Chapter III

Culture as Reflected in Pre-Śaṅkaradeva Literature

It has already been noted that the Assamese poets of the pre-Śaṅkaradeva period were Mādhava Kandali, Harivāra Vipra, Hema Sarasvati, Kaviratna Sarasvati and probably Rudra Kandali. The books composed by these poets were Mādhava Kandali’s Rāmāyaṇa (Ayodhya, Aranya, Kīśkindha, Sundara and Lankā cantos); Harivāra Vipra’s Lava-Kuśar Yuddha, Babruvāhanar Yuddha and Tāmradhvajār Yuddha; Hema Sarasvati’s Prahlāda Carita; Kaviratna Sarasvati’s Jayadratha Vadhā and Rudra Kandali’s Sātyaki Praveśa.

A. Social Life : People and Social Conditions:

We come across various pictures of the Assamese society in the writings of these poets. These books carry references to various castes, like the Brāhmaṇas, the Kṣatriyas, the Śūdras, the Hāris, the Dhobās living in the Assam of those days. Usually, the Brāhmaṇas and the Kṣatriyas were accorded higher status. Rāma performed the Aśvamedha Yajña as a form of penance for his act of killing Rāvana, the son of a Brāhmaṇa.¹ The killing of a Brāhmaṇa

¹. Lava, vv. 167-72
was regarded as a grave sin. Rāma has praised the Brāhmaṇas as the highest caste. In another context, too, the poet is found to eulogise the Brāhmaṇas as the highest of all castes. In Kaviratna Sarasvatī's Mahābhārata, too, it is indicated that the Brāhmaṇas are worthy to be worshipped by the others. Mādhava Kandali notes in the Aranya Kānda of his version of the Rāmāyana that Rāma has offered obeissence to the dvijas or Brāhmaṇas, besides the gods and the guru. Mādhava Kandali describes Hanumān in the garb of a Brāhmaṇa in these words: he carries a flower-vessel (karaṇi), kuśa-grasses, an umbrella and a cluster of yak's tail hair (chawar) in his hand. His hair is grey and dry as śan threads. He carries the sacred thread on his shoulder and puts on a dhoti. He moves forward supporting himself on a stick. He is well versed in the Vedas. He observes the tithi of ekādaśī. From the descriptions found in Rudra Kandali's poetic work, Sātyaki Pravesa, we have this information about the Brāhmaṇical customs and rites that the Brāhmaṇa meditates and studies the Purāṇas, the Samhitā and the four Vedas. The

1. Lava, v. 6
2. Lava, v. 204
3. Cāneki, p. 324
4. Rāmā, v. 3033
5. Rāmā, vv. 4346-49
Brāhmaṇa must follow the ideal of non-violence as his religious creed. The Brāhmaṇa is destined to go to heaven by the piety of his recital and meditation and, if necessary, he may also turn someone into ashes with his curse. To offer blessings is also a part of a Brāhmaṇa's religious duty. Several books carry references to this. On their return from Lanka, when Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and others offer obeisance to Vaśiṣṭha and the other Brāhmaṇas, the latter bless them with the words "May you live long with your near ones" (sakutumbe ciraṇālva hauka). The Brāhmaṇas were also accepted as 'kulaguru' (family priest). References to the Brāhmaṇas offering blessings to Rāma and others on their return to Ayodhyā are also found in Mādhava Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa and Harivara Vipra's Lava-Kuśar Yuddha.

Referring to the Kṣatriyas, Mādhava Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa eulogizes them as a heroic race. The art of stealing does not befit them. In the Aranya-kāṇḍa Virādha rakṣasa on seeing Sitā in the company of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, chides them on a false pretext of kidnapping another's woman despite being Kṣatriyas.

1. Cānekī, p. 145
2. Lava, v. 7
3. Rāmā, v. 1503
4. Lava, vv. 6, 7
5. Rāmā, v. 2695
There were learned and pious persons among the Kṣatriyas. There are references to various gotras according to which the people were classified. In Babruvāhanar Yuddha it has been mentioned that committing murders within the gotra or engaging in violent clashes within a gotra is a sin. It has also been mentioned how the Pāṇḍavas had to do penance for such acts by performing Aśvamedha Yajña. Mādhava Kandali has mentioned various castes or professional classes such as Hārī, Śaṅkhāri, Naṭa, Thāthāri, Parikara, Candāla, etc. People belonging to the Hārī caste were regarded as low caste and unworthy of reading the Vedas. As at present, the kings or other persons had their kula-purohita or family priests. Vasiṣṭha was the family priest of Rāmacandra. On the basis of Mādhava Kandali's descriptions, it can be deduced that people belonging to the following castes or professions were in existence in Assam in those days: Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, Kāyasthas, Naṭa, Bhāta, Tell, Tāntī, Thāthāri (makers of metallic vessels), Sonārī (goldsmith), Kamār (blacksmith), Śaṅkhāri (artisans who made things of conch shells), Baniyā, Chamār, Sūtār (carpenters), Dhobā

1. Cāneki, p. 324
2. Babru, v. 1
3. Rāmā, v. 3244
4. Rāmā, vv. 3171, 3244
5. Rāmā, v. 2381
(washermen) and Kumār (potter). 1 In Lavakuśār Yuddha also we find mention about such professional classes. Persons belonging to the classes of Naṭa or Naṭini or Rāṇḍi were looked down upon in the society. In Ayodhyā kāṇḍa, Bharata chides Kaikeyi as Rāṇḍi because of her role in banishing Rāma to the forests. 2 In Aranyakāṇḍa, Rāma abuses Rāvaṇa as a "Naṭa kidnapping a woman" (tirīcor Naṭa) in the presence of Jatāyu. 3 Harivara Vipra also uses the term Naṭa as a taunting word on several occasions in a derogatory sense. The term mleccha also occurs at several places. The term mlecchas indicated probably non-Aryans. In Rudra Kandali's Sātyaki Praveśa it has been stated that Dronācāryya 'picked up good mleccha soldiers' and pursued Sātyaki. 4

1. Rāmā, v. 2382; Lava, v. 16
   ksatri vaiṣyaṇa  kāyaṣṭha sajjana
   naṭa bhāṭa tell tantī
   ṭhāṭhāri sonāri  kamār sāṅkhāri
   bharatara lage jānti
   baniyā camār  kamār sūṭār
   dhobā āru kumbhakāra
   isaba pramukhye  chalilā jateka
   ādi anta nāhi tāra.
   (Rāmā)

2. Rāmā, v. 2278

3. Babru, vv. 81, 83

4. Cānecki, p. 134
The society of those days had the system of keeping servants, male and female. The maid servants and ill-fated women were called cerl (Skt. Chetikā). A woman rejected by her husband had no place in the society. Fallen women were known as rāṇḍī and sometimes the term rāṇḍī was used as a term of abuse. Harivara Vipra, too, uses the term veiśyā in a derogatory sense.

Harivara Vipra by using the term Vaiśya to refer to a lower caste denotes the Vaiśyas to a position inferior to the Kṣatriyas. In Lava-Kuśar Yuddha, there is the reference to the profession of dhobā or washerman. Harivara Vipra has mentioned that the washerman used to clean others’ clothes by using alkali (khār). The washerman had a low position in the society.

System of Marriage:

We have references to eight different systems of marriage in those days in the Hindu society such as brāhma,

1. Rāmā, v. 2294
2. Rāmā, v. 2810
3. Rāmā, v. 2278
4. Babru, v. 86
5. Babru, v. 76
6. Babru, v. 78
7. Lava, v. 58
8. Lava, v. 61
9. Lava, vv. 70, 72
daiva, ārṣa, prājāpatya, gāndharva, rākṣasa, āsura and paisāca. We get references to some of these in the books under our study. Secondly, there was the system of svayamvara in ancient days. According to this system, kings and princes of other countries assemble together in a country to marry some princess. Whomever princess selects out of the assembly of kings and princes, is garlanded by her and accepted as husband. Sometimes again the would-be husbands among the kings and princes have to display their prowess or skill and the one who is proved to be the best in his prowess or skill among the candidates wins the hand of the princess. This has been illustrated in the Rāmāyana. Rāmacandra could marry Sitā only when he could break Hara's bow.¹

From descriptions in the Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, it is learnt that while Rāma and Sitā together with others were on their way back from Mithilā, the subjects decorated the town by planting banana trees on the roads and hoisting flags. They were received by people blowing conch-shells and playing drums, bells, etc. Rāma and Sitā were ceremoniously received into the household by Kaikeyī and other women. Queen Kauśalyā placed golden pots in the house and accorded welcome to them with the assistance of other women.²

1. Rāmā, v. 1495
2. (a) Rāmā, vv. 102-03
   (b) thāpilanta grhata suvarṇamay ghaṭa
       kanyāsabe pārila bātata neṭapata
       āponāra ācāra karilā nārīgane
       daśaratha thita bhailā sahariṣamane. (1512)
The system of offering dowry in marriage is not yet obsolete in Assamese society. In the Rāmāyāna also there is reference to dowry being offered to Rāma and Sītā. Besides offering gold and other property, parents would also offer one or more maids as part of the dowry. In the Rāmāyāna, it is mentioned that Mantharā was offered as maid to Kaikēyī.

There are also references to the system of polygamy in the society. King Daśaratha, besides having Kauśalyā, Kaikeyī and Sumitraw as his queens, married six hundred other women. In the Aranyā Kanda it has been mentioned that King Janaka had several major consorts. In Babruvāhanar Yuddha also we have reference to this from the characters of Citrāṅgadā and Ulupī who were Arjuna's wives.

Sacramental Rites (daśakarma):

In the Hindu society there is the prevalence of ten different ceremonial practices such as garbhādhāna, simantonnayana, pumsavāna, jātakarṇa, cuḍākarṇa, upanayana, vivāha, etc. On vivāha we have already discussed above. In

1. Rāmā, v. 1508
2. Rāmā, v. 1575
3. Rāmā, v. 1514
4. Rāmā, v. 2654
5. Babru, v. 357
the books under reference we also come across mentions of the remaining ceremonial practices.

In Harivara Vipra's *Lava-Kuśar Yuddha* we find a detailed description of the puṁsavana ceremony of Rāma and Sītā. In the same book, there is a reference to Vālmīki performing the bālya-saṁskāras of Lava-kuśa in the āśrama. In our society there is the system of ṭīkani-dhara of the bridegroom and the bride. Harivara Vipra mentions this system in *Lava-Kuśar Yuddha* in connection with the puṁsavana ceremony of Sītā.

System of Education:

In ancient Aryan society education was imparted through the gurukula system. This meant that the disciple or student, be he the son of a king or a poor commoner, would have to stay in the guru's household and acquire his education. In Hema Sarasvatī's *Prahlāda Carita* we find reference to this. When Prahlāda, son of Hiraṇyakaśipu, the king of demons, had attained the age for receiving education, his father sent him to the house of Sanda and Amarka, sons of guru Śukrācārya, and thereby arranged for his studies.

1. *Lava*, vv. 25-43
2. *Lava*, v. 165
3. *Lava*, v. 41
Sanda and Amarka tried to teach Prahlāda the Vāmāṇaya-śāstra.¹

Usually, persons belonging to the community of Asuras or those who did not follow the Vedic rites would attach importance to studying the Vāmāṇaya-śāstra. That was why Hiranyakaśipu asked his son to read the Vāmāṇaya-śāstra with due attention: vāmāṇaya śāstraka parhio bhāla kari.²

On the basis of Kaviratna Sarasvatī's Drona Parva it is learnt that in those days studies were made of the fourteen śāstras, the four Vedas, Vedānta, Kāvyā, Kośa, Purāṇa, Mahābhārata, nāṭaka, tarka-śāstra, etc. The guru would teach his disciple 'in a drawling voice' (dirgha rāwe).³ In Kandali's version of the Rāmāyaṇa, Rāvana has been described as well versed in the fourteen śāstras and an adept in political science.⁴

Aspects of Social Life:

In the literary works of the period under study we come across references to many social customs and manners

¹ Cāneki, p. 150
² Cāneki, p. 151
³ Cāneki, p. 321
⁴ Rāmā, v. 1434
prevalent since ancient times. Mādhava Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa has it that gods and the Brāhmaṇas as well as the guru must be respected with due humility. The son should obey the father's will and women should be faithful to their husbands. In case of marriage, a girl or a boy coming of a respectable family was preferred by both the bridegroom's and the bride's guardians. In the Rāmāyaṇa, Sītā has been described as a bride belonging to an unblemished lineage.

The practice of bribery was prevalent in the society in those days. Mādhava Kandali mentions this in his Rāmāyaṇa. A person guilty of accepting bribes was denounced by the society. For a woman, the husband was the supreme guru. The wife was expected to serve and attend to her husband to the best of her abilities. In Mādhava Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa, it has been mentioned that while Rāma lay on the gold-made bedstead, Sītā would sit by him and fan him with a white yak's tail whisk. Women look upon their husband as gods. Kaikeyī addresses King Daśaratha as 'gosāin' (the divine one). The Rāmāyaṇa mentions that there was a belief that women would

1. Rāmā, v. 3033
2. Rāmā, v. 4147
3. Rāmā, v. 3244
4. Rāmā, v. 1653
5. Rāmā, vv. 1615, 3078, 3106
attain to heaven and salvation through their devotion to husbands. A woman devoted to her husband was highly esteemed, by the society. It has been mentioned that Śītā was offered thirty-two varieties of ornaments (batriśa alamkāra) as a symbol of love and regards by Anasūyā, the sage's wife. Simultaneously, Anasūyā blessed her with the words - "Let your vermilion mark and sandalwood paste remain forever" (śindura chandana tora nugucoka āra).

In Assamese society whenever someone leaves for some other place or goes out of the house, he has a word with the other inmates. Such a practice has also been mentioned in Mādhava Kandali's Rāmāyana.

Hospitality, is a part of the ancient Indian tradition. A guest is treated like Nārāyaṇa incarnate. In the Rāmāyana we find reference to Rāma and Śītā being entertained as guests, by Anasūyā, wife of the sage Atri. A woman would not desist from jumping into fire or starting her neck with a knife to mourn the loss of her husband.

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1. Rāma, vv. 2641-44
2. Rāma, v. 2646
3. Rāma, v. 1656
4. Rāma, v. 2636
5. Rāma, v. 3106
Polygamy was allowed in the society of yore and the Rāmāyaṇa contains several references to the fact of a stepmother's malicious feeling towards a step-son. In Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa it is remarked that the sons of a concubine cannot be trusted¹ and that a woman sometimes creates dissension among the brothers.²

It is a part of Assamese social norms that a younger brother should respect an elder brother. This has been illustrated on several occasions by the reverence shown to Rāma by his younger brothers Bharata, Lakṣmaṇa and Satrughna. Lakṣmaṇa looked upon Rāma as a god.³ Bharata ruled over the kingdom by placing Rāma's wooden sandals on the throne as a symbol.⁴

In those days, arts such as killing a Brāhmaṇa, drinking wine, stealing a Brāhmaṇa's gold, committing incests, disobeying the master by a servant, etc. were regarded as sins by the society.⁵

It is mentioned in the Rāmāyaṇa by Kandali that the practice of cursing was in vogue in the society in those days,

1. Rāma, v. 3105
2. Rāma, v. 3109
3. Rāma, v. 3108
4. Rāma, v. 2588
5. Rāma, vv. 2583-84
but such a practice was also regarded as an act of impiety. Similarly, the society also believed in the system of divine blessings or blessings from the Brāhmaṇa and the guru. Rāvana became invincible through the blessings of Brahmā. In Hema Sarasvati's Prahlāda Carita, there is a reference to Prahlāda being blessed by Viṣṇu.

The society attached importance to public scandal. Those males who could have their way with women were condemned by the society. This has been mentioned in the Rāmāyana.

In Harivara Vipra's writings we find that the social system banned acts of patricide and matricide, which were considered as great sins. Women were expected to shun all other thoughts except that of serving their husbands. Killing of one's relatives was regarded as a sinful act and, we are told, the Pāṇḍavas performed aśvamedha yajña to expiate for such a sin. In times of adversity or crisis, a friend

1. Rāmā, v. 3281
2. Rāmā, vv. 1596, 1612, 3150
3. Cāneki, p. 156
4. Rāmā, vv. 1627-28
5. Babru, vv. 385-86; Rāmā, v. 2446
6. Babru, v. 3
7. Babru, v. 3
was expected to come to the rescue of a friend.\textsuperscript{1} Mention is also found of the prevailing social custom of hospitality in *Babruvāhanar Yuddha.*\textsuperscript{2}

The society expected that one should repay an act of kindness or service with similar act or service, otherwise one would be treated as guilty of a lapse. This has been illustrated in Rudra Kandali's *Sātyaki Pravesā.*\textsuperscript{3}

The society also had another notable custom: a married girl should not remain in her parents' house. This has been particularly indicated in Harivara Vipra's *Lava-Kusār Yuddhā.*\textsuperscript{4}

Games and Sports:

The literary works under our study point to the prevalence of various forms of games and sports as a source of pleasure and entertainment to the society. For instance, in the *Sundarā Kānda* of Kandali's *Rāmāyaṇa* we come across descriptions of various games played by the rākṣasas of Laṅkā.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{1. Babru, v. 114}
\item \textbf{2. Babru, vv. 575-78}
\item \textbf{3. Čāneki, p. 141}
\item \textbf{4. Lava, vv. 63, 67}
\end{itemize}
These games were prevalent in Assam at one time and these are still in existence in some places. These games are - ghilā, bhanṭā, jhunti, dhop, gambling, pāśā, Mālyuj, deliyuj, luni, guwāl-guwālī, etc. Similarly, while describing Bāli's physical prowess, the poet has referred to the game of dhop.

Social ethics:

In those days, the society attached great importance to man's moral character. Criminals like thieves, dacoits were looked down upon by the society. Persons guilty of kidnapping women were also viewed with contempt by the society. In Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa, Sītā condemns Rāvana, the kidnapper of women, as sinner, lowly and barbaric as well as "hārīr āuthā khāhā" (eater of the left-overs of a scavenger). In another instance we find that Sītā misunderstood the purpose of Laksmana when the latter refused to go out to help Rāma and rebuked as taking bribes from Bharata and trying to go upon her.

Similarly, indications that an absconder or bhāṅg (gāñjā) addict was held in low esteem by the society are found

1. Rāmā, vv. 4100-01
2. Rāmā, vv. 3178, 4202
3. Rāmā, v. 3244
4. Rāmā, v. 3104
in Hema Sarasvatī's Prahlāda Carita. The same book also mentions at several places the habit of abusing or chiding a person one dislikes. In Hema Sarasvatī's Prahlāda Carita Hiranyakasipu tells Prahlāda that if the latter abuses Viṣṇu or Mādhava instead of reciting his name with reverence, the king would hand over the kingdom to him. Again, Hiranyakasipu chides Prahlāda with the words "a comet is born to my family" (mohora vaṃśata upajila dhumketu) as the latter has become a devotee of Hari instead of obeying his father. In Kandali's version of the Rāmāyana, Sītā chides Rāvana on several occasions. Similarly, Rāvana, too, takes her to task with abusive words like pāpiṣṭhi (the sinning woman), durjanī (the bad one), etc. and vents his anger upon her with express wins like "cawarar cote tora sāriero dānta" (I'll remove your teeth with a slap).

B. Political matters:

Just as the society comprised people of various castes or ethnic groups, similarly there were various persons

1. Čāneki, p. 159
2. Čāneki, p. 160
3. Čāneki, p. 154
4. Rāmā, vv. 4200, 4206
5. Rāmā, vv. 3178, 4202
holding different status or subscribing to various professions or avocations as revealed in the literary works, of the period under study. The king held the supreme position in the country. His responsibilities consisted as much of administering the country and bringing the guilty to book as of providing shelter to the shelterless and ensuring the welfare of the subjects. To illustrate, we may refer to Rāma's obligations as mentioned in Lava-Kusār Yuddha. Rāma banished Sītā for the sake of the welfare of his subjects.¹ The king paid due respects to the Brāhmaṇa. The king was devoted to Lord Viṣṇu or a servant of goddess Mahāmāyā and he took care of the subjects like his sons.² The kings were pious, liberal and munificent.³ In those days, the king's son was made the heir-apparent or Yuvarāja.⁴ The term Yuvarāja occurs in several works under our study.⁵ The prince becomes the king and he reigns over the kingdom by hereditary rights. Only the sons or grandsons of the king inherit the royal authority to rule over the kingdom, and such authority is denied to brothers or other relations. This point has been clearly stated before Kaikeyī by Mantharā in the context

1. Lava, vv. 29, 99
2. Caneki, p. 147
3. Caneki, p. 324
4. Rāmā, v. 1658
5. Caneki, p. 137; Rāmā, vv. 1540, 1736
of the talks about Bharata becoming the king. While a prince was crowned king, a ceremonial function was organised. The coronation is arranged at an auspicious moment. On the day preceding the ceremony, adhivāsa or dress ceremony is held. The occasion was accompanied by recitations of the Vedic hymns, offerings made to the ceremonial fire, etc. Adorned with various ornaments and carrying flowers, scented sticks, flags in their hands, the subjects would express their joy by dancing and singing. King Daśaratha tells Rāma about the qualities of a king that the king must pay attention to the six virtues of sandhi, vigraha, āsana, dvaidha, sakhya and yāna. Besides, the king must think of the welfare of the subjects. He must be able to look upon them with an equal eye without discrimination. On the day of adhivāsa, women performed auspicious rituals (strī-ācāra) praying for the wellbeing of Rāma and Sītā. The sage Vaśiṣṭha recited the Vedic hymns and made numerous offerings to fire and performed the dressing ceremony of Rāma. On that day Rāma lay on a mat of Kuśa-grass in a devagṛha. At dawn he put on ornaments and worshipped Hari.

1. Rāmā, v. 1585
2. Rāmā, vv. 1530-67
3. Rāmā, v. 1555
4. Rāmā, vv. 1540-42
5. Rāmā, vv. 1555-62
6. Rāmā, vv. 1555-62
Each king had several vassals under him. A king with several vassals under him was called Rājacakravartī and the vassals were known as sāmarāja. ¹

It is interesting to note that Mādhava Kandali, while giving the names of the officials under Rāma mentions Sandhikai, ² which was the name of a clan of the Āhom royal families.

The descriptions of a royal palace seem to present a picture of the house-hold of an affluent Assamese family. There are mentions of typically Assamese house building materials such as bamboo products like kāmi, ruwā, mārāli, khutā, etc. in Mādhava Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa and Harivara Vipra's Babruvāhanar Yuddha. ³ In the latter, we come across a fine description of the royal court of Manpur. ⁴

In all the books under study we find graphic descriptions of armour, armoury and the modes of conducting of battles.

1. Babru, v. 561
2. Rāmā, v. 2209
3. Rāmā, vv. 1641-45; Babru, vv. 25-27
4. Babru, vv. 25-31
In the Rāmaṇa, there are references of cavalry as well.1

The weapons used in battles are: narāca,2 sātāghni,3 candrahāsa,4 trikaṇṭaka,5 parigha,6 prāśaka,7 aṅkuśa,8 belakha,9 mudgara,10 Sālyaka,11 siddhasāra,12 dhanu,13 muṣala,14 nāgpāśa,15 khāṅḍa,16 khadga,17 agnisāra,18 nidrāvāṇa,19 yāṭhi-jong,20 etc. Besides these one comes across references to weapons like trisūla, vajra, gadā, tāngi, paraśu, etc., and kavaca21 was also used in warfare.

The kings would perform asvamedha-yajña as a means of expiation for such sins as killing of relatives or Brāhmaṇas or to demonstrate their powers. We have instances of this in Babruvāhanar Yuddha and Lava-Kuśar Yuddha. In Babruvāhanar

11. Rāma, v. 4399
Yuddha we are told that Yudhiṣṭhira regarded the killing of relatives as a sin and began performing aśvamedha-yajña, as a form of expiation.¹ In Lava-Kuśar Yuddha, it is noted that Rāma performed aśvamedha yajña to expiate for the slaughtering of Rāvana a Brāhmaṇa's son.² In Tāmradhvajār Yuddha we come to know that the king of Vāṇpura, Mayūradhvaja performed the aśvamedha yajña for six times and on the seventh occasion he set at large the horse of the aśvamedha. Before the horse is let loose, its forehead is adorned with a golden leaf. On that leaf is recorded the name of the king who owns the horse. The monarch of the kingdom across which the horse passes has either to owe allegiance to the king performing the aśvamedha or he has to fight the king's soldiers who follow the horse after catching hold of the horse. If the horse returns to the venue of performance of the yajña, the yajña is deserved as successfully performed, otherwise the aśvamedha yajña fails.³

On the conclusion of the yajña, it was imperative to perform an auspicious bath called avabhṛtha and only the women with husbands could perform this. The yajña was also followed

1. Babru, v. 1
2. Lava, vv. 169-70
3. Tāmra, v. 168
by acts of charity.¹

In order to perform the aśvamedha yajña, it was necessary to observe a difficult vrata or pledge called asipatra. We have reference to this vrata being observed by Rāma in Lava-Kuśar Yuddha.²

C. Economic Conditions:

Agriculture, Trade:

The literary works under our study do not provide any systematic account of the economic conditions of those days. Of course, on the basis of references made in other sources to various trades or professional names such as teli (manufacturer of edible oil), tānti (handloom weaver), sonāri (goldsmith), kamār (blacksmith), baniyā (trader), camār (shoemaker), kasār (bell-metal artisan), sūtār (carpenter), dhobā (washerwoman), kumbhakār (potter), etc., we can presume that such trades were prevalent in Assam during the fourteenth-fifteenth centuries.³ People used to earn their livelihood from such trades. Kandali mentions “potter’s wheel” in his

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¹ Babru, v. 218-19
² Lava, vv. 173-79
³ Rāmā, v. 2382
version of the Rāmāyaṇa.1 The poor would also work as servants or maid servants. The maid servant was called cerī.2

In Kathā-guru-carīta we are told that Sāṅkaradeva's forefather Supanthagiri had got the blessings of Lakṣmī, the goddess of wealth, in riches, paddy, servants, cattle and men (dhane-dhāne grāme dāsa-dāsi go-mohe jane acalā Lakṣmī).3

Agriculture was the main source of livelihood for the people in general. The means of agriculture was ploughing the fields. From the Rāmāyaṇa we find that even the king also ploughed land. In Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa it has been mentioned that Sītā was born out of the furrows while King Janaka was ploughing the field, and hence the girl was named Sītā.4 Cattle were used for the purposes of ploughing. In Mādhava Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa we come across a simile like 'maribāka lāgi kene bāghe hāl bāi' (For fear of death, even the tiger ploughs the land).

From Harivara Vīpa's Lava-Kusār Yuddhā we learn that there were beggars and poor people in those days and that they managed to live by begging.5 In Rāmāyaṇa, too, we are told

1. Rāmā, v. 4385
2. Rāmā, vv. 1575, 2294
3. KGC, p. 4
4. Rāmā, v. 2653
5. Lava, v. 11
that Rāvaṇa assumed the garb of a beggar and met Sītā. A reference in Kandali’s Rāmāyaṇa also suggests that fishing rod (Barasī) was in use in those days. Harivara Vipra’s Lava-Kusar Yuddha carries a reference to the practice of rearing and milking the cows.

Food and drinks:

The descriptions of varieties of food used in ancient Assam have found beautiful expressions in the literary works under our study.

The Kandali Rāmāyaṇa mentions different kinds of food-items and fruits. Among varieties of fruits, mention has been made of madhuphala or amitā (pāpaya), kalmau, tiyāh (cucumber), mango, black-berries, jackfruit, banana of dasanaiyā variety as food in the Madhuvana. The Rāmāyaṇa also refers to Silikhā (a species of myrobalan) and dālim (pomegranate) at several places. Hanumān is said to have

1. Rāmā, v. 3116
2. Rāmā, v. 3116
3. Lava, v. 210
4. Rāmā, vv. 4352-53
5. Rāmā, v. 4174
6. Rāmā, v. 3124
told Sītā that Rāmā use to have a diet of fruits for one day every year. Also, mention has been made of such indigenous fruits as paniyal, cocoanut, orange, mahari, śṛipala, etc.

Among other items of food, we find reference to pāyasa (a preparation of rice boiled in milk with sweeteners). This was regarded as a choice item of food in those days. Kandali in his version of the Rāmāyaṇa has noted that the women kidnapped by the Laṅkā king Rāvaṇa used to eat pāyasa.

Drinking of wine was in vogue in those days. The Rāmāyaṇa mentions on several occasions the Rākṣasas' habit of drinking wine.

The Assamese habit of taking sōkotā (dried jute leaves) is still in vogue. It is bitter in taste. Mādhava Kandali has expressed this by using a simile: "śukutāka khāibo kene amṛta tejiyā" (Why should I taste the bitterness of sōkotā by foregoing amṛta?). Besides, he has used the names of items like ghee and ghol (a milk preparation).

1. Rāmā, v. 4309
2. Rāmā, v. 2079
3. Rāmā, vv. 3291, 4122
4. Rāmā, v. 4175
5. Rāmā, v. 3156
6. Rāmā, v. 3157
In the Rāmāyana, the poet also mentions the poison called kālkuta. Sītā chides Rāvana telling him that he is out to consume the poison kālkuta.¹

There are also several references in the Rāmāyana to the food habit of eating deer's meat.²

The poet has not even left out favourite Assamese food items like pīṭhā or cake, made of rice of the kharikājāhā variety. Arrangements are said to have been made for Kumbhakarna to eat buffalo meat, as well as pork and mutton, and to drink wine³ before going to the war field. Kumbhakarna's food also includes bhaṭ, pīṭhā (rice, cake), etc.⁴ There is a reference to honey being taken by Hanumān.⁵ Rice of śāli variety and mutton were counted among food items. The demon Ilvala in his attempt to kill the sages entertained them with śāli rice and sheep meat which sheep-meat was in reality the flesh of his brother Vātāpi under the pretext of his father's śrāddha ceremony.⁶ On the occasion of the śrāddha ceremony, there was the system of entertaining guests with varieties of

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1. Rāmā, v. 3149
2. Rāmā, vv. 2050, 2071
3. Rāmā, v. 5422
4. Rāmā, v. 5432
5. Rāmā, v. 4353
6. Rāmā, v. 2700
food preparations.¹

Betelnut, camphor and modaka were in use those days. This is evident from various references in the Rāmāyaṇa.² The use of camphor with betelnut is still prevalent in Assamese society as after-food stimulant.

As in Mādhava Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa, Kaviratna Sarasvatī in his poetic work, Jayadratha Vadhā mentions fruits like mango, blackberry, betelnut, cocoanut, jarā, paniyal, leteku, lime, pomegranate, soleng, guava, orange, etc., and food items like ceni and gur (sugar and molasses).³ Among intoxicants in use those days, we come across reference to hemp (bhāṃg). Hema Sarasvatī describes bhāṃg (hemp) addicts as bhanguā in his Prahlāda Carita.⁴

Harivara Vipra in his Babruvāhanar Yuddha has mentioned about Cengeli fish,⁵ Kacu (yam)⁶ which are still in use as food in the society. We also come across references to the use of drugs.⁷

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1. Rāmā, v. 2760
2. Rāmā, vv. 4186, 4188
3. Cāneki, pp. 318-19
4. Cāneki, p. 159
5. Babru, v. 87
6. Babru, v. 222
7. Babru, v. 300
In Assamese society there is the system of offering pañcāmṛta to pregnant women. In Lava-Kusār Yuddha we find reference to pañcāmṛta in the context of Sītā being entertained with this. In this context the poet mentions food items like anna (rice), ākhai (fried rice), cīrā, lavaṇu (butter), etc., besides curd, milk, ghee, honey and sugar.¹

In Harivara Vipra's Lava-Kusār Yuddha, the poet mentions rice the staple food and betelnut the tasty food of the Assamese.²

Dresses, Ornaments, Cosmetics:

The literary works under our study contain references to various kinds of dresses, ornaments and cosmetics used by both males and females in different circumstances.

Lord Śiva's only clothing, a piece of deer-hide, finds mention at several places in the works under our study.³

When Rāmacandra returned to Ayodhya after marrying Sītā, the people of Ayodhya offered them a warm reception by

¹ Lava, vv. 11, 46-47
² Lava, v. 63
³ Cāneki, p. 321
wearing various kinds of dresses. While describing these dresses, the poet mentions that they wore clothes made of fine white pāṭ silk. Their ears were adorned with bright kuṇḍala. As they walked, one could hear the jingling sounds of kāṇci and nūpur (ornament for anklets). Mention has also been made of their offering gold and silver made ornaments as presents to Rāma and Sītā. Some of the women wore clothes bearing designs of coloured brocade. To welcome Rāma and Laksmana before their entry into the house, virgins spread clothes of fine silk with brocade and flowery designs.¹ The Rāmāyaṇa notes that Kaikeyī presented Mantharā with a seven-stringed neckless (sātsari hār), besides ornament made of jewels. Rāma was adorned with a special set of coronation clothes.²

As cosmetics, flowers and sandalwood paste were used by Queen Tārā decorated herself with sandalwood paste and ornaments all over her body.³

On the occasion of performing pūjā, etc., usually white clothes were worn. Kauśalyā wore white clothes before

1. Rāmā, vv. 1498-1512
2. Rāmā, v. 1633
3. Rāmā, v. 3453
performing the pūjā of Lord Viṣṇu.¹

We find references to the use of alātkā² (Skt. alakta, red colour made of lac) - a practice which is still prevalent. The Rāmāyana makes mention about Śītā's adorning herself with a lace made of pearls (gajamati hār).³ We also find the mention of the jingling sounds of ratnakānci, bracelets and nūpur (gold ornament for the anklets).⁴ When one takes to a life in the forest, one wears clothes made of birch.⁵ We come across references to devāṅga vastra,⁶ sārī made of pāṭ silk,⁷ royal ornaments,⁸ mukūṭ (crown), kuṇḍāla (earring), sātsrī hār (seven-stringed necklace), nūpur, pāgāri (headwear), kaḥkan (bracelet), ratnānguli (ring made of jewel), kānci, etc., at several places.⁹ There is also a reference to divine alaṃkāra and best quality gold necklace.¹⁰ In the Aranyā-Kānda of Kandali Rāmāyana, we are told how Anasūyā, wife of the sage Atri presented Śītā with thirty-two varieties of ornaments.¹¹

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1. Rāmā, v. 1551  
2. Rāmā, vv. 4173, 5431  
3. Rāmā, v. 3125  
4. Rāmā, v. 3128  
5. Rāmā, v. 1927  
6. Rāmā, v. 1928  
7. Rāmā, v. 1931  
8. Rāmā, v. 1936  
9. Rāmā, v. 1939  
10. Rāmā, v. 3508  
11. Rāmā, v. 2644
For married women, vermilion and sandalwood paste were the major items of adornment. Hence, the sage's wife bestow blessing on Śītā in these words - "Let your vermilion and sandalwood paste marks remain forever."¹

A description of Urmila's ornaments narrates that she wore necklaces of gajamuktā (a kind of pearls) and sātsarī (seven-plaited necklace) on her neck, bracelets called kaṅkan and balayā on her arms, āṅguṭhi or rings on her fingers, rings of bells of jewels on her feet, and rings (ujjhantī) on the fingers of her feet.²

In rings were carved the names of individuals. Hanumān displayed to Śītā a ring whereupon Rāma's name was inscribed.³

At several places in the Rāmāyaṇa we find references to the use of pānai or kharam (wooden sandals).⁴ In Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa, it has been noted that Kumbhakarna adorned his body with divine clothes, sweet-smelling sandalwood paste and floral wreaths.⁵ The use of sweet-scented incense and kasturi

¹ Rāmā, v. 2646
² Rāmā, vv. 2668–70
³ Rāmā, v. 4298
⁴ Rāmā, v. 4157
⁵ Rāmā, v. 5423
in those days is confirmed in Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa.\textsuperscript{1} There is also reference to agaru candana (sandalwood paste).\textsuperscript{2} On the occasion of festivities, aromatic water was profusely in use. In Kandali's version of the Rāmāyaṇa it is noted that on the occasion of Rāma's coronation ceremony, aromatic water contained in a golden pitcher was used.\textsuperscript{3}

\begin{itemize}
\item Married women used to put on vermilion on the parting of their hair and vermilion marks on the forehead, but widows should not wear such marks and ornaments. A reference to this is made in the Rāmāyaṇa in the context of the widowhood of Tārā.\textsuperscript{4} This is confirmed in Babruvāhanar Yuddha as well.\textsuperscript{5}
\end{itemize}

Hanumān is said to have seen some women in a palatial house called Vaijayantī in Laṅkā and they wore ornaments like kīṅkini,\textsuperscript{6} sātsarī hār, net kṣauma.\textsuperscript{7} During the days of Mādhava Kandali, besides gold, glass beads were also used as ornaments. This is found mentioned in the Sundarā-Kanda of the Rāmāyaṇa.\textsuperscript{8} It is narrated that Bāli's consort Tārā and other women, adorned with flowers and sandalwood paste as well as ornaments, accompanied him by

\begin{itemize}
\item 1. Rāmā, v. 4188
\item 2. Rāmā, v. 4935
\item 3. Rāmā, v. 1632
\item 4. Rāmā, v. 3658
\item 5. Babru, vv. 366, 429-30
\item 6. Rāmā, v. 4124
\item 7. Rāmā, v. 4137
\item 8. Rāmā, v. 4225
\end{itemize}
holding aloft decorated fans. Kānci and nūpur were used—
as mentioned on many occasions.

It was the custom in medieval Assam that while
setting out for joining some battle, warriors should use a
kind of protective garments called kavaca kāpor. Mādhava
Kandali in his Rāmāyana mentions this garment which was woven
within one night. Its use has been confirmed later on well.

In Babruvāhanar Yuddha the poet Harivara Vipra notes
that Babruvāhana decorated his horse by putting up a pearl
necklace around its neck and a mirror on its forehead as also
a golden crown on its head. In Lava-Kusār Yuddha, we come
across a reference that the horse selected for performing the
Aśvamedha yajña was decorated with uttarī wastra (a kind of
dress worn on the occasions of pūjā, etc.). Again, in
Babruvāhanar Yuddha, poet Harivara Vipra mentions that
Citrāngadā was adorned with sandalwood paste and treated to
the cooling air of a hand fan. On hearing the news of
Arjuna's death, Ulupī and Citrāngadā tore off their sātsari
necklaces and put off other ornaments.

1. Rāmā, v. 3453 5. Lava, v. 250
4. Babru, v. 104
The practice of keeping beard and moustache by some people has been referred to by Rudra Kandali in Śatyaki Praveśa.  

In Babruvāhanar Yuddha, while describing the beautiful women of Manipura, Harivara Vipra notes that they wore necklace on the neck, kundāla (a kind of ear-ornament) on their ears, and have adorned their bodies with kasturi and sandalwood paste, besides wearing gold ornaments. In Babruvāhanar Yuddha, it is mentioned that the daughters of the serpent king Ananta wore necklaces of jewels and earrings inset with stones. In Babruvāhanar Yuddha, we are told about the Manipura kings' wearing lohitakamali vastra (red) and adorning themselves with ornaments and sandalwood paste in the royal court before paying obeisance to King Babruvāhana.

Deer-hide had been in use in India since ancient days. The sages used to meditate by sitting on such deer-hide. Deer-hide was also used as an article of luxury. Sītā implored Rāma to kill the golden deer so that she could use the golden deer-hide as a seat.

1. Cāneki, p. 136  
2. Babru, vv. 537-38  
3. Babru, vv. 506-7  
4. Babru, v. 24  
5. Cāneki, p. 321  
6. Rāmā, vv. 3072, 3075
Mādhava Kandali provides a graphic description of a beggar's dresses which are still seen in society. The reference is to his description of Rāvana in the garb of a beggar. The latter wears a kapin (Skt. Kaupina, a single-piece cloth), uses wooden sandals for his feet, carries an umbrella on his shoulder, a beggar's bag hung by his side, carries a kamandalu (a pot with a semi-circular handle on top) and puts on a garland of rudrākṣa on his head. 1 Mārīca is described as dressed like a sage with a deer-hide and his head covered with knotty hair. 2

The system of presenting various clothes and ornaments to servants and maid-servants is still in vogue in today's society. In Kandali's version of the Rāmāyana, we are told how Rāma presented the servants and maid-servants with gifts like pāṭ (silk clothes), pāṭ (paintings), kundalas (earrings), bangles, jewels, necklaces, nūpur (foot ornaments), head-cover, etc., while leaving for the forests. 3

Articles of Daily Use:

The accounts given of various articles of daily use in those days in the books under our study throw light on the

1. Rāmā, v. 3117
2. Rāmā, v. 3017
3. Rāmā, v. 1870
economic life of the Assamese society of those times. From these we can deduce that the Assamese society of those days was in no way backward.

In Madhava Kandali’s Rāmāyaṇa we come across a reference to King Daśaratha’s dead body being kept immersed in Nārāyanī oil. ¹ The use of this oil is still found in our State. The container which was used for such immersion was known as tailadronī.² ³ ⁴

About the use of seats (āsana) made of a variety of grass (kuśa) and deer-hide, Harivara Vipra mentions in his Lava-Kuśar Yuddha.³

We also come across several references to the use of drugs for remedy of diseases in those days in the books under study. In Kandali’s Rāmāyaṇa it has been stated that unless drugs are applied at the early stage of a disease, the ailment becomes serious.⁴

In Babruvāhanar Yuddha Harivara Vipra mentions that, when Citrāṅgadā fainted, her maids fed her with water mixed with juice of ginger and salt, and applied cold sandalwood

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1. Rāmā, v. 2271
2. Rāmā, v. 2211
3. Lava, v. 316
4. Rāmā, v. 4444
paste on her body.  

Among other articles of daily use which find mention in Mādhava Kandali are bokandā, that is, a container made of the outer covering of gourd, Palawa (a kind of fishing device), bhela (a float of banana plants), Śruva or homadanda (a ladle for using at homa function), etc.

Religion and Philosophy:

It has been noted earlier that Śaivism, Śaktism and Vaisnāvism have been prevalent in Assam since ancient days. Besides these, we also come across references to the prevalence of Buddhism and the cults of various other gods and goddesses in Kālikā-purāṇa and a few copper-plate inscriptions. The continuous flow of different religious faiths has also been in evidence during the period under our study, viz., the pre-Śaṅkaradeva age. We find evidence of this in Kathā-guru carita, other holy biographies, Darang Rājvaṃśāvalī, etc.

1. Babru, v. 352
2. Rāmā, v. 1961
3. Rāmā, v. 1745
4. Rāmā, v. 2457
5. Rāmā, v. 5095
6. KGC, p. 16 ('Kusumbara Bhuyān was blessed with a son namely Śaṅkara after performing Śiva Worship'.)
7. Darang Rājvaṃśāvalī, pp. 50-53
In Mādhava Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa, the supremacy of Śiva is indicated in the following events: Lord Śiva offered his bow and arrows to King Janaka, and Rāma could display his prowess and win Sītā only by breaking that bow. Rāvaṇa was a devotee of Śiva and he vainly tried to transfer Śiva's Kailāśa to Lāṅkā. Once Rāvaṇa usurped Lāṅkā from the possession of his elder brother Kuvera and Rāvaṇa failed to kill Kuvera as the latter had converted himself into a devotee of Lord Śiva. Damaru is Śiva's favourite musical instrument, and this musical instrument has been mentioned by way of a simile.

Harivara Vipra's Babruvāhanar Yuddha mentions that Arjuna was advised by Babruvāhana to offer pūjā to Śiva with the help of the skull of the deceased Vṛṣaketu so that Arjuna could earn Śiva's blessings. From this it can be inferred that during the period when the poet wrote, namely, the 14th century A.D., Śiva was worshipped with human skulls. Śiva is also known by another name, Rudra. The poet has mentioned elsewhere that Lord Śiva destroys people of the world by assuming his other self of Rudra. Similarly, in Lava-Kuśar

1. Rāmā, v. 2656
2. Rāmā, v. 3168
3. Rāmā, v. 3164
4. Rāmā, v. 3127
5. Babru, v. 294
6. Babru, v. 244
Yuddha, it is learnt that Sita's son, Kuśa chopped off the head of Nāga, younger brother of Śatrughna's general, and Śiva used the severed head as part of a garland worn around his neck. From this it can be surmised that during the poet's times perhaps the Assamese society believed that, like his consort Kālikā or Kāli, Lord Śiva also wore a garland of human skulls.

Kaviratna Sarasvati, while describing Śiva, has variously described Śiva's abode on the Kailāśa mountain. These descriptions present graphic pictures of Assam plants and flowers which the poet's imagination has implanted in his Kailāśa. It has been revealed there that sages or devotees of Lord Śiva meditate on Śiva by taking their seats on the hides of deer in postures of Padrmaṇasana and after performing various vratas. They also sing hymns in praise of Śiva to the accompaniment of damaru. The poet's descriptions indicate that even Brahmā, Indra and Nārāyaṇa offer daily worship to Śiva. It is noteworthy that certain descriptions in pre-Śaṅkara literary works reveal a predominance of Śiva.

In accordance with the prevailing beliefs in Assamese society,

1. Lava, v. 302
2. Čāneki, pp. 318-20
3. Čāneki, p. 321:

Brahmā Nārāyaṇa ādi devagane tathāta kare bhakati.
Śiva is described as the presiding deity over the Yakṣas, Rākṣasas and the ghosts and spirits. Our poet, too, has located Śiva as the presiding deity of ghosts and spirits and has portrayed these devotees in all their ugly forms.¹

It is worth-mentioning that, as stated by Kaviratna Sarasvatī, Indranārāyaṇa, son of the Kamatā King Durlabhanārāyaṇa, was a devotee of Lord Śiva and was blessed by the latter.² Usually the subjects adhere to the same religious faith and worship the same god as is done by the king. From this, it can be presumed that during the reign of King Indranārāyaṇa Śaivism was popular in the kingdom of Kamatāpur.

Kaviratna Sarasvatī has also noted in his Dronā Parva that Brahmā, Nārāyaṇa and Indra were devotees of Śiva.³

Saktism

It has been mentioned in Chapter I that Saktism was prevalent in Assam since ancient days. Particularly during the period when the Kālikā-purāṇa was composed we find

1. Cānekī, p. 322
2. Cānekī, p. 324
3. Cānekī, p. 321
indications about Saktism assuming an extreme form. That even during the 14th century A.D. Saktism still held strong sway can be ascertained from the Caritaputhis. In the Kathāguru-carita we have evidence that the forefathers of Śaṅkaradeva were followers of Saktism. Śaṅkaradeva's great-grand-father Caṇḍīvara was so devoted to the Devī that King Durlabhanārāyaṇa conferred on him the title - 'Devidāsa'.

According to the Caritaputhis, Caṇḍīvara was born out of the blessings of the goddess Caṇḍi. Even Śaṅkaradeva's father, Kusumavara is learnt to have worshipped the image of the goddess after placing it in his house.

In this context, it was but natural that the poets of the pre-Śaṅkaradeva era would deal with Saktism in their writings. In the Ayodhya kānda of Mādhava Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa, Queen Kauśālyā says that she will be like a sacrificial goat of the Astami day in the absence of Rāma. This is a reference to the practice of sacrificing goats on the occasion of the Astami day of Durgā worship. While Rāvana was kidnapping Sītā, the bird Jaṭāyu says that Rāvana should let Sītā free; otherwise he (Rāvana) would be like a sacrificial goat before Rāma. Goats are even today sacrificed to propitiate the

1. KGC, p. 18
2. Rāmānanda, p. 459
3. KGC, p. 20
4. Rāma, v. 2104
goddess of Śakti.

From Harivara Vipra’s writings, it is gathered that he was a worshipper at the feet of goddess Gaurī.\(^1\) Besides, the poet has also mentioned how Citrāṅgadā was blessed with a son like Babruvāhana by virtue of her worshipping Hara and Gaurī.\(^2\)

Vaisnāvism

In the preceding chapter, it has been mentioned that Vaisnāvism was prevalent in Assam since very early times, preceding the 14th century A.D. by several hundred years. Mādhava Kandali’s Rāmāyaṇa mentions about Viṣṇu worship at several places. In the Ayodhyā-kāṇḍa, on the occasion of preparations for Śrī Rāma’s coronation ceremony, Rāma has been mentioned as offering pūjā to Lord Viṣṇu. On another occasion, Kauśalyā speaks of the glory of Viṣṇu worship.\(^3\) Following Rāma’s punishment to the forests, Kauśalyā and Sumitrā offer pūjā to Viṣṇu praying for the well-being of Rāma, Sītā and Laksmana.\(^4\) In a Kīśkindhyā-kāṇḍa episode, the sage Mātaṅga is

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1. Babru, v. 223
2. Babru, v. 348
3. Rāmā, vv. 1553-54
4. Rāmā, v. 2627
said to have chanted mantras invoking Lord Viṣṇu.  

All the three works by Harivara Vipra refers to the worship of Lord Viṣṇu. The Kālikā-purāṇa mentions about the worship of Vāsudeva and it is learnt that such worship was performed in Assam during the 14th century as well in tantric form.  

A copperplate inscription found in North Lakhimpur reveals the practice of worship of Vāsudeva during the period from the end of the 14th century to the first years of the 15th century. At more than one place in Harivara Vipra’s poetical works we come across references to devotion to Lord Viṣṇu. In Babruvāhanar Yuddha, it has been noted that all sins are forgiven if the name of Mādhava is recalled. King Haṁsadhvaja has also been described as a 'parama vaisṇava' (a devoted Vaiṣṇava). The poet notes that the men and women of Manipur were always devoted to Hari. While fighting a battle, Babruvāhana pays silent obeisance at the feet of Vāsudeva. The poet describes Babruvāhana as 'parama vaisṇava' and a Vaiṣṇava king. The poet glorifies Viṣṇu by saying that

1. Rāmā, v. 3470
4. Babru, v. 401
5. Babru, v. 187
6. Babru, v. 4
7. Babru, v. 105
8. Babru, vv. 245, 486
His name cures life of diseases\textsuperscript{1} and takes man to heaven after death.\textsuperscript{2} Such is the glory of Lord Viṣṇu's name that Vṛṣaketu even when beheaded by Babruvāhana does not forget to recite the name of Kṛṣṇa.\textsuperscript{3} Lord Kṛṣṇa has been termed as an avatāra (god incarnate).\textsuperscript{4} Kṛṣṇa is none other than Vāsudeva, Dhanañjaya suffers death in the battle only because Kṛṣṇa is not there with him.\textsuperscript{5} The poet also refers to Viṣṇu's weapon - the Sudarṣan cakra. Lord Viṣṇu is the creator, preserver and destroyer of the world.\textsuperscript{6} In Tāmradhvaj Yuddha, too, the poet describes the Pāṇḍavas\textsuperscript{7} and Mayuradhvaja\textsuperscript{8} as devotees of Lord Viṣṇu. Sometimes the poet also speaks of the glory of Rāma, another incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu.\textsuperscript{9} While speaking of Nārāyana's or Viṣṇu's blessings which saved Arjuna in his fight against Tāmradhvaja, the poet indirectly expresses the glory of devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa.\textsuperscript{10} In another context, the poet sermonizes that man should be devoted to Mādhava and recite His or Rāma's name at the time of death;\textsuperscript{11} because, Mādhava is the greatest of all gods.\textsuperscript{12} Thus, on several

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2. Babru, v. 272 & 8. Tāmra, v. 7  \\
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occasions, the poet makes mentions of the devotion to Madhava. He asserts that by such means as yajña, tapa (meditationed), japa (recital of name), etc., it is only Viṣṇu who is worshipped.\(^1\) In Lava-Kusar Yuddha as well the poet observes how one can attain to salvation by recalling the name of Hari.\(^2\)

Another poet of the pre-Śaṅkaradeva era, Hema Sarasvati asserts in the poetic work Prahlāda Carita that it is Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa who is the Lord of Vaikunṭha, there is none else who can save man.\(^3\) On another occasion, the poet mentions about the various incarnations of Viṣṇu such as Matsya, Kūrma, etc. It has been noted there that He is the Eternal One - whose beginning and end are beyond human comprehension. It is He who saves mankind from the world.\(^4\) Even though we find clear indications of Vaiṣṇava influence in Hema Sarasvati's writings, he was actually a poet of the pre-Śaṅkaradeva age. His colophons (bhaṇitā) make this influence evident.\(^5\)

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1. Tāmra, vv. 336-40
2. Lava, v. 3
3. Cāneki, p. 149
4. Cāneki, pp. 145, 321
5. Cāneki, pp. 155-58
In the Drona Parva of his Mahābhārata, Kaviratna Sarasvatī speaks of Viṣṇu mantra as the essence of religions. The poet begins this poetical work by invoking the glory of Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu. The poet states that Indranārāyaṇa, son of the king Durlabhanārāyaṇa, always offers pūjā to Hari. From this, it can be presumed that the king Indranārāyaṇa was devoted to Vaiṣṇavism.

In poet Rudra Kandali’s Sātyaki Pravesā also we find the mention of Vaiṣṇavism. Rudra Kandali describes his patron King Śrīmanta-Tāmradhvaja and his brother as devotees of Lord Viṣṇu and the servant of Mahāmāyā. The poet also asserts that Hari always accompanies the devotee, and that there is no other way to salvation except Hari. Even when a man commits sins, either knowingly or unknowingly, all such sins are washed away by the name of Hari.

Other Gods and Goddesses:

Besides references to the prevalence of Śaivism, Śaktism and Vaiṣṇavism, we also come across allusions to

1. Cānekī, p. 323
2. Cānekī, p. 318
3. Cānekī, p. 324
4. Cānekī, p. 148
other Purāṇic gods and goddesses such as gods like Brahmā, Sūrya, Gaṇeśa, Agni, Bāyu, Baruṇa, Indra, Yama and goddesses like Laks̱mlī, Sarasvatī, Gangā, etc. The Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa of the Rāmāyaṇa refers to Brahmā's blessings to Girāḍha rākṣasa1 and Rāvaṇa. As a matter of fact, Rāvaṇa became invincible because of Brahmā's blessings.2 That was the reason why Rāvaṇa could boast of that, besides causing to step the movements of Bāyu, Sūrya and Candra, he could vanquish gods like Yama, Indra, Baruṇa and Agni.3

In Harivara Vipra's Lava-Kusār Yuddha, Sītā makes obeisance to Sūrya4 with offerings and swearing by the Lord of the ten directions asserts that she has been following the rites of a loyal wife.5 Harivara Vipra then calls Rāma as the incarnation of God and notes that if a man recites his name on some occasion, he can escape all worldly sufferings.6 It is worth noting that the poets of the Vaishnava era have clearly accepted Rāma as the incarnation of Viṣṇu, We shall

1. Rāmā, v. 2651
2. Rāmā, v. 3161
3. Rāmā, vv. 3181-83
4. Rāmā, v. 254
5. Lava, v. 255
6. Lava, v. 325
discuss this in the subsequent chapter.

In *Babruvāhanar Yuddha*, Karna cuts off his own flesh and offers it to Indra.\(^1\) Again, the poet adds that in the absence of images of various gods and goddesses, the temples lack in beauty.\(^2\)

In Kandali's *Rāmāyaṇa*, we come across a reference to Rāma's entering into friendship with Sugrīva vowing to the god of fire as the witness.\(^3\) Besides referring to different gods and goddesses, the poets of the period under study also mention about such demi-gods and goddesses as apsaras, gandharvas, yakṣas and rākṣasas. The poets have described the gandharvas and apsaras as adopt in fine arts. In Hema Sarasvatī's *Prahlāda Carita*, it is described how following the death of Hiraṇyakaśipu, the apsaras danced and sang out of joy.\(^4\) In *Lava-Kuṣar Yuddha*, we have a reference to the practice of the worshipping of the pentad of the gods, namely, Sūrya, Gaṇeśa, Śiva, Śakti and Viṣṇu.\(^5\)

In Mādhava Kandali's *Rāmāyaṇa* we find instances to show that the society deprecated persons acting against

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1. *Babru*, v. 285
2. *Babru*, v. 289
3. *Rāmā*, vv. 3415-16
4. *Cāneki*, p. 163
5. *Cāneki*, p. 38
religion. On seeing a beautiful consort accompanying Rāma dressed in bark as a sannyāsi, Virāṭa rakṣasa says, The irreligious is unworthy of sight (dharma-birodhika dekhibāka nuhi yoga).¹

Diverse Pūjā materials : Polytheism : Auspicious practices:

The Rāmāyaṇa cites the names of various materials required and the ceremonial modes to be followed while performing an auspicious act. When Rāma was on his way to meet King Daśaratha, Lakṣmaṇa accompanied him by holding aloft an umbrella. The practices of showering green grass, rice, flowers, etc. on the head after chanting mantras on occasions of auspicious acts and welcoming distinguished persons with white feather fan are still in vogue in Assamese society. We have reference to this in Kandali’s Rāmāyaṇa.² On the occasion of Rāma’s coronation ceremony, auspicious wind instruments such as horns, conch shells were blown. Eight beautifully dressed maidens presented themselves at the entrance. White feathery fans, flowers and fruits, curd, condensed milk (kṣīrā), water of the seven seas, the holy water of the Gangā and the Yamunā were kept together in a golden pot.

¹. Rāmā, v. 2690
². Rāmā, v. 1816
The doorsteps were decorated with a golden flag.¹

When a guest came to the household, it was customary to welcome him in, attend to his needs and make polite enquiries about his well-being. The Rāmāyāna gives such a picture. While Rāma came to the Citrakūta mountain, the sage Atri asked about his well-being only after performing a ceremonial pūjā with flowers and fruits.²

According to our social customs, at the end of an auspicious act, people go round some respected persons, the sacred venue of worship, temple, etc. This is believed to be indicative of reverence. We have references to such customs at several places. Rāma went round King Daśaratha and stood with folded hands just before his coronation ceremony. Hanumān had talks with Rāma only after going round him.³ Before entering into the bond of friendship, Rāma and Sugrīva had ceremonially walked around the fire.⁴ Again, just on the eve of killing Bāli, Sugrīva paid obeisance to Rāma after walking round him with Rāma's garland on his head.⁵ Hanumān accepted with folded hands the jewel offered by Sītā

1. Rāmā, vv. 1631-33
2. Rāmā, v. 2336
3. Rāmā, vv. 1536, 3407
4. Rāmā, v. 3415
5. Rāmā, v. 3577
at Asoka vana only after ceremonially walking round her (pradaksīna).  

In those days the Assamese society gave importance to meditation, vows (vrata), yajña, etc. This was because of the belief that one could please a deity and have one's desires fulfilled by such rites. Man can earn virtue (puṇya) by performing meditation and practising recital of god's name, etc., and thereby attain to heaven. We find reference to such a belief in Rudra Kandali's Sātyaki Pravesā.  

The belief that by such rites one can please god and earn one's desired object is referred to in Kaviratna Sarasvatī's poetical work, Jayadratha Vadha as well. Sometimes, in order to appease god Śaṅkara, people performed yoga and meditation. While performing yogic meditation, one would sit in padmāsana (the lotus position) and perform pūjā to Śiva.  

In Assamese society many perform vrata on the ekādaśī tithi. Kandali has referred to this in the words of Hanumān in a Brāhmaṇa's guise in Laṅkā when the latter said that because of performing ekādaśī vrata the previous day, he was weak with hunger.  

People had faith in religion and they

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1. Rāmā, v. 4343
2. Cāneki, p. 145
3. Cāneki, p. 321
4. Rāmā, v. 4347
believed that anyone indulging in irreligious acts would suffer deterioration. This is revealed through the conversation between Sītā and Hānumān. It was believed that those who followed the path of religion possessed miraculous powers and could reduce anyone to ashes with their curses.¹

Since time immemorial, the Vedas were reverentially accepted as the messages of God. In Sātyaki Praveśa, the Vedas, the Purāṇas and the Mahābhārata are called Brahmaraṇa (i.e., the very self of Brahma) and it has been said that by studying these man can attain to Vaikuntha, that is, Viṣṇu's paradise.² The Brāhmaṇas were accorded a high position in society in those days and it was believed that slaughtering a Brāhmaṇa amounted to a grave sin. This is illustrated in Rudra Kandali's Sātyaki Praveśa.³ Even the slaughtering of anyone belonging to the Brāhmaṇa lineage was regarded as a grave sin. This has been mentioned in Babruvahana Yuddha.⁴ We find a reference to this in Tāmradhvaj Yuddha as well.⁵

Since ancient times the Hindus have been cherishing the belief and they still do that the Ganga and the Yamuna

1. Rāmā, vv. 4280-81
2. Cānekī, p. 148
3. Cānekī, p. 145
4. Babru, v. 1
5. Tāmra, v. 1
are sacred rivers and Ganga water being sacred, it can remove all sins and bring salvation when it is sprinkled on the body. This belief finds expression at several places in the work under our study. In the Ayodhya Kanda of the Ramayana we have a reference to the practice of using Ganga and Yamuna water on auspicious occasions. On the auspicious occasion of Rama's coronation, the sacred water of the Ganga and the seven seas was brought. Besides, it was considered an impious act to touch Ganga water with the left leg.

The practice of placing a purnaghaṭa (holy pitcher) with unripe cocoanut on it is still in vogue in Assamese society and this has been mentioned in Kandali's version of the Ramayana. Similarly, on the eve of undertaking any journey there is the practice of decorating the elephant's body with vermilion marks. This has also been noted by Kandali in his Ramayana.

Assamese society still has the custom of sounding uruli (huludhvani) as an auspicious sign. Kandali's Ramayana refers to this practice as well.

As in present times, in the early Assamese society also there was the system of judging people's acts in terms

1. Rāmā, v. 1632; Babru, v. 59; Cāneki, p. 148
2. Babru, v. 451
3. Rāmā, v. 1650
of piety and sins and this has been referred to at several places in the literary works under our study. In those days women enjoyed a high position in the society. In Babruvāhanar Yuddha we are told that Babruvāhana reprimanded Arjuna as adhami pātaki (the impious sinner) when the latter spoke ill of his mother as fallen before Babruvāhana.¹

The crime of killing one's father was regarded as a grave sin. It was for this reason that Babruvāhana, after killing his father, became penitent² and finally desired his own death.³ In Babruvāhanar Yuddha, there is a reference to five great sins (mahāpātaka).⁴

In Prahlāda Carita, we are told that one's father is one's great preceptor and in the absence of the father, the world appears all gloomy.⁵ In the world, man is destined to reap the fruits of his virtues and vices.⁶ The abode where the souls of one's forefathers were believed to live after their death on earth was called pitṛ-loka.⁷ Similarly, the

1. Babru, vv. 85-86, 311
2. Babru, vv. 393, 399
3. Babru, vv. 583, 586
4. Babru, v. 591
5. Čāneki, p. 163
6. Čāneki, p. 163
7. Babru, v. 323
abode of Yama, god of death, was called Yama-loka. People believed in previous and later births. There was the faith that even when a man dies, his soul does not die, and that man's life during previous births had its own virtues and vices. Parents were regarded as preceptors in the society, and in Babruvāhanar Yuddha there are several references to exemplary devotion to parents. Just as the child showed devotion to the parents, similarly the parents also love the child. In Lava-Kusar Yuddha, we are told that the pregnant Sītā could not commit suicide because of her attachment to the unborn children. Lava-Kusar Yuddha also illustrates the ideal of women's loyalty to their husbands. In Mādhava Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa also we come across several instances of woman's devotion to husband.

Harivara Vipra in his Tamradhvajar Yuddha has advised that the services and devotion should be offered to the preceptor, the dvija or Brāhmaṇa and the gods.

1. Babru, v. 214
2. Babru, v. 44
3. Babru, vv. 75, 85-86, 105, 217
4. Lava, v. 150
5. Lava, v. 253
6. Rāma, v. 3078
7. Tamra, v. 7
In judging vices and virtues, agni-parikṣā or the fire ordeal was given preference. In Lava-Kuśar Yuddha, it has been mentioned that Śītā's chastity was proved by putting her to the fire ordeal. Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa also confirms this.

Popular Beliefs and Superstitions:

Popular beliefs are usually found associated with certain natural phenomena, certain particular modes of behaviour of animals at particular times, involuntary sensations felt in certain limbs of the body, calling someone from behind while going on a journey, dreams, etc. While studying popular beliefs, it will be relevant to refer to man's belief in fate or destiny. We come across several instances of such beliefs in Mādhava Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa.

During Rāma's coronation ceremony, King Daśaratha had an ominous dream and the earth experienced tremor as well as the fall of a thunderbolt - all of which were believed to be ominous. Prior to Rāmacandra's departure for the forests, Daśaratha recalled the reading of an astrologer and said that at that time both the evil planets of Rāhu and Maṅgala were

1. Lava, v. 5; Rāmā, vv. 6515-24
2. Rāmā, v. 1547
unfavourable to him. In consequence, both the king and his subjects suffered adversities.¹ We find another reference to people's faith in astrology in this way: immediately on meeting Rāma, Sugrīva said that he was then in the circle of the planet Bṛhaspati on the 11th day.² The belief that it was an auspicious to be under the influence Bṛhaspati in the eleventh house in horoscopic position is still prevalent in Assamese society.

It is believed that the sighting of any ominous sign on the eve of a journey makes the journey inauspicious. The Rāmāyana has it that Kumbhakarṇa, while setting out for joining the battle, found his left eye and other left-hand side limbs including his hand and leg trembling, and vultures flying above.³ Later on, it so happened that Kumbhakarṇa met with death in that battle. Similarly, Khara and Duṣaṇa while on their way to the fight against Rāma, are described as observing certain ominous signs.⁴ Bāli, too, found some ominous signs on the eve of his journey,⁵ and met with death.

Harivara Vipra also describes such ominous signs. In Babruvāhanar Yuddha, Arjuna is said to have encountered

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1. Rāmā, vv. 1547-48
2. Rāmā, v. 3414
3. Rāmā, v. 5492
4. Rāmā, v. 5577
5. Rāmā, vv. 3597-99
various ominous signs before going out for fighting against Babruvāhana.¹

Before undertaking any important act, the practice was to ascertain some auspicious day and time including the position of the stars. Such a practice is still prevalent in our society. In Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa it is found that an auspicious time was chosen for performing the ceremony of installing Rāma as the Crown Prince.²

In Lava-Kuśar Yuddha also, there is a reference to astrologers. It has been mentioned there that since Rāma and Sītā had their union at the stellar conjunction of the star Vaiśnava and the Ravi lagna, the result of that union did not become happy. Even though Sītā conceived, she had to suffer from banishment in the forests.³

That Lava and Kuśa were born at auspicious moments has been noted in the poetical work, Lava-Kuṣar Yuddha.⁴ We

1. Bahru, vv. 18, 210-215
2. Rāma, v. 1540
3. vaisnava nakṣatre garbha bhaila ravi lagna
   rāma ra sītāra mitravaži kare bhagna
   henaya samyoge āsi bhaila garbhabāsa
   dekhaya sītāra dukh āru banabāsa.
   - Lava, v. 19
4. Lava, v. 161
also find reference to the precise day, occasion and the stellar position marking the time when Babruvahana killed Arjuna in a battle.\(^1\) In Tāmradhvajār Yuddha we are told that on the day of the full moon in the month of Caitra, the sacrificial horse of King Mayūradhvaja was let off.\(^2\)

Kambuṅṭha (neck looking like a conch), Tribali (three folds of skin above the navel of women), etc., were regarded as auspicious signs and are so mentioned in Kandali's version of the Rāmāyaṇa.\(^3\)

A salient point of Indian belief is in re-birth or in the effects of one's karma or action. We find examples of this in Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa. Sītā had the fortune of being wedded to Rāghava only because of her prolonged meditation in course of her previous birth.\(^4\)

We also find hints of beliefs in tantra and mantra (incantation) in Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa. There is a reference in Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa suggesting how Rāma shot his arrow of reed (ishīka) after pronouncing some incantatory verses, and thus the son of Indra in the form of the crow became blind in one

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1. Babru, vv. 333-34
2. Tāmra, v. 8
3. Rāmā, v. 2668
4. Rāmā, v. 2673
eye because of the application of incantation by Rāma. There is a prevailing popular belief that the crow is really the son of Indra and is blind of one eye. In Babruvāhanar Yuddha, Harivāra Vipra speaks of the efficacy of incantations. Hema Sarasvatī too, has written about the belief in tantra and incantation in his book Prahlāda Carita. The poet mentions the incantations having the power to control wild elephants in the words of Hiranyakaśipu.

According to general Indian belief the husband is placed on the level of a god and it has been asserted that a woman may attain to heaven and salvation through her devotion to the husband. This has been affirmed at several places in the Rāmāyana.

The Indian people believe in destiny. Such a belief persists even today and we come across references to this in the Rāmāyana. It has been said that because of a pre-destined decision, Rāma could not inherit the kingdom.

1. Rāmā, vv. 2497-2503
2. Rāmā, v. 2503
3. Babru, vv. 249, 495, 498
4. Cāneki, p. 152
5. Rāmā, vv. 2641, 2643
6. Rāmā, v. 3405
Even now in Assamese society many people believe in the effects of dreams. This has been illustrated in Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa when Bāli's wife Tārā is said to have had an ominous dream.¹

In Babruvāhanar Yuddha we are told that before Arjuna met with his death at the hands of Babruvāhana, Arjuna's mother Kunti had had an ominous dream.² In Lava-Kuśar Yuddha, too, we come across references to belief in the effectiveness of dreams. There is a reference in Lava-Kuśar Yuddha that Śītā had a bad dream as a result of which she was banished.³

The throbbing of any left-hand limb of a woman was considered an auspicious sign. On certain occasions when a crow cawed, it was believed to bring in some good news. We have evidence of such beliefs in the descriptions given in the Rāmāyaṇa prior to Hanumān's approach to Śītā.⁴ In Kandali's version of the Rāmāyaṇa we are told how Bharata had an ominous dream while staying with his maternal uncle prior to the death of King Daśaratha.⁵

1. Rāmā, v. 3585
2. Babru, vv. 530-32
3. Lava, vv. 20-23
4. Rāmā, vv. 4252-53
5. Rāmā, vv. 2221-24
There is a popular belief in our society that during the period of dusk or the transition from day to night, man's physical self is devoid of the benign presence of some deity. This is because that was the time when God assumed the form of Man-Lion (Nara-Simha) incarnation to slaughter Hiranyakasipu on the ground below the eaves of a house. That is why people take care to avoid danger during such an hour and place for fear that such places are infested with evil spirits. We have reference to this ominous hour and the ground just below the eaves in Hema Sarasvati's Prahlāda Carita.¹

The practice of ascertaining auspicious signs by divination is still prevalent in the society. This has been indicated by Harivara Vipra in Babruvāhanar Yuddha. The poet mentions that Citrāṅgada and Ulupī observed five pomegranate flowers in order to ascertain the truth about their husband Arjuna's death.²

Notions about death:

In the literary works under our study, we come across references to various social customs relating to death and

1. Čāneki, p. 163
2. Babru, v. 369
funeral ceremonies. The Rāmāyaṇa mentions Citragupta who is believed to be the keeper of all accounts of births and deaths.¹

In Kandali's Rāmāyaṇa, there are several occasions when funeral ceremonies are elaborately described. While depicting the funeral ceremony of King Daśaratha,² Mādhava Kandali refers to the practices of daśapīṇḍa, ādya-śrāddha, offering gifts to Brāhmaṇas, etc.³ Similarly, in the Laṅka kānda episode of the Rāmāyaṇa, the poet has given an elaborate description of Rāvana's funeral ceremony after his death.⁴ Kandali makes mention of such practices as ekādaśā, dvādaśā and tridaśā ceremonies observed by relatives of the dead till the 13th day after death,⁵ pāraṇā, that is, feast after ceremonial fasting.⁶ Similarly, the exiled Rāma offers pīṇḍa on the bank of the river Mandākinī after hearing of the death of Daśaratha.⁷

1. Rāma, v. 1729
2. Rāma, vv. 2324-32
3. Rāma, vv. 2348-49
4. Rāma, vv. 6436-40
5. Rāma, v. 2348
6. Rāma, v. 4348
7. Rāma, vv. 2542-44
We have a description of Jātāyu's funeral ceremony observed by Rāma and Lākṣmana.¹

Similarly, in Prahlāda Carīta of Hema Sarasvatī describes the performance of the pretakārya after Hirāṇyakaśipu's death by his son Prahlāda.²

In those days, the custom of Suttee (an Indian widow who burned herself on her husband's pyre) was in vogue in the society. We find reference to this custom at several places in the books under our study.³

E. Fine Arts:

Since ancient times India has had the tradition of cultivating the sixty-four arts. In the Rāmāyaṇa those sixty-four arts have been noted by Kandali through Rāvana's speech.⁴

Musical instruments songs and dances:

In the literary works under our study we find references to dances and songs in many places. Usually, such

1. Rāmā, v. 3353
2. Čāneki, p. 164
3. Babru, v. 387
4. Rāmā, v. 3141
references to dances and songs occur in connection with
festive occasions like marriage, the performance of pūjā, etc. 
Musical instruments were played to the accompaniment of such
dances and songs and also during the time of battles.

Kaviratna Sarasvatī has noted that on the Kailāsā, 
besides other gods, Brhaspati, the guru of the gods, used to
sing hymns by playing on the damaru.¹

While Rāmacandra was on his way back to Ayodhyā
after marrying Sītā, the people of Ayodhyā welcomed them by
playing on conch-shells, pataha, mādal, drums, etc.² While
performing the adhivāsa or auspicious ceremony for Rāmacandra,
the inhabitants of Ayodhyā danced and sang in joy.³ Conch-
shells and horn-pipes were sounded on the occasion of that
festival.⁴

Usually when the sages were engaged in meditation,
Indra, out of fear, would send down the Apsaras or heavenly
entertainers to the sages to interrupt their meditation with
their bewitching dances and songs. A well-known example of
this was the story of Menakā interrupting the meditation of

¹. Caneki, p. 321
². Rāmā, v. 1499
³. Rāmā, vv. 1567–69
⁴. Rāmā, v. 1631
sage Visvamitra which has been described in Kālidāsa's poetic work, *Abhijnāna-Sakuntalam*. Similarly, in the Rāmāyaṇa we are told how Indra sent an Apsara or heavenly dancing woman to interrupt the meditation of sage Mandakanni and how the former disturbed the sage's meditation by dancing and singing, keeping the beats with her hands.\(^1\)

In battles, war-drums or dundubhi were played upon.\(^2\) Musical instruments such as bheri, horn-pipe, conch-shells, muhuri, Kāhāl, etc., were played upon to wake up sleeping Kumbhakarṇa.\(^3\)

On the occasion of the coronation ceremony of Sugrīva, musical instruments such as conch-shell, vīra-dhāk, dhol (drum), tabal (tabla), dagar, dandi, bhemac, kṣaimac, Jhājhar, remaci, rāmtāl, kartāl, ṭokārī, kendarā, bipaṅči, dotārā, vīnā, bānśī (flute), dośarī, moharl, jijiri, kāhālī, śīṅgā, bheri, etc.\(^4\) Some of these instruments are no longer available. Those were in vogue in Assam during the period of Mādhava Kandali.

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1. *Rāmā*, vv. 2751-53
2. *Rāmā*, v. 2966
3. *Rāmā*, v. 5425
In the *Sundara-kānda* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* it is described how the women abducted by the king of Laṅka were tired of dancing and singing and how they are slept with musical instruments like kendara, mṛdanga, vīnā, marut, etc. lying by their side. Some of them were lying in such a condition as if the dancers are dancing in delight with expressive gestures (bhangībhāva kari jen range nāce naṭā).¹

Dhol or the common drum is a musical instrument of a large size. The poet has occasionally compared the bat to a drum.² In *Babruvāhanar Yuddha* we are told that on the occasion of the birthday festival of Babruvāhana, arrangements were made for performance of dance and music. The arts of dance and music were practised with so much of devotion that any false note or lapse in rhythmic beats was considered as a grievous fault.³

In Assam there is a class of musicians known as naṭa. One of their characteristic musical instruments is the mādal, which was played upon by hanging it around the neck.⁴ That this class of people were looked down upon by the society is

1. *Rāma*, vv. 4128-32
2. *Rāma*, v. 4316
3. *Babru*, vv. 41-42
4. *Babru*, v. 82
illustrated in what Arjuna said addressing Babruvahana.\textsuperscript{1} In Harivara Vipra's Babruvahanar Yuddha it is narrated how while proceeding to receive Arjuna, Babruvahana's journey was accompanied by musical recital on the following instruments:

\begin{center}
dhāka dhola bheri bhemachi dhumachi
dagaro māroka bāngsī
temachi khikichi mādali remachi
tokārī māroka kāngsī
tinā karatāla jhājhārī dubala
āna bādyā bhanḍa yata.\textsuperscript{2}
\end{center}

It has been mentioned in Babruvahanar Yuddha that while Yudhīsthīra was taking the holy dip, called avabhrītha, people were engaged in various kinds of dances and music and played upon various musical instruments.\textsuperscript{3} Victories in battles

\begin{enumerate}
\item cāñcharī māhāra tora naṭara ācāra
naṭara chavalīra kisara rājya-bhāra.
sara-dhanu-kavacaka pācha kari thaiyo
cāndī bāndhi mādali galata tuli laiyo.
yāra ghare utsava tāhāra laga laiyo
nāca-gīta yogāyo mādaliguṭī bāyā.
bīṣeṣata naṭa jāti jānā kāpe jāpa
nicini najāni yāke tāke bole bāpa.
- Babru, vv. 81-83
\item Babru, vv. 56-57
\item Babru, vv. 218-19
\end{enumerate}
were also celebrated with performance of dances and music and playing upon musical instruments.\(^1\) In those days a class of minstrels, known as bhāṭa, would sing songs of ecology in praise of the king or would dance in his adulation.\(^2\) We come across references to such naṭa and bhāṭa musicians on several occasions in the literary works under study.

In Lava-Kuśar Yuddha it has been mentioned that when Rāma and Sītā were back to Ayodhyā from Laṅkā, the Brāhmaṇas danced and sang and engaged in games to express their joy.\(^3\)

In the same work, it has been noted that Lava and Kuśa used to sing while moving about in the forest with vīnā in their hands.\(^4\) During the battle between Lava and Šatrughna, musical instruments like dhāka, dhol (drums), mahari sīngā (horn-pipe) conch-shell, etc. were played upon.\(^5\)

Paintings, Sculptures, Architectures:

The literary works under our study cover various references knowing light on the arts of painting, sculpture

\(^{1}\) Babru, vv. 335-36
\(^{2}\) Babru, v. 339
\(^{3}\) Lava, v. 7
\(^{4}\) Lava, v. 166
\(^{5}\) Lava, vv. 206, 239
and architecture as practised during the pre-Śaṅkaradeva era.

In the Rāmāyaṇa by Mādhava Kandali there are descriptions of houses built in Ayodhya and Laṅkā and these descriptions throw light on architecture and sculpture and provide pictures of the houses belonging to aristocratic Assamese families. In describing the houses in Ayodhya and Laṅkā, Mādhava Kandali has spoken of highly built Dhouvali1 or dhoulivar,2 that is, white coloured houses resembling to those in Kailāśa. These houses were said to have small windows or Kundarukha net through which women could peep into the streets.3 The Assamese houses are generally thatched and the building materials used for constructing such houses include posts, bamboo-made beams and rafters. While describing a palace in Ayodhya, Kandali has mentioned about golden beams, rafters decorated with black stones, and sixty-four columns. The roof of this building was made of gold plates instead of thatches and the rafters were tied up with gold plates and cross bars. Pieces of tasks of elephants had been painted with pink or hengul colour for fixing as bars on the windows. Such a palace was brought with precious stones like indranil maṇī, baidurya maṇī, etc.4 Besides residential

1. Rāmā, v. 1504
2. Rāmā, v. 4113
3. Rāmā, vv. 1504, 1663
4. Rāmā, vv. 1641-45, 6777
houses, Madhava Kandali has also mentioned about guru-ghar, wāri, etc. In addition, there is reference to hāndīśāl or hātīśāl (elephant-shed). In the Laṅkā episode of the Rāmāyaṇa, Madhava Kandali, while describing the households in Laṅkā, has taken note of, besides dhawalivar, nāgar-bhawan, Indra's palace called Vaijayanti and Kāntāmaṇḍap. From these buildings carrying varied names, we can form idea about the variety of the art of architecture. There are references suggesting that such houses had small windows towards the top which have been called 'Kundarukha jāl'.

In his poetic description of Kailāśa, Kaviratna Sarasvatī has mentioned about columns built of crystals and various jewels. In Babruvāhanar Yuddha, the description of King Babruvāhana's royal palace contains references to materials used in constructing typical Assamese house:

"sonār māndali dīlā rūpār ruwali rūpār saṇḍāsā kāmī suvarnava śali" (v. 25).

Besides, it has been noted that the house had bars made of brass, columns made of gold and fencing all around,

1. Rāmā, vv. 1878-79
2. Rāmā, v. 4152
3. Rāmā, v. 4114
4. Rāmā, v. 4115
5. Rāmā, v. 1663
besides, the painter drew images of Indra, Bāsuki, Rāma, Jānaki, Draupadi, various plants, fish, elephants and horses, etc. in that court house. From this we can deduce that during the times of Harivara Vipra the art of painting was practised well in the country. Another example which testifies to this is the incorporation of a good number of illustrations in the poetic work, Lava-Kuśar Yuddha by the same poet. From this we can presume that during the period of the poet, that is, the 14th century A.D., Assam had a flourishing practice of the art of painting. These paintings have rendered the exact images of nature of that era in art. In Harivara Vipra's Lava-Kuśar Yuddha, we are used that on the occasion of performing Rāmacandra's Puṇgsavāna ceremony (a kind of mock marital ceremony) Bharata built a house decorated with gold and silver and beautiful paintings. Lava-Kuśar Yuddha also mentions about the making of a golden image of Sītā on the occasion of Rāmacandra's performance of the aśvamedha yajña or sacrificial horse and this reveals the excellent level attained by the art of sculpture in these days. In all the books under study, we find references to the building of chariots along with descriptions of battles.

1. Babru, vv. 25-34
2. Lava, vv. 31-32
3. Lava, v. 179
There is a reference in the Rāmāyaṇa which shows that the chariot which was built on the occasion of celebrating Rāma's coronation ceremony carried beautifully executed sculpted images of songs, musical instruments and dances. The chariot was decorated with gold and valuable stones and eight white horses are yoked to it.¹ The chariot used by Rāvana was named 'Puspak ratha'. Popular belief was that no women with inauspicious signs could board that chariot.²

In the Rāmāyaṇa, when Mādhava Kandali describes the city of Laṅkā, it seems he is depicting the Assam of his days. Laṅkā is said to have been surrounded by forts made of gold.³ Hanumān while proceeding in search of Sītā, saw dhoulivar, Vaijayanti, Kāntāmaṇḍap, etc. in Laṅkā. At Kāntāmaṇḍap a pond containing pure water had life-size mirrors (śarbāṅga darpaṇa) placed here and there.⁴

In the Ayodhyā episode, while describing the artistic works done in Rāma's house the poet has left evidence of the excellence of the art of painting. The images painted on Rāma's house included Śaṅkara riding a bull, Pārvatī seated on a lion, Ganapatī sitting on the back of a rat, Kārtika

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1. Rāma, vv. 1651-52
2. Rāma, vv. 1651-52
3. Rāma, v. 4093
4. Rāma, v. 4115
riding a peacock, Bāmaṇa with an umbrella on his shoulder and King Bāli preceding him, Viṣṇu and Brahmā on the back of Gaḍura bird flanked by Laksmi on the right and Sarasvati on the left, Kuvera, Indra, Bāyu, Baruṇa, and such other deities. From all such evidence we can conclude that in fourteenth century Assam there was a flourishing practice of the art of painting.

1. Rāma, vv. 1646-48