cakrapani’s emergence as the first such teller of guru-lore receives special attention from various quarters, but his close association with the Narowā group of sattra has not been properly discussed till today. It was at Narowā sattra, he received religious training of evangelical activities under Ramākānta Ātā who guided his early life and influenced him to come to the fold of Vaiṣṇavism and to play as the role of the first such itinerary.

Another peculiar form of literature called Bhakat-mālā, like that of Madala panji of Orissa is found at Narowā-Bālisattra. The original manuscript of Bhakat-mālā of Bālisattra contains the names of the entire Narowā Adhikāras, their principal associate bhakatas called átois, their dates of births and deaths of are recorded and arranged chronologically right from the days of Śaṅkaradeva to the latter half of the 19th century.

In regard to the innovation and improvement of dramatic and musical performances including the Ankiyā Bhaonas and some of the forms and style of sattriyā dances the Narowā group of sattras contributed a lot. In this context the

780 M. Neog (ed.), GCK, Foreword (293)
nāmsāmarār nāc and mohini nāc etc. may be mentioned. It is also worth mentioning that to make more convenient and acceptable among ethnic tribes some of the scripts and gītas of dramatic performances were partially composed in the colloquial languages of the Tiwās and Misings instead of following the tradition of using only the Brajāwāli or old Assamese languages. Dhaneswar Ātā of Narowā Bālisattra composed a song of Asit Chandra’s play Kirāja Parva in Tiwā vernacular. The Nāmsāmarār nāc (concluding dance of an institutional prayer) is an important contributions of Narowā sattra which is not found in any other sattra groups. It is noteworthy that for each of the presentation of a bhangi (posture) a particular ghoṣā is prescribed. So far twelve such unique dance postures are enumerated. A total of 29 kinds of bhari-māns (foot works) used in the Bardhemāli part of the yorā of Gāyana-Bāyana recital or preliminaries of a Bhāonā is found at Narowā Bālisattra. Names of these are coined in the local tongue but experts have found similarities with those incorporated in the Nātyasāstra of Bharata (200 B.C).

7) The American Baptist Mission was very much wary of the activity of Vaiṣṇavite sattra and its influence in post-colonial period. They lament ‘It is as hard for grown up Assamese to alter his customs, as it is for the Ethiopians to change his skin, or the leopard to change his pot.’ The influence of neo-Vaiṣṇavite sattras in Nowgong district under the colonial period was so high that Dr. Miles Bronson, an American Baptist missionary once expressed his regret that he could not even succeeded in converting a single Hindu into Christianity within two years. Writing two letters in the Magazine of American Baptist Missionary

781. Bina Gupta, A tribute to Šaṅkaradeva

(294)
he expressed his hopelessness in this regard and said that it happened due to untiring influence of some gosāins and mahantas. We may safely conclude that Missionaries activities came to a naught due to the influence of the most prominent sattra of that time Bardowā and some others including the four Narowā sattras of our concern.

8) Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, the doyen of the cultural activist of Assam who just returning from Germany went to Bardowā Thāān in 1931, felt astounded at the architecture designs of some engraved pillars at the two nām-gharas of Bardowā. He discerned some similarities in designs of the Simhāsana embellished with paintings with that of the cubist form he saw in Europe. His new observances on the neo- Vaiṣṇavite sattra and culture had profound impact on the minds of intellectual sections of Assam. Till than the custom was to look at Śaṅkaraδevas’s contributions from religious angle and was confined within the ambit of bhakata’s circle. We believe that what Jyoti Prasad saw at Bardowā was only a legacy of Śaṅkaraδevas’s artistic contributions; those were the handiworks of some of the expert sculptors and engravers of the Narowā and Salaguri sattras for which they acclaimed a position.

9) The Thākur carita narrates that Ramācandra Ātā, brother of Ramākānta and the most celebrated artiste of the Narowā group once organized a Bhaona at the

---

782 M. Neog, ‘Bronson’s prasatri’, Souvenir, Dr. Miles Bronson mritu sata varṣiki (ed.), November 9, 1983
783 Rupkonwar Jyoti Prasad Agarwala (1903 – 1951 A.D.) was a great Assamese playwright, song-writer, poet, writer and film maker. He was considered as Assamese cultural icon, deeply revered for his creative vision and output and is popularly called the Rupkonwar.
784 H. Gohain (ed.), Jyoti Prasad Rachanavali, p.468
invitation of the Ahom king Śiva Siṅha, who also arranged a session of Barnāma (a great congregational prayer) on that occasion. Prosperity and importance of Narowā sattra began to enhance as soon as Siva Siṅha invited Rāmacandra Āṭā, his brother an expert histrionic artiste of the group to enact a series of Bhāona at his capital Rangpur. Pleased with the performance he constructed a Bar-nām-ghar for the use of the sattra and blessed him with a huge amount of valuables. It clearly shows that King Śiva Siṅha was not an arch enemy of the Vaiṣṇavas, as has been blamed by a section of scholars. Among the authors of the post Śaṅkaradeva period that disseminated the ideals and traditions of Vaiṣṇavism, Lākṣmīdeva, the grandson of Ramaṇḍra shines as the foremost who penned seven theological dramas. His skills in theological writings display profound impact of the message propagated by his great predecessors, Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva and the two Ṭhākurs.

10) In our study some negative facts and acts are also seen. For instance during the late decades of 20th century, heavy and rapid encroachment made by some doubtful citizens under political patronage compelled the last group of the indigenous settlers of Rāmpur Narowa sattra in Nagaon district to flee for other places to be extinct. The sattra is nowadays exists only in the official papers.786

Thus our study has revealed a number of new facts of Assam History in general and of History of Vaiṣṇavism in Assam in particular. Some of them are quite contrary to the established views. Hence if persuade in proper way this study may be of great help in future studies.

786 R.D. Choudhary, Asomar durdasagrastha sattra samuh, pp.38-39