CHAPTER – II

HISTORY OF VAIŚṆAVISM AND DEVELOPMENT OF VAIŚṆAVITE CULTURES IN ASSAM

2.1 Assam the frontier province of India on the North-East was known as Prāgjyotisa or Kāmrūpa in the Epic Mahabhārata, the Harivamsa, the Rāmāyana and the Viṣṇu and other Purāṇas. The earliest epigraphic reference to Assam is in the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samdragupta (C 350 A.D.). The Kalikā-Purāṇa of 10th century A.D. and Yogini-Tantra (16th century A.D.) also traces the geography of Pragjyotisa. “From the mountain of Kāncana in Nepal up to confluence of Brahmaputra, from the Karatoyā to Dikaravāsini, to the mount Kānja, in the north, in the west the Kartoyā, in the east the Diksu, in the south the confluence of Laksā with the Brahmaputra; this is the territory which all scriptures call by the name Kāmrūpa.

Thus, the ancient Kāmrupa comprehend besides the districts of modern Assam, the whole of North Bengal including Koch-Behar, Rangpur, Jalpaiguri and Dinajpur. By the early centuries of Christian era, Assam as Prāgjyotisa and Kāmrūpa had became definitely a part of Hindu India. The fame of the dynasty of Naraka, originating from Viṣṇu and Earth Goddess themselves also spread over India. The kingdom of Pragjyotisa-Kāmrūpa contained the major portions of Eastern India. Varying fortunes brought by conflicts with the neighbouring powers in the west

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1. Prag means former or eastern and Jyotisa, a star, astrology, shining. Pragjyotisapura, means the city of Eastern Astrology. Prāgjyotisa may be Sankritisation of Non-Aryan formation.
2. Here with Samatata and Davāka (which are in East Bengal) and Nepal and other states, Kāmrupa is mentioned as a prayanta or frontier state outside the Gupta Empire but friendly and subordinate relationship with it. Kalidāsa also mentioned Pragjyotisa and Kāmrūpa as a state which was conquered by Raghu. S.K. Chatterjee: The Place of Assam in the History and Civilization of India, p. 18
3. The term Kāmrūpa (Kamakhya) symbolized a new cult and its exaltation of it the land itself was rechristened. Kāmrupa with such Austrics formation as Kāmrū or Kamrul which is Santali is a name for a lesser divinity. The Buddhist Caryās and Haragaurisamudā alluded that the term Kāmaru or Kāmaru were the alternative form of Kāmrupa. According to Kālīka Purāṇa, soon after Naraka of Mithela became king and was placed in charge of the Goddess Kāmakhya, the name of the land was changed from Prāgjyotisa to Kāmrūpa. According to Purānic legend, the name Kāmrūpa is associated with Kāmdeva, the God of love. B.K. Baruah: A Cultural History of Assam, p. 15.
4. During the medieval period Kāmrupa beame a center of Tāntrik worship and came to be considered a most sacred place, especially the temple of Kāmakhya where the Devi was adored. This worship of the Goddess and the very way names of Kāmakhya and Kāmrūpa have led Dr. Kakati to consider that the cult was probably derived from Pre-Aryan divinity. B. Kakati: Assamese, Its Formation and Development, p. 53-54
sometimes pushed back her boundary across the river Karatoya and sometimes extended it beyond that river. But Pragjyotisa or ancient Kāmrūpa was much larger-kingdom than most of other kingdoms mentioned in the Mahabharata and most of the sixteen Mahajanpadas existing during the time of Gautama Buddha.

The modern name of the province Assam is related with Ahoms or Shan invaders who entered the Brahmaputra valley in the beginning of the 13th century A.D. The tradition of Ahom themselves is that the present name is derived from ‘Asama’ in the sense of ‘unequal’ or ‘peerless’. According to Banikanta Kakati, “Asama peerless may be a latter-day Sanskritisation of an earlier form ‘Āchām’. In Tāi ʿchām mean undefeated conquerors”. If this is its origin from the people the name was subsequently applied to the country. According to Baden Powell the name of Āsām is most probably traceable to the (Boro) Hā-com the lower level country. It was in this case the country which gave its name to the people.

Therefore the word ‘Asom’ has a non-Aryan origin. The Bodo speakers who dominated eastern Assam at the time of Tai-Shans entered this land called them Sam. Subsequently the country they occupied came to be known as – Assam or the country of the Sams, which was later Sanskritized into Asama, from which the terms Asam, Assam and Ahom gradually rose.

Earlier the Persian works like the Tabaquat-i-Nasiri, and Riaz-us-Salatin mentioned this land as Kamru or Kamrud, later the Persian works like Padishahnamah and Fathiya-i-Ibriyah referred the term Asham or Assam occurs. Tavernier regarded it as Asom. However it should be mentioned here that the word ‘Ahom’ is nowhere to be found in Tai-Ahom literature. Therefore we may conclude that the word Assam was a later development occurred after Tai-Shans. It reflected a new-regional awareness of north-east resulting from its political unity achieved under the Ahom rule.

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5. This term was used towards them by the native tribes during the time of the invasion of the Valley. It was an index of the awe and administration with which the latter regarded the Ahoms as conquerors who conciliated them.
7. Baden Powell: The Indian Village Community, p. 135
8. P. Gogoi: The Tai and Tai Kingdom, p. 19
9. Assam is situated in the extreme north-east frontier of India, is between 28° and 24° North latitudes and 89°86 and 96°. East longitudes and borders on the hill states of Bhutan, Arunachal, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya in the vicinity of China and Tibet on the north, of Burma on the east and the south and of Bangladesh on the West.
Assam formed a highway not only for trade but also for the exchange of ideas between India and Burma and South-West China from at least the closing centuries of the first millennium B.C. Various groups of people speak the Tibeto-Burman languages. The most prominent groups of tribes of the Tibeto-Burman race known as Bodo forms the numerous and important section of the non-Aryan peoples of Assam.

The Tai or Shan of Yunnan migrated into upper Burma in the 6th century A.D. then from the mountains of Southern Yunnan into the valley of Sheweli and adjacent regions. The Tibeto-Burmans and the Shans today constitute the bulk of population of the province, valleys as well as the hills. According to Risely Assamese is unmistakably Mongoloid. Elwin regarded them a rather modified Mongoloid with a dolichocephalic or long head but with the typical flat nose, high cheek bones and oblique slit eyes.

We cannot assume properly when the Aryans came into the valley of Brahmaputra. However they arrived in early period either as the consequent of invasion or by means of peaceful penetration. Assam always lay on the highway of all Indian immigrants to the Far East and this kept Assam in partial contact with the rest of Aryan Indian and checked non-Aryan tendencies from making any racial change in

10. S.K. Chatterjee: The Place of Assam in the History and Civilization of India. pp. 15-16
11. Linguistic and ethnographic evidence including some ancient place names of the province indicate that the earliest inhabitants of Assam spoke an India-Chinese language of Mon-Khmer family, a branch of Austro-Asiatic family of languages. It is very difficult to define the contribution of the Austro-Asiatic-speaking Mongolian peoples to the ethnological structure of Assam, but it is manifested in many existing cultural institutions, customs and manners of the Assamese.
12. The Bodo groups of tribes included the Koches, the Kachari, the Lalung, the Dimacha, the Garo, Rabha, the Tipra, the Chuitya and the Moran. They were hemmed in from the east by the Ahoms of the great Tai race and from the west by the Aryans. E.Gait: The History of Assam, p. 46
13. The Shans call themselves Dai or Tai meaning ourselves, equivalent to the ‘we’ group in meaning o Dr. Li Chi’s Classification of Peoples. (The formation of Chinese people)
15. B.K. Baruah: The Cultural History of Assam. p. 8
16. Both the epics, the Râmâyana and the Mâhâbhârata revealed Assam’s contact with the Aryan India. In the Aryanisation of the province, the Naraka legends also bear significance. Diksitar: Aryanisation of East India (Assam) I.H. Qxxi, p. 29-33 cited from B.K. Baruah: The Cultural History of Assam, p. 8
the main structure of Assamese. A succession of influence on ideas, and cultures entered Assam down to the medieval period, through Madhyadesa. Sanskrit became not only language of the people but also the medium of expression for poets, philosophers and preachers.

Assam is a country which at most periods of its history has remained outside the Indian civilization. In fact Assam had a significant history of her own and had intimate relation with both India and with a wider world beyond that. The special Assamese characteristics resulted from the absorption of varied elements and conditions of life, varied people traveling to this land at different periods of its history that Assamese culture constituted a strong and vitalizing force in Indian life.

**2.2 Political Condition:**

From the 13th century to the beginning of the 19th century, almost a long period of six centuries, the social and cultural history of Assam marked the rise and fall of several kingdoms and dynasties. A far reaching change took place in political, social, religious and cultural sphere of people. Gradually, these changes paved the way for the evolution of a unified and dominant Hindu society in Assam.

In the beginning of the 13th century A.D, the political unity of Assam was at its lowest level. The kings of Kāmrūpa driven by the lust for conquest and love of power, turned their ears to ancient Dhārmic principles and neglected the rules of Dharma-Samgrāma. They vied each other to establish one’s supremacy over the other. The period of long drawn out struggle became inevitable, the natural consequences of which was the division of Kāmrūpa. This fact becomes more and more evident when we look at the political geography of Assam of this period. The decline of Pala dynasty towards the end of 12th century was followed by the rise of

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17. In the early centuries of the Christian era, the high class Aryan such as Brāhmans, Kāyasthas and Kalitās came and settled in Assam. The Nidhanpur copper plate grant also commenced that king Bhutivarman of 6th century A.D. granted special agrahāra settlements to more than two hundred Brahmans of various gottaras and Vedasākhas for promotion of Vedic religion and culture. Geographically the boundary of Assam extended to the river Kausika of Bihar. Ibid, p. 8

18. These people not only established Aryan settlements with their own people but brought the earlier inhabitants to their fold by giving them Aryan religion, rites and languages. In the process of Aryanisation even tribes also changed their name. Ibid. p.9

19. The Aryan influence became so widespread and penetrating that even minor Vedic customs and rituals became deep-rooted in the life of common people. The Aryan also influenced the masses culturally and persuaded unity among the diverse tribes and races of the provinces.

20. J. Rapson( edit) :Cambridge History of India .vol.- I pp. 11-12
various dynasties. The Pala dynasty was succeeded by the dynasty of Vaidyadeva which continued till the first half of the 13th century.21

The early part of the 13th century was significant for two major events in the history of Assam. One was the beginning of a series of invasions from the west led by Turko-Afghan22 rulers of Bengal and another was the foundation of the new kingdom by Tai-Shans known as Ahoms immigrated under the leadership of Sukāpha through Patkai range of hills in 1228 A.D in the South Eastern part of Brahmaputra valley. The Muslims emerged as territorial, while the Ahoms as agricultural settlers in search of land. Whereas the rulers of Kāmrūpa were losing their hold over and authority over their possessions owing to the internal dissension. They were finally overtaken by a small group of Tai-Shan who later became the lord of the land, and in their fight against the invaders from the west, whom they repulsed successfully in a series of battle. The Ahoms initially carved out a small principality in the easternmost part of the valley and assimilated with the local tribes -Borahi, Morun and Chutiya. In course of time gradually they expanded towards the west along with the banks of Brahmaputra and pushing the Kachāri power to the South Western direction. By the middle of 16th century they became the supreme political power in Assam. The conquest of Tai-Shans changed the very trends in the political history of north-eastern India, marked the beginning of a process leading to the establishment of non-Aryan hegemony and end of long drawn out period of struggle against Aryan ascendancy. In such atmosphere of political stability the inhabitants of the region subsequently found new regional identity, as the subjects of the kingdoms of Assam and evolved a new

21. Vaidyadeva’s conquests did not cover the eastern part of Kāmrūpa, where the death of the last king of Palas were followed by an emergence of a number of independent or semi-independent kingdom or officers entrusted with the assessment of revenue of certain areas under the old administration became powerful landlords and exercised important political powers. They were known as Bhuyans and often behaved as kings. The western part of the kingdom retained the name of 13th century, after which Bhuyans gradually rose to power. Bhuyan exercised their power in the regions between Dikrai and Barnadi on the north bank and in the Kapili valley and eastern confines of the kingdom of Kāmrūpa on the south.

22. The thirteen century opens with the invasion of Kāmrūpa by Muhammad-i-Bukhitiyar, son of Muhammad-Bin-Bukhitiyar, in 1205 on his way to Tibet and China. The first invasion was repulsed by king Bartu or Pithu of Kāmrūpa, inflicting heavy losses to the invading forces. According to Tabaquat-i-Nasiri, Bakhtiyar managed to save his life with only few followers. Though this invasion was repulsed with heavy losses to the enemy, nevertheless it set the ball rolling for further Muslim invasions during the next few centuries. In 1257 A.D., Yuzbak invaded Assam, it was followed by the invasion led by Muhammad Shah in the second half of the fourteenth century.
fabric of culture and society, which became distinctly Assamese. It was no longer the west, but the east to which the rulers of the north-east looked for friendship and goodwill. In fact the coming of Tai-Shans the center of political gravity in the region shifted from the west to the east. The organized pre-Aryan society in the ancient days tended to become pre-Mongolian. Gradually where the Ahoms (Tāis) became the master of the entire valley, the epithet was transferred to the region over which they ruled. Thus the name Kāmrūpa was replaced by Āchām and finally Assam.

The political history of Western Assam remained somewhat hazy and confusing for nearly two centuries till the establishment of Khen dynasty at Kāmatapur towards the middle of 15th century. According to K.L. Barua, during this period the political capital of Kāmrūpa was shifted from ĒKhāmrūpa-nagarāl near modern Guwahati to Kamatapur. Another far-reaching and most significant event was the invasion of Hussain Shah (1493-1513 A.D.) that led the defeat of Nilambar, the king of Kāmata and subjugate of the kingdom by Sultan. Thus, the sack of Kāmrupa was finalized. Thus ended the ageless pursuit of the ideal of Pragjyotisa-Kāmrūpa, a glorious and powerful kingdom subscribing to the Aryan ethos. It was marked by the total disintegration of the western kingdom and founding of a new one by the Tai-Shans in the east.

The fall of Khen dynasty gave an opportunity to the rise of chiefs in different parts of Western Assam and North Bengal. The Muslim rule established in Kāmrūpa-Kāmata in the close of the 15th century was short lived. Whatever administrative measures found their way along with the alien officer to this new possession of Hussain Shah, the governor of Bengal were soon abolished. It was the Bhuyans who made an attempt to re-establish their own rule and restore the old administrative tradition, killed the governor there and threw off the alien domination. Subsequent events in Western Assam brought one more Mongoloid power into prominence, the Koches. The Koch dynasty came into existence in the first or second decade of the 16th century A.D who not only carved out a new kingdom on the ruins of the erstwhile

24. Towards the middle of 15th century, the Khen dynasty came to power in Kamatapur, and ruled for nearly fifty or sixty years in parts of North Bengal and Western Assam.
25. K.L. Barua.: Early History of Kamrupa. p. 130
26. The word Koch is a term of some ambiguity. In Assam proper it has become the name of a Hindu Castes, into which we receive tribal converts like the Kocharis, Laliung, Mihir and Garos. In North Bengal and Koch Behar the term Koch had been abandoned for the appellation ‘Raj Vamsi’ which donates a tribe not a caste. Taking advantage of the absence of a central power, Visu an adventurous youth of humble origin established himself as the king of the kingdom by defeating powerful Bhuyas. S.L Barua : A Comprehensive History of Assam, p202.
kingdom of Kāmrupa-Kamata but also in course of their eastward expansion, proved their might against the rising power of Ahoms, who were yet to assume a significant role as rulers in this part of India. It is also equally true that after subjugating one neighbouring state after another, they at once established their authority over an extensive territory posed as a challenge to the rulers of Gauḍa and formed a defence alliance with the Mughal Empire.²⁷ Even it is significant that meantime Koch Bihar was literally swarming with cultural workers under the patronage of the Koch kings.²⁸

Amongst numerous kingdom in the upper Brahmaputra valley, which emerged on the political scene following the extinction of the Palas, those of the Chutiya³⁹ and the Kachāris³⁰ both were indigenous people of Assam reached its zenith in the fourteen and fifteenth centuries but was completely wiped out by the Ahoms towards the middle of the sixteenth century and the territory was annexed to the Ahom kingdom in 1523 A.D.

Besides the above mentioned political power, there were the Jayantias who ruled over the Jayantia hills and Jayantiā parganā and hill tribes of the Nāgā, Gāro, Khāsi and Mikir hills were ruled by local chiefs. However early history of the tribes are mostly obscure because no written record of these tribes were preserved.

Thus, the above mentioned political situation divulged that by the latter half of the sixteen century and from the beginning of the seventeenth century Ahoms became the supreme political power in Assam who successfully resisted the Mughal invasions. Kept the country in peace, prosperity and order, the Ahoms subdued all the

²⁷. The Koch power having its territory spread over the present districts of Kāmrupa, western part of Darrang, Goalpara, Koch Behar, and Jhalpaughari attained a great height during the reign of Naranārayana.
²⁸. Koch Behar served as a heaven for social and religious reformers, who under the leadership of Śaṅkaradeva accelerated the process of assimilation of indigenous tribes into the early feudal society in Assam. Thus, Koch Behar was the base wherefrom a force was set in motion, which started smashing many a tribal barrier and brought a radical social transformation in a region, where the peasantry grew in size.
²⁹. The Chutiya kingdom was founded towards the end of 13th century when the Kāmrupa kings lost their hold over the eastern part of the kingdom and the capital was transferred to Kamatapur. The Chutiyas ruled the present districts of Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur, Sivasagar, Darrang and Duar Areas. Perhaps, the Chutiyas were the earliest of the Mongoloid tribes in upper Brahmaputra valley to accept Hinduism. However, it is no denying fact that Chutiyas had an advanced civilization and the annexation of their kingdom strengthened the Ahoms.
³⁰. After the fall of the Palas, Kachāris another Mongoloid origin tribe regarded as the earliest inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley. In the beginning of the thirteenth century, when the Ahoms appeared on the political scene of Assam, the Kachāris were the most important and organized tribes with their kingdom extending from the river Dikheri in the east to the Kapili in the east and covering the present district of North-Cachar in the South. Gradually, the Kachāris receded back to the South due to the onrush of the Ahoms until it was confined to the North Cāchar hills and plains of Cāchār. The frequent conflicts between the Kachari and Jayantia kings offered opportunity to the Ahoms to intervene occasionally which encouraged them to gain ascendancy over the entire region. “The Kachari kingdom with its capital at Dimapur Maibong or Khaspur was looked upon by the scattered Kachari as the lingering symbol of their racial unity. It was only under the British that Kacharis had finally lost their kingdom. S.K. Bhuyan: Kachari Buranj, Intro. p XVII
petty chiefs of the *Brahmaputra* valley as well as of the tribal frontiers which led to the emergence of one closely united geographical and political society named Assam. The most significant achievement of the *Ahom* rule was the political verification of the country which gradually led the rise of social, cultural and linguistic unity and evoked the spirit of oneness among the people. In fact the impact of the *Ahom* rule for six hundred years in the *Brahmaputra* valley and that of the *Koch king* of Western Assam on the life and society of the people of Assam in shaping their social and cultural pattern cannot be ignored.

### 2.3 Religious Condition:

Constant friction and conflict for the supremacy among the above mentioned power were the order of the day which crossed political instability in the country. The political instability of the country led a chaotic atmosphere in the sphere of religion. In the fifteenth century the religious life in Assamese was far from satisfactory. The social condition of Assam was hardly conducive to a healthy religious growth. The religious history of Assam from the beginning of the 13th to the end of 17th century may be called a period of expansion and consolidation of Hinduism, as the dominant religion of Assam.  

Although Hinduism was as old as the Aryan migration of Assam i.e. the historical dynasties and king professed Hindu religion and strived utmost for the maintenance and spread of Hinduism, yet the bulk of population being ethnically non-Aryan remained outside the pale of Hinduism till the beginning of 13th century.  

The majority of the people belonged to the non-Aryan tribes having distinct manners, customs, and religious beliefs. Those who professed Hinduism loosely adhered to *Vaiṣṇavism* or *Saivasim, Saktism* or *Tantricism.*

The religious life of medieval Assam before the rise of *Neo-Vaiṣṇavism* movement followed largely the tradition of earlier period but meantime revealed a considerable deviation from them. Still the *Brāhmans* were the parent of the Hindu society, but instead of making religion a dynamic force in the life of the common masses, they made it a secret lore obfuscated by elaborate ceremonialism. Hence people sought his solace in magic, incantation and all kinds of left-handed practice. However, this was not an isolated phenomenon in Assam. Indian society, in general,

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31. S.N. Sarma: *Cultural History of Assam.* p. 188
32. Ibid. p. 189
was in a state of chaos till the religious reformers of Bhakti movement gave a new orientation to the spiritual and social outlook of the people.  

Before the wave of the Indian Bhakti Movement reached Assam, Saivism and Saktism were the pre-occupant cults in the Brahmaputra valley.

1.1 Šaivism:

Originally a tribal god, Siva continued to receive homage from both the ruling families and tribal communities. Siva was the tutelary God of ancient king of Kāmrupa from the 7th to the 12th centuries. Moreover attached to every Devi temple we invariably found a temple dedicated to Siva, in the form of Bhairava. According to Kālikā Purāṇa the land was reserved by Sambhu for his own domain. Saivasim was a flourishing religion at the time of Śaṅkaradeva. The appeal of Saiva cult was so strong that even after the coming of the neo-Vaiṣṇava movement some of the followers of the new faith continued to have some weakness for worshipping Siva with offering of animals. But this was not allowed in neo-Vaiṣṇava fold of Śaṅkaradeva.

1.2 Saktism:

Throughout the medieval period even down to the 18th century the leading religion of Assam was Saktism. The fertility goddess worshipped by the tribes was accepted by the Brāhmans as Shakti. Since the ancient days, Assam has been the...

33. S.L. Baruah: A Comprehensive History of Assam, p. 442
34. "The Bodo-Kacharis worshipped a God called Batho, Bathau, Bathau-Brai or Bathau Siv-Rai" who was identified with Siva according to their tribal rites. The Hinduized royal families worshipped Siva according to Brahmanic rites but honoured tribal rites as well. The Koch king Nārānārayan worshipped Siva according to tribal rites and later he issued an edict by which he had legalized the tribal form of Siva worship amongst the Koch, Mech and Kachari people inhabiting the area to the north of Gohain Kamal Ali. To secure the aid of the tribal people the Ahom king Pratap Singha built Siva temples at Dergaon and Biswanath. Later the descendent of Tungkhunia Ahom King constructed numerous Siva temples in different parts of the county. In their coins also the Ahom king betrays their Saiva-Sākta proclivities.
35. As a matter of fact, Siva appear in the Kālikāpurāṇa and the Yogini-tantra often as Bhairava than as a normal God and therefore adhered to extreme Vāmācara practices. In these temple Siva was worshipped as Bhogi Siva and Yogi Siva. The Bhogi Siva in the form of Ardhanārisvara was worshipped according to Tāntic rites while Yoga Siva was worshipped in Yogin form according to Purānic rites. B. Kakati : The Mother Goddess Kamakhya, p 22
36. Most of the early Hindu kings of Assam were the exclusive devotees of Siva and Siva was the guardian deity of the kingdom. M. Neog: Religions of North East India, p. 6
37. Indeed he himself was born in the family of Candivara, a devout Sākta and known in political circles as Devidāsa and Siromani-Bhuiyā. Ibid, p. 6
38. However the concept of Siva was not totally discarded. Rather Śaṅkaradeva taught that Hari (Viṣṇu) and Hara (Siva) should be recognized as identical. Siva continued to have an appeal in his popular form, even to another subscribing the neo-Vaiṣṇava faith as evidenced by the Asvakarna-vadha and the Bhimacarita of Rāmāraswati: KGC. Sec. 286
prominent center of Sakti worship. According to B.K. Kakati, the Dikkaravasini of Kālika-purūṇa was the Goddess Tāmresvari or Kecāikhāti. Kāmrūpa was the greatest center of Sāktas. Kāmākhya emerged as the prominent deity of Kāmrūpa and Eastern India and this is mainly responsible for popularizing the cult of Kāmākhya throughout India. The Ahoms who formally accepted the Hinduism from Rudrasingh to the last ruler of the dynasty were adherents of tantric-saktism and became the disciples of Sakti Guru belonged to the family of Krsnarāma Nyāyanāgisha, who introduced some modification in the procedure of the worship of Kāmākhya.

With the increase of Sākta influence in the royal palace, some of the nobles and high officials of Ahom kingdom also embraced Saktism. Adoption of oppressive measures by Ahom royal family and nobles towards the Vaiṣṇava community encouraged the Māyāmara-Mahanta to rise in revolt against the Ahoms.

40. During the thirteen century the Chutiyas worshipped a Goddess called Kechari-khāti whom some scholars have identified with goddess Dikkaravāsini of Tantras. In the beginning of the thirteen century the Kachari king followed the Saiva-Sakti cult. The Ahom king Suklenmung Gargaya Raja patronized towards Saktsim, after his defeat at the hands of Koches. Pratap Singha also promoted the worship of Shakti to improve his relation with the tribes mainly the Koches, the Chutiyas as well as the Jayantias who were notaries of a goddess called Jayanti or Jayantieswari.

41. Kāmākhya is the most holy and famous shrine of the sect and with its worship there associate various rites, mantras and sacrifices. The Purāṇa mentioned the worship of the goddess in both Vāmacārā (left handed) and daksinācārā (right handed) tantrik ways. Probably Kāmākhya was originally a tribal cult of ‘mother’ of a matriarchal society taken over by the Hindus as a symbol of the primordial female energy. Later she was identified with Durga, Pārvati, Kāli, Cāmunda etc. and also the other consorts of Mahādeva. However the Purāṇa makes an attempt at a compromise or conciliation between Saivasim and Saktism by making Kāmākhya a consort of Śiva and by assigning the latter the role of Bhairva. The Kālikā-purūṇa and Yogini-tantra (16th century AD) two Sanskrit works composed in Assam have mainly dealt with Sakti cult and in the tenth or eleventh century A.D. The Kālikā- Purūṇa nevertheless exhibits an exemplary instance of religious tolerance in respect of Vaiṣṇavism and Saivasim which continued till the advent of neo-vaiṣṇavism in the early decades of the 16th century.

42. Kṛṣṇa nāma implemented the modified procedures of worship of deities and also purification (Sama-Skaras) and ob-sequel rites (aurdhavardihika) introduced by Raghunandananda Bhattacharya of Navadwipa of Bengal.

43. This revolt with varying intensity continued for twenty years and was ultimately subdued with the help of the East India Company in 1794.

44. The family kept an image of Candi in their house. According to the biographies of that period, Mādhavadeva, the favourite disciple of Śaṅkaradeva was a staunch believer in Saktism. But fortunately his meeting with Śaṅkaradeva, after a serious scholastic debate succeeded in converting the former of purity and supertory of devotional Vaiṣṇavism. Instances of Devi worship narrated in different hagiographies are confirmed the popularity of Sāktism in medieval Assam before the resurgence of Vaiṣṇavism under the leadership of Śaṅkaradeva. M.Neog (edt): Katha Gurucarita. p. 20

45. H. Sarma Dolo : Saktism and Saka Literature. chap. VI
The family of Śaṅkaradeva, till his advent practiced Saktism.\textsuperscript{44} Even during the days of Vaiṣṇavism the worship of Devi and her different popular manifestations in the forms of Manasā and Sītā (Ai) was prevalent among the unorthodox section of the people.\textsuperscript{45} Another folk worship related with the Sakti worship is the ritual observed in appeasing Apecharī (Apsarā). This is also observed and conducted by womenfolk.\textsuperscript{46} In Western Assam, the virgin worship does not take place. It may be a form of worship of the sun-rays.\textsuperscript{47} The other popular female deity that worshipped in medieval times was Lakhimi and Ghar-deuti.

\subsection*{1.3 Tantrism:}

The Kālikā-purāṇa (11\textsuperscript{th} century) the Yogini-tantra (16\textsuperscript{th} century) and the Kāmākhya tantra composed in Assam conformed the prevalence of the Tantrik cult centering round the goddess Kāmākhya and her different manifestations.\textsuperscript{48} The mode of worship and some other activities follow the tantric procedures i.e. the Vāmācara way. But these are not meant for the uninitiated general masses.\textsuperscript{49} Even the human sacrifice was prevalent in Kāmākhya, in the temple of goddess Tāmresvari situated in the eastern most regions near Sadiya and in the Jayantasweri temple of Jayantapur.\textsuperscript{50}

The Kāmākhya temple at Guwahati, the Kechāikhati temple at Sadiya, the Mahādeva temple at Dergao, and the network of Sakta temples at North Lakhimpur divulged the extent of tantric influence in Kāmrūpa. These rites gained laurels in Assam by the preaching of peripatetic Buddhist monks. Two such preachers were found roaming about in Eastern Assam and Śaṅkaradeva is said to have vanquished them in arguments which made them flee from the country.\textsuperscript{51}

The tantric ritual was known in Assam by Baudhachara or the usages of Buddhists. The general people not followed the Vāmācara rites and rituals or human

\textsuperscript{44} S.N. Sarma : Fairy Worship in Assam cited from S.N. Sarma : Cultural History of Assam, p205
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid. p.
\textsuperscript{46} Chinnamasta, Urgatara, Trippurasundari, Dikkarvasini, Lalitakānta, Tiknakānta, Bhuvaneswari, Kalikākānta, Vide, Kalika-purana, Yogini tantra.
\textsuperscript{47} All these are assigned for those who would venture to develop deep into the mysteries of the tantrik sakīt cult. Tantric rituals in their debased forms were practiced in Assam in the centuries preceding in vaisnava revival. Magic rites, wine drinking and derivation by ripping open the entrails of a pregnant woman. L.N. Bezbaruah: Sri Sri Sankardeva and Madhavadeva, p. 30
\textsuperscript{48} Human sacrifices were also offered by the Tippers, Kacharis, Koches, Jaintias, and other Assam tribes. During this period, Kāmrūpa or Ancient Assam was at one time the home of Tantricism. Gunabhikram Baruah: Assam Buranji. pp. 38 and 269
\textsuperscript{49} They worshipped Durgā, Kāli, Jagadhārī and other goddess according to prescription and mode of worship laid in Puja padhati with incarnations, ivaṇā, nyāsa, ivaṇeda and sacrificing animals. The extreme rites and rituals connected with Pasvācarā and Vāmācara were practised by a handful of people with their Gurus. This tantrism was primarily patronized by the kings and well-to-do class.
sacrifices. After the fall of Pala dynasty and disintegration of the kingdom the local landholders, the Bhuiyās favoured this tantric-saktism.

Alongside the organized religious practices of magic and incantation people including the ruling authority were swayed by their influences. The belief in magic was also exploited by a host of other individuals, who used to earn their livelihood by performing magical feats. The Buddhist magicians of Belaguri and the Yogis whose profession was snake-charming are mentioned in Katha-Guru-Carita.

The Gaurulila or biography of Dāmodaradeva also described the state of religious affairs in Assam on the eve of the Vaiṣṇava revival. In Vansi-Gopaladevar-carita the author Rāmānanda Dwija also described the spiritual degeneration. Though Hiuen-Tsang did not notice any trace of Buddhism in Assam in the seventeenth century A.D. but the esoteric Buddhism in the form Vajrayana gradually began to gain ground secretly from the 9th century onwards till it was practically obliterated by the surging waves of Vaiṣṇavism. Perhaps the Bouddhas mentioned by Vaisnavite biographers were Vajrayānists.

Tantricism which had already secured a foot-hold in this land under Pala King of ancient period gained wide popularity. Keeping the door open to all irrespective of castes, sex, it recognized equality of rights to worship and attracted thereby innumerable notaries. Thus the Tantricism both Hindu and Buddhist type was widely prevalent in Assam and worship of various Gods and Goddess with elaborate ceremonies both esoteric and exoteric were also very popular.

1.3 Vaisnavism:

The third prominent sect of Hinduism was Vaiṣṇavism. It was prevalent in Assam on the eve of neo-Vaisnavite movement known as the Pāncarātra Vaiṣṇavism. The Katha Guru-carita also mentioned the popularity of Vāsudeva in

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52. The practice of magic and incantation attracted the notice of the Persian chroniclers of the 16th and 17th century. The Ain-i-Akbari and the Fathiy-a-i-Ibriyāh contain the references of Assamese magical rites. According to Ain-i-Akbari magic held an important place in the estimation of the people. The author of Baharistan-i-Ghaibi narrates how the people of Assam practiced sorcery and magic to influence the course of judicial proceeding as well as war.
53. The Alamgirnamah states that whoever came to this country lost his way and could not go back. Further, there was many superstition shared by people of all classes.
54. This practice of magic and incarnation was kept alive even after the expansion of the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement. By performing magical feats some persons could even command followers during the period of the Moamariya uprising. M.Neog (edt): Guru Carita, pp. 57.
55. S.N. Sarma: NVMSIA. p.8
56. Ibid. p.8
57. But this type of Vaiṣṇavism is quite different from the one introduced by Śaṅkaradeva and his followers. The copper plate grants dating 1392 and 1401 A.D. also mentioned the prevalence of this cult before Śaṅkaradeva. The Bargangā Rock Inscription of Māhabhuti Varman (1554 A.D.) mentioned the existence of vaiṣṇavism.
the North Eastern region of Assam. The Kālikā Purāṇa stated five manifestation of Vasudeva with their piths Hoyagrīva-Mādhava, Māstyā-Mādhava, Pāṇḍunāth-Mādhava, Vāsudeva and Varaha-Mādhava which were worshipped at different places of Kāmrūpa. All these forms of Vāsudeva installed in the different shrines are still worshipped according to Pāncarātra mode. Hence, the Vāsudeva cult was a living cult on or before the 15th century which is proved by the personal names to be found in the land-grants of early Kāmrūpa kings and genealogies of few early performers. According to S.N. Sarma, Vāsudeva was worshipped in Śmrīta rites like Srāddha and Pārvāna. Images of Vāsudeva that revealed in various parts of Assam evinced that Vāsudevaism was the earliest form of Vaiṣṇavism practised in Assam where Trantik are also fraternize. The doctrine of montra and yantra in the Samhitas of Pāncarātra Vaiṣṇavism are indistinguishable form of Śākta teachings. The cult of Vāsudeva primarily flourished in the temples while the vaiṣṇavism of the Epics influenced a certain sections of the mass. Besides these major sects, some other Purāṇic Gods and Goddess i.e. Ganesa, Kārtikeya, Indra, Agni, Kuvera, etc. were also worshipped in Assam.

Surya also seems to have received special reverence, although there is no definite indication in the epigraphs regarding the sun-worship in Assam. The Vaijayāna Buddhism known as esoteric form of Buddhism gradually began to gain ground secretly from the 9th century onwards, till it was practically obliterated by the surging waves of Vaiṣṇavism.

58. The names like Vāsudeva, Sankaradeva Harideva and Aniruddha proved the prevalence of this cult before advent of neo-vaiṣṇavism. The worship of Viṣṇu in the form of Vāsudeva was prevalent from the very early period. During this period the people adopted Visnus’s name as an individual name. U.C. Lekharu (ed.) Katha-Gurucarita, p. 28

59. The Kalika Purana Chap. 12 According to B. Kakati of these, Hayagrīva-Mādhava at Manikuta and Vāsudeva in the Dikkaravāsini regions are most important. B. Kakati: Mother Goddess Kamakhya, p. 71-72

60. The Nidhanpur grant of Bhaskarvarman alone contains personal names of Brahmans which are also names of Vyūhas and Viḥāva of the Pāncarātra-Vaiṣṇavism. B.K. Barua: The Cultural History of Assam, p. 150

61. Hence the Brahmans who worshipped Vāsudeva were known as Pracīna-Panthī whose forefathers came to Assam later and adopted the modes of Śmrīta practices. S.N. Sarma: NVMSIA, p.6

62. The Assamese translations of the Rāmāyana by Mādhava-Kandali, the court poet of the Kachari king Mahāmāniṣya of the 14th century and popular translations of several episodes of Māhābhārata by Harihara Viṣṇu, Kavirātra Sarasvati and Rudrakandali, all belonging to the 14th century AD established that Vaiṣṇavism as found in the two epics were not unknown to a section of people. B. Kakati: Mother Goddess Kamakhya, p. 75

63. A copper plate of later period of 1392 AD began its prasasti with the adoration of Gaṇapati The namo-ganapataye vande. The Kālikā-Purāṇa mentioned the worship of these Gods and described in detail the procedure of their worship. It referred the description of sacred places in Assam connected with the worship of various Gods and Goddess. The Kālikā-Purāṇa. Chap. 79

64. The Kalika-purana and other texts confirmed the prevalence of sun-cult, the Mārkandeya-Purāṇa also referred about the sun-temple of Kūmrūpa whose fame was spread far and wide. Tarānāth also mentioned that sun-worship enjoyed a special favour in Assam. B.K. Barua: A Cultural History of Assam, p. 176
Different types of yoga were also practiced in Assam from early times. Due to a confused admixture of different Hindu and Buddhist trantic cults a mysterious atmosphere was created in Assam which came to be known to the outside world as a land of mysticism and sorcery.\(^{66}\)

**2.4 Social Condition:**

The fifteenth century Assam presented a motley collection of diverse shades and political status.\(^{67}\) Like the king of ancient India, the kings of Kāmrūpa also followed the Varnāsrama-dharma and imposed it on the people.\(^{68}\) The rigidity of the caste system had fatal effects, which shaped the very foundations of the society. A wide gulf came to be created between the higher and lower castes. Though not by the consent of the people at large, but by the law of the land, the supremacy of the Brāhmana was recognized.\(^{69}\) Of the Chutiyas, Kacharis, Moran and Barahis, the tribes who ruled in the eastern Brahmaputra valley only the ruling families of the Chutiyas were the Hindus. The king in the Western Valley, i.e. the Khens and the Koches as well as the Bhuyans who ruled in area on both banks of Brahmaputra were also Hindus. However with the expansion of Neo-Vaiṣṇavism in the 16\(^{th}\) century, the mass population in the entire valley came under the pale of Hinduism.\(^{70}\)

The Ahoms considered as a separate caste, were the ruling dynasty for six hundred years and started accepting Hinduism from the sixteenth century.\(^{71}\) Though they accepted Hinduism, but not like the Koches adopted all the Hindu rites and

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65. Ibid. p. 126 f
66. M. Neog: SHT. p. 91
67. There was no political or social solidarity. The society was decayed within and various factors blended to threaten the very existence of society. Further the caste systems also worsen the situation to the tyranny. In fact the social condition of the country was utterly depressing, degenerating and tending towards revolution.
68. At the time of the advent of the Ahoms, the people of Brahmaputra valley were computed of two broad divisions – the Hindus and non-Hindu tribes. The Hindus included the Brahmans, the caste Hindus, the Hinduised royal families and other converts whose members were gradually increased. All the non-Brahmans were known as Sudras.
69. They were the religious Guru, maintained the schools of Sanskrit learning, the tolas and enjoyed significant offices in administration. The inscriptions referred the traditional castes and professional committees. Among the non-Brahmans castes, the most prominent were the Kayasthās who were scribe or accountants, the Daivajnās also known as Ganaka, professionally the astrologers, the Kalitas monopolized the trades and other professions, the Keots were usually the cultivators. All of them were regarded as castes Hindus. Besides, there were some other Hindu communities like the Barias, Suts and Kaivartas. The Yogis or Naths, whose occupation was snake charming, silk rearing or drum beating formed a distinct class by themselves and performed their social and religious rites by their own priests.
70. S.L. Barua: Comprehensive History of Assam. p. 257
71. However, Ahoms community gradually developed and increased in number in course of centuries since its arrival in thirteenth century by absorbing local people into its fold. After disintegration of the Chutia kingdom, large slices of the Chutiyas were taken into the Ahom fold. Similarly a large number of Barbhais and Morans were absorbed by the Ahoms.
rituals as assigned by the Smritis for Sutras.\textsuperscript{72} The other professional communities such as Banias (traders) Tantis (Weavers), Hiras (potters not using the wheel), Sonowals (gold washers), Telis (oilman), Nadials (fisherman), Haris (Scavengers) and others, only a few like the Hiras formed a real caste.\textsuperscript{73} Besides these, certain other communities of people entering Assam in later part of Ahom rule i.e. in sixteenth and seventeenth century were the Manipuris, Sikhas and Rajputs. Again towards the later part of 18\textsuperscript{th} century, some of the Shan tribe like Khamits, Phakials, Aitonias, Turungs migrated to Assam, who were Buddhist. All these entrants forming small groups were in the process of being Assamized.

Besides, there were people skilled in various arts and crafts, some of whom came here in search of livelihood, whereas others were imported. Originally belonged to the professional castes, elsewhere in India, these professionals were too few to form a caste here, but too specialized to be despised. A section of Muslims people also divulged their skill in arts and crafts which gave them a social distinction and enabled them to get offices in Ahom administration.\textsuperscript{74} On the other hand, craftsman without distinction were degraded and belonged to the lowest strata of Hinduzed parts of the society.\textsuperscript{75}

In the social hierarchy the privileged aristocracy such as the King at center, the tributary Rajas, and the Patra-mantris, the frontier or local governors and the priestly class occupied the highest position in society. The ladies in the courts were provided with certain mels or estates along with the service of Paiks. The gentry consisted of the Chamua classes were appointed in the office of Phukans, Barua etc. while the caste Hindu were appointed in the civil office of Phukan. The Chutiyas mobility and deposed Bhuyans were engaged in junior office of administration. The Paikes formed

\begin{itemize}
\item[]{\textsuperscript{72} As the Ahoms did not totally discard their old faith and customs, they were given neither the status of high class Hindu, nor treated as lower or depressed class.}
\item[]{\textsuperscript{73} Most of the professions like these of goldsmiths, blacksmithy, pottery, dancing, garland making were monopolized by Kalitas, subsequently termed as Saru-Kalitas (inferior Kalitas) in order to distinguish them from their counterparts who could acquire affluence and learning and make themselves Bhuyans (landlords) or merchants and subsequently heads of certain Satras. To establish their superiority, these Kalitas began to initiate themselves as Pure or Bar-Kalitas and refused to marry with Saru-Kalitas.}
\item[]{\textsuperscript{74} The social assimilation of the Muslim populations with indigenous people of Assam was so complete that Srihabuddin Talish had cited that 'As for the Mussalmans, who had been taken prisoner in former times and had chosen to marry here, their descendents are exactly in the manner of Assamese, and have nothing of Islam except the name, their hearts are inclined for more towards mingling with the Assamese than towards association with the Muslims.' By the term 'Assamese' Talish meant the Ahom.}
\item[]{\textsuperscript{75} Some of them became adherents of Vai\text{\`{s}}navism; others followed Saktism and worshipped Hindu deities.}
\end{itemize}
the peasantry and the militia of the kingdom. The system of slavery was also prevalent in the entire region that were brought and sold in the open market, where market price being determined by the caste.

Thus, there prevailed rigid social distinction among the people belonging to different classes, which were prevalent in the initial stage of Ahom rule. The distinction between the king, the nobility and small section of the gentry holding high offices on one hand and masses on the other was strictly maintained.

In Kāmrūpa there existed the Pargana system where the distinction between aristocracy and commoners were maintained. A distinction was noticed between the Ahom state officials and local people. Hence there were caste distinctions among the Hindu population of the entire valley even though the caste system as such was not enforced in Assam with all its rigidity. Though the majority of people came under Hinduism in different phases, yet a large number of indigenous people living in hills and plains managed to maintain their separate identities. The cultural influence of Hinduism on the tribal life varied from community to community.

The tribesman both unassimilated as well as semi-assimilated spread over the entire valley was governed by their age-old customary laws, practices, and institutions. But there are some common features in their mode of land-lording, institution, social customs and usages. The tribal life and society has the democratic basis of their social and administrative organizations.

On the other hand the tribes of plain areas who came into contact with Hinduism particularly liberal vaiṣṇavism not only worshipped some Hindu deities, but equally paid homage to their traditional Gods and Goddess and observed the Hindu festivals along with tribal festivals. As regards assimilations or Sanskritisation they embraced vaiṣṇavism and gradually merged in the main stream of Assamese society. During this period systematic attempt were made to bring all castes and communities under the umbrella of the liberal Vaiṣṇavism.

76. From the subjugated Chutiyas and Bhuyans, Ahoms royalty acquired the taste and fashions of the upper stratum of the feudal society. Gradually, the feudal super-structure was developed and this led a steady increase of pomp and pleasures appropriated to their respective status and enough to maintain their vanity.
The Muslim society did not differ from that of Hindu in observance of non-religious rites and ceremonies connected with an agrarian society.\textsuperscript{77}

In the medieval period, the populations of Assam were non-Aryans belonging to various Indo-Mangolian tribes speaking various Tibeto-Burman dialects. The process of Aryan-migration began in the early centuries of the Christians era.\textsuperscript{78} The steady Hinduzation of the Tibeto-Burman people during the ancient period brought about a Sanskritization of the local pre-Aryan names of both Sino-Tibetan and Austrics origin.\textsuperscript{79} By the end of the early medieval period, that in by 1200 AD, Assam especially the plain lands watered by Brahmaputra, definitely, appears to have became a part of Aryan speaking India.\textsuperscript{80}

The highly ritualistic and priest-ridden religious rites of Brahmanical religion were considered unsuitable for the majority of the people who belonged to the non-Aryan ethnic groups with little or no knowledge of Sanskrit language in which Brahmanical rites and rituals were conducted.\textsuperscript{81}

Being deprived of local justice, the untrodden people were awaiting the coming of a Messiah. The Messiah came in the persons of Srimanta Šaṅkaradeva, rescued the downtrodden and established truth and social justice in a new socio-religious order.\textsuperscript{82} At hour of need Šaṅkaradeva came forward with his neo-vaiśṇavite practices and re-established it on a pure and broader basis which attracted all sections of the people.\textsuperscript{83} The task before Šaṅkaradeva was simply revolutionary.
2.5 Šaṅkaradeva:

Prevailing political, social and religious tradition influenced Šaṅkaradeva who were born to family surrounded by Sākta, Saiva and Vaiṣṇava tradition. But his initiation, education and realization freed him from all the influences. He got out all the barriers of religious dogmatism, super nationalism, taboos and many other social inhibitions and dedicated for the truth that he realized for life and society. The views of Vedas, Upanisads and Bhāgavata-Purāṇa shaped and moulded Šaṅkaradeva’s ideals. He was an apostle of Vaiṣṇavism who taught the worship of Kṛṣṇa, denounced the idolatry, sacrificial piety and caste structure of the society. From a land of primitive animism which was being affiliated to Saivasim and the Śaṅktism of

84. He was born in the family of a ruling Bāra-Bhuyān chief of Bordowā and was the descendent of Srímoni-Bhuyān Chandibar, whom Durlabhnāryān the king of Kamata settled in Kāmrupa at the middle of 14th century. The genealogy in shown below –

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suryabar</th>
<th>Kusumbar</th>
<th>Šaṅkaradeva</th>
<th>Rājajdar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chandibar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

When Viswa Singha was extirpating the Bhuyān chief in order to secure undisputed supremacy in Kāmrupa, Kusumbar, also known as Kusum Bhuyān migrated to Bordowa within the Ahom kingdom. He was the chief of the Bhuyans (Srimoni Bhuya) with considerable power and affluence. K.L. Barua: EHK,p. 204

85. The earlier biographers of his life and religious activities, Rāmacarna and Daityari Thakur have not referred the date of year of his birth, although both of them have recorded the date and year of his demise as Sāka 1490 (1568 A.D.). Ramacarna V. 3856, Daityari, 1736. It is latter biographers of the 18th century that have recorded the year of his birth which cannot be accepted without reservations. A close perusal of the internal evidence furnished by the later biographers leave some scope of the doubt the authenticity of the earlier date i.e. 1443 A.D., but there is scarcely any doubt about the year of his death. H.K. Barpujari, Comprehensive History of Assam, Vol. III, p. 231

86. Šaṅkaradeva came out of the Sanskrit tol of Mahendra Kandali as an erudite scholar in all branches of Sanskrit lore – grammar and kāṇaya, Śāstras and Purāṇas.

87. According to S. Radhakrishanan Šaṅkaradeva came out of the Sanskrit tol of Mahendra Kandali as an erudite scholar in all branches of Sanskrit lore – grammar and kāṇaya, Śāstras and Purāṇas.

88. According to S. Radhakrishanan Šaṅkaradeva came out of the Sanskrit tol of Mahendra Kandali as an erudite scholar in all branches of Sanskrit lore – grammar and kāṇaya, Śāstras and Purāṇas.
the Tantras, Śaṅkaradeva and his disciple Mādhavadeva transformed Assam into a country of an advanced humanism.  

He was married and took up administrative works. After he gave his daughter in marriage to one Hari, Śaṅkaradeva set out for pilgrimage throughout the length and breath of India for twelve years in course of which he must have met many saintly and scholarly person. It is likely that he had witnessed neo-vaiśnavite movement led by his predecessor in different regions of India like Mādhavacharya, Nitambarācarya, Visnusvāmi, Vallabha, Rāmaṇanda and Kabir.

According to Rāmaṇanda, Śaṅkaradeva also met Caitanya at Puri in the course of his pilgrimage. The religious and theological deliberation with these preachers reflected in the vaiśnavite movement which Śaṅkara subsequently evoked in Assam.

It is not unlikely that Śaṅkaradeva might have received spiritual initiation from some Vaiśnava saint at Puri, where he spent more than one year. Curiously enough he has maintained a complete silence about the identity of his spiritual guide, although he has not failed to pay obeisance to his Guru in the opening lines of some of his poetical compositions. But according to Rāmaṇanda Dvija, after he visited the temple of Jagannatha, he resolved not to bow down his head to any deity having once bowed to the image of Jagannatha. Thus, it proved that Puri was the scene of Śaṅkaradeva’s illumination.


89. But his wife died, immediately after the birth of her daughter leaving no other issue. This alienated the young Bāra-Bhuyan from worldly things and made him think of living a religious life of meditation and prayers. M. Neog (ed.): The Bhakti Ratnakara, p. 62
90. Lekharu (edt): KGC. p. 33
91. But this appears to be an anachronism since Caitanya was a mere boy of six years or seven years, when Śaṅkaradeva visited Puri near about 1490 AD. Śaṅkaradeva was deeply impressed by the nature and working of the neo-vaiśnavite movements carried on by the sects of Rāmānuja, Mādhavacharya, Nimbārka and Rāmaṇanda in different parts of the country. S.N. Sarma: NVMSIA, p. 10
92. Curiously enough he has maintained a complete silence about the silence about the identity of his spiritual guide, although he has not failed to pay obeisance to his Guru in the opening lines of some of his poetical compositions. But according to Rāmaṇanda Dvija, after he visited the temple of Jagannatha, he resolved not to bow down his head to any deity having once bowed to the image of Jagannatha. Thus, it proved that Puri was the scene of Śaṅkaradeva’s illumination. Ibid. Viṣṇupuri figures prominently in the Vaiśnava tradition and literature of Assam literature of Assam. T.N. Sarma: Madhevdev and his works, p.157.

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According to B. Kakati, Vaiśnavism of Assam preached by Śaṅkaradeva, and that of South speak adequately of the influences imbibed during his pilgrimages. After twelve years of such wandering through many sacred seminaries of vaiśnavite learning, Śaṅkara returned home a much traveled man, acquiring knowledge of vaiśnavite theology, texts, mode of worship, and management of institution. Śaṅkaradeva’s experience and impressions of his long pilgrimage encouraged a great deal in widening his religious outlook and inspired him to stipulate the task of re-orienting the religious set up of the country. After a lapse of twelve years, Śaṅkaradeva returned home fired with imagination and zeal for a reform. He had carried a deep impression of nascent neo-Vaiśnava movement that was pulsating in the heart of Northern India and manifested itself in the devotional song. He was now ready to fulfill his mission of his life that Śaṅkaradeva now convinced that in order to elevate oneself spiritually and at the same time be of service to humanity one need not renounced the world.

Activities at Bordowā:

Immediately after his return from pilgrimage and re-marriage, Śaṅkara removed his residence from Alipukhuri to a near about village Bordowa, where he permanently transferred the office of Siromani-Bhuyan to a son of one of his uncles to fulfill his mission of life which took a definite shape. Now he started with fresh impetus and vigorous enthusiasm.
At Bordowā he set up a Satra (monastery) and on his request, his brother Rāmarāya constructed a spacious deva-grha where regular prayers and religious discussions began to be held. To induce the people towards his faith according to Kathā-Guru-Carita and Bardowā-Carita, Śaṅkara organized a dramatic performance i.e., a pantomimic dance known as Cihna-Yātra, dramatic representation with paintings. Preparations were made for illumination and fire work.

Thus, this was the first spectacular step for attracting people and popularizing the cult. Now people began to respect Śaṅkara with a sense of wonder and reverence. Thus, the relatives and neighbors were brought to his fold with one stroke of his genius.

But the faith and the movement did not take a definite shape till the receipt of Bhāgavata-Purāṇa with Śrīdhara Swami’s commentary through Jagadisa Mishra of Tirhut who came from Puri at the binding of the lord of Jagannatha-Ksetra to recite the scripture before Śaṅkaradeva. Śaṅkaradeva was highly benefited by this recitation and exposition. The possession of a copy of Bhāgavata-Purāṇa with the commentary of Śrīdhara Swami not only helped him to give clear and definite shape

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99. Jagatānanda alias Rāmarāya, and Rāmarāma Sarma, the son of his family priest were the outstanding companions, who helped Śaṅkaradeva with available means at their command to create a proper religious atmosphere at the initial stage of movement. Bhusana-Dvija, Sri Śaṅkaradeva, p. 37

100. Here he depicted the scene of seven Vaikunthas with a presiding Viṣṇu over each. The painting done by Śaṅkara himself on cotton made paper (tuļāpaṭi) represented the celestial abode of God, Vaikuntha. Aṣṭa (drama), slokas, songs and other elements were depicted in the Cihna-yatra. According to Bardowa-carita the performances continued for seven days and seven nights. Both Śaṅkara and Rāmarāma, appeared as ‘Sutradhāra’ and Viṣṇu at different stages. M. Neog: SHT, p. 107-8

101. Śaṅkaradeva performed this show, after his return from the pilgrimage at the request of his relatives and friends. The performance was a great success and all were amazed at the miraculous power of the initiator and director of the show. According to Śaṅkara-carita by Ramacarana Thakur, the Cihna-yatra was performed before Śaṅkaradeva set out for the first pilgrimage but Katha-gurūcarita and other biographies have stated it to be his post-pilgrimage performance.

102. According to Rāmaṇanda, wife of Jayanta Dalai was the first convert; she was followed by Harirama, Śrī Śaṅkaradeva’s early teacher, Mahendra Kandali, possibly belonged to this first batch of converts. B. Kakati, The Mother Goddess Kamakhya, p. 40

103. According to bio-graphies Śaṅkaradeva composed several songs based on the stories of Bhāgavata before he was in possession of the original copy brought by Jagadisa Misra. From Jagadisa Misra, he came in possession of the original version of the Bhāgavata with Śrīdhara Swāmī’s commentary. The Verse runs this — अमाराधार ओऽिेत अदेचपोि ओऽिाजिउ् जाणां जाणां जाणां जाणां जाणां ।


104. Though the new cult was primarily based on the teachings of Bhāgavata-Purāṇa further it was fortify by the teachings of Gīta which admonish complete surrender to God and by the thousand names of Viṣṇu narrated in the Padma-Purāṇa. S.N. Sarma, NVMSIA, p.12

105. Ibid, p. 12
to the creed of Bhāgavatism which had perhaps remained somewhat vague before, but also made it possible for him to render the original texts into Assamese verse.⁹⁴

According to Rāmānanda, ‘From that day the Bhāgavata came to gain currency and devotees began to listen to its expositions with unflinching faith.⁹⁵ Śaṅkaradeva listened with rapt attention of the exposition by Jagadisa Misra and realized that ‘Bhāgavata’ was a scripture without parallel, the scripture that determined Kṛṣṇa as the only God, ‘Nāma’ as the real dharma and ‘Aikāntika-Sarana’ and ‘Sat-Sanga’ as the indispensable elements of the faith. He thus, realized the sublimity and profundity of the ‘Bhāgavata-Purāṇa’.⁹⁶

Eastern Assam:

The movement commenced by Śaṅkaradeva was well received in his native place at Bardowa. But it received a temporary set-back from the clash between the Bhuyans and Kacharis which compelled him to quit central Assam and temporarily settled at Rowta and then to Gangāmukh or Ahataguri in Eastern Assam. Ere long, the inroads of Bhutanse and Koches compelled them to shift their residence to Dhuahātā-Belaguri, where the Ahom monarchs settled them with lands and estates. Here also Śaṅkaradeva stipulated himself in propagating the new faith through the process of congregational chanting of prayers, song, dramatic performances, and religious discussions.⁹⁷

Śaṅkara’s fourteen years long stay at Dhuahātā-Belaguri was marked by two significant incidents to his fold. The first was the acquisition of Mādhavadeva, the exponent of Sākta scholar into his fold who after his conversion from the Sākta faith

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106. Śaṅkaradeva’s vaisṣṇavism known as ‘Ekaśarana-hari-nāmā-dharma’-the religion of Supreme surrender to one, and that one is Viṣṇu who in the form of Nārāyana assumes incarnations from age to age. Daitiyari-Thakur: Sankaradeva-Madhavadeva-Carita. p. 25. According to Śaṅkaradeva, vaisṣṇava should not worship any other God except Viṣṇu, he should not enter any other Gods temple nor should be partake of the offering made to any other God. In doing bhakī would be vitiated. B.K. Barua: Sankaradeva. p.5

107. The simplicity and purity of the new faith in contrast to the ritual dominated Brahmanical cult was the prime factor in attracting unsophisticated masses to the devotional path. The portal of this new faith was kept wide open to all communities and no discrimination was made on the basis of castes and status while conferring initiation or ordination. S.N. Sarma: NVMSIA. p. 13

108. Mādhava not only assumed the vaisṣṇava faith but also recognised Śaṅkaradeva as his Guru. Mādhava’s relation with Śaṅkaradeva was similar to that of Uddhava with Kṛṣṇa. Hence, both Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva were regarded as the incarnation of Nārāyana and Ananta respectively.
proved himself the ablest and most faithful disciple.108 This unique union gave a renewed momentum to the progress of vaisnavism in Assam. His ardent devotion, scholarship and missionary zeal treading upon the opposition that stood on the way helped to widen the sphere of vaisnavism.109 The second incident relates to Šaṅkaradeva’s encounter with the Ahom king Suhumnung110 which compelled the Bhuyans headed by Šaṅkara to shift to Kāmrūpa due to the tragic incident of his son-in-law Hari’s execution and confinement of Mādhava in the capital for six months. These made it clear to him that he could no longer hope to see peaceful thriving of his order in the Ahom kingdom.

Kāmrūpa:

Šaṅkaradeva look out for possibilities of changing his place of residence to a safer locality ever since the arrest of Hari and Mādhava. In 1534 after the death of Visvasirīha, his son Naranārayana ascended the throne with Sukladhraja alias Chilaraya as his commander in chief. With their accession to power, the attitude of Baro-Bhuyans towards Koch power has changed. According to Daityari, Šaṅkara learned the ‘poetic qualities’ (scholarly disposition) of Narānarayana111 and decided to migrate to his kingdom.112 Thus commenced the third phase of Šaṅkaradeva’s life, marked by a comparative clan and gave him the opportunity to fulfill the mission of his life.113 Šaṅkaradeva and his followers remained in Pālengdi for nearly a year and then made their houses at the village Ganakkuchi or Ganakpara.114 But after three months stay at this village Šaṅkaradeva removed his abode to Kumarkuchi where he

109. Mādhava’s unflinching devotion to God and deep allegiance to his Guru, ultimately prompted Šaṅkaradeva to nominate him as his successor and the head of the Vaiṣṇavite community. S.N. Sarma: NVMSIA, p. 14

110. The Brahmanas accused Šaṅkara before the Ahom king of preaching a religion unorthodox and not envisaged by the Vedas. The Ahom king Suhumnung evoked him to argue with Brahmanas of his court. Šaṅkara defeated them and got off from the trial with credit having stayed at Dhuwahati-Belaguri peacefully for nearly fifteen years.

111. Daityari-Thakur: Sankerdeva-Madhavadeva-Carita, p. 113

112. Meantime the Koch king was preparing for an attack on the Ahoms which offered an opportunity to Šaṅkaradeva and his followers to migrate in Kāmrūpa. Having settled at various places Šaṅkaradeva moved further to west, stayed for a short time at Bārādi went up a small stream, Gaijān and stationed themselves at Pālengdi bari or Cunpaa on the Barpeta bill.

113. Here he initiated a wealthy resourceful and talented merchant named Bhabananda who was later renamed Naryana Thākur and became a stout devotee of Šaṅkaradeva and a devoted friend of Mādhava. Mādhava of Jayanti village, Govinda-Garamati, a worshiper of Devi, Budha Gopāla, Budha Sri-rāma Ata, Balarāma, a singer in oja-pāli, chorous and others to his creed.

114. According to Daityari, Šaṅkara moved direct from Palengdi to Patbausi.
resided for one year, and finally settled at Bausi later known as Patbaisi. For the last eighteen or twenty years of his life, Patbaisi was Śaṅkaradeva’s permanent place of residence.  

Here at Patbaisi, Damodaradeva, Harideva and Ānanta Kandali three of the principal Brahmin associates of Śaṅkaradeva moved towards his movement with equal zeal, who spread the teachings of Śaṅkaradeva and converted the Brahmaṇa to this new faith.

The Carit-puthis mentioned that Śaṅkaradeva did not personally initiate the Brahmans, but had them initiated by his family priest Rāmarāma Sarma.

### Second Pilgrimage:

Having permanently established himself at Patbaisi, Śaṅkaradeva set out for second course of pilgrimage with more than 120 followers near about 1550 A.D.

According to different ‘Carit-Puthis’ during this pilgrimage Śaṅkaradeva met Caitanya of Bengal, either at his native place at Navadwipa or at Puri.

Śaṅkaradeva and his followers did not visit Vṛndavana, as Mādhavadeva did not agree to accompany them there. The pilgrimage stayed at Puri only for a few months, when Śaṅkaradeva had the opportunity of meeting holy men from different parts of India.

After return from the second pilgrimage, Śaṅkaradeva further more engaged himself in the propagation of his faith. Śaṅkaradeva resumed in customary works of

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115. At Patbaisi Śaṅkaradeva established a Satra with Namghar (prayer hall), Shrine (manikuta), where he used to hold regular religious discourses, recitations of sacred texts, congregational prayers and dramatic performances. People began to come in large number into his fold attracted by his personality as well as by the mode of his preaching. Śaṅkaradeva also composed major portion of his literary activities namely, the songs, dramas and kāvayas at this Satra. B.K. Barua: Śaṅkaradeva. p. 7

116. The co-operation of Dāmodardeva, Harideva, enabled Śaṅkaradeva to extend the sphere of his activities to the Brahmical section which had been averse so long to the movement. Śaṅkaradeva enlisted the sympathy and co-operation of the Brahmans who as a class had remained so long outside the sphere of his influence. Ibid p. 7

117. Ramananda: Guru Carit. p. 183

118. Śaṅkaradeva set out in the month of Agrahāyana (Nov-Dec) in the company of 120 bhaktas including Mādhavadeva, Rāmārama, Rāmarāya, Srirāma Atā and others. Nārāyana Thakura also accompanied them, but had to return after a day’s journey as he had to take back his old and decrepit uncle Caitanya. M. Neog (edt): Katha Guru Carit. p141-142

119. Daiyari places this interview at Caitanya’s than or math. Śaṅkara saw Caitanya at Puri during his first pilgrimage, which does not seem to be probable. Śaṅkaradeva also met Harivyāsa, Rāmnānda and others in Puri, but this seems nothing but an anachronism, since Caitanya, Rāmnānda and Harivyāsa died earlier than 1550 A.D. The Carit-Puthis also mentioned that on his way to Puri via Gaya. Śaṅkaradeva visited Kabirs than or Matha of Kabir whom Śaṅkaradeva had held in high esteem; but to their utter disappointed Kabir was no longer alive to receive them but his granddaughter reverentially greeted them. The Carits also mentioned that after the pilgrims had left Puri they met two merchants who identified themselves as Rūpa and Sanātana Gosvamis. Daiyari Thakur: K.G.C.p 511 ff.

120. According to later biographies Śaṅkara made several converts of the priests of Jagannātha temple. They had to return before the rains set in and after travels covering six months they reached back home in the months of Vaisakha. KGC – 1549-169 gives a long string of names of places falling on Śaṅkara’s route, most of which seem to be Bengal. KGC – 1549-169
prayers, meditation, and nāma-kīrtana and gave religious instructions and initiation to large number of people.\footnote{The king of Hedamba and Muslim tailors Cândsai were converted. Budhā-dalai of the Daivajna caste and his brother, and officer of Koch king fastened in Vaiṣṇava camp.} Besides, these activities he made all his major poetical and dramatic works at Pātbausi. The last sections of Kīrtana-Ghoṣa were now written and Bhāgavata X, Ādi was rendered into Assamese verse and regarded as the most popular works of Assam Vaiṣṇavism. Except Patni-Prasāda, Śaṅkaradeva composed and produced the dramas. Besides, he also composed Bhāgavata I, II, IX, XI and XII, the ‘Anadi-Pātana’, the ‘Bali-chalana’, the ‘Kurukṣetra’, the ‘Nīmī-nava-Siddha-Samvāda’, the ‘Ramayana’, ‘Uttara-kanda’ and some lyrics of ‘borgīta’ and ‘bhatima’\footnote{The local traditions of Patbausi is that the Master stayed there for 18½ years and made books twice this number of years of his day.}.

Śaṅkaradeva also compiled his treatise, ‘Bhakti-ratnākara’ from the ‘Bhāgavata-Purāṇa’, the ‘Bhāgavadgīta’ and other ‘bhakti’ or ‘vedenta’ texts. The work seems to have been complete before Śaṅkaradeva received a copy of Visnupuri Samnyāsīs ‘Bhakti-ratnāvali’ through Kanthabhusana, Rāmārāma’s son in law and Naranārayana’s family priest.\footnote{According to Daityari, Kanthabhusana bought this copy at Banaras and gave it to Śaṅkaradeva to see if the book was a good and useful one. Bhusana and Rāmānanda mentioned that this Brahmā youth, after a thorough training in Kalāpa grammar, went to Banaras to study Vedanta and coming to know from him of Śaṅkaradeva’s activities, his teacher Brahmananda sent Kanthabhusana with a copy of ‘Bhakti-ratnāvali meant to be handed over to the Assam saint. Śaṅkaradeva cordially obtained this work and was rendered to Mādhava’s charge for the purpose of making of an Assamese version of it. This work was regarded as significant that because Mādhava’s translation of work is counted among the popular category of ‘four books’ of Vaiṣṇava canonical literature. Bhakti-ratnāvali VV 582 ff} The fast growing popularity of the new faith entices fresh hostilities. Those of the old priestly class, who could not tolerate Śaṅkaradeva’s teachings made doggerels\footnote{The complainants were led by one Vidyā-vīguţā Chakravarti cited from M. Neog: VFMA. p. 118} stressing the anti-traditional traits of his schools and abused king Naranarayana’s ears with greatly exaggerated accounts of Śaṅkaradeva’s activities.\footnote{King Naranārayana summoned Śaṅkaradeva to his court. Śaṅkaradeva by his scholarship and erudition defeated the Brahmāna Pundits in a contest. Śaṅkaradeva elucidated before the king the main principles of bhakti-dharma with pertinent citations from the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and other Vaiṣṇava texts. Daityari: K.G.C.712 ff} But Śaṅkaradeva established the truth of his creed and created a strong impression upon the king who was convinced about the superiority of Śaṅkaradeva’s creed and deeply moved by his majestic personality.\footnote{Naranārayana who was highly impressed desired to become his disciple but Śaṅkaradeva refused to give him initiation because king was unable to observe the religious and ethical code of his religion. B.K. Barua: Sankara deva. p.8} During the last few years of his life Śaṅkaradeva had to keep close contacts with the royal court which indirectly encouraged him to overcome oppositions.\footnote{With both the kings and the commander-in-chief’s support at his back, Śaṅkaradeva and his followers felt completely secure in their movements, and the Vaiṣṇava order thrived vigorously. M. Neog, EHVM, p. 119} After his reconciliation with the king Naranārayana, Śaṅkaradeva left Pātbausi for several times in order to visit the Koch
capital. The Koch senapati Cilārāya built for him a Satra near the capital, which was later known as Bhelā or Bhelādanga-Sattra. The great saint who gave Assam a new way of thinking about God and man, passed away in 1539 A.D. Thus, he lived for a hundred and nineteen years of full and vigorous life. Both Mādhava-deva and Dāmodardeva outlived him and spread his tenent far and wide. When English traveler Ralph Fitch visited Koch Behar Śaṅkaradeva’s teachings had already taken a firm root in the country.

Śaṅkaradeva’s influence has been felt for the last few centuries in all fields of the cultural life of Assamese people. He moved from one place to another to remit his knowledge and faith wherever he settled. Equal to Śaṅkaradeva’s physical strength and beauty, was his intellectual stamina and excellence. A versatile genius, he limited himself many astonishing qualities. “He was an administrator, a social reformer, poet and dramatist, painter, musician, and actor in dance-drama, wide and deep in his readings and firm and persistent in his intellectual grasps. In religious disputations, he pushed his antagonists with sincere and persuasive arguments to the defeated corner.

Śaṅkaradeva revealed in his organizing capacity in placing the doctrine of his faith on a firm soil in the truth of the bitterest opposition. A householders, he resigned himself and his all to God and remained detached from the pleasure and pains of the world. His weal and his woe depended on that of his followers. The culture of bhakti among his disciples in the proper manner was his delight. Always busy with

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128. On one occasion Cilārāya gave him a copy of a work called ‘Janma-Purāṇa’ and Śaṅkaradeva had it rendered into Assamese verse by Mādhava. At special request of the king, Śaṅkaradeva designed and directed the weaving of Vṛndāvānīyā Kāpoor, a cloth of sixty yards in length wherein the episodes of the Book X of the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa were embroidered. Besides this he also composed and staged Rāmāvayana-nāṭ at the request of Cilārāya. KGC 198, 866 ff.

129. B.K. Barua: Sankaradeva, p.8


131. M. Neog: EHVFMA. p. 121

132. Ibid. (as a Siromani Bhuyan and later as a gomasta under Koch)

133. Ibid. p. 122

134. KGC 44121

the writing of books and holding of discourses on religion and philosophy, he was not devoid of humors, which often broke forth in course of his narratives, dramatic works and in common talk.\textsuperscript{136}

Śaṅkaradeva persuade the message of religion of Love home to the people, released the soul of the common man from the oppressive burden of sacerdotalism and indicated to the individual that his voice could be heard by God if only it rose from a pure and sincere heart.\textsuperscript{137} Śaṅkaradeva’s religious activity was the root of the growth of rich and varied culture and literature. The common masses of the valley or on the hills could now comprehend a simplified democratized Hinduism without his having to be looked down upon by the high castes.\textsuperscript{138}

Before his death, Śaṅkaradeva assigned his disciple, Mādhavadeva to the apostolic seat, disregarding the claims of his son, who was also a devout vaiṣṇava.\textsuperscript{139} The neo-vaiṣṇavite movement initiated by Śaṅkaradeva was a turning point in the history of religion and philosophy of Brahmaputra valley in Assam. The Vaiṣṇavism became the faith and culture of Assamese social life under the Stewardship of Śaṅkaradeva and his followers. Though Assam was politically cut-off from the rest of India, till it was occupied by the British, yet the Vaiṣṇava cultural idealism was not totally cut-off from the main stream of India. Due to this fact the Vaiṣṇava renascent movement headed by Śaṅkaradeva was inspired and enriched by the main stream of Vaiṣṇavism as he was acquainted with art and culture of India.\textsuperscript{140}
After Śaṅkaradeva, the most prominent figure in the Assam Vaisnavite movement was Mādhava deva, the favourite disciple of Śaṅkaradeva who blazed across the literary firmament of Assam, a spectacular phenomenon. Daitayari considered Śaṅkara and Mādhava as two successive incarnations of Viṣṇu.

The Carit-Puthis divulge that Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhava upheld the ideal of Guru-Sisya-dharma. Importance of Mādhava’s place in the Sankarite order needs scarcely be stressed. The joint efforts of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhava led to quick promulgation of the new tenant. Mādhava became the head of the newly formed religious community at the wish of Śaṅkaradeva at his death-bed.

Mādhava outlived Śaṅkaradeva by twenty-eight years, and most of this period was spent by him in comparative quiet, giving him the opportunity to propagate the faith of Śaṅkaradeva far and wide.

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141. Mādhava was born in 1492 in a small village Letekupukuri near Nārāyanpur in a Kāyastha family of Hari-Bhuyan, a contemporary of Candivara, the great grandfather of Sankaradeva. In Bāndukā, Mādhava had his education in Kāyasthikāvṛtti (accounting), Nyāya, Tarka (philosophy and logic) and Sanskrit poetry. Madhavadeva was very much impressed by Sankaradeva, citation from Bhāgavata-Purāṇa in Eka-śaraṇa-hari nāma-dharma and nivṛtti mārga, the path of detachment to the world. Just as watering at the root of a tree nourishes the trunk, branches and its twig, just as different senses thrive if the vital life is maintained, so when one worships Acyuta, he worships all other Gods’. Bhāgavat-purāṇa

142. B.K. Barua: HAL. p. 45

143. A Religion which is to be cultured through services to the preceptor. It is said that, “उन्नीतेदेशं ज्ञनेषुद्दाहि आदि यज्ञ इति; इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति इति
Kāmrūpa and give it a firm foundation in the hearts of the common people. But in the very first year of his pontifical tenure, a section of Vaiṣṇava headed by Dāmodaradeva seceded, disowning Mādhava’s leadership. Thus, began a rift in the lute which within a year of Śāṅkaradeva’s death culminated in a complete schism.

Śāṅkaradeva’s apostolic successor Mādhava was a celibate and he created an order of celibate works called Kevaliyās who lived in small huts within the precincts of religious temples called Satras. However absence of any outward attraction adversely affected the spread of his cult. A large section of people attracted by the liberal attitude of Dāmodaradeva and also by the outward show of festivals and performances observed in his Satra went over to his side. Hence at the advice of Nārāyana Thākur his friend and colleague, Mādhava reorganized and re-constructed, the Barpeta Satra.

Mādhavadeva selected some of his followers and invested them with proper authority to admit disciples and offer śarana to neophytes in the name of the great Guru. Besides the followers of Mādhava contained several Bhakatas of tribal origin who assumed the Hindu names after śarana. Mādhava successfully carried out the mission of his Guru without caring for personal comfort. Mādhava was responsible for the raising of the Sāstra, books embodying the Holy names to the pedestal in complete exclusion of the idol. Śāṅkaradeva relegated idol worship (arcana) to the background, bringing śravana, and kīrtana to the forefront, whereas Mādhava

147. Though he spent most part at this monastery at Sundaridiyā, but also visited the surrounding areas of Bhabānīpūr, Kālijār, Barbhū on the south bank of Brahmaputra, Hājo, Kṣetri, Jāberikuci, Bijaypur and Nilāchala or Kamākhya hill. The magnetic personality of Mādhava and the technique of propaganda through music attracted many people of various places to the faith. M. Neog: SHT. p. 125

148. As a follower of strict disciplinarian and a life long celibate Mādhava had not allow any of his followers to relax the practice of Ekaśarana-dharma. B.K. Kakati: The Mother Goddess Kamakhya. p. 74

149. KGC. p. 384 ff

150. The opening ceremony of the Satra was performed with dramatic performances, religious dances, whereas devotees donning female costumes acted and danced as Gopīs. S.N.Sarma: NVMSIA. p. 19

151. Among his followers the most prominent were Mathura Atā of Barpeta, Bar Visnu Atā of Daksnipāt, Gopāla Atā of Bhawanipūr, Padma Atā of Kamalābari, Laksminikānta Atā and his nephew Rāmācārana who carried the message of Nāma-dharmav to different parts of the land, and also erected Satras which became the center of Vaiṣṇava religion and culture. Those Satras still occupy a prominent position in the Assamese social scheme. T.N. Sarma: Madhava and His Work. cited from B.K. Kakati (edt): AEAL. p. 154

152. Garo Bhotaba Hartra nam lai-Namghosa, p. 473. Among them some even erected Satras of which few are still survive.
wiped it (idol worship) completely out of the picture. It was Mādhava who commenced the system of thāpana which means placing the Holy books on the pedestal as already mentioned. But unlike the Granth-Sahib of the Sikhs, the puthi or the thāpana need not be worshiped with formalities.

Mādhava also systematized the daily prayer services to be conducted at Satras and religious centers by fixing the number and order of their performances. He also organized the Satra on a democratic basis vesting all authority in the Assembly of devotees that resided within the campus of the Satra. Mathurādasa Atā one of his leading disciples was installed as the leader of the assembly of devotees.

The hostile attitude of the king as well as of a section of Brahmins made the atmosphere of Kāmrūpa too uncongenial for him for whom Mādhava migrated to Western Koch Kingdom where king of Koch Behar Laksminārayan received him most respectfully. This royal patronage extended to Mādhava made silenced to all opposition and helped a great deal in gaining new adherents to Vaiṣṇavism. He stayed Koch Behār for three years and firmly established new faith in Kāmrūpa and Koch Behār. This was the most peaceful period of his life, and completed his Nāmaghoṣā the crowning glory of his literary activities during that period which reveals blissful state of poets’ mind.

Thus, from a land of primitive animism which was being affiliated to Saivasim and the Saktism of Tantras, Śaṅkaradeva and Mūdhavadeva transformed Assam into a country of an advanced humanism. But unfortunately, the message of Śaṅkaradeva did not go out of Assam, except among a few Vaiṣṇavas in Bengal.

2.7 Sri Deva Dāmodara:

Sri Deva Dāmodara was an illustrious preacher and propagator of Brahma Samhati or Brahma Sāmpradaya in Assam and Koch-Behār. Being a great poet

154. T.N. Sarma, : Madhava and His Work, p. 154
155. Ibid, p. 156
156. Mādhava also commenced the fourteen services (caidhya-prasanga) in the Satras Ibid, p.
157. Mādhava also appointed twelve Dharmācāryas with power to initiate discilpes at various places of the country. Among them two of the followers Gopāladeva and Yadumanideva the disciples of Damodaraadeva propagate this faith in the Ahom kingdom. The youngest of the Dharmācāryas viz Padma alias Badatā Atā was invested with the status and power of a Dharmācārya in Koch Behār
158. Ibid, p 156
159. Mādhavā’s death was quite sudden. He dropped down while changing his clothes and within I short time breathed his last with Holy Name in his lips. It was in the year 1536.
160. S.K.Chaterjee: The Place of Assam in the History and Civilization of India. p.52
161. He was born in 1488 A.D. in the district of Nowgong in a village known as Nalacha near Bordowā, the birth place of Sri Sankaradeva. He was the third and youngest son of a Brāhman friend of Sankaradeva,
and social reformer Dāmodara came in to close contact with Sri Śaṅkaradeva as his father Dvijā Sadānanda was a great admirer and close associate of Mahāpuruṣa Śrī Śaṅkaradeva. He was of very sharp intellect and within a short time he could master of the four Vedas and fourteen Sāstras and later became a great exponent of Bhāgavata.\footnote{Sadananda by name. D. Neog : NLHAL, p. 152 According to Carit Puthis, Sankara himself blessed the child with the name Dāmodara. Ramacaran Thakur: Guru Carit. p. 310}

After the death of Śaṅkaradeva there arouse a dissension between Dāmodara and Mādhava which seceded Dāmodardeva from Mahāpuruṣīya sect headed by Mādhavadeva and founded a new sect of vaiṣṇavism, which came to be known as after his own name Dāmodariya.\footnote{Dāmodara joined prasanga and religious discourses at Pāthrausi. Dāmodara was attracted towards Sankara’s bhakti movement with its musical charm and he was soon found joining vaisnav order. According to Ramananda, Damodara got the formal initiation (Sarana) from Ramarama, while Sankara administered him the formal sermon or institution (Upadesa or Gru Vakya) Ramananda: Guru Carit. p. 41.} Dāmodara was the first founder of the Satra and the Satra system of organization for dissemination of spiritual knowledge and religion and also as a center of social, administrative and cultural activities in Assam.\footnote{He introduced the worship of minor Gods and observance of Vedic and Brahmical rites. However in social intercourse there is no distinction between Mahāpurusiya and Dāmodar. They join in all religious ceremonies connected with the Satras and Nāmghars only while the Mahapurusiyas are stern against idol worship and the worship of other Gods, the Damodiaryas may perform the ceremonies. B.K. Barua : Sankaradeva, p. 119} Dāmodara was of very sharp intellect and within a short time he could master gavata karma and karadeva and founded a new sect of Sankardeva, worship and the worship of other Gods, the Damodari yas may perform the ceremonies. B.K. Barua :\footnote{Dāmodara played a prominent role in the spread of Sanskrit religions, particularly in converting the Brahmansas to the faith. With the conversion of the learned Brahma the movement gained a status and superiority over the faiths and came to command the administration and reverence of the kings and nobles. Ramananda: Guru Carit. p. 41} Dāmodara joined prasanga and religious discourses at Pāthrausi. Dāmodara was attracted towards Sankara’s bhakti movement with its musical charm and he was soon found joining vaisnav order. According to Ramananda, Damodara got the formal initiation (Sarana) from Ramarama, while Sankara administered him the formal sermon or institution (Upadesa or Gru Vakya) Ramananda: Guru Carit. p. 41.}

According to some other Carit-Puthis, Śaṅkara before starting on his second pilgrimage asked Dāmodara to manage the Satra ceremonial and initiate persons, especially Brāhmaṇa and social reformer Dāmodara became a founder of the Satra system of organization for dissemination of spiritual knowledge and religion and also as a center of social, administrative and cultural activities in Assam.\footnote{Pāthrausi Satra that established in 1540 A.D. or 1642 saka was the first proper Satra institution of Assam. This Satra was the central or Adi Satra of Dāmodara from which he preached and propagated the Bhagavati Vaiṣṇava cult throughout Assam establishing subsidiary Satras and appointing Adhikāris. Later on in 1669 Saka, Ahom king Pramatta Singha, constructed a temple in this place. There were similar nāmghars also called Kirtana-Ghars, in the other Satras of Srimanta Śaṅkaradeva and Harideva and all the three Vaiṣṇava Gurus assembled occasionally in either of the Satras, had religious discussions and discourses, nāmprasangas and enjoyed each other’s association or sargas. S.N. Sarma: NVMSIA p. 74.}

\footnote{S.C. Goswami: Deva Damodara cited from Medieval Bhakti Movement of India. p. 277} Probably it was Dāmodara who for first time introduced the system of paying religions tithe (dharmarkar) by disciples to their respective Satras.
Dāmodara was not a poet like Śaṅkaradeva or Mādhava but a religious organizer who could be ranked equally with them. Dāmodara preached and propagated the Suddha Bhagavatī-Vaiṣṇava-dhāma as propounded and illustrated in Srimad Bhāgavata-Purāṇa, Srimad-Bhāgavat-gīta, ‘Harivamsa’, ‘Viṣṇu Purāṇa’, ‘Sāndilya- Sutra’, ‘Sātvata-Tantra’ and such other Vaiṣṇava texts. He also referred the procedure of initiation of the disciples in the Satras and also in the houses of disciples. In the Damodaria cult besides administering Śarana and Bhajana there is also the initiation by dikṣā to Brāhmaṇa disciples in Vaiṣṇava tantric-mantras. In dikṣā Viṣṇu homa is also performed as a part of ceremony.

Dāmodara was also joined by a young Brāhmaṇa scholar, Vaikunthanatha of Bajali, who was entrusted with the task of reading and expounding the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa in Dāmodara’s Satra at Patbausi.

In 1591, Dāmodara was ordered to leave Kāmrūpa by Koch king, Pariksit Narayana for upholding a creed propounded by a Sūdra saint. Later Dāmodara appointed Paramānanda as the head (Medhi) of Vaikunthapur-Sattra and Balrāma as its Pāthak. After his death, his several illustrious followers carried his doctrine into the eastern part of Assam.

Harideva:

168. Dāmodara modified the religious teachings and practices by making a compromise between the path of devotion and Brahmanical practice. To attract the Brahmans, he did not prohibited nitya (daily), naimittika (occasional) which led the increase of Brahmaṇa disciples by leaps and bounds.

169. He codified these instructions by his disciple Bhattadeva in the Sarana Mālikā. From the propagation, Dāmodara selected few capable and scholarly young men whom he sent to different direction of Kamrupa where they were installed as a local religious heads. S.C. Goswami : Deva Damadara. p. 290

170. S.C. Goswami: Deva Damadara. p. 290

171. Dāmodara also nominated Bhattadeva as the head of his Satra at Patbausi. Bhaṭṭadeva also himself founded Satra at Viyāskuchi. He had taken Gopāla-mantra from a work, called Taṭtra-Sāra and had also stayed at Mathurāḍāsa Ata’s Barpeta Satra, for some time. M. Neog: SHT. p. 130

172. Now it offered an opportunity to extend the jurisdiction of his religious activities to Koch Behār. With the aid of the Koch king Lakṣmi Nārāyaṇa, he organized a Satra in Koch Behar and named it Vaikunthapur. Vaikunthapur, Dāmodara was joined by Balarāma, a man of Behār who already converted him to the faith at Pāthausi by Paramānanda. Ibid, p130

173. He approved four other followers i.e., Vamsigopāla, Bhattadeva, Bhagavān and Santa-Bhusana as his chief deputies. Later, Paramānanda and Balarāma were joined Vanamāli of Ahom kingdom, a follower of Vamsigopala. But at their death Vanamāli himself left the Koch Behār for Assam and founded the Satra at Kaliyābar Jalkarā (Majuli) and finally at Daksinpāt (Majuli). The Ahoms patronaged him in this regards, other followers of Dāmodara such as Gopāla Misra, Arjunadeva, Manohara Kāyastha also established Satra at various places.
He was another Brāhma follower of Śaṅkaradeva who attained a high spiritual eminence. After the death of Śaṅkaradeva, he set up an independent sect of Vaiṣṇavism and also appointed the Medhi or heads of the Satras like Dāmodaradeva. As he died sonless, Harideva installed the elder of his two daughters, Bhuvanesvai in the Satra at Māneri or Maniyari.

The other prominent followers of the faith were Padma-Ātā and Gopāladeva also known Vaṁsigopāla who came into close contact with people to whom they delivered the message of bhakti.

Besides these three apostles, Niranjanadeva, a disciple of Vaṁsigopāla founded the Auniati Satra Vanamalideva, the prominent disciple of Varṣigopāla established the well-known Dakhinpūt-Satra at Majuli. Mādhava’s sisters son Rāmacarana and Mathurādāsa were left in charge of the temples built by the saint at Sundridiya and Barpeta. As the three sons of Śaṅkaradeva died prematurely therefore his grandson Purusottama and Caturbhuja and latter’s wife Kanaklata appointed their deputies who organized Satras in various places.

Thus, the three Assamese states of Eastern India, Assam, Kāmrupa and Koch-Behār were covered by the end of the 17th century and beginning of 18th century with a network of these vaiṣṇava establishments. Some of the adherents of the Vaiṣṇava order have made serious departures from the original tenets of the faith or have relapsed into heterogeneous doctrines discarded by the Gurus. These Satras brought a new orientation and salutary reformation in every aspects of Assamese life.

The Sanskarite movement originated a galaxy of eminent saints, poets, preachers, philosophers and leaders who contributed much in intellectual awakening, social consciousness and regeneration of the country and dissemination among the masses of universal message, gospels and thoughts preserved in Indian literature.

174. He was born in 1494 A.D. (1415 Saka). Harideva joined Śaṅkara’s vaiṣṇava order and used to come every day from his residence to Pāthausi-Satra to attend the services. B.K.Barua: Sankaradeva, p. 121
175. Maneri in Kamrupa, Nārāyanpur in Lakhimpur and Haripur in Koch Behār are considered as the chief Satras of Haridevi sect. He died in 1568 A.D.
176. Varṣigopāla was a saint of a practical temperament and had superb organizational abilities. He established the Kuruabahi Satra at the mouth of the Dhansiri river of Sibsagar district and inspired his disciples to set up Satras in Upper Assam. Ibid, p. 120
177. The Ahom King Jayadhvajā Singh became his disciple and endowed the Satra with suitable land grants for the maintenance of the monks and monastery.
179. Ibid, p. 154
religion and philosophy. By their missionary zeal, these saints united the various races and tribes who were in various stages of culture and thus infused newness and fullness to Assamese life and thought.

**Saṁhati:**

During the long life of Śaṅkaradeva, men of all castes from high class Brahmanas down to Chandāla were initiated into his religion. Śaṅkaradeva’s religion came to be respected by all classes of men from thronged monarch down to the poorest beggar. There was no schism among His apostles, but the signs of differences sprang up on the occasions of his monthly srādha ceremony. Śaṅkaradeva who died in 1568, leaving two prominent apostles to succeed him, Mādhavadeva and Dāmodaradeva in the helm of his religious affairs. Śaṅkaradeva nominated Mādhava as his own successors on the other hand, Dāmodaradeva, a Brahmana by caste, a great bhakta and one of the principal followers of Śaṅkaradeva was no way inferior to Mādhavadeva. Hence he was greatly aggrieved at the appointment of Mādhavadeva as the head of the Vaiṣṇavas in suppression of his claims. Dāmodara expected to succeed Śaṅkaradeva to the pontifical position. But when his presumption was belied by the nomination of Mādhava, he found it difficult to regard Mādhava an erstwhile colleagues, as his superior. Though Dāmodara was highly erudite yet he could not help being jealous which led to dissensions among the followers of the two Vaiṣṇava leaders.

On the occasion of the monthly, srāddha ceremony, Mādhava declared to the followers and Bhaktas of the great reformers that the monthly srādha of their Guru should be performed in a befitting manner and directed them to issue invitation on a wide scale. In response to his invitation a large number of followers attended but Dāmodaradeva did not attend the same. Being conspicuous by his absence, when Mādhavadeva asked Dāmodaradeva replied that as Śaṅkaradeva had conferred the religious headship upon Mādhavadeva, in suppression of his superior claims, he could not respond to the invitation in question. At this Ramananda Thōkura could not bear the distinction that was made by Dāmodaradeva between the departed reformer and Mādhavadeva. So he threw away the entire thing that sent by Dāmodaradeva for the

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180. Ibid, p. 154  
181. B.K. Barua: Sankardeva, p. 124  
182. Ibid, p. 125  
184. S.N. Sarma: NVMSIA, p. 18
occasion of sārdha ceremony of Śaṅkaradeva. Thus from this time there began quarrel between these two great Vaiṣṇava preacher.

According to Carit-Puthis, Dāmodardeva did certain modification to accommodate Smārtta rituals in the vaisṇavism of Śaṅkaradeva. Even accepted in his fold a few persons, who were expelled from the order by Mādhavadeva. The unpleasant reply of Dāmodardeva led Mādhavadeva to sever all connections with Dāmodardevadeva. Mādhav’s uncompromising attitude towards smārtta rituals alienated a section of Vaiṣṇavas, particularly the Brahmins who could not altogether shake off a Brahmanical bias for such rituals.

All these events led finally the division of the faith with Dāmodardeva breaking away from the main stream and create his own branch, later known as Dāmodariya sub-sect. Both Dāmodardeva and Harideva being Brāhmīns had emerged claiming independent identities for their sub-sects. Gradually the schism proliferated and later on, the two other preachers Gopāl Āta alias Gopāladeva and Puruṣottama Thākur, a grandson of Śaṅkaradeva, who did not acknowledge Mādhavadeva as the successors of Śaṅkaradeva founded their own sects. When Mādhavadeva and Gopāl Āta did not approve the attitude of Puruṣottama Thākur, the later was said to have forbidden the use of Kīrtan and the Daśama, composed by his grandfather, not only that even he composed a new sect of devotional verse known as Na-Ghoṣā to replace the Nāmghoṣā of Mādhavadeva. After the demise of Mādhavadeva, some short of difference in connection with the mantle of leadership of the sect raised its ugly head, because Mādhavadeva did not expressly nominated anybody to the pontifical office after him. Gopāl Āta, Mathurādāsa Buḍha Āta and Puruṣottama Thākur, a grandson of Śaṅkaradeva indirectly, if not openly aspired for the religious headship. Hence each of them therefore introduced some new elements, rather gave special emphasis on some already existing devotional elements which would distinguish his branch of Vaiṣṇavism.

Subsequently after the death of Mādhavadeva (1598) his disciples, Mathurādāsa Buḍha Āta founded the last and his own order to retain the original features of the sect intact. This historic division took place in lower Assam by the close of 16th century popularly termed Samhati or Sampradā. Consequently; this division led to the formation of four ‘Samhati’ in Assam Vaiṣṇavism. These are – (1)

186. Ibid
187. T.N. Sarma: Auniati Satrar Buranji, p. 370-72
188. D. Nath: RSNEI. p. 39

In fundamental doctrines and practices there is no difference amongst them. Despite differences in minor aspects due to difference of personalities and contents of development, they share the common basic elements of Vaiṣṇavism as initiated by Śaṅkaradeva viz., ‘Nama’, ‘Deva’, ‘Guru’ and ‘Bhakta’.

The orthodox Vaiṣṇava regarded the term viz., Brahma, Puruṣa, Kāla and Nikā is a fanatic or mythological way without any rational basis. 189

(1) **Brahma Samhāti**:

The Brahma Samhāti190 contained the two sub-sects initiated by Dāmodaradeva and Harideva.191 "This Samhāti represents a brahmanized form of the Māhāpurusia faith192 as the Vaiṣṇavism of Bamuna Satra is less brahmanized than that of Dāmodari Satra like Dakinpat.193 This Samhāti favoured the Brahmanical rites very liberally alongside to the general devotional practices and took a rigid view of caste distinction. The term Brahma-Samhāti has nothing to do with Brahma-Sampradaya of Mādhvacārya.

**Features:**

This Samhāti contained two sub-sects and consisting the most affluent Satras of Assam. The head of the most of Satras were generally Brahman but non-Brahman heads were also not negligible. Some of the affiliated Satras of this Samhāti were monastic in character and removed the misapprehension of a section of orthodox people who regarded the new-vaiṣṇava faith un-vedic and contrary to the traditional Hindu religion. 194 According to the leaders of the Brahma Sanhāti, the Vedic and Purāṇic rituals and devotional practices are not mutually exclusive. One can be a

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189. Ibid, p. 39
190. *Brahma Sanhāti* originated from Brahma, the creator, because of the prepondece of Brahminal elements, it is also known as bōmūnia Samhāti.

191. It was originated by Dāmodaradeva and his followers’ and was later joined by Harideva; Dāmodaradeva was more widespread and influential while Harideva’s activity was mainly confined to the present district of Kāmrūpa. As the influence of the sub-sects of Dāmodaradeva is far deeper and far-reaching, the consideration of the sub-sects has been taken up first. Later the followers of Yadumani and some other Satras with Brāhma abbots also joined this sect.

Būhi VIII.p146

192. M. Neog: EHVFMA, p. 154
193. Ibid, p. 154
194. S.N. Sarma: NVMSIA, p.83
good Vaiṣṇava even performing daily and occasional rite enjoined by the ‘dharmaśāstra’.\textsuperscript{195}

According to Dāmodaradeva, ‘śravana and “Kīrtana” are primarily necessary but meantime the other seven kinds of devotion are also necessary and observable.\textsuperscript{196} Hence for the Satras of ‘Brahma-Saṁhati’, worship of idols in the ‘manikuts’ and the ‘nāma-kīrtana’ in the Nāmghars are equally estimable and desirable. Thus, the Satras of ‘Brahma-Saṁhati’ emphasized much on (i) devotee (ii) the Bhāgavata and (iii) the idol along with the Guru. It also laid much emphasized on ‘Sat-Sanga’ (company of wise men).\textsuperscript{197}

In entire Satras of ‘Brahma-Saṁhati’ the process of initiation is not uniform. The Satras that originated from Vaṁśigopāla do not ordinate initiation according to trantric rites.\textsuperscript{198} The Satras established by Bhaṭṭadeva, Santadeva, Bhaagavāndeva Baladeva, Paramānanda and Dāmodaradeva initiated neophytes according to tantric rites. Even today, the Dāmodaria Satra of Kūmrūpa like Patbāusi performed the process of initiation according to tantric method. In Upper Assam, the Dakhīnpat Satra of Vanamālideva performed the initiation by the process of Sakta dikṣya.\textsuperscript{199} They did not regard to call them Mahāpurusiyas. Only Auniati and few others Satras observed the original process of initiation through rosary and hymns.\textsuperscript{200} The most prominent followers of this ‘Saṁhati’ was Bhaṭṭadeva who preached the ethics of Vaiṣṇavism according to codified formula and translated ‘Kātha-Bhāgavata’, the ‘Gīta’ and ‘Ratnāvali’ into Assamese. The others were the Vaṁśigopāladeva and Vānamālideva.

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\textsuperscript{195} Do not alienate the Brahmins by telling them to give up ‘nītya’ and ‘naiumittika’ rites. But yourself set an example by performing daily rites like ‘sandhyā’ and ‘āhnikas’ regularly.” Though the originator of these two sects did not believe in the worship of any other God than Viṣṇu, but later on followers adopted liberal viewed as regards to the worship of other Gods or goddess, Ibid,83

\textsuperscript{196} T.N. Sarma.; opp cit, p. 359

\textsuperscript{197} In the midst of the ‘Sat-Sanga’, through ‘śravana’ and ‘Kīrtana’ one can attain the self-surrender to God. It not only means the company of devotees but also has three interpretations – viz. Sat means permanent or eternal and a sat means transitory. The feeling of the presence of ‘Paramatma’ (eternal self) in ‘Sat Sanga’ has broad sense. Secondly the company of devotees leads to the devotion which ultimately leads to perfections. Thirdly, the company of ‘Sat Guru’ (wise spiritual guide) can lead to the world of pure and unsullied devotion. In Satra all the bhaktas of Hari Hati live together, listened the holy name together, sing together and serve the lord together.

\textsuperscript{198} T.N. Sarma: Auniati Satrar Buranji, p. 369

\textsuperscript{199} Bahi : IV Nos. VII-VII

\textsuperscript{200} T.N. Sarma: Auniati Satrar Buranji, p. 370-72
The ‘Ἀνιότι, Δακ्हिन्पात, गधामुर and Kuruवधाही’ Satras became the richest and most influential institutions of this community and enjoyed the patronage of the Ahom Kings from their inception. The kings addressed the heads of these Satras as ‘Bapu’ who blessed the king with ‘nirnāli’ touching the latter’s forehead. Besides these four prominent Satras, the others important were Ādhār of Sivasagar, Mūhārū Patiyari, Dokharāṃukh, Agnisala, and Bahri, Jāgārū, Subhū Bainākuchi of Kāmrūpa and Goalpara.

(2) Puruṣa Saṃhati:

This Saṃhati derives its name from the Mahāpuruṣa, the honorific titled applied to Śaṅkaradeva. It was Puruṣottama, who was the originator of this sect, retaining the original features of Śaṅkara’s faith and therefore regarded as the main Saṃhati. Initiated by Puruṣottama Thōkur the eldest grandson of Śaṅkara, Puruṣa-Saṃhati was organized by the younger brother Caturbhuja Thōkur. Puruṣottama created twelve apostles to initiate disciples in different parts of central and eastern Assam and also responsible for reviving the glory of Śaṅkaradeva. After death of Puruṣottama it was Caturbhuja who succeeded as dharma-āchārya and appointed twelve principal apostles to preach the tenents of his sub-sects in the Ahom kingdom. After Caturbhuja, his wife Kanaklatā took the lead in organizing the sub-sector and initially establishing a Satra at Barpeta, the ancestral site with one Dāmodara at its heads. She also appointed twelve principal apostles to preach the tenents who also erected another twelve Satras in different parts of Assam. Thus, these twenty four satras established by Caturbhuja and his wife are known as Sarubārajania Satras. According to Dvija Bhusana, Srimanta Puruṣottama the elder brother of Caturbhuja, summoned all his disciples of his side, and asked them to regard as their Guru none else but Śaṅkaradeva and he wrote :-

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201. The first three traces their genealogy to Varāsiṅgopala and the last one to Vanamūlīdeva.
202. M. Neog: EHVFMa, p. 155
203. Established by Yadumoni
204. Puruṣa-Saṃhati derived its name from Puruṣa-Nārāyaṇa perphas the first initiator
205. These twelve religious heads diffused the teachings of the sub-sects by establishing Satras in their own localities.
206. Puruṣottama regarded Śaṅkaradeva as the only Guru of the sect and others proselytizers or the preachers as mere representatives or agents of Śaṅkaradeva. He even reluctant to acknowledged Mūdāvadeva as the second Guru of the sects. However the religious heads that came after Śaṅkaradeva have been termed as Āchārya not as Guru. S.N. Sarma: NVMSIAp p.91
207. Bhusana-Dvija : Sri Śaṅkaradeva. p. 222
Puruṣottama is said to have formulated the rules and regulations of congregational prayers.²⁰⁹ In this Saṅhati, caste distinction is not as rigid as the Brahma-Saṅhati though not as liberal as Kāla-Saṅhati. Hence both the Brāhman and of non-Brāhman heads are equal in their performances. This is the only instance in Assam, where Brahmans continued to be disciples of non-brāhman Gosains.²¹⁰ Hence this Saṅhati became very popular; especially the Narowā and Kowāmarā Satras received the fore-front positions among all Satras.

**Features:**

According to Vaisnavite traditions, this Saṅhati laid much stress on Nāma.²¹¹ Hence the various Satras of this Saṅhati evolved various ways and modes of singing or chanting congregational prayers, such as ‘Pāla-nāmā, estha- nāmā’ etc. According to Ramānanda, Puruṣottama asserted before Vamisigopāladeva that those who do not recognize the Gītā, Bhāgavata, images of Viṣṇu and Brahmānis and do not perform Srādhas are offenders of ‘Māhapuruṣiya cult’.²¹² Though this sect emphasized on ‘Nāmā’ but also encouraged the idol worship and brahmanical rites. Besides, this Saṅhati does not recognize Mādhavadeva as of equal footing with Śaṅkaradeva. The position of Śaṅkaradeva is unique in the hierarchy of religious saints.

**Practices:**

Guru occupied the prominent place among the Cāri-Vastu (four meals), Viṣṇu is the only worshipping deity and Śaṅkaradeva is the only Guru. So the idols of Viṣṇu are installed in their Satras. Some ‘Smārtta’ rituals are observed but with restrictions, such as upanayana, srāddha and marriage ceremony, ‘bar-biya, sanit-biya’ etc. Most of the disciples are householders rather than celibate. In this Saṅhati celibacy is not a required qualification for devotees. ‘Śaṅkaradeva was an ideal householder, a bhakata and a vaiṣṇava’. According to Śaṅkaradeva none need to be a celibate or sannyāsin. Even Mādhavadeva, a lifelong celibate never asked anybody to

²⁰⁹ B.C. Mahanta: Mahapurusa Śaṅkaradeva. p. 76
²¹⁰ K.D. Goswami: Satra Sankritir Ruprekha. p. 98
²¹¹ One of the four fundamental elements in the practice of devotion. According to this act chanting and singing in praise of God and meditating on his various names and forms are considered acts of special merit.
²¹² M. Neog (ed.): Vamsi-Gopaladevar-Carita, p. 140
renounce the life of householders (Graha-asrama) for the sake of ‘Hari-bhakti’. ‘Do not lare to adopt celibacy taking me as your model’ said Mādhavadeva. During their old age, to keep up with devotion, they are welcome to the ‘Undāsinar-bāhā or hāti-beta-huts for old, attached to Kirtana Ghar. This Saṁhati contained the devotee from different castes, creed and walks of life, who reaped the equal status and the right to participate in congregational prayer, bhāonās, religious discourses etc.

The Gosāins of this Saṁhati are efficient in dance, music, painting, literature, medicine, manuscript preparations, astrology, woodcraft, works of illumination and fireworks, astrological calculation for ceremonial rites, conferment of social sanction to marriage proposals and observances of purificatory rites and fasting on different occasion and like.  

This Saṁhati observed the death anniversary of Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva and Caturbhuj Thākura. The Narowā, Kowāmarā, Dighali and Cāmguru Satra offer pinda to Śaṅkaradeva, Barpeta Satra to Mādhavadeva and Narowā to Caturbhuj Thākur. The most prominent Satras of this Saṁhati were Bar-bārajaniay satras i.e. established by twelve principal disciples of Puruṣottama-Thākur and Saru-bārajaniay satras originated by twenty-four disciples of Caturbhuj Thākur and the Bardowā Satra with all its collaborative branches.

(3) Kāla Saṁhati:

This Saṁhati originated from Gopāladeva of Bhavanipura, one of the apostles (dharmācāryas) nominated by Mādhavadeva was democratic in character. Gopāladeva spread the message of Bhāgavata among the Ahoms, Moranas, Kacharis and Chutiyas in addition to Brahmanas Kōyasthas and Kalitas. Twelve Satras were established under the auspices of Gopāladeva, six presided over by Sudra Mahanta and six by Brahmana Mahanta.  

213. K.D. Goswami: SSR, p. 107
214. Maniram Barbhandar Barua: Buranji Vivek Ratna, p. 100
215. Bar-bārajaniay satras contained kurucūng, Cekērātali, Catamiyā, Gomiṇā, Puniyā, Elengi, Ratanpur, Śaḍā-kuchi, Kāḥlpūl, Beienā-āṭi, Cupalā, Ṭhakariyāl etc.
216. Saru-bārajaniya satras contained the satras like Barguāni, Ghar-katiya, Gobhir, Kōwāmari, Hālādhibāti, Salaguri, Bhumāni, Nācanipātara, Bhaduulā, Čūṇgāpūr, Uzanīyāl, Belvādhiyāl etc.
218. Yadumaṇi of the senior of Bāḥhārī, Dihing, or Silhātāl, Namāṭi, Leingdi, Sarmara etc. Yadumaṇi the junior of Gajalā, Āntalā, Cīrāṭiyā, Anirudhā of Māyāmāra, Nārāyana of Daḥghār, Hālādhibāti Sanāṭa of Nāgarīyā and Kṛṣṇākanta (no satra). Ibid.
The twelve Āchārya nominated by Gopāla Ata preached the message of Kāla-Saṁhati in different directions. From these as well as of the disciples the number of Satras multiplied with its numerous branches. The pages of Assam history are dotted with the acts of royal persecution of the Kāla-Saṁhati Mahantas, which persecution made the laity of the Māyamarā-Satra of this community into a war like race lacking only the organization of the Sikhs.\textsuperscript{219} This Saṁhati was known as Kāla-Saṁhati because Gopāla Ata’s seat of propagation was Kālajhar from where he preached the doctrine of Gurudeva.

\textbf{Features:}

This Saṁhati lays stress on Guru, who is considered to be the human representatives of God. Gopāladeva is credited for this philosophy, which brought to the fore-front the doctrine of Gurudeva.\textsuperscript{220} Secondly, it made no distinction between the disciples on ground of caste, though the practice of inter-dining and inter-marriage were not prevalent. This Saṁhati was more liberal in its attitude towards the social problems. A Brahmin simply because of his birth does not receive a higher position, or status in their sectarian assembles than a non-brahmin.\textsuperscript{221} It exhibited an indifferent attitude towards all brahmanical rites, adhered strictly to the central monotheistic doctrine of Śaṅkara and place absolute faith in all adherences to the Guru.\textsuperscript{222} According to Buranji Vivekaratna, the Brahmns affiliated to this sub-sect did not perform the Vedic Sandhya or utter the Gāyatri mantra.\textsuperscript{223}

The Kāla-Saṁhati Satras were the most liberal in admitting disciples from all communities and also brought the tribals and socially backward communities within the fold of Vaiṣṇavism. By this the Saṁhati offered an opportunity to satisfy their spiritual urge. It also not allowed the practice of initiating women. According to them bhakti cannot be cultivated by owing double allegiance to the husband as well as of Guru.\textsuperscript{224}

The Satras of Kala-Saṁhati order, including the Dhing and Mayamara Satras had their distinctive features. In regards to their procedure of initiation, the
relationships between the disciples and their Gurus and between co-disciples are somewhat different from these in other monasteries. The hymns used in this Samhāti varied from Satra to Satra. The originals ones were composed by Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva, Gopāladeva, but additional hymns were composed by the pontiffs. The Māhana were regarded as superman who appreciated all the honours due to human being. Therefore the religious Mahanta of Māyāmara Satra has been designated as mūrti (image). Aniruddhadeva, the founder is regarded as Adya-mūrti (the primal image). The Mahanta never died, he simply closed the drama of his life. Like Kālacaryana, a leftist Buddhist sect, this section has been practicing esoteric ceremonies.

Principal Satras:

The premier Satras of this Samhāti are mainly confined in central and eastern Assam. The Dihing Satra and Māyāmara Satra were the most prominent of the six Sudra monasteries of Upper Assam associated with Gopāladeva. These Satras became extremely popular as they admitted converts from non-Aryan tribes. In this Samhāti the influence of the Brahmanical ritual had been reduced to a negligible position. The Buranji-Vivek-Ratna of Maniram-Dewan referred that even the Brahmans affiliated to this sub-sect did not perform the Vedic-Sandhya or mutter gāyatṛi-mantra. But the upper caste disciples in other Satras of this Samhāti usually followed Brahmanic rites in their marriage and deaths. Their counterparts in the Māyāmara Satra had no relation with the Brahmana priests and performed all their rituals by Harināma. Their disciples contained ‘Brahmans, Kāyasthas, Kalitas, Kacharis, Ahoms, Kaivartas and Brittials and also Chutiyas and Morans who were known as Moamarias and were placed on same footing and also noted for their political role towards the later part of the Eighteen century. The humanitarian outlook of the Kāla-Samhāti was best seen in these two Satras.

These Satras were run as democratic lines, hence could draw new converts to their fold in ever increasing number. In course of time, the Dihing and Māyāmara Satras grew to be the strongholds of Sūdra-vaiṣṇavism in Upper Assam as opposed to

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225. N.K. Basu: Assam in Ahom Age. p. 242
226. Ibid, p. 243
227. S.N. Sarma: NVMSIA, p. 90
229. S.N. Sarma : NVMSIA, p. 240
230. The Māyāmāra or Moamaria were notable for their fanatical devotion to their Guru.
the Brahmanical Monasteries.\textsuperscript{231} The 	extit{Dihing Satra} which secured royal patronage from Rajeswar Singha contained some of leading officers of the 	extit{Ahom} court as disciples of whom Kirti Chandra Barbarua was the most prominent. The 	extit{Mōyamārā - Mahanta}, on the other hand declined royal patronage but had equal or presumably more flourishing growth on independent lines. Besides these two premier Satras, the other prominent Satras are the Gajalā with its several branches founded by Saru-Yadumani in Sivasagar and Nagaon district. It was originally established on the Gajalā in Majuli. So it was named 	extit{Gajalā Satra}.

The other prominent Satra was Āhāṯguri, founded by Srirāma Atā, son of Govinda Mīrsra and a disciple of Gopāla Atā. The 	extit{Kāla Saṁhati} was well known for its egalitarian and humanitarian outlook and Satra enjoyed autonomy and could develop on distinct lines within the general tenants of the Saṁhati.

The message of this Saṁhati reached the very masses of Assamese nation. Those castes which are now denominated as ‘depressed’ were deeply admitted into the fold of these Satras\textsuperscript{232} and gradually they imbibed refined and enlightened ways of living.\textsuperscript{233} In other parts of India, the humiliation to which these unfortunates were subjected, drove them to the bosom of other religion; in Assam the liberal policy of the Kāla Saṁhati Satras endowed them with a sense of self respect and individual value. These Satras made a great appeal to the unsophisticated Assamese people and so they commanded unprecedented popularity. According to S.K. Bhuyan, ‘On account of the characteristics physical vigour of the large majority of disciples of the two Satras they were likely to make a more enterprising band of soldiers than the comparatively ease-loving and refined followers of the other Gosains’ as was actually proved on the outbreak of the Moamaria insurrection.\textsuperscript{234}

(4) 	extit{Nikā or Niśṭhā Saṁhati}:

This Saṁhati had taken its shape in the last phase. The name ‘Nika’ indicated that this Saṁhati originated immediately after the formation of other three sub-sects. The necessity of organizing a cleaner sect arose when other sub-sect appeared to have gone somewhat astray from the original path chalked out by the first two Gurus.\textsuperscript{235}

Therefore, Pādma-Atā the youngest of Mādhavadeva’s chief disciples and also

\textsuperscript{231} N.K. Basu: \textit{The Assam in Ahom Age.} p. 242
\textsuperscript{232} Ibid. p. 243
\textsuperscript{233} S.K. Bhuyan: \textit{Anglo-Assamese Relation.} pp p. 197
\textsuperscript{234} Ibid. pp. 194-197
\textsuperscript{235} S.N. Sarma: \textit{NVMSIA.} p. 96
saddled with the responsibility of the religious headship in eastern Assam, thought the necessity to evolve a proper code of conducts for Vaiṣṇava. In this regards Pādma Samhati was encouraged by Mathurūḍāsa Atā of Barpeta Satra and Keśava Ātā. Thus, these three viz., Pādma Atā, Mathurūḍāsa Atā and Keśava Ātā may be considered the trio of the ‘Nikā-Saṁhati’. Besides these three personalities, Rāmacarana Thākur, nephew of Mādhavadeva was also the adherents of this Saṁhati who was the head of the Sundaridiya and Barpeta Satra, after departure of Mādhava to Koch-Behar. His sons and grandson also contributed towards the spread by establishing several Satras in Western Assam.236 There is nothing very much noteworthy in the history of ‘Nika-Saṁhati’ after passing away of these personalities.

This Saṁhati’s adherents pay great attention to the rules of outward cleanliness and other formalities so it also known as ‘Nitya-Saṁhati’.237 These communities particularly its body of monks do not attach much importance to the Brahmanical rites.238

Features:

The purity and neatness of the original neo-Vaiṣṇavism preached by Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva are retained in this Saṁhati. This Saṁhati emphasized much on the importance of holy association of devotees (bhakti sangha).

This Saṁhati considered Mādhavadeva as the Guru of the sect, while Śaṅkaradeva as the Guru of their Guru. Their relation with Mādhavadeva is immediate and that with Śaṅkaradeva is indirect. Every neophyte of this sub-sect is required to owe allegiance to the name of Mādhavadeva.239 Hence the position of Mādhavadeva is more important than that of Śaṅkaradeva in their religious hierarchy. This Saṁhat also ignored the practice of image worship and emphasized much only on the worship of the scripture which is the prominent features of this sect. Though this characteristic of worshipping a scripture is also present in the ‘Puruṣa and ‘Kāla Saṁhatis’, it is more prominent in ‘Nīka’.240

236. Rāmacarana composed some literary and devotional compositions and collected different parts of Śaṅkar’s Kīrtana which were lying scattered in different parts of Assam.
238. M. Neog: S.H.T. p. 154
240. They never take food prepared by others, even never take a betel-nut without taking bath and never put on a piece of cloth that has been washed or dipped in water daily. S.N. Sarma, NVMSIA. p. 99
In fact these branches differ very little in respect of the fundamental doctrines of the sect. The three apostles evolved a set of conduct and rules for their followers to purify Vaiṣṇavas in body and mind. This Saṁhati also maintained strict discipline regarding food, dress and manners and in all religious matters. Even fuel is sprinkled with water before it is put into fire. Similar stringent rules are also observed in other spheres. These conducts of everyday life are uniformly followed in all Satras affiliated to the ‘Nika Saṁhatis’.241

**Principal Satras:**

The most influential Satras of this Saṁhati is Barpeta established by Mādhavadeva of western Assam. Besides this the other prominent Satras of Western Assam are the Sundaridīya of Rāmacarana Thākur, Camariya of Bar Visnū Atā, Dhopugir of Laksmikānta, and Khatarā of Govinda Atā who were the disciples of Mādhavadeva. In Eastern Assam the most prominent Satras are Kamalabari and Barjahā founded by Badalā Atā and Keśava Atā. Another prominent Sattra is the Madhupur Satra of Koch-Behār. Thus, five hundred and odds Satras spread over the Brahmaputra Valley are traditionally affiliated to any one of the above Saṁhatis.

Besides, these above mentioned Satras of four Saṁhati there is a line of Satras originated from Sri Caitanya of Bengal. The ‘Gourdiya-Vaiṣṇavism’ of Caititany made its first sporadic appearance in later part of sixteen century. Mathurādāsa Buddha Ata, the prominent disciples of Mādhavadeva was a ‘Gauḍiya-Vaiṣṇava’ signing sixteen names before his conversion to ‘taṅkarite Vaiṣṇavism’.242

Gopāla Atā is also initially attracted to Bengal Vaiṣṇavism before he met Mādhavadeva.243 A descendent of Nityananda, the right hand man of Caitanya came to Assam towards the close of 17th century and having married an Assamese girl settled and preached Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇavism in Assam.244 Later in the seventeenth century many Satras were established in Kāmrūpa and Nowgong, though preached and followed the Bengal Vaiṣṇavism but adopted Assam Vaiṣṇavism in structural and organizational pattern.245 Among these, Satras the most significant is the Kalabari

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241. Ibid. p. 98
242. S.N. Sarma : Cultural History of Assam. p 213
243. Ibid. p. 213
244. Ibid. P. 213
whose tenant and practices are almost similar to the ‘Brahma- Saṁhati.’ They used Bengali Khol-tāla and worship Rādha-Kṛṣṇa according to Vedic rituals.246

In Nowgong, the three significant Satras are the Kholāgōn, Daipārā, and Barangabari.247 In Kāmrūpa, the most important are Ulubarī, Allibari, and Rampur etc. In these Satras, a festival called ‘Astaprahar-Saṁkirtan’ is celebrated with great pomp and grandeur.

Besides these, some sects which claimed to be Vaiṣṇavas in reality, secret esoteric societies, spuriously associated themselves the names of Śaṅkara, Mādhava and Gopāladeva as their promoters, became popular among a section of the people towards eighteen century was known as Aritiya Mat. This secret cult was known by several names such as ‘Rātikhowā, Purnabhagia, Madhupuriyā, Ratibhojiyā, Gopidharā, Batibhgiyā’ etc.

This fraternity of night worshipers traces its history of Gopāladeva, the initiator of the ‘Kāla-Saṁhati’ branch of Assam Vaiṣṇavism. In its might congregations the members sing esoteric songs supposed to be composed by Mādhavadeva and some regions heads of the Satras affiliated to the ‘Kāla-Saṁhati’. In fact Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva and Gopāla Atā had no connection with its origin. This association or circle of free masons was open to select persons drawn from all castes, who did not hesitate to raise above all inhibitions and taboos imposed by castes, community and sex.248 In occasional meets they used to partake of prohibited food and drink and freely mixed with the members of opposite sex.249 But after the functions, the members revert themselves back to their original castes and social status. According to the chronicles of later Ahom period, this ‘Aritiya’ practices were observed by the followers ‘Māyāmara, Bāreghar, Cecā, Chaliha and Kālanipar’ Satras.

The Tungkhungia Buranji depicted that during the reign of Kamalesvara Sinha one Panimua was accused of indulging in such acts where all sorts of nightly orgies were practiced and taking advantage of it Panimua and a few others were said to have hatching a plot to kill the king.250 Along with the associates Panimua and Sunanda Gosain were arrested and executed.

246. M. Dewan :BVR 54A
247. N.C. Mahanta: Chaitya Satra. Cited from M. Neog (edt.): SHT,p. 143
248. Ibid. p. 216
249. Ibid. p. 216
250. S.K. Bhuyan: Thingkhungia Buranji, p. 161
Vamsi-Gopāladevas-Carita referred that one Mukunda Gosain in the name of Vaiṣṇavism replaced the ‘Smṛti’ rituals by name ‘Kīrṭana’ and performed marriages by exchanging garlands. He was put to death by King Pratap Simha for committing acts against the established traditional ‘Sastric’ rites. The Māyamāriyās practiced the magical and unholy rites with the help of tantric scripture named ‘Kalpataru-Sastra’ written on copper plate. Such practices have been performed at the commencement of a campaign to ensure success.

Gradually, innumerable Satras sprang up in every nook and corner of Assam claiming affiliation to one or the other of four Saṁhati. Consequently it absorbed so many able-bodied men that the Ahom king Gadadhar Simha (1681-1696 A.D.) had to make stern measures against them. He persecuted the Vaiṣṇava sect, but in spite of this persecution the institutions survived and after Godadhar Simha the activities of the proselytizers commenced with renewed vigour and till today though bereft of its old vitality and energy, the Satras are functions as living institutions.

**Conclusion:**

Although the main order of Vaiṣṇava was divided into four sub-sects, there are very little fundamental differences in their tenants and practices. The differences lie only in their methods, which is really an artificial one and is due to the lack of their mutual understanding.

These sub-sects or Saṁhati began a network of Satras throughout the entire Brahmaputra valley, and converted more than half of its population to Vaiṣṇavism. Except a brief period of twenty years between 1770 to1790 in which the Māyamāriā sect is a fit of religious frenzy and political intoxication tried to dominate over the followers of other sub-sects. The history has not mentioned any friction between the different sub-sects of vaiṣṇavism in Assam. A spirit of co-operation and harmony marked the relation between the different sub-sects throughout the history of Vaiṣṇavism in Assam.

Though some biographers of Vaiṣṇavite saints contained sectarian verification, but its effects on Saṁhais was negligible. Satras of different Saṁhati expounded and thrived side by side without mutual antagonism. Though the rapid growth of Satras

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254. Ibid. p. 99
had some demerits but its contribution towards the socio-cultural sphere cannot be ignored.

Thus, the Bhakti Movement popularly known as the Neo-Vaisnāvite movement entered in this part of India in the 16th century commence by Śaṅkaradeva, the prominent Vaisnavite saint, and the social reformer of Assam was based on what was going on in India for a few centuries prior to that. Being by nature a protestant movement against existing brahmanical ritualism and caste rigidity, ‘bhakti’ system brought a revolutionary social outlook in men and a literary outburst all over India. While this was one aspect of the movement its protestant side interrogated the priesthood and feudal oppression of the state. Rooted in this ideological background, ‘bhakti’ initiated by Śaṅkaradeva in Assam was therefore a revolutionary phase of the process of socio-cultural education in this part of the country. Universalism of Vaiṣṇavism and democratic spirit underlying made it popular. In this regard we can mention a version of Kalaguru Bisnu Rava -

255. M. Neog: Socio-Political Events in Assam leading to Military of the Mayamaria Vaisnava.

256. D. Nath: RSNE, p. 3

257. Famous Assamese Poet Jatindra Nath Duorah therefore described Śaṅkaradeva’s contribution as follows:-

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