Chapter V

Culture as Reflected in the Writings of the Contemporaries of Saṅkaradeva

Saṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva are the two central figures of the Neo-Vaiṣṇava literature of Assam. After them, other important contemporary Vaiṣṇava poets and dramatists are Ananta Kandali, Rāma Sarasvati, Ratnakara Kandali, Śrīdhara Kandali, Kaṁsāri Kāyastha, Kaḷāpcandra Dvīja, Gopāla Carana Dvīja, Baikuṇṭhanātha Bhāgavata Bhattācārya, Bhabānipuri Ā Gopāla Ātā, Gopāla Miśra and Rāmacarana Thākura, etc. Dr. Maheswar Neog has very rightly termed those poets as poets and writers of "Pracchāyā āru Upacchāyā" (Umbra and Penumbra) of Saṅkaradeva.¹ This is because, the impact of Saṅkaradeva's writings on the works of those poets and authors is very much evident. Now, in the following paragraphs it has been discussed, in general, how the picture of the Assamese society and culture has been depicted in the writings of these poets and writers.

In this context we may mention that the pictures of the society found in the books under discussion have much similarity with those referred to in the Chapters III and IV. This might have been due to the fact that most of the

¹ M. Neog, Asamīyā Sāhityar Rūprekhā, p. 135
writings of the ancient poets had their origin in the Rāmāyaṇa, the Mahābhārata and the Bhāgavata, etc. Hence, it has been observed that through their writings belong to different period of time, the events narrated and the pictures depicted in them reveal similarity in many areas due to the common source. Secondly, the differences in time-gap among most of those poets were not much. Even though there was some appreciable time-gap between the poets of the pre-Śaṅkaradeva and the Śaṅkaradeva era, yet the poets of the latter period were almost contemporary. Those poets of the Śaṅkaradeva era, viz., Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva, Rāmasarasvatī, Ananta Kandali, Gopāla Ātā belonged to the same Assamese society and were closely familiar with the same type of customs and manners due to which their writings also reflect the pictures of the same type of society. Hence their writings reflect the same pattern.

A. Social Life : People and the Social Conditions:

The writings of the poets under reference reveal different facts of the ancient Hindu society. For instance, the caste system prevalent since the Vedic era has also been referred to in different writings of these poets. Besides the four castes\(^1\) that divided the Hindu society originally

\(^1\) 'cāturvarṇyam mayā srstāṁ guṇakarma bibhāgaśaḥ.'

- Gītā, 4.13.
and as quoted in the Gītā, viz., Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya and Śūdra,¹ the other castes like Candāla,² Kumāra³ (potter), Dhobā⁴ (washer), Baniyā⁵ (traders in valuable minerals and stones), Nāpit⁶ (barber), etc., are also referred to.

In those days the Brāhmaṇas occupied high position in society. They were engaged in performing the services of priesthood⁷ for the kings and others. A glimpse of the activities of those different castes is found in the Sabha-parva of Rāmasarasvatī's Mahābhārata.

On one occasion Rāmasarasvatī states that like the Veda and Fire, the Brāhmaṇas are also part of Lord Viṣṇu.⁸ He asserts that Lord Viṣṇu had created the Brāhmaṇas from milky blood of His own body (dugdhamaya teja). That is why the Brāhmaṇas are very much pure and holy and when they meditate, fire and water in increased volume come out of

1. Ādi, v. 257; Rāmāyana (A), v. 30; Sabhā, v. 2379
2. Ādi, v. 915
3. Ādi, v. 758
4. Ādi, v. 867
5. Sabhā, vv. 2379-80
6. Sabhā, v. 2469
7. Ādi, v. 244; Rāmāyana (A), v. 47
8. Sabhā, v. 2281
their mouths. But, these Brāhmaṇas have also been classified into three categories, viz., Uttama (the best), Madhyama (the mediocre) and Sāmānya (the common) according to their traits and actions. The best Brāhmaṇas used to study and also teach. Besides that they also engaged themselves in priestly duties and holy thinking. The mediocre Brāhmaṇas are those who are not lured by kāma (desire), krodha (anger), lōbha (greed), mohā (illusion), dambha (pride), ahamkāra (egotism), desire for money and also having no enmity towards any creature. The Brāhmaṇas who used to offer services to others for their livelihood, bow before the big and the small, take drinks, visit prostitutes, indulge in enmity towards others are not regarded as Brāhmaṇas, despite their birth in the Brāhmaṇa family. On the other hand, Ananta Kandali has asserted that the Brāhmaṇas, who do not have devotion to Kṛṣṇa are inferior even to Candāla.

In those days also the Brāhmaṇas were divided into two classes - Candra Vipra and Sūrya Vipra as described by

1. Baqha, v. 12271
2. Baqha, vv. 9157, 12283
3. Baqha, v. 12281
4. Baqha, vv. 12276-78
5. As quoted in Asamīya Sāhityat Drstipāt by H. Sarma, p. 144
Rāma Sarasvatī.

In more than one place of his Mahābhārata, Rāma Sarasvatī has expressed that it is a great sin to kill a Brāhmaṇa. One should offer proper pūjās and make other offerings to the gods and Brāhmaṇas to get rid of the sin of killing a Brāhmaṇa, (brahma vadha pāpa), Rāma Sarasvatī has termed the Brāhmaṇas who are engaged in performing śrāddha as Yājak Brāhmaṇa. Brāhmaṇas were shown respect by the kings with gesture like washing their feet with water (pādyā-arghya) and with other offerings. After performing the Yajña the king presented the Brāhmaṇas with gold, silver, land, servants, maid-servants and meals.

Regarding the Kṣatriyas, Rāma Sarasvatī notes that to conduct warfare was their basic duty. Taking part in warfare was the primary religion for them. During the war

1. Yajña, v. 13125; Vijaya, v. 5717
2. Baghā, v. 3059; Yajña, v. 12670
3. Yajña, v. 12672
4. Yajña, v. 12725
5. Adi, v. 896
6. Virāta, v. 18856; Rāmāyaṇa (A), vv. 50, 65
7. Adi, vv. 944, 1716-17
8. Adi, v. 199
9. Sabhā, vv. 2828-29; Kulācala, v. 16317; Baghā, v. 10703
they became ruthless and without any inhibition they slaughtered even their relatives if required. Nobody appreciated a Kśatriya who was against war. It was the religion of the Kśatriya to take part in war to uphold justice; the Kśatriyas get ruined if they fought an unjust war. Like the Brāhmaṇas, the Kśatriyas were also classified as Uttama (the best), Adhama (the lowest), etc.

In the Mahābhārata Gangā-devī favoured marrying an Uttama Kśatriya. The Kśatriya kings used to claim proudly that they were the descendants of gods, viz., Candra, Sūrya, etc., or some prominent kings. Candravamsa, Kuruvamsa, Bharatavamsa, etc., originating from the Kśatriyas are referred to in the Mahābhārata. According to Mahābhārata it was the religion of the Kśatriyas to protect the Brāhmaṇas; likewise, the Kśatriyas obtained one-sixth of piety of Brāhmaṇas which they earned by way of practising dharma, karma, tapa (religion, service, meditation). The Brāhmaṇas and Kśatriyas were the most honoured castes in the society. The Vaiśyas and Śudras were also counted with certain amount

1. Ādi, v. 85
2. Ādi, v. 763
3. Ādi, v. 738
4. Ādi, v. 398
5. Ādi, vv. 10, 11, 1014, 1756
6. Ādi, vv. 1965–66
of reverence in the society. The rest were called antyaja (decasted). It was thought proper that no one belonging to a particular caste should deviate from his respective code of conduct. For example, it was thought improper that Brähmanas should handle weapons and Südras should study the Gita and Bhāgavata. Besides these castes, Kumār (potter), Dhoī (washerwoman), Tell (oilman), Tant (weaver), Vaidya (physician), Kamār and Sūtār (blacksmith and carpenter), Baniyā, Māll (trader, gardener), Dokāni, Pohāri, Sadāgara (shop-keeper, Hawker, merchant), Gowāla (milkman), Cāndāla (slavenger), Kaivarta (fisherman), Nāpit (barbar), etc.,

1. Adi, v. 1887
2. Adi, vv. 1777-78
5. Janghā, v. 10608; Rāmāyāna (A), v. 17; Adi-vana, v. 3306
6. Kamsa-n, p. 478
7. Virātā, v. 19666; Vijaya, v. 6852; Yajñā, vv. 129000-01
8. Sabhā, v. 2787
9. Sabhā, vv. 2380, 3051; Kamsa-n, p. 478
10. Sabhā, v. 2380; Adi, v. 1089; Kamsa-n, p. 482
11. Pu-ha-vana, v. 4079; Baghā, v. 12382; Virātā, v. 18811; Gita-g, vv. 78, 172
12. Adi, v. 915
13. Gita-g, v. 189
14. Sabhā, v. 2469
and people of different professions and their activities have been referred to in the works under study. Also there were other classes like Gāyana, Bhāta (singer), Naṭā, Naṭī (dancer), etc. They were engaged in entertaining others, specially the king, by way of performing dances, singing songs or by eulogising the glories of the king.

The social system which has been described in the books under study gives the impression that the society was maintained under specific law and order, manners and customs, etc. The father was the head of the family and he was considered as cause and way to heaven, religion, meditation and salvation. Those who did not obey their fathers' orders were religated to the level of dogs. Likewise the words of the mother were also regarded as Vedic utterances.

The younger brothers used to show great respect to the elder brother, which has been attractively illustrated in the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata more than once. The person,

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1. Ādi, vv. 56, 324, 907; Viśā, v. 19098; Vijaya, v. 5714; Rāmāyaṇa (A), v. 33; Yajñā, vv. 13173, 13332; Sīndhu, v. 11724
2. Baghā, v. 11829; Rāmāyaṇa (A), v. 70
3. Baghā, v. 11831
4. Ādi, vv. 680-82
5. Rāmāyaṇa (A), v. 707
6. Baghā, v. 9229
who went against his brother was discarded by the society.\textsuperscript{1} On the other hand, those who used to leave their father or elder brother were considered some as a thief.\textsuperscript{2} It has been observed in the Rāmāyaṇa by Ananta Kandali that the son, who looked after the welfare of the father, was the worthy son. But, the son, who did not listen to his father's behests or who did not perform the Śrāddha ceremony at the death of his father was like a dead son and his life was regarded as fruitless.\textsuperscript{3} That was why, the son was also accorded a special position like the father. All the parents expected to have sons; because they presumed that their sons would devote themselves to religion as well as household duties and would look their old age. The son, who was a devotee of Lord Viṣṇu ultimately united with his parents in heaven.\textsuperscript{4} Even a king was always unhappy, if he did not have a son.\textsuperscript{5}

A son only could generally offer pīṇḍa\textsuperscript{6} (a lump of rice mixed with milk, sugar, etc., offered in commemoration

\begin{enumerate}
\item Rāmāyaṇa (A), v. 437
\item Baqhā, v. 9720
\item Rāmāyaṇa (A), vv. 217-18
\item Baqhā, vv. 8681-82
\item Ādi, v. 395
\item Ādi, v. 1646
\end{enumerate}
of a deceased person). It was believed that those who did not have sons would be sent to the 'Punnām Naraka' (the name of a hell, as described in the old Hindu holy books). Likewise, if some parent discontinued their relationship with the son, such a parent was believed to be as guilty as killing of his son.

Women would always wish the welfare of their husbands and prayed to god to bestow grace to never make them widows. After preparing meals, the women used to feed their husbands and brothers-in-law. After that only they would have their own meals. This system still prevails in the Assamese society. Women were accorded high position in the society and the unmarried women were respected as mothers. It was assumed that women were devoid of the knowledge of religious scriptures. The women who were wholly loyal to their husbands begot peace in their minds and suffer no sorrows in their present and future lives. It is stated that the life

1. Asvakarna, v. 15800
2. Baghā, v. 12173
3. Baghā, v. 7597
4. Baghā, vv. 8575-76; Mani-Ghosa, v. 4591; Ādi-vana, v. 3862; Gita-g, v. 37
5. Baghā, v. 8687
6. Baghā, v. 9065
7. Baghā, vv. 9192-93
of a woman without husband had no value. Husband was the way to salvation for a woman. A woman should not leave her husband even though he was poor, lame or crippled. For woman, husband was like Lord Viṣṇu. Those women who did not follow the words of their husbands did go to hell. A woman had to maintain the dignity, character and honour of her own family. The chaste woman devoted to their husbands were not allowed to come out of their residence (grhara olāibe yogya nāhi tāsambāra). So the women of Ayodhya peeped through the nets of 'kundrākṣa' (small windows) as and when Rāma and Sītā passed by their houses. Rāmasarasvatī has commented that women folk were weak by nature and they should not come out of their residence by the night time. Ananta Kandali has expressed that woman never enjoyed full freedom in her life because she was looked after by her father during infancy, by her husband when she was young and by her son when she was old. The society laid

1. Khatā, v. 14388; Rāmāyana (A), v. 346; Yajña, v. 14019
2. Gita-Q, v. 59
3. Gita-Q, v. 60
4. Yajña, v. 13921
5. Kamsa-n, p. 472
6. Rāmāyana (A), vv. 36-37
7. Gita-Q, vv. 50-51, 276
8. tīnio kālata nāri nohe svatantari.
   - Kumāra, v. 34; Gita-Q, v. 252
stress on the virginity of a girl. If somebody gave his unchaste girl by way of marriage, his twenty-one generations would go to hell and the father of the girl degraded himself to the level of a Candāla (scavenger).¹ To touch the queen, or guru's wife, or daughter of a Candāla was sin, comparable to defiling one's own mother.² From this it can be presumed that women were accorded high position in the society. The hen-pecked husbands were criticised and they were considered as living dead.³ Regarding the character of woman, Ananta Kandali says that woman's nature was incomprehensible. In a flash their moods changed from joy to anger and with harsh words could drive a man to insanity.⁴ Rāma Sarasvatī wrote that - "stri jāti alpamati" and "sahaje caṇcalī nārī hṛdaya komali"⁵ (women are somewhat dul-witted, fickle minded and soft hearted).

The younger sister was regarded as one's own daughter.⁶ In general, the seniors were respected and the

¹. Kumara, v. 33  
². Kumara, vv. 215-16  
³. Rāmāyaṇa (A), vv. 156-60  
⁴. Rāmāyaṇa (A), v. 143  
⁵. Gīta-Q, vv. 158, 171  
⁶. Janma-n, p. 395
juniors were loved. In the Rāmāyaṇa of Ananta Kandali it is mentioned that, parents used to show their love to their sons by smelling their heads. In the yajña ceremony of the Mahābhārata it is noted that, when Lord Kṛṣṇa greeted and honoured Yudhiṣṭhira as the senior, the king embraced him in love, smelt the head and kissed. There are also examples of kissing the head of Bhīma by Indra.

Guests were offered warm hospitality. In the Baqhāsura-Vadha it is found that at the end of the day's work Yudhiṣṭhira used to offer 'deva pitṛ tarpaṇa' and fed the guests and then only pertook his food. The same example is given in the Sabhā-parva also. Likewise, Rāma Sarasvatī describes in his writings how the son of sage Gautama worshipped king Yudhiṣṭhira as a guest with Pādyā, Arghya, Āsamanā, Madhuparka, fruits and flowers, etc. In the Kumara-harana also there are examples of offering such hospitalities to the guests. Nanda entertained his guest Uddhava with

1. Baqhā, v. 11073
2. Rāmāyaṇa (A), vv. 71, 678
3. Yajña, v. 12791
4. Baqhā, v. 9626
5. Baqhā, v. 9998, Sabhā, v. 2822
6. Baqhā, v. 9385
7. Kumara, v. 337
Pancâmṛta and offered him a golden bed to sleep upon.\textsuperscript{1} Also when Akrura had been to Vṛndāvana, Kṛṣṇa himself had washed his feet, offered paramāṇa (milk preparation) and made him sleep on the golden bed and massaged his feet.\textsuperscript{2} In the Rāmāyaṇa, Guhaka the Candāla offered respect to Rāma by Sāstāṅga-praṇāma (salutation by falling prostrate on the ground) and offered camphor, arecanut as token of hospitality.\textsuperscript{3}

In the Sabhāparva it is narrated that the Pāṇḍavas received the Yādavas along with their families as guests.\textsuperscript{4} It was regarded as an offence not to honour a guest. That is why, Sakuntalā had to attend to Dusṣmayanta, despite her unwillingness in the lonely house.\textsuperscript{5}

From this it is found that in those days guests were regarded as gods and honouring the guest was regarded as a holy service.

When someone committed offence or if some problem cropped up, then people were called to a gathering to dispense justice. There the verdict given was obeyed by all. It is

\begin{enumerate}
\item Uddhava-n, pp. 435, 439
\item Kamsa-n, p. 468
\item Rāmāyaṇa (A), v. 473
\item Sabhā, vv. 2044-48
\item Ādi, vv. 259-61
\end{enumerate}
found in the Mahābhārata that, as King Duṣṣrayanta did not keep touch with his married wife Sakuntalā, Kanva-Muni held the social gathering and decided to send Sakuntalā to her husband's house. People were given due status in the society, and persons with integrity were regarded as wise men. In the writings of Ananta Kandali, Rāmasarasvatī and others there are references to taking oath by putting grass-straw between two rows of teeth.

As there was the system of offering blessings and pronouncing curses, in the society, the people in general tried to lead an honest life by avoiding disorderly conduct.

systems of marriage:

From the writings of this period, the marriage system prevailing in the society at that time can be understood. In Kumara-harana we have descriptions of the

1. Adi, vv. 307-08
2. Adi, v. 10952
3. Adi, vv. 419-20
4. Adi, v. 11846; Gītā-g, v. 198
5. Adi, v. 12177; Yajñā, v. 14258; Asvakarna, v. 15332; Kumara, v. 477
6. Kulācal, v. 15986; Adi, v. 8676
tying up of the bride and groom's hair and the edges of clothes, the exchanging of betel-nuts between the two, the giving of Durvākṣata (grass and rice) on the head and escorting the couple by carrying rice and Dīpa or Cāki (earthen lamp) in front.¹ Another description of marriage is given like this - the bride was decorated with different costumes, ornaments, etc. The bride and the groom's hands were united and Tila (seasum), Kuṣa (a kind of grass used in sacred ceremonies) and Tulasī were given in the hand of the groom and puspa-mālā - durvākṣata was placed on the heads of the bride and groom to complete the marriage rituals.²

The prevalence of dowry system in the marriage is also referred to.³ Servants, maid-servants, chariots with charioteers, gold and silver were offered as dowry.⁴

After the marriage function there was the system of welcoming the bride and groom to the groom's house, specially by the women. The entrance through which the couple entered were decorated with banana trees, earthen lamps were lit and

1. Kumara, vv. 231-32
2. Adi, vv. 282-85
3. Mani-Qhosa, v. 5233
4. Kumara, v. 48; Rāmāyana (A), v. 113; Sindhu, v. 18513; Baghā, vv. 9432-33
different musical instruments were played to greet the couple. The Brāhmaṇas were reciting Vedas. While arriving at the house the mother of the groom used to welcome the couple with earthen lamps and pitcher of holy water. Auspicious songs (Nāma) were sung by the women and with accompaniment of uruli (huludhvani) fistful of rice and Dubari (a specific kind of grass used in Hindu pūjās) were thrown to them. The couple used to pay obeisance to the seniors.1

Polygamy was prevalent at that period in the society.2

Sacramental Rites : Daśa-karma:

In the books under our study all the aspects of ceremonial performances of the Daśa-karma are not found. However, the names of some performances and customs associated with those karmas may be cited. For example, when the sons of Kṛṣṇa and Drupada Rajā were born, astrological study and Jāta-karma was performed and alms were given to the poor, which have been referred to in many writings.3 Besides the Jāta-Karma (a ceremony performed after the navel string is divided),

1. Rāmāyana (A), vv. 22-53
2. Adi, v. 36; Baghā, vv. 9394-95, 10602; Vijaya, v. 6903; Rāmāyana (A), v. 51; Uddhava-n, p. 450
3. Janma-n, p. 407; Adi, vv. 941-46; Udyoga, v. 20967
Annaprāśana¹ (First rice giving to the child), Cuḍākaraṇa² (shaving of the head due to religious causes), Vidyārāmbha³ (starting of education), Upanayana⁴ (investiture with the holy thread) are also referred to.

Regarding the Jātalkarma of Kṛṣṇa, the Jātaka (a new born child), it has been told that, after taking bath, Nanda, the father of the child invited the Brāhmaṇa astrologer and got the Jātalkarma performed. On this occasion the relatives, neighbours and friends came to the residence of Nanda carrying Sandesā (sweets). Besides throwing flowers on the head of the child, turmeric and milk were also sprinkled amongst them as part of meriment.⁵

In Rāmasarasvatī's Ādi-parva of the Mahābhārata there are references to King Dusśyanta's son, Bharata's Jātalkarma, Annaprāśana, Kārnavedha (the earboring ceremony), Cuḍākaraṇa (the ceremony of tonsure) being performed by the Brāhmaṇas.⁶

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1. Ādi, v. 946
2. Ādi, v. 700
3. Ādi, v. 700
4. Ādi, v. 584
5. Janma-n, pp. 407-10
6. Ādi, v. 302
All these social institutions and practices described in the Assamese versions of the Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata have also perhaps a reference to times when these versions were made.

Education System:

In the discussed books, some informations regarding the education system of those days are available. In the old days the gurus used to keep the disciples in the āśramas or ṭolas to impart education, which has also been referred to in case of Kanva-muni. Likewise, the Pāṇḍavas used to study the Vedas by staying in the āśrama and also obtained the arms training by staying with guru Dronācārya. While the disciples were in the gurus place, they were specially taught with Vedakāvyya, different śāstras (books), Cauḍāśṭhi Kalā (sixty four arts), Sāmadaṇḍa bhedaṅkṛta rājñīti (politics of equal justice of division), etc. While Duṣśāyaṇa explained to his son Bharata about Sāma Veda (the third of the Vedas), Dāna (offerings), Daṇḍa (punishment), Bheda (differences), etc., while imparting him lessons of politics.

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1. Adi, vv. 297, 1640
2. Sindhu, vv. 18371-72
3. Adi, vv. 154, 295, 303; Yajña, v. 12675
4. Adi, v. 445
In describing the education given to Bhīṣma, Rāma Sarasvatī wrote that he was taught the art of playing games like Mālarī (wrestling), Bhantā or Ṭāngūṭi (a wooden ball striking with a stick), etc., and technique of using arms like Gadā, Mudgar, Sūla, Khadga, Dhanu-śara (arrow and bow), etc., besides gathering knowledge from the volumes of Hari Bamsā, eighteen Purānas, Bhāgavata, four Vedas and fourteen Śāstras. In the Udyoga-parva also, Malla-vidyā (wrestling art) and Khadga-vidyā (sharp and heavy weapon) is found. The informations regarding teaching of religious scriptures along with the politics is also found. On the other hand it is also quoted that the countries of the kings who were not conversant with politics got ruined early. In the case of giving education, training for wrestling, elephant and horse riding were also given, along with Tantra-Mantra (incantation). The Kṣatriyās used to give lot of stress on learning Dhanur-veda. In different writings, the Āgama Śāstra has also been

1. Ādi, vv. 444-53; Sabhā, v. 2380
2. Udyoga, v. 20800
3. Ādi, vv. 701-02
4. Yajña, v. 13710
5. Ādi, vv. 950-51
6. Ādi, vv. 1783, 1827
referred to. ¹ The poet has detailed the medical science in *Yajña-parva.* ²

In different descriptions of the impartment of education in scriptures and military science to children of the Mahābhārata age, the poets have mentioned of such indigenous Assamese games as Bhantā and Tāngūṭi. From these it is apparent that the writers are not oblivious of the surrounding situation. Even those activities which are described in the original Sanskrit epic may have continued in the period of the Assamese versions.

In the *Adi-vana-parva* Rāma Sarasvatī states that to get the Mahābhārata translated through the poet, the King Naranārāyaṇa arranged the assemblage of many scholars from Kāmarūpa and Gauḍā. Besides he gave the poets the Mahābhārata, Purāṇas and various other religious books for translation.³ Hence, it can be presumed that during the time of the poet, those original Sanskrit works were studied in the country.

In those days, classical music was cultured and this can be gathered from the *Gītā-Govinda* of Rāma Sarasvatī.⁴

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1. *Sabhā,* v. 2293; *Vijaya,* v. 5630
2. *Yajña,* v. 12901
3. *Adi-Vana,* vv. 6103-05
4. *Gītā-G,* vv. 11, 68-70, 107
The poet has cited in the Baghāsura-Vadha that the ladies were also engaged in the study of scriptures.\(^1\) Besides scriptures the ladies also used to culture poetry.

In the Kumara-haraṇa-kāvyā Ananta Kandali described the learning of poetry by Usā-Citralekha while spending their days as prisoners in the palace fortified with Agnigāda.\(^2\) In Baghāsura-Vadha, the use of the word, 'Sattra' is a matter to be noted. It is stated that in the sage's 'Sattra' Kṛṣṇa Kathā (talks regarding Kṛṣṇa) was discussed.\(^3\) Study of astrology is also found to be mentioned in the kāvyas of those days.\(^4\) In Kumara-haraṇa-kāvyā, the poet has described Citralekha's study of the Panjika (the almanac).\(^5\) In another part of this kāvyā, the astrologers study of the future of the maid of King Bāna is also quoted.\(^6\)

From above, this can be presumed in the contemporary society of the poet, various scriptures, Veda, jyotiṣa (astrology), sangīta (music), kāvyas, tantra-mantra, Armours,

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1. Baghā, v. 9425
2. Kumara, v. 41
3. Baghā, vv. 10466-69
4. Adi, v. 1867; Rāmāyana (A), vv. 74, 83-85
5. Kumara, vv. 157-58
6. Kumara, vv. 275-77
etc. were widely studied and different games were taught.

The Last Rites of the Dead:

The last rites of the deceased has been described in some places. It was generally believed that by the performance of last rites the soul got pleasure and attained salvation. With this in view Caturthā (on the fourth day), Dāhā (on the tenth day), Ādya Śrāddha (on the eleventh day), Sapiṇḍan (on twelveth day), etc., were performed.

In general the karma or the last rite of the dead was performed by the son. If there were more than one son the eldest or the youngest one performed this rite. In general, eldest son was the authority for offering Piṇḍas to the departed one. When the deceased had no son, the Śrāddha was performed by the nephew or by some other members of the family. In Ananta Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa, the son, who did not perform the rituals like Śrāddha, etc., of his father was termed as a dead son or as an enemy to his father.

1. Yajña, v. 13837
2. Udvyoga, v. 20953
3. Rāmāyaṇa (A), v. 218
When somebody died, the dead body was cremated in the cremation ground, and prior to that the body was decorated and carried by some people to the cremation ground. Very good description of the cremation of the dead body is found in the Ananta Kandali's Ayodhyākānda Rāmāyaṇa. Pyre of king Dasāratha was made with Agaru-candana kāth (scented woods) and the body was placed with the head towards north. After chanting mantras by Baśistha, ghee was poured on the pyre and then it was set on fire. After cremation of the body, Bharata and Śatrughna offered pretāñjali (religious rituals of the Hindus for offering physical articles for the departed soul as homage) in the river Saraju. From the day of the demise of Dasāratha, till ten days his sons Bharata and Śatrughna slept on straw cots, and on the tenth day they offered Dasa pinda and on the eleventh day they were purified by performing Śrāddha. In that Śrāddha the sons donated bed, tila-pātra (vessel for keeping sesamum), umbrella, gold, silver, clothes, betel-nuts and betel-leaves, sandal of wood, cows, etc. Besides these, the Brāhmaṇas were given plenty of money after performing the act of Brśotsarga (an oblation of a bull on the day of offering the sacrifice to an ancestor). This is

1. Virāṭa, vv. 19196-97
2. Rāmāyaṇa (A), vv. 750-52
3. Rāmāyaṇa (A), v. 758
4. Rāmāyaṇa (A), vv. 766-69
the form of last rites, prevalent even today and must have been so in the days of Ananta Kandali.

The deserving son was supposed to give Pindajal to the soul of his departed father. So, though Rāmacandra was not present besides his father at the time of death yet afterwards, when he received the information, he offered pindajal with Ingudi, Āmlakhi, Kuśa, etc. to the river Ganga.¹ The son maintained his fathers race by offering pinda, due to which Rāmasarasvatī wrote that, those who did not have a son dwelled in hell.²

On the cremation of Fāṇḍu and Mādri together on the same pyre Haris name and Vedic mantras were chanted.³

Social Customs and Other Aspects of Social Life:

To render justice in case of any violation or crime, there is a system in Assamese society to call the people into a samāj (assembly).⁴ The system to formally enter into a bond of friendship (sakhā or sakhi) was prevailing in the society

1. Rāmāyana (A), vv. 942-43
2. Adi, v. 355
3. Adi, vv. 1194-95
4. Adi, vv. 307-08
from the olden age.  

In the society, killing of a Brāhmaṇa, drinking of liqueur, stealing of gold, eloping with the master's wife, not obeying one's own mother, etc., were regarded as great sins. As in the writings of Śaṅkaradeva, these informations are also found in the writings of Ananta Kandali and Rāmasarasvatī.

Arrangements for adoption of a son was also prevalent in the society in those days and the father of the adopted son was called "Postāpitā" (foster Father) and the mother of the adopted son was called "Dhāimā" (foster mother).

The system of servants and maid-servants was there.

1. Sabha. vv. 2243-47; Baghā, v. 10603
2. K-q, v. 183
3. Rāmāyana (A), v. 731
4. Ādi, v. 1951
5. Baghā, v. 9515
6. Svamanta-n, pp. 576-77
7. Rāmāyana (A), v. 105
Sports and Games:

In those days there were different amusements and sports. In more than one Parva of Mahābhārata, very good details of Dhop\(^1\) and Pāśā khel\(^2\) (dice game) could be found.

Also in Ananta Kandali's Kumara-harana kāvya descriptions of dice playing by Uṣā-Citralekhā and Uṣa-Aniruddha is found.\(^3\)

Besides this, in the writings of the poets of that time, reference to Bhanta or Tāṅguṭi\(^4\) (a wooden ball striking with a stick), Ghilā\(^5\) (a seed of a kind of creeping plant used in the game), Lāṭum\(^6\) (child's top), Dali-Yūj\(^7\) (throwing fight), etc. are also found. In the Ādi-parva, descriptions of Jalakeli\(^8\) (water sports) played by the children was available. Very good descriptions of Malla-yuddha or Māllari

\(^1\) Baghā, v. 8931; Ādi, v. 1347; Sabha, vv. 2082-83
\(^2\) Baghā, v. 9312; Sindhu, v. 13251; Virāṭa, vv. 18784-87; Sabha, vv. 2082-83
\(^3\) Kumara, vv. 41, 306
\(^4\) Ādi, vv. 1311, 1347
\(^5\) Ādi-Vana, v. 3351
\(^6\) Ādi-Vana, v. 3344
\(^7\) Ādi-Vana, v. 3337
\(^8\) Ādi, v. 1384
(wrestling), Bāhu-yuddha (wrestling), Musti-yuddha (boxing) and Munḍa-yuddha (the head fight) could be found in different books.

From Kumara-harana it is understood that literature, Mahābhārata, Purāṇa, etc. were studied by the people which showed that the people had fascination of studying various scriptures. In Ananta Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa also, the study of Gītā-Bhāgavata Sāstra (scripture), Purāṇa-sāstra, etc., had been quoted.

B. Political-matters:

In the writings of Rāmasarasvati and Ananta Kandali some information about political matters of those days could be found. The king used to conduct his royal administration, consulting with the Mantri (minister), pātra-mantri (State minister), Pāriṣada (group of adherent), Senāpati (generals),

1. Ādi, vv. 950, 1311; Sabhā, vv. 2082-83; Virāta, vv. 18953-65
2. Ādi, vv. 1347-49
3. Kumara, vv. 33, 41
4. Rāmāyaṇa (A), v. 672
5. Baghā, vv. 8791, 10591; Rāmāyaṇa, v. 45
6. Baghā, v. 10591; Sabhā, vv. 2708-09; Vijaya, v. 5843
7. Mani-Ghosa, vv. 4730, 4739
 etc. Relations or friendship with kings of other countries were made through the help of ambassadors. In the Vijaya-parva it is stated that to utter lie by an ambassador was a great crime and by telling lie, he would go to hell. This proves the high esteem in which an ambassador was held at that time. Like that, the king who punished the ambassador without any fault was termed as a great fool in the scriptures.

Besides manning the chariot, the charioteer used to offer advice to the king. Here, advice given by Mātali to Indra and Sumantra to King Daśaratha can be cited as examples. Generally the charioteer was almost like a Sakha (friend) to the king. Besides, senāpatis (generals), Senās (soldiers), Dhanurdharas (archers), etc., were also appointed by the king to defend the country from the hands of the enemies or to attack other countries. For that purpose

1. Baghā, v. 11234; Sabhā, v. 2197; Vijaya, v. 3070
2. Sabhā, v. 2361; Janghā, vv. 15499, 15505
3. Vijaya, v. 6338-40
4. Sabhā, v. 2219
5. Rāmāyaṇa (A), v. 45
6. Janghā, v. 155571
7. Baghā, v. 11234
8. Rāmāyaṇa (A), v. 664
9. Baghā, v. 10463
elephant, horse, chariot, etc., were used.

For the defence of the country, besides the army, the king used to keep watchmen and they used to inform the king of confidential political matters.\(^2\)

From the writings of Rāmasarasvatī and Anantakandali it could be gathered that of maintaining armies to defend the country from the external enemies and to maintain peace inside the country and for the purpose of general administration an army was maintained. There was again different divisions within the army like cavalry, charioteer, infantry, etc. Besides this, to assist in the war elephants, horses, etc., were also maintained. In Kumara-harana and Rāmāyaṇa of Ananta Kandali 'Caturanga Dal' (cavalry, elephant force, charioteers and infantry) has been mentioned.\(^3\) In the battles, for strategic reason sometimes an array (Vyūha) was made and the enemy was tried to put inside the array and killed. However, the enemy put all their effort to come out by breaking the array.\(^4\)

\(^1\) Rāmāyaṇa (A), v. 669; Baghā, v. 12619; Vijaya, v. 6414
\(^2\) Vijaya, v. 6211
\(^3\) Kumara, vv. 303, 312-13; Rāmāyaṇa (A), vv. 16, 389
\(^4\) Drona, pp. 1569-85
Regarding the duties of the king it was told that the king should punish the notorious thieves, the wicked, etc., and should give shelter to the Brāhmaṇa, Vaiṣṇava and the noble people. Criminals should be fined or be killed. The virtuous king should abandon or even hang his own son for the welfare of his subjects. If need be, the king must sacrifice his own life for the protection of his subjects. In a country where the king was greedy the subjects were always unhappy. King was the saviour of the religious ones and destroyer of the evils. The king should abide by the rules of the scriptures and religion. Because if a king was not religious, his subjects suffered. In Ananta Kandali's Rāmāyana also, the qualities of the king are thus described: the king should rule the country legally, along with his ministers, he should seek for more allies so that the enemy could not do any harm to his subjects, his persistent effort should be to save as much as possible, the royal treasury, behave with dignity with his generals and army and arrange to

1. Baghā, v. 9074
2. Vi jaya, v. 7185
3. Baghā, vv. 9065-68
4. Mani-Ghosa, v. 5133
5. Mani-Ghosa, v. 5138; Vi jaya, v. 6340
maintain elephants, horses, chariots, etc. It was held that those kings, who ruled his subjects in this way could conquer the three worlds.\(^1\) The king is the highest honoured person in the country.\(^2\) The queen was regarded as the "Varanārl" (First lady).\(^3\) Hence, the person who obeyed the king's orders had been considered very loyal\(^4\) and the person who disobeyed the royal orders held to be a great sinner.\(^5\) Rāmasarasvatī writes about subservient rulers who used to serve under the emperor (Cakravarti King)\(^6\) and pay taxes regularly. Likewise, there was the system of levying of taxes from the subjects.\(^7\) Generally, after the demise of the king the eldest son ascended the throne and the next brother was coronated as the crown prince.\(^8\) Sometimes, the king also formally coronated his son as the crown prince or gave the responsibility of the country.\(^9\)

\(^1\) Rāmāyana (A), vv. 76-78
\(^2\) Kulācalā, v. 15886
\(^3\) Vijaya, v. 7084
\(^4\) Baghā, v. 9586
\(^5\) Baghā, v. 9585
\(^6\) Vijaya, v. 7083; Mani-Ghosa, vv. 5131-32
\(^7\) Ādi-vana, vv. 3656-57
\(^8\) Vijaya, vv. 7068-72
\(^9\) Baghā, v. 12617
Ananta Kandali and Rāmasarasvatī depict vivid illustration of the kings' court in their writings.¹

In the war club (Gadā, Muṣala,² Parigha,³ Mudgārī⁴), sword and shield (Çandrahāsa, Khadga⁵), bows and arrows (Dhanu,⁶ Brahmasa,⁷ Baruṇa-bāṇa,⁸ Nāga-pāśa,⁹ Narāca¹⁰), spear (Jāṭhi, Jhong, Śūla, Trisūla¹¹), etc., weapons were used. The kings and the warriors used pennants (Dhvajā) with their own emblems.¹²

Rāmasarasvatī has mentioned of this pennant while referring to Baghāsura's war.¹³ In Janghāsura-Vadha also

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1. Vijaya, vv. 5949-56; Kumāra, vv. 283-87
2. Baghā, vv. 9086-87, 9105
3. Baghā, vv. 9906, 10093
4. Baghā, v. 12128
5. Baghā, v. 9663
6. Baghā, vv. 8667, 8698
7. Baghā, v. 9239
8. Baghā, v. 9258
9. Baghā, vv. 10184-85
10. Baghā, v. 10786
11. Baghā, v. 12128
12. Baghā, vv. 9297, 9906, 12128
13. Baghā, vv. 10412, 10461
there are mentions of pennants.¹

King was the ruler of the country. But his main task was to maintain *Deva Dharma* (religion), to control the wickets and to maintain the honests.²

C. Economic Condition:

Agriculture:

In the works of these poets some informations regarding the economic condition of the country could be found. Assam is an agrarian state and agriculture is the primary occupation of the dwellers of Assam. For agriculture, plough³ is the primary tool about which these poets wrote in various writings.

In *Puspa-harana Vana-parva*, Rāmasarasvatī has given descriptions of sowing rice seeds, transplantation of paddy seedlings,⁴ and thrashing paddy by allowing cattle to tread on it (*Maranā*).⁵ In their writings there are also

1. Janghā, v. 15591
2. Mani-Ghosa, v. 5133
3. Baghā, vv. 9649, 9651; Kānkhowā, p. 5
4. Pu-ha-vana, vv. 4039-40
5. Pu-ha-vana, vv. 4131-35
descriptions of cultivation of mustards besides the cultivation of rice.¹

Trade and Commerce:

Besides agriculture, very good illustration of trade and commerce has been drawn such as trading milk, Kasturi (musk), Agaru (scents extracted from the Agar timber), and Hirā, Māṇik, Mukutā² (precious stones), powāl,³ etc., by the Gowāls (milkmen), Baniyā (tradesman), Pohāri (woman vendor) and Sadāgara (merchants).

From these writings, some informations about transport and communication could be found. Generally boats were used for navigation⁴ as well as for trade and commerce.⁵ Besides boats, rafts or floats were often used as means of transport.⁶ For transportation, Šakaṭa (carriage) and Dolā (sedan) were also used. For carrying the Dolā, Dolā Bhārī

1. Baqha, v. 10465
2. Sabha, v. 2380
3. Sabha, v. 2628
4. Aḍi, vv. 159, 1569; Rāmāyana (A), v. 849; Virāta, v. 19040
5. Gita-g, v. 71
6. Viṣaya, v. 5898
7. Ghunucā, v. 1
(sedan carrier) was needed.  

As a media of trade and commerce, cowrie shells were used. In ancient Assam there was wide circulation of cowrie shells. "We have earliest references to the use of cowries in Kāmarūpa in the Harṣa-carita which records that the king Bhāskara Varmanā (7th century A.D.) sent to Harṣavardhana 'heaps of black and white cowries' as present." The use of cowries is further proved by the Tezpur Rock Inscription of Harjjara (829-839 A.D.). It is evident from the account given in an Ahom Chronicle that on the occasion of the funeral ceremonies of his mother, the Ahom King Śiva Sīṃha (1714-1744) "gave a feast to the attendants and labours and presented them with clothes, silver and cowries in innumerable numbers." Instances of circulation of Ŭtakā (money) and Mohara (gold coin) could also be found.

1. Khata, vv. 14486-92
2. Sabhā, vv. 2296, 2298
3. As quoted in History and Civilization of the People of Assam from Harṣa-Carita, (Cowell), p. 222
4. P.C. Chowdhury, History and Civilization of the People of Assam, p. 361
5. G.C. Barua, tr. and ed., Āhom Buraṇji, 1930, p. 273
6. Sabhā, v. 2507
Hāts (bazars, markets) were held in those days also.

In Ghunucā-Kirtana, very good sketch of sitting of the woman-vendor (Pohērl) by displaying merchandising products has been portraited.¹

It is written in Vijaya-parva that the subjects had to pay tax to the king regularly. Also the victorious king used to collect taxes from the defeated kings.² From the gifts offered by a king to his friendly king, it can be understood that in those days, besides chariots, animals like bulls, asses, etc.; gold-silver, gems, pearls, corals, etc.; precious stones and copper, bell-metal, iron, etc., minerals had their uses.³

Society had the system of slaves and maids and this has been quoted in many books.⁴

The system of begging was prevalent in the country and both the king and the subjects used to offer alms. The generous kings donated whatever the beggars asked for.⁵

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1. Ghunucā, v. 60
2. Vijaya, v. 7079
3. Vijaya, vv. 5992-95
4. Baghā, v. 11721; Udyoga, v. 21071; Virāta, v. 18883
5. Sabhā, vv. 2405-06
In the country, herbal drugs were widely used and generally the Vaidya used to cure the patients with herbal drugs. Amongst the herbal drugs, 'Bisalyakarani' is noteworthy.1

Food and Drink:

As in the writings of Saṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva the contemporary poets also described about different foods, garments, jewellery, cosmetics used in those days in their writings.

Rice is the staple food amongst all the food stuff. Mention of this 'Anna' (boiled rice) could be found in most of the books.2 In Bhima-Carita3 the plight and distress of food and shelterless persons was nicely portrayed. Along with rice people ate venison,4 mutton, meat of buffalos5 and also pork.6

1. Vījaya, v. 6571; Kulācala, v. 17282
2. Baghā, v. 8543; Yajña, v. 12859; Janghā, v. 15481; Virāta, v. 19029; Rāmāyaṇa (A), v. 282
3. Bhīma, p. 9
4. Baghā, vv. 8575, 11947
5. Bhīma, p. 10
6. Adi-Vana, vv. 4045-47
Rāmasarasvatī describes Bakāsura's meal comprising of meat of deers, goats roasted on a spit, cakes made of a kind of fragrant and fine rice (Kharikājāhā rice), thick milk preparation, pitchers of wine and betel-nuts as the Muhudi (after-meal item). In the Vijaya-parva mentions has been made of decorating betel-nut, camphore on the batā (tray with one foot) as after-meal preparation. Examples are also found of taking fish and vegetables, besides meat along with rice. Rāmasarasvatī stated through utterance of Yudhiṣṭhira that one could not live without partaking rice. Different books referred to food consisting of Sālīdhān, Kharikājāhā (different rices), etc., which are still in vogue in Assam.

Besides rice, fish and meat, etc., these books mention different food like pañcāmṛta (mixture of curd, milk, ghee, honey and sugar), Pithā (cakes), Paramānna or

1. Bhīma, p. 10
2. Vijaya, v. 6031
3. Baghā, v. 11947; Rāmāyana (A), v. 828; Virāta, vv. 19029–30
4. Baghā, vv. 9611, 12309; Ādi-Vana, v. 3240; Pu-ha-vana, v. 4499
5. Ādi-Vana, vv. 3185–86
6. Vijaya, vv. 5884, 6044
8. Yajñā, v. 12793; Ghunucā, v. 42
Payasa¹ (sweetened boiled rice), Akhai² (fried rice), Cirā³ (beaten rice), Lāru⁴ (sweet balls), Karāi⁵ (coarser flour of parched rice), condensed milk,⁶ sweets,⁷ etc. From this it can be understood that during those days such articles were abundantly available in Assam. Also from 'Ṣaḍarasa⁸ it is understood that Assamese people had the knowledge of eatables tasting sweet, bitter, pungent, astrigent, acid and salt.

The poets also described about roasted fish, fish barbeque,⁹ curry of the Magumāh (Phaseolus munga beans) and Māṭimāh (Phaseolus radiatus, beans) along with rice.¹⁰ Besides that, in Kumara-harana, there is very good description of fifty varieties of curries.¹¹ The poet has described the recipe of Citralekha, as she prepared very

¹. Sabha, v. 2303; Adi, v. 351; Sindhu, v. 18043; Janghā, v. 15655; Manī-Ghosa, v. 5321
². Adi, vv. 1100-01, 1371-74
³. Adi, vv. 1371-74; Ghunucā, v. 21
⁴. Adi, v. 1100; Bhīma, pp. 1, 5; Vijaya, v. 7337
⁵. Yajña, v. 12793
⁶. Ghunucā, v. 20; Bhīma, p. 10; Adi, v. 38
⁷. Yajña, v. 12798
⁸. Sabha, vv. 2039, 2048, 2794; Udyoga, v. 20378; Yajña, v. 12794
⁹. Vijaya, v. 7173
¹⁰. Vijaya, v. 7172
¹¹. Kumara, v. 234
tasteful preparation by adding macur-dāl along with mug-dāl and mixing ghee, sugar, molases, zinger, salt, black-pepper, and curry powder, etc. Castrated goat's meat was fried with twelve types of curry powders. Other dishes were prepared by adding hing (asafotida - a special type of curry powder extracted from the latex of tree) with meats of doves, tortoises, deers, and pork with roots of plantain trees. Murighaṇṭa (a dish) was prepared with macur-dāl and Barāli fish.

Dishes were prepared like Ilish fish and Kānduli fish roasted on a spit, Jāmīr (a kind of lime or lemon) and Laphā-śāk (potherb) mixed and prepared with Soleng (citrous vegetable) and curry made of Āri fish and Pāleng-śāk (pot herb). In Jujube (Bagarī) juice, sugar and ripen tamarind (Tetelī) along with molases (Guḍa) were mixed to prepare a different curry.¹

In Kumara-harāṇa lucid description was there about the preparation of fifty tasteful dishes by Citralekhā. In Vijaya-parva, Rāmasarasvati has described of Pacalī, another palatable dish of the Assamese people.² Lot of Assamese people used to invoke their respective god and offer a little

1. Kumara, vv. 235-39
2. Vijaya, vv. 6570-7019
portion of the eatables before partaking their meal. Vaiśṇavāmṛta of Ananta Kandali contains examples for these.\(^1\) Assamese society had the custom of offering Arcaṇa (prayer) to the gods and father and giving sacrificial fees (dakṣiṇā) before taking meal.\(^2\) In the contemporary society also, such traditional customs have been followed partially by some people.

In the menu of the rākṣasas (demons), the poets have mentioned of drinks along with meats\(^3\) and their behaviour of madness when they gave indulgence in drinking.\(^4\) In different books Modak, another intoxicating item like drink has been mentioned.\(^5\)

Ananta Kandali refers to Bhāng or Gānjā (hemp) in Rāmāyaṇa.\(^6\) While referring to food, the names of different fruits as described by the poets can be mentioned. Out of these, beside citrous fruits like Jāmīr (a kind of lemon), Soleng (a kind of acid fruit), Cakalā (a kind of acid fruit),

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1. Vaiśṇavāmṛta, v. 94
2. Adi-Vana, v. 3183; Yajña, v. 13667
4. Baghā, v. 11310
5. Adi, v. 38; Sabha, v. 2471
6. Rāmāyaṇa (A), v. 458
Jara (a specious of citron), Bagari (jujube), Kamalā (orange), Nemu (lemon), Āmlokhi (emblic myrobalan), etc., the names of Ām (mango), Jām (engenia jambolana), Leteku (a kind of fruit), Khājurī (date palm), Pālim (pomegranate), Nārikal (cocoanut), Śrīkāla (wood apple), Jāikāla (nut meg), Sondā, Campā, Digjowā, Mālbhog, Daśanaiyā, etc. bananas are also found.¹

Dresses, Ornaments and Other Articles of Luxury:

In the writings of the contemporary poets of Śaṅkaradeva, descriptions of different characters and their dresses, jewellery and other articles of luxury are found. Like the older poets Madhvakandali, Śaṅkaradeva, etc., the Vaiṣṇava poets also gave the following descriptions of dresses of Nārāyaṇa or Kṛṣṇa, viz., yellow dhoti, peacock's feather at the head, guṇjamaṇi, pāncani and keyurakaṅkaṇa in hand, hemahār on the neck, gajamuktāmani, vanamālā, kiṅkini at waist, balayā at the arms, rings in the fingers, golden nūpura at the feet, etc.² Kṛṣṇa's body is pasted with candana and ornamented with crown on the head and tilaka at the forehead.³

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1. Śādi, vv. 248-50, 1101; Baghā, vv. 8807, 9375; Bh. III, v. 878
2. Baghā, v. 12439; Yajñā, vv. 12745, 13693-94; Gīta-Q, vv. 46-47
3. Gīta-Q, v. 87; Kulācala, v. 16719; Yajñā, vv. 12745, 13179
Descriptions of Hara and Pārvatī's dress are also found in their writings. About Rādhikā Rāmasarasvatī wrote that she wore blue dresses and different ornaments. The gopīs decorated Kṛṣṇa's head with tulasi garland.

Rāmasarasvatī describes the beauty of a hermit as follows: "His head is covered with matted hairs. He is slim, has holy thread on the shoulder, garlands of rudrākṣa and bones on the neck, exposed teeth, face filled with unshaved beards and wore a 'Kaupina' (a kind of short, one piece cloth tied around the waist)."

In describing the beauty of the Brāhmaṇa-priest, Rāmasarasvatī wrote that he wore the holy thread, and uttariya (a kind of dress worn on occasion of pūjā, etc.), Kamaṇḍalū (a pot with a semicircular handle on top) in hand, tilaka on the forehead, clothes and pasted candana on all parts of the body.

The mediaeval Assamese officers used to wear turbans on their heads and caps were also of popular use.

1. Baghā, vv. 8578-80, 8594
2. Gīta-Q, v. 83
4. Aśvakarna, vv. 15236-38
5. Sabhā, v. 2381
6. Yajñā, v. 14203; Kumara, v. 119
Rāmasarasvatī refers to such turbans while describing Kṛṣṇa's dress. From this it may be presumed that during the days of Rāmasarasvatī, that is at the later part of 16th century A.D. or at the early part of the 17th century A.D. the use of cap was prevailed in Assam due to the influence of Islam.

The queen used to wear white clothes during worshipping of god. Such customs are still prevalent in Assamese society.

Among the cosmetics are candana, red candana, oil, altā (lac dye, alaktā), kājala (lamp black used for cosmetic purpose), etc.

Furniture, Utensils and Other Things of Utility:

From the various descriptions given by the poets, some informations of materials of daily use in Assamese

1. Udyoga, v. 20523; Ādi-Vana, v. 3899
2. Rāmāyaṇa (A), v. 88
3. Ādi, v. 47; Sabhā, v. 2399
4. Gita-g, v. 295
5. Sabhā, v. 2471
6. Gita-g, v. 283
7. Gita-g, v. 303
society of those days can be obtained. As at present in those days also, gold, silver and brass materials were used. Out of these materials use of Suvarṇā Vṛṅgāra or kalah\(^1\) (pitcher of gold), Ghaṭa (pot for offering mango groove in ceremonial occasions), Dunari\(^2\) (a small basket containing rice, betel-nuts and a lighted lamp carried with the procession that goes to fetch water at a marriage), oil, ghṛe for lighting lamp, lamp, incense, candana (sandal wood), kasturi\(^3\) (musk), jewelled plate with stand for offering betel-nut preparation and camphor,\(^4\) Suvarṇa Sāfurā (golden box for betel-nut),\(^5\) different articles of bell-metal,\(^6\) dhavala cāmara (white whisk made of the tail of the yak) to fan,\(^7\) mattress on the bed, pillow, blanket, kathā\(^8\) (mat).

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1. Āsvakarna, v. 15030; Ghunucā, v. 21; Sindhu, v. 18073
2. Adi, vv. 1226, 1864-65; Kumara, v. 487; Mani-Ghosa, v. 5161; Ghunucā, v. 4
3. Adi, vv. 1533-34, 1865; Vijaya, vv. 2565, 5629; Kumara, vv. 244-45; Ghunucā, v. 4
4. Mani-Ghosa, v. 4730; Vijaya, v. 6031
5. Gīta-g, v. 235
6. Kulācala, v. 16345
7. Udyoga, v. 20859; Ghunucā, v. 26; Rāmāyaṇa (A), v. 192; Kumara, v. 109; Gīta-g, v. 99
8. Kumara, vv. 144-45; Rāmāyaṇa (A), vv. 358, 510; Sabhā, v. 2554
knife, axe, spade, ālā, kulā (bamboo materials used in household purpose), paṭā-paṭāguți (grinding slab and stone), etc., are also found. From the writings of Rāmasarasvati it is also gathered that hooks with bait were used for catching fish. Moreover, mentions regarding the uses of herbal drugs in different writings are also found.

D. Religion and Philosophy:

Since these poets are Vaiṣṇava, they have tried to establish the glory of Vaiṣṇava religion and the superiority of Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa over the other gods and goddesses. As a result, the descriptions of the Śaiva and Śakta religions prevailed in Assam from the early days could not be specifically found in the writings of the poets.

In their different works, the poets have shown that Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa is worshipped even by Brahmā, Śiva, etc.,

1. Kumara, v. 80
2. Kumara, v. 79; Rāmāyana (A), v. 777; Ādi-Vana, vv. 4013, 4019
3. Ādi, vv. 613, 1991
4. Kumara, v. 174
5. Sindhu, v. 18575
6. Udyoga, v. 2079; Baghā, v. 10578
because the glory of Kṛṣṇa is unfathomable even to Brahmā-Hara also.  

Śaivism:

During this period even though the Vaiṣṇava religion was prevalent, worshipping of Śiva was also very much there. While giving self-introduction, Rāmasarasvatī has mentioned that King Naranārāyaṇa's father Viśva Simha was the son of Lord Śiva.² In support of this statement, Sūryakharī Daivajña's Darang Rājvamsāvalī can be pointed to.³ In the 'Satī' system as given by the poets in Vijaya-parva of Mahābhārata, the wife at the death of her husband pray to Śiva and jump into the flames of the burning pyre. Satī is considered to have merged with Durgā's body and thus gained immortality.⁴

Here one thing is to be noted that, being a Vaiṣṇava poet, Rāmasarasvatī defied Śiva and Durgā also.

In Rāmāyaṇa though Kavi Ananta Kandali has depicted Rāma as the incarnation of Kṛṣṇa but in one occasion he has

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1. Adi, v. 19
2. Baghā, vv. 8638-39
3. Darang Rājvamsāvalī, v. 71
4. Vijaya, vv. 7086-90
compared Rāma with Śiva also.¹ But time and often the poet has expressed as jāno viṣṇu bine gati nāi (I know that there is no succour without Viṣṇu) and kahe krṣna gati.² From the following facts in Kumara-harana like regular worshipping of Śiva and Gaurī in the Śiva temple by King Bāna,³ boon received by Uṣā and Citralekhā from Śiva and Gaurī,⁴ it has ultimately been shown that Lord Viṣṇu is the Supreme Lord and through Viṣṇu’s will only this whole universe is sustained.⁵ Simultaneously the preaching of Hari to Hara also depicts the same thing.⁶

In the Ādi-parva of Mahābhārata, Rāmasarasvatī refers to Śiva Daula (Śiva temple).⁷ The poet has extolled Śiva as ‘Māyāra Īśvara’ (god of illusion)⁸ or ‘āgama niṣame jāra napāvaya ādi’.⁹

In Kulācala Vadha, Rāmasarasvatī refers to the prevalence of Śiva worship in the Śiva Caturdaśī¹⁰ and in

¹. Rāmāyana (A), v. 193
². Rāmāyana (A), vv. 241, 1010
³. Kumara, v. 20
⁴. Kumara, vv. 52-56
⁵. Kumara, v. 474
⁶. Kumara, v. 478
⁷. Ādi, v. 729
⁸. Ādi, vv. 884-87
⁹. Ādi, v. 882
¹⁰. Kulācala, v. 17600
Baghāsura-Vadhā about the 'rudra rūpa' of Śiva or Hara.¹ It is noteworthy that from very ancient time Śiva pūjā was performed in almost all places in Bhāratavarṣa during Śiva Caturḍāsī. From Rāmasarasvatī's writings it can be easily derived that in sixteenth century A.D. Assam also, besides constructions of Śiva temple Śiva pūjā was specially performed during Śiva Caturḍāsī tithi.

In the Vaiṣṇava poets writings, the description of Śiva's journey on the back of Brśava, holding Trisūla in one hand and playing Damaru with the other, wearing tiger skin at the waist, reflects the same image of Śiva as depicted in the literatures of the pre-Vaiṣṇava poets.²

Saktism:

Like Śiva worshipping, Śaṅkaradeva has prohibited Śaktī worshipping also and by extolling Viṣṇu, he has initiated the flow of 'eka śaraṇā nāma dharma' (the religion of one power belief) and brought a renaissance in religion. But at times Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva and their contemporary Vaiṣṇava poets exalt at the glory of Śiva and Śaktī or devi. For instance, Suraketu Vīra remained immortal with the boon

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¹ Baghā, v. 12595
² Kumara, v. 92
of devi Durga.1 Again Rāmasarasvatī describes how by virtue of Durgā’s divine power, demon devotee also able to master heroic power.2 Even a votary jumps into the battle field by chanting Cāṇḍi-Durgā’s name.3 In one portion of Baghāsura-Vadha, Rāmasarasvatī has extolled the devi as Mahāmāyā Jagat Janani (mother of the universe), sorrow healer of the distressed, Kāla-māyā-pālikā (controller of time and illusion), sustainer of the entire creation.4 On the other hand, in Ādi-parva, Mahāmāyā is depicted as Kātyāyani, Bhuvana Mohini,5 in Kulācala Vadha as Bhadrā6 and Virāṭa-parva as Kālikādevī.7 The poet has also mentioned that success can be obtained by worshipping and total submission to Durgā.8 From the writings of the Vaiṣṇava poets it is understood that Sakti worship was prevailing in Assam in those days.

1. Baghā, v. 9867
2. Baghā, vv. 9827, 12163
3. Baghā, v. 11571
4. Baghā, vv. 12180-81
5. Ādi, v. 1106
6. Kulācala, v. 16248
7. Virāṭa, v. 19430
8. Ādi, vv. 919-25
Vaisnavism:

Though Vaisnava religion is prevalent in Assam from ancient time, it was not as widespread as Saiva and Sakta religion, and it was known as tantric Vaisnava religion. The wave of the neo-Vaisnava religion originated by Šaṅkaradeva could touch the people of all levels of Assam and his process of reforming the society was successful. The 'eka śaraṇa nāma dharma' originated and promoted by Šaṅkaradeva was very liberal and was open to all. The philosophy of this religion was obtained from Gitā and Bhāgavata. Hence, later on this religion became the vehicle of cultural exchange between different caste and religion.

In Vijaya-parva, poet Rāmasarasvati remarked that as King Naranārāyaṇa was benevolent, master of all śāstras and regarded the Vaiśṇavas in high esteem, no misfortune had befallen in his kingdom.¹ Poet Rāmasarasvati, one of the noted scholars in the king's court has praised Koc Prince Sukladhvaja and wrote that his kingdom became very prosperous with the blessing of the Vaiśṇavas.²

According to Vaiśṇava religion, Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa is the supreme lord and Kṛṣṇa is the destroyer of all the evil

1. Vijaya, vv. 6284-85
2. Vijaya, vv. 6421-22
demons. He is servant to his devotees and rescuer of the down-trodden and the sinners.¹

Besides Śaṅkara-deva and Mādhava-deva, all the granthas (books) of contemporary Vaiṣṇava poets are composed centring around glories and virtues of Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa. Bāsudeva² - another form of Viṣṇu and Hayagrīva Mādhava have also been referred to in these granthas.³

In the writings of these Vaiṣṇava poets, the description of ten incarnations of Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu is found. In the book Kānkhaṅwā, written in the style of lyrics, Śrīdhara Kandāli has given vivid descriptions of nine incarnations of Viṣṇu.⁴ In Ananta Kandāli’s Rāmāyaṇa it is written that Rāma descended on earth as incarnation of Viṣṇu for the welfare of the devotees.⁵ Rāmaśarasvatī in Ādi-vana-parva refers to Lord Viṣṇu’s incarnation as Kṛṣṇa⁶ who incarnated for the welfare of the commonfolk, incarnation of Parasūrāma⁷

¹ T.M. Sarma, Kirtana-Ghoṣā āru Nāma-ghoṣā, Intro., p. 3
² Ādi, vv. 955-56; Sabhā, v. 2520
³ Vījaya, vv. 7207, 7213
⁴ Kānkhaṅwā, pp. 2-6
⁵ Rāmāyaṇa (A), vv. 54, 477
⁶ Ādi-vana, v. 3620
⁷ Ādi, v. 823
in Adi-parva and Kṛṣṇa's full incarnation in Kalikāla in Yajña-parva.¹

In neo-Vaiṣṇava religion propagated by Śaṅkaradeva, Bhakti (devotion) has been given utmost significance and in the preface of the writings, his contemporary Vaiṣṇava poets also offered worship and adoration to Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa, who is incomprehensible even to Brahmā and Hara² and whose lotus feet are worshipped even by Brahmā and Śiva.³ In Vaiṣṇavāṁṛta, Ananta Kandali has expressed that Viṣṇu is worshipped by Brahmā, Laksṇī, Agni, Bāyu, Candra, Sūrya, Kuvera, Baruṇa, etc. gods and those who are not blessed with salvation even after Tapadharmā, Sāṅkhya-yoga, Karma-yoga, Dāna, Vrata, Tīrtha-sāna, can obtain salvation by nāma dharma (chanting the name of the lord).⁴ In Rāmāyaṇa, Ananta Kandali has been quoted as - 'viṣṇu bine nāi gati' (no salvation without Viṣṇu) and in Ghunucā Kīrtana, Śridhar Kandali is quoted as - 'kṛṣṇa bine guru gati dātā nāhi āna' (except Kṛṣṇa, there is no other master and giver) and this way they have advised to worship Hari or Viṣṇu.⁵

1. Yajña, v. 12825
2. Baghā, v. 11610; Gītā-g, vv. 1, 66
3. Adi, v. 1; Bh. III, vv. 1-4; Gītā-g, v. 1; Vaiṣṇavāṁṛta, v. 1
4. Vaiṣṇavāṁṛta, vv. 16-18, 19-20, 40
5. Rāmāyaṇa (A), v. 241; Ghunucā, vv. 167, 171-74
Out of nine types of bhaktis enunciated by Śaṅkaradeva, Śravaṇa Kirtana (hearing and singing) is the best. Those who listens to Kṛṣṇa Kathā, even if their parents who are rotting in hell gets free and ascend towards heaven. The Vaiṣṇava poets are offering adoration to Viṣṇu only. The poet has depicted Viṣṇu in three images. Viṣṇu creates as Brahmā, sustains the creation himself and destroys as Rūdra. Lord Viṣṇu's dark green body is groomed with yellow attire, Kaustubha in the neck, Śaṅkha, Cakra, Gadā, Padma in his hands. Garuḍa bird is his vehicle. Such descriptions of Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu is found in different writings of the Vaiṣṇava poets. Besides that, the poet has expressed that offering prayer at the feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa is nobler than salvation. In different parts of the writings of the Vaiṣṇava poets, it is found that the devotees are dearer to Hari or Viṣṇu and He keeps bestowing grace on them. In the character of a Vaiṣṇava Satya (truth), Śauca

1. Bh. I, v. 38
2. Baqha, vv. 12114-15
3. brahmā rūpe srajā pāla viṣṇu rūpe dhari
   rūdra rūpe āpuni saṁhari niyā hari.
   - Yajña, v. 13236; Adi-Vana, v. 3726
4. Kumara, v. 91; Baqha, vv. 11586-89
5. Gita-G, v. 203
6. Áṣvakarna, vv. 15351-52; Janghā, v. 15476; Yajña, v. 12740
(purification), Kṣamā (forgiveness), Dayā (charity), etc., are predominant. In Ādi-parva, Rāmasarasvatī has commented that, "vaisnavehe viṣṇu jānā viṣṇue vaisnava" (be it known that Vaisnava is Viṣṇu and Viṣṇu is Vaiṣnava). Vaiṣnava poet Rāmasarasvatī has written that he who dies in the hand of a Vaiṣnava goes to heaven. Poet Ananta Kandali, the great devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa has said "hauka haripade acaḷā bhakati" (let there be firm devotion at the feet of Hari).

Ananta Kandali felt that in Mādhava Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa, all the worshipable quality of Rāma were not fully revealed and so he extracted the substance from Bhāgavata and wrote the Rāmāyaṇa. In Ananta Kandali's view Rāma was like Kṛṣṇa "sākṣāte parama brahma svarūpa".

Other Gods and Goddesses:

Besides Śiva and Viṣṇu, references to other gods and goddesses are also found in the writings of the Vaiṣnava

1. Baghā, v. 9160
2. Ādi, v. 1504
3. Baghā, v. 11921
4. Kumara, vv. 260, 68
5. M. Neog, Asamlyā Sāhityar Rūprekhā, p. 139; S.N. Sarma, Asamlyā Sāhityar Samiksātmak Itivṛtta, p. 159
poets contemporary to Śaṅkaradeva. In Ghunucā-Kṛtāna the poet has described Lakṣmi devī as the primordial nature of earth. In her, the three guṇas, viz., Sattva, Raja and Tama prevails. She is the cause of creation and stability of the universe; in her the whole universe dissolves. She is lord incarnated and with Viṣṇu they are in eternal bliss. She is the goddess to be realized by Brahmā and Hara. The creation is sustained on her grace.¹ In the beginning of Kumara-harana, Ananta Kandali has worshipped the feet of Mahā Lakṣmi,² and in Rāmāyaṇa, Sītā has been adored as Lakṣmi’s incarnation.³ In the same way the poet has worshipped Sarasvatī also.⁴

Besides Brahmā,⁵ Gaṇeśa,⁶ Indra,⁷ Kārttikeya, Agni, Bāyu, Baruna, Yama,⁸ Ananta,⁹ in Gita-Govinda poet Rāmasarasvatī has lucidly expressed the acknowledgement of

1. Ghunucā, vv. 75-76
2. Kumara, v. 1
3. Rāmāyaṇa (A), v. 16
4. Kumara, v. 1; Rāmāyaṇa (A), v. 1010; Gita-g, v. 331
5. Ādi-Vana, vv. 3116-17; Kumara, v. 90; Ādi, v. 839
6. Kumara, vv. 1, 93
7. Kumara, v. 93; Baghā, v. 10951
8. Kumara, vv. 93-95; Ādi, v. 839
9. Vijaya, vv. 5624-25
defeat of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Maheśvara before Kāmadeva. Being tortured by Kāma-sāra (Cupid's arrow), Kṛṣṇa has lauded Kāmadeva to be the lord of the universe.

In different granthas, mentions of demi-gods and goddesses (ardha deva-devī) like gandharvas, vidyādharas, apsarases, etc., are also found. In the Sindhu-yātrā, chanting of god's name (Hari kirtana) by gandharvas, vidyādharas, vidyādharīs and apsarases are being mentioned.

Through the character of Nārada, the Viṣṇu devotee, the poet has expressed that god appears through the devotee only. The poet describes Nārada as follows - his waist is wrapped with antelope skin with Yapamālā and Kamaṇḍalu in hand.

In the chapter Sindhu-yātrā of Vana-parva the fact regarding the worshipping of Navagraha (nine planets) is found. In Kumara-harana also, the description of sun-

1. Gita-gītā, vv. 142-44
2. Gita-gītā, v. 150
3. Ādi, v. 5; Sabhā, v. 2525
4. Ādi, vv. 5, 1082; Yajñā, v. 13172; Baghā, v. 9263
5. Ādi, vv. 93, 120, 268; Baghā, v. 9263; Yajñā, v. 13172
6. Sindhu, v. 17723
7. Ādi, vv. 1901-02; Kumara, v. 132
8. Sindhu, v. 17718
worshipping by Aniruddha is found.¹

Like these gods and goddesses, mentions of Ḍākinī (witches), etc., are also found in different books.²

Diverse Pūjā Materials : Polytheism : Religious Practices:

For pūjā, generally five type of materials such as incenses, earthen lamps, fruits, flowers and offerings are used.³ In Hari or Viṣṇu pūjā mentions of the use of Tulasī (Ocimum sanctum, sacred basil) is found.⁴ In Baghāsura-Vadha Kāvya it is also stated that the wood-apple leaves are included in the articles of pūjā.⁵ Besides these, diverse pūjā materials like rice, Durvā (a kind of grass), Candana (sandal-wood), Tulasī, etc. are sprinkled over one's head and blessings are bestowed with Uruli.⁶ In different books, utterance of waves of uruli in religious ceremonies are being cited.⁷ From the writings of Saṅkaradeva's contemporary

1. Kumara, v. 325
2. Sindhu, v. 17741; Baghā, vv. 8579-81
3. Vījaya, vv. 5624-25; Ādi, v. 36; Baghā, v. 8919
4. Vījaya, v. 7209; Vajñā, v. 12761
5. Baghā, v. 8582
6. Vajñā, vv. 1369, 14212; Āsvakarna, v. 15758
7. Sabhā, vv. 2296, 2301, 2305; Ādi, v. 549
poets, it is known that in those days, yajña was performed for the welfare of the king and the country. It was believed that expiation can be obtained from Brahma Badha by holding mahāyajña. The poet also prescribes that if a childless person performs mahāyajña, he will be blessed with a son. Vivid descriptions of yajña festivals with details of kings and sages giving oblation by holding Tulāsi and Durvakṣata in hand are found. After offering full oblation (pūrṇāhuti) and dakṣīṇā, they handsomely donated servants, maid-servants, chariots, elephants, horses, cows, gold, land, etc. To the relatives they presented garments and ornaments.

Besides this, in the writings of the Vaiṣṇava poets mentions of sacred deeds like sacred bath, vrata, yoga, etc., are found. Various descriptions are there of Avavṛtha-snāna (pre-yajña bath), Tirtha-snāna for general welfare. Descriptions of desiring for heaven by going on pilgrimages are available in the writings of the poets. In Sindhu Yātrā

1. Yajña, v. 12680
2. Kulācala, vv. 1502-12; Vijaya, v. 7199
4. Ādi, vv. 928-30, 944-45; Sabhā, v. 2541; Sindhu, v. 17716
5. Udyoga, v. 20889
6. Udyoga, v. 21099; Bagha, v. 9203-05
7. Ādi, vv. 1971, 2004; Sindhu, v. 18146
of *Vana-parva*, descriptions are there of *Sindurajā* performing *pañcatapa vrata* on *ekādaśa divasa* by way of looking high to the scorching sun after being encircled with fire of scented wood;\(^1\) similarly in *Baghāsura-vadha* and *Gītā-govinda* informations are available of holding *Kātyāyani pūjā* on Puṇṇimā Tithi during the month of *Agnayāna*. There the young maidens observe *Kātyāyani Vrata* by dipping themselves up to the neck in water with the desire of getting *Kṛṣṇa* as husband.\(^2\) It has also been stated that by virtue of yoga even miracles can be performed.\(^3\) From the rituals observed by sage Gautama and from the darsana of *Kṛṣṇa* that *Akrūra* had after he performed 'Māidyāna Sandhyā' (religious ceremony performed at evening) in water, it is understood that the system of regular worshipping of Viṣṇu or Mādhava after performing 'Snāna Sandhyā' was prevalent in society.\(^4\) In the writings of the Vaisnava poets, descriptions of different auspicious functions are found. In *Rāmasarasvati's Ādi-parva*, it has been mentioned that these auspicious functions were held in auspicious moment.\(^5\)

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1. *Sindhu*, vv. 17728-29
2. *Baghā*, v. 9475; *Gītā-g*, vv. 16-17
3. *Kulācala*, vv. 15944, 15947-48
4. *Sabhā*, v. 2292; *Kamsa-n*, p. 473
5. *Ādi*, v. 1741
Popular Beliefs and Superstitions:

Innumerable examples of folk belief or superstitions that were prevailed in the Assamese society from the olden days are available in different books. There is general belief in the society that from some signs noted in dreams or in reality, good or bad results are obtained. As it was in the olden days, descriptions of such folk belief and superstitions are available also in the writings of the Vaisnava poets contemporary to Śaṅkaradeva.

Rāmasarvasvati in his writings has mentioned that during birth of Gāndhārī's son, there were hurricanes; sky was gloomy and overcast; there were frequent lightning and thunderbolts and falling of meteors; and during the birth of the hundred sons, bray of ass, ominous cry of foxes carried the signs of impending calamity to the royal family.\(^1\) The way it is believed that appearance of a comet signifies misfortune for the country, so also the unlucky fellow is termed as the comet (Dhumketu). In Ādi-parva Rāmasarvasvati has termed Kṛṣṇa, the destroyer of hundred sons of Gāndhārī as the comet for the evils.\(^2\) Similarly, in Baghāsura-vadā

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1. Ādi, vv. 1072-79, 3064-65; Sabhā, v. 2880
2. Ādi, v. 1870
Kāvya, Baghāsura and Suraketu have been termed as the 'global comet'. It is believed to be inauspicious for the person or the country if two suns or two moons are sighted in the sky, falling of a comet in front, trembling of the left arm and the left eye, burning of the heart and breathing very fast, shower of turmeric, blood or stones, falling down of trees like Śāl, Tāl, etc., crying of a jackal looking at the face, bray of an ass and caw of crows in the city, entry or birth of Son-gūi (a kind of lizard having golden colour on the back) inside the house, flying and crying of vultures, crows, eagles over the heads of the subjects, the sky clouded with yellow or turmeric coloured

1. Baghā, v. 8940; Yajña, v. 13359
2. Baghā, v. 9844
3. Kulācala, vv. 16498-99; Baghā, v. 10646; Vījaya, v. 6490
4. Baghā, v. 10646; Yajña, v. 13967; Ādi, v. 3064
5. Baghā, vv. 10647, 12427; Yajña, v. 13967; Pu-ha-vana, v. 4189
6. Baghā, v. 12499
7. Baghā, vv. 11552-54; Sindhu, v. 17893; Ādi, v. 3307
8. Ādi, v. 3307
10. Janghā, v. 15583
11. Kulācala, v. 16299; Vījaya, v. 6491
12. Kumara, v. 355; Virāta, vv. 19530-32
cloud,\textsuperscript{1} thundering sound and falling of meteors from the sky without cloud,\textsuperscript{2} etc. On the other hand, just before starting of any purposeful deed or while setting out for war, if empty vessels are observed, if two widows or prostitutes engaged in quarrel are being seen or sighting of crossing of oil vendor or woodcutter with bundles of wood in front, are regarded as signs of ill luck and presumptions of non-fulfilment of objective.

In Ananta Kandali's \textit{Kumara-harana Kāvya} expressions of such ominous signs sighted at the time of King Bāṇa's setting out for war are found.\textsuperscript{3}

When misfortune befalls in human life, he laments for his ill-fate and destiny. "Vidhātā srajileka dukhi kari" (the god created as unfortunate) - with this expression Draupadi remembers deva or god while introducing herself to Durgā devi.\textsuperscript{4} Similarly the Brāhmana wives were almost mad thinking whether they would be able to see Kṛṣṇa or not and lamented as "lekh̄he ki nelekh̄he āmāra kapāle" (whether it is there in our luck or not).\textsuperscript{5} There are mentions of Hemākumari's fate

\begin{itemize}
\item[1.] \textit{Kumara}, v. 355
\item[2.] \textit{Vījaya}, vv. 1490-91
\item[3.] \textit{Kumara}, v. 356
\item[4.] \textit{Baghā}, v. 8585
\item[5.] \textit{Baghā}, v. 9484
\end{itemize}
written on her forehead\(^1\) and King Daśaratha's destiny\(^2\) in Rāmasarasvatī's Aśvakarna-Vadha Kāvyā and Ananta Kandali's Rāmāyana respectively. Such fate and god's decree are mentioned in Janmayātrā drama also.\(^3\) In Kaṁsa-Vadha drama it has been mentioned that nobody can change the course of destiny.\(^4\) The folk-belief in the voice from heaven or oracle is available in different books.

In Baghāsura-Vadha Kāvyā and in Janmayātrā drama, Kaṁsa's attempt to kill Daivakī after hearing the oracle which forecast his death in the hands of the eight son of Daivakī\(^5\) and in Sindhuyātrā\(^6\) the prevention by an oracle of Draupadī's attempt to jump into the fire after hearing the news of death of her husbands are available. Descriptions of such oracles are also available in Yajñaparvā,\(^7\) Sabhā-parvā,\(^8\) Vijaya-parvā,\(^9\) Janghāsura-Vadha,\(^10\) etc.

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1. Aśvakarna, v. 15022
2. Rāmāyana, v. 15022
3. Janmayātrā-n, pp. 396, 406
4. Kaṁsa-n, p. 465
5. Baghā, v. 9452; Janmayātrā-n, p. 395
6. Sindhū, v. 18196
7. Yajña, vv. 13593, 13598
8. Sabhā, v. 2566
9. Vijaya, vv. 6832, 7712
10. Janghā, v. 15742
As in fate, belief in the powers of planets and stars are also observed in the Assamese society. It is believed that the influence of good planet results well-being and the bad or evil planet's influence invites dangers to the life of human being. Examples of faith in such planets and stars are also available in the writings of the Vaiṣṇava poets. It is believed to be auspicious to formally enter a new house on a Thursday during the month of Phālguna. From the ancient time the customs of setting out for journey or starting some work in auspicious moment, days, Tithis or by noting the positions of stars is prevalent in the Assamese society. The Vaiṣṇava poets also mentioned of such folk-belief in their different books. Besides that it has also been cited in different books that the people had faith in holy places, lakes or in holy rivers. The way it was believed that one can obtain salvation by a dip in holy giver, so also in Ananta Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa it was stated that the belief that ones desire is fulfilled if he offers pūjā to a banyan tree (Bāṭa-vṛksa) was in vogue.

1. Baqha. v. 9222; Vijaya. v. 6107
2. Adi. vv. 1531-32
3. Baqha. v. 8772; Virāta. v. 19481; Kumara. v. 121; Ghunucā, v. 2; Sabhā, vv. 2062, 2143; Vijaya. v. 6208
4. Pu-ha-vana. vv. 4494-95; Ādi-vana. v. 3680; Rāmāyaṇa (A), v. 167
5. Rāmāyaṇa (A). v. 533
Peoples deep faith in astrology is expressed by Ananta Kandali in *Kumara-harana* through the episode of the meeting of the astrologer with Kujl.¹

Like Śaṅkaradeva, in the writings of his contemporary poets also, faith in rebirth and that of previous incarnation has been expressed.² It was believed that one could obtain heaven by practicing religion of truth and the corrupted ones were thrown into the hell up to next twenty one generations.³ One who defies royal order never earns merit or peace in his next incarnation. Such is the belief expressed in *Baghāsura-Vadha Kāvyā*.⁴ In the writings of Rāmārasvatī some informations are available about 'jātismara' - the person who can have recollection of his previous life.⁵ On the other hand it was believed that one who does not have a son goes to hell again.⁶

In social life of those days faith in dreams is noticed from the writings of many poets. Lucid illustrations

1. *Kumara*, vv. 275-77
2. *Jarmayātrā-n*, pp. 392, 399, 404
3. *Vijaya*, vv. 6176-80, 6451-53
4. *Baghā*, vv. 9586-87
5. *Mani-Ghosa*, v. 4664
6. *Vijaya*, v. 6080
of such folk belief are available in Ananta Kandali's writings. King Daśaratha had premonitions of impending calamity when he dreamt bad dreams like planting of Palāśa (Bulea frondosa) plant by uprooting Campak flower plant (Michia champoca), seeing aridity all around during blooming season of flower and fruits, earthquake and falling of thunderbolts on earth. To avert this, he had decided to offer the reign to rule the country to son Rāma.¹ The poet gave vivid descriptions of how just before the death of King Daśaratha, son Bharata got terrified by seeing dreams of moon falling out of the orbit to earth, all consuming total solar eclipse, sudden evaporation of the seven seas, eruption of earthquakes, father Daśaratha riding a donkey and moving towards south wearing red clothes, lying with face downward smearing the body with oil, removing paste of sandal (Candana) from the body and using cowdung, getting embraced by an auburn coloured lady while kept sitting on an iron bed wearing a garland of red flowers on head,² etc.

It is believed that dreaming such bad dreams evoke bad and dangerous results in reality.³ In Baghāṣura-Vadha Kāvya Rāmasarasvatī has depicted pictures of such evil dreams.

1. Rāmāyana (A), vv. 83, 598
2. Rāmāyana (A), vv. 660-61
3. Rāmāyana (A), v. 674
In the evil dreams dreamt by Yudhishthira his left arm, left thali and left eyes were trembling frequently and his four brothers standing mum near him wearing garlands of Aur Kusuma (China rose).¹ In Janghāsura-Vadha Kāvyā, Janghāsura was surprised to experience in his dreams of being bitten by snakes while wearing a garland of China rose flower (Aur Kusuma) or seeing himself moving naked massaging oil.² It is believed that dreams like flying of a king in a heavenly vehicle assuming a divine form while his subjects are inundated in water up to their neck³ or when the limbs become immobile due to sudden shivering of the whole body or seeing wearing blood-red clothes or getting encircled or embraced by the deceased one portend evil in reality.⁴

Belief in mantra or in witchcraft is there in Assamese society from ancient time. Mentions of such belief in tantras and mantras are there in different books (granthas).⁵

From the physique, a man is considered to be fortunate or unfortunate. Such folk belief are being mentioned in the

¹. Baghā, vv. 10961-62
². Janghā, v. 15582
³. Kulacala, vv. 17068-69
⁴. Pu-ha-vana, vv. 4508-09
⁵. Adi, vv. 1420-21; Vijaya, vv. 6869, 7201; Baghā, vv. 8765, 9299; Yajñika, v. 140b9; Janghā, v. 15609; Udyoga, v. 20499
writings of the Vaiśnava poets. In Ādi-parva it is told that a person having marks of Cakra and Padma in his palm is like Nārāyaṇa. Similarly in the writings of Rāmasarasvatī special references to like "padmini nārīra śārīrara ghrāṇa bahe" (the body of a padmini lady is aromatic) are indicative of fortunate lady. In the writings of the poet references to citrini, śāṅkhini, padmini, hastini women are also available.

It is believed that one who is having an eunuch at home or the very sight of such a person causes loss of longevity or even portentous. Rāmasarasvatī wrote that birth of such a person brought degradation to the family as well as for the country. On the other hand in Janmayātra-nāt it has been told that at the moment of a noble man's birth, sweet scented air blows, peace prevails in the heart of the noble ones and a peaceful and auspicious atmosphere engulf the whole world.

1. Ādi, v. 294
2. Sabhā, v. 2254
3. Virāta, v. 19520
4. Vijaya, vv. 6096-97, 6112
5. Janmayātra-n, pp. 399-400
E. Fine Arts:

Music and dance;

As in the writings of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, in the writings of Śaṅkaradeva's contemporary poets also, fine arts of the mediaeval era is reflected. To propagate the Vaiṣṇava religion the poets composed pada, bhaṭīmā and nāṭa with the same ideal and objective like Śaṅkaradeva and arranged their stage performance. From different rāgas, tālas, bādyas, etc., expressed in those songs and dramas, it is presumed that in those days classical music was widely practised in Assam. The songs of Aṅkiā-nāṭ of those days are composed on the basis of different rāgas and rāginiś like: Āswārī,1 Belowār,2 Kānāda,3 Dhanaśrī,4 Kāmod,5 Kalyān,6 Vāṭālī,7 Sindhorā,8 Śrī,9 Bhupāli,10 Basanta,11

1. Janmayāṭrā-n, p. 390
2. Uddhava-n, p. 433; Kāmsa-n, p. 481; Syamanta-n, p. 582
4. Uddhava-n, p. 402; Kāmsa-n, p. 492
5. Janmayātrā-n, p. 403
6. Kāmsa-n, p. 494; Janmayātrā-n, p. 404
7. Janmayātrā-n, p. 409
8. Uddhava-n, p. 425
9. Uddhava-n, p. 429
10. Uddhava-n, p. 439
11. Uddhava-n, p. 439
Gauri, Kedar, Mallar, Suhai, etc. Besides such rāgas, in Rāmasarasvatī's Gita-govinda, collection of rāgas like Basanta, Māllava, Gāndhāra, Rāmagiri, Kaivartti, Barāri, Bhairavi, etc., and in Kumara-harana that of Kārnāta, Suhāga, Mālavi, Lalit, Viṣvāga, Maṇju, Maṇjuri, Yogāṇḍhāra, Krauñcakiri, Mahānāṭ, Khāṭa, Hāṅgiri, Mādhami, Devagiri, etc. are found. Moreover from the writings of Rāmasarasvatī one can know the characteristics of different rāgas. Some of his comments are "Māllava is the king of all rāgas, raga Bhairavi is the best of the Rūpak-tāla".

1. Jamnayatrā-n, p. 391; Uddhava-n, p. 442
2. Uddhava-n, p. 428
3. Kaṃsa-n, p. 489
4. Jamnayatrā-n, p. 394; Syāmanta-n, p. 583
5. Gita-Q, vv. 68-70, 277
6. Gita-Q, vv. 11, 107-10
7. Gita-Q, vv. 98, 101
8. Gita-Q, v. 82
9. Gita-Q, v. 112
10. Gita-Q, vv. 216-18
11. Gita-Q, vv. 294-95
12. Kumara, vv. 219-20
13. Gita-Q, v. 113
14. Gita-Q, v. 294
etc. Along with different rāgas, references are there to different tālas and mānas also. Some informations could be gathered from the writings regarding the use of tālas like Eka-tāla, 1 Paritāla, 2 Biṣamtāla, 3 Rūpak, 4 Jauti, 5 Choka, 6 Cantā, 7 etc. From these one can infer that these poets were very conversant with classical music.

Songs and dances are in abundance in Ankīā-nāts. Besides Ankīā-nāts, references to dances in other kāvyas is noteworthy. In Gītā-Govinda, dancing of Padmāvati 8 with the rhythm of music, in Ananta Kandali’s Rāmāyana 9 and Kumāra- harana 10 the richness of dances and songs, in Ghunuca-Kīrtana, dancing and singing of all together with earthen lamp and incense in hand 11 and performance of dances of

1. Kāmsa-n, p. 492; Gītā-g, vv. 98, 113, 159
2. Kāmsa-n, p. 472; Janmayātrā-n, p. 397
3. Kāmsa-n, p. 470
4. Kāmsa-n, p. 481
5. Uddhava-n, p. 433
6. Janmayātrā-n, p. 409
7. Uddhava-n, p. 433
8. Gītā-g, vv. 72, 159-60
9. Rāmāyana (A), vv. 40, 169
10. Kumara, v. 485
11. Ghunuca, vv. 11, 12, 86
natīs (devotional dancers) in temples are being mentioned. Accompaniment of different musical instruments along with dance and songs are narrated in different granthas. The following instruments like Mrdaṅga, Dundubhi, Dobā, Tavalā, Mādal, Dhol, Dhākḍhol, Bherī, Dāmā, Dambaru, Khol, Tāl, Rāmtāl, Kartāl, Bhōrtāl, Mandirā or Khuṭi-tāl, Śāṅkha, Śิงā, Beṇu, Ghantā, Gajaghatā, Knāh, Kāhālī, Maharī, Muraj, Tomar, Vipaṇci, Dotārā, etc. were used. Of these, Dundubhi\(^2\) was considered as special instrument of gods. Rāmasarasvatī has written about playing forty-two types of instruments at the place of yajña\(^3\) and also during the time of bringing the bride out.\(^4\)

In the battle field\(^5\) or when the battle is won,\(^6\) along with victory cry, instruments like, Śāṅkha, Dhāk-dhol, Kāhālī, Maharī, Bherī, etc. were played. Also while starting any auspicious work, five different types of instruments were played. It is written there in Ādi-parva about playing of five different types of instruments while

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1. Ajāmila-n, p. 506
2. Ādi, v. 298; Nṛsiṁha-n, p. 524
3. Ādi, v. 907
4. Ādi, v. 1742
5. Vījaya, vv. 6202, 6204, 6550, 7489; Vīrāta, v. 19608
6. Vījaya, vv. 6851-52; Janghā, v. 15697
formally entering to a new house. It is also there in Ananta Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa that at the coronation function, dancing girls were dancing and singing with the rhythm of five types of instruments. Dances and songs are very much part in festivals. From Ajāmila-Upākhyāṇa drama, it is learnt that the whores or dancers (Naṭī) were singing and dancing in the temples.

Painting, Sculpture, Architecture:

In the writings of Śaṅkaradeva's contemporary poets, beautiful descriptions of paintings, sculptures and architectures are found. The portrait of humble Assamese house is reflected from observing the utilization of house building materials such as Kāthi, Kāmi, Ruā (house building material of bamboo), etc. and also from the following few words - "gaura varṇa māṭī, pāṇi, sītā sati lipilanta nija

1. Ādi, v. 1533
2. Rāmāyaṇa (A), v. 169
3. Ghunucā, vv. 9, 11, 12, 86; Kumara, vv. 485-86; Yajña, v. 13172; Ādi, v. 8758; Sindhu, v. 17722
4. Ajāmila-n, p. 506
5. Ādi, v. 1095
6. Sabhā, v. 2715
7. Asvākarna, vv. 14953-55
hāte"¹ (bringing white coloured mud, satī Sītā plastered the walls with her own hands). In the descriptions given in those books, informations of having small round window nets in the houses are available.² Before entering into a new dwelling house, it is customary to offer pūjā to the gods.³ On the other hand with the beautiful picture described about hātīsālā (elephant rearing place), ghorāsālā (horse rearing place), pāṇīsālā,⁴ nrtyāsālā (dancing court),⁵ bharālghar (store house),⁶ bhojangrha (dinning house),⁷ antespura (ladies bed room),⁸ etc., help to provide a vivid picture of ancient Assamese life.

Temples were built for worshipping one's own deity and instances of worshipping in those sacred premises are available in Vijaya-parva and in the Third book of Bhāgavata.⁹

1. Rāmāyana (A), v. 553
2. Kumāra, v. 176; Rāmāyana (A), vv. 37, 177
3. Rāmāyana (A), v. 554
4. Yajña, vv. 13122-24
5. Virāta, v. 19138
6. Yajña, v. 13124; Pu-ha-vana, vv. 4110-11
7. Ādi-Vana, v. 3771
8. Vijaya, v. 7047; Mani-Ghosa, v. 5158
9. Vijaya, v. 6092; Bh. III, v. 70; Uddhava-n, p. 426
Besides these, in different writings various aspects of constructions like phatikar grha\(^1\) (crystal house), louhamai grha (iron house),\(^2\) beautiful house fitted with golden sticks\(^3\) were mentioned.

Constructional aspects of the cities were described as follows - immediately after the main gateway,\(^4\) the boundary of the cities were first guarded by wide stockade of crystal or kaṣati stone,\(^5\) or fire followed by fortified trench.\(^6\) Within the cities there were temples, pandals, ponds and roads.\(^7\)

In the writings of the Vaiṣṇava poets descriptions of Yajñagṛha\(^8\) or hamghar, decoration of the court for dice game,\(^9\) construction of high arena for wrestling,\(^10\)

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1. Mani-Ghosa, vv. 4716-21
2. Kumara, v. 189
3. Ādi, v. 1095
4. Viśvāi, v. 6208
5. Mani-Ghosa, vv. 5450-51; Viśvāi, v. 6089; Yajña, v. 12979
6. Kumara, v. 37
7. Rāmāyana, vv. 776-77
8. Yajña, vv. 13120-21; Ādi, vv. 251, 899-901
10. Kamsa-n, p. 492; Baghā, 9512
construction of meeting premises for assembly of more than a lakh of kings\(^1\) are also found. Again references to the uses of ratha-bimāna (chariot),\(^2\) Hemamaya ratna singhāsana (gold and jewel studded throne),\(^3\) decorated golden seat with cushions,\(^4\) golden bed,\(^5\) bed decorated with gold studded ivory,\(^6\) etc. give some glimpses of cultural life of those days.

From different writings it is understood that in those days, drawing and paintings were cultured in Assam. For instance, in Ananta Kandali's <i>Āyodhya Kānda Rāmāyaṇa</i>, alongwith beautiful description of Rāma's house, there is also description of the heṅgul (vermilion colour) touch on the ivory wall,\(^7\) designs of different dolls on the wall,\(^8\) Lākṣmī's husband Kṛṣṇa riding over Garuḍa (a sacred bird) holding Kamalā or Lākṣmī by the right arm and Sarasvatī by the left, picture of four headed Nārāyaṇa with yellow dress,

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1. <i>Ādi</i>, v. 3
2. <i>Ādi</i>, v. 758; <i>Rāmāyaṇa (A)</i>, v. 190; <i>Vījaya</i>, v. 7262; <i>Uddhava-n</i>, p. 440
3. <i>Rāmāyaṇa (A)</i>, v. 166; <i>Mani-Ghosa</i>, v. 4834
4. <i>Rāmāyaṇa (A)</i>, v. 71; <i>Uddhava-n</i>, p. 426; <i>Bh. III</i>, v. 1198; <i>Virāṭa</i>, v. 18985
5. <i>Rāmāyaṇa (A)</i>, v. 192; <i>Uddhava-n</i>, p. 435; <i>Virāṭa</i>, v. 19043
6. <i>Bh. III</i>, v. 1197
7. <i>Rāmāyaṇa (A)</i>, v. 177
8. <i>Rāmāyaṇa (A)</i>, v. 179
crown on the head, Kuṇḍala (earring) in the ear, Vanamālā (garland of wild flowers) on the neck and decorated with all types of decorative dresses and along with different gods and goddesses the imaginary picture of entire Vaikuntha.¹ Pictures of Kalpataru in the jungles and saint chanting god's glory by playing Tāl, Mṛdaṅga (musical instrument) were also drawn.²

With portraits of Śiva embracing Pārvatī on the vrśava, Kārtika on the peacock, Gaṇapati on the rat and Nandi-Bhrṛṅgī with ghosts gave the picture of imagination³ of Kailāśa (the abode of Śiva). In different places of the walls of houses, portraits of four headed Brahmā, goat-headed Dakṣaṇa, sages like Atri, Āṅgirā, etc. and Nārada with Vīṇā (an Indian musical instrument with string) were also drawn.

In some houses portraits of Viṣṇu's Bāmana (dwarf) avatāra, Ananta Nāga with different snakes, images of various demons and devils were drawn.⁴ In the Third Book of Bhāgavata descriptions of portraits of ladies with jewel

¹. Rāmāyana (A), v. 181
². Rāmāyana (A), v. 181
³. Rāmāyana (A), v. 182
⁴. Rāmāyana (A), vv. 183-86
studded lamps on the house walls are available.\textsuperscript{1} Besides that, golden ghaṭas (holy pots) decorated with fruits and leaves were placed at the doors.\textsuperscript{2} Similarly in the writings of Gopālacaraṇa Dvīja, mentions regarding the use of the symbol of umbrella on the Mādhava temple is also found.\textsuperscript{3} Citralekhā's drawing of portraits as mentioned in Ananta Kandali's \textit{Kumara-harana} Kāvya and establishment of Vāsudeva, Brahmrā and Mahesvaṇa's idols and worshipping these with areca-nut preparations as narrated in \textit{Sabhā-parva} and references to sixty four varieties of arts and cultures give hints of the in-depth study of art and cultures in Assam in those days.

Śaṅkaradeva's contemporary poets were influenced with the ideals of both the gurus and stressed in propagating and expanding the Vaiṣṇava religion through

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{Bh. III}, v. 1198
\item \textit{Rāmāyana} (A), v. 188
\item \textit{Bh. III}, v. 70
\item \textit{Kumara}, vv. 90-106
\item \textit{Sabhā}, v. 2520
\item \textit{Yajña}, v. 13061
\end{enumerate}
Ankia-nāṭ. Many dramas written by some of the poets of that period has enriched the Assamese literature. To stage these dramas, besides the art of acting, dresses, ornaments, musks, drawing of scenes, etc. required for the dramas reveal the cultural dimension of Assam at that time.

1. Gopāla Ātā, Janma-vāтра and Uddhava-Sāmvāḍa; Rāmacarana Thākura, Kamsa-Vadha; Dwija Bhūṣana, Ajāmila-Upākhyāṇa.