A. Social Life : People and Social Conditions:

Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva in their various books have depicted diverse pictures of the society of their times. In his Kārtana-ghosā, Śaṅkaradeva has the expression "chatrisa jāti",¹ or thirty-six castes, but he has not named those castes. At another place he has noted thirty-four castes.² Of course, his various literary works contain references to castes such as the Brāhmaṇas, the Kṣattrīyas, the Vaiṣyās, washermen, gardeners, Candālas, the Śūdras, etc. Similarly, Mādhavadeva's works also carry references to these very castes. Śaṅkaradeva has spoken of the Brāhmaṇas as higher caste.³ Bearing ill-will towards a Brāhmaṇa was regarded as a reprehensible act and any one found guilty of such an act was regarded as a sinner.⁴ Even though during the period of Śaṅkaradeva there were caste differences between the Brāhmaṇas and the Candālas in respect of their status.

1. K-q, v. 73
2. K-q, v. 2035
3. K-q, v. 130
4. K-q, v. 1530
Sankaradeva maintained that scholars could not be differentiated on the basis of caste divisions like Brāhmaṇa and Candāla. All are equal where scholars are concerned.¹ In the drama, Patnlprasāda, Sankaradeva mentions titles like Misra, Kandali, Ācārya, Bhāratī as those borne by the Brāhmaṇas.² It was the Brāhmaṇas who acted as the family priests of the kings and the kings performed all the great yajñas like rājasūya, āsvamedha through them. The Brāhmaṇas were presented with gold, silver, paddy, etc., on the occasion of such yajñas.³ In Hariscandra-Upākhyāṇa, the king tells Śāvyā that no harsh words should be bandied at the Brāhmaṇas and they should be attended upon like gods.⁴ In Rukminiharana-kāvyā we are told that the learned Brāhmaṇas have no right to ask for gifts.⁵ We have also reference to Brāhmaṇas and such other pious men becoming favourities of the king with the hope of gaining wealth.⁶ According to the affiliation to Vedas, the Brāhmaṇas were categorised as Rigvedī, Sāmavedī, Yajurvedī, etc. In the Dasama Skandha (Tenth Book) of the Bhāgavata Sankaradeva notes that only the Yajurvedī Brāhmaṇas were fit

¹. K-q, v. 1821
². Patnl-n, p. 6
³. Hu, vv. 19-21; U-Rāmā, v. 6794
⁴. Hu, v. 430
⁵. Rukā, v. 90
⁶. Rukā, v. 530
for performing Viṣṇu worship. In connection with Nandotsava, we find a reference to the practice of offering cows to Brāhmaṇas. In the Daśama Skandha we are told that, for the welfare of child Kṛṣṇa, Nanda arranged the recitation from the Caṇḍī, besides offering pūjā and fire-worship. The Brāhmaṇas have been described as well-versed in the Vedas. But they are proud and are not devotees of Lord Kṛṣṇa. That every section of people try to protect their own caste and lineage can be presumed from the fact that the Brāhmaṇas did not go to Vraja-dhāma so as to save their caste from the tyranny of King Kamsa. In the Ādikāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa, Mādhavadeva notes that the four castes - the Brāhmaṇas, the Kṣatriyas, the Vaiśyas and Śūdras tried to protect their caste and creed by upholding their own customs. We can gather from the Ādikāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa that King Daśaratha, queen Kaikeyī's father and the priest of King Sumitra were Brāhmaṇas and in performing Sumitra's marriage that Brāhmaṇas took the leading

1. Bh. X, v. 136
2. Bh. X, v. 141
3. Bh. X, vv. 212-13
4. Bh. X, v. 931
5. Bh. X, v. 940
6. Patni-n, p. 7
7. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 171-72
8. Ā-Rāmā, v. 209
part. The slaughtering a Brāhmaṇa was considered a grave crime and we find reference to this in the case of the killing of Sindhu Muni by King Daśaratha. From the Ādīkāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa, one can realize that the Brāhmaṇas belonged to a higher caste and the Caṇḍālas to a lower one; but the fault of pride can turn a Brāhmaṇa into a Caṇḍāla. From the Rājasūya-kāvya of Mādhavadeva it is learnt that the ruler of Dvārakā, Lord Kṛṣṇa, decorated the Brāhmaṇas, who were well-versed in the Vedas, and presented them with gold, clothes, cows, etc.

The Kṣatriyas are heroic by nature and it is their duty to save others. A Kṣatriya king who cannot protect his subjects including the Brāhmaṇas is not really a Kṣatriya but is to be classed with a dancing entertainer or naṭa. The term naṭa refers to a class of people who entertained others with their dance and singing. That they were looked down upon by the society is implied here. In this way we come across references to people bearing different names or titles in accordance with their vocations and activities in the different parts of Saṅkaradeva’s Kirtana-ghosā. For instance,

1. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 230-31
2. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 351-54
3. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 768-72
4. R-Kā, vv. 38-39
5. Kg, v. 1533
yogi¹ (ascetic), vaidya² (physician), bai'tālika³ (singer), dhobā⁴ (washerman), gowāl⁵ (milkman), mālākār⁶ (garland maker), nāṭa⁷ (dancer), malla⁸ (wrestler) and such other castes or professions giving a total of thirty-four classes as mentioned by the poet.⁹ As enumerated in 'Uresā-varṇana' a good number of such castes and professional people lived in Assam in the age of Saṅkaradeva¹⁰ and do still exist.

1. Kg, vv. 202, 472
2. Kg, v. 203
3. Kg, v. 434
4. Kg, v. 1125
5. Kg, v. 1127
6. Kg, vv. 1132, 1139, 1714
7. Kg, v. 1185
8. Kg, v. 1197
9. tell māli šilākuṭi baniyā sūtār
carmakār candāl kamār kumbhakār
citrapār kāhār kunḍār vidya jata
aneka kāyastha jāi rājār lagata
nāṭa bhāṭa nārāṭki gāyan aparanta
vipragaṇa nṛpatira lagata calanta
prthivir jateka vṛttiyāgaṇa āche
cauṭris jātiyo jai nṛpatiro kāche.
   - Kg, vv. 203-38
10. In the Koc Behār capital of the Koc King Naranārāyaṇa, a contemporary of Saṅkaradeva, lived the following castes or trades - the Dokāṇi (shop-keeper), the Cākari (service-holder), the Gipāhi (soldier), the Piyāda (page), the Dhopdhārā, the Garmali, the Bharāli, the Mahaliyā, the Sadāgar (merchant), the Naṭa, the Bhāṭa (dancer and singer).
   - KGC, p. 92
As in Kirtana-ghosā, Śaṅkaradeva also mentions in his works Hariścandra Upākhyāna, Rukminiḥaraṇa kāvyā, Uttarakāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa and in the different books of the Bhāgavata about various castes such as Candāla, Hāri, Brāhmaṇa or Dvija, Daivajña, Kāyastha, Kṣatriya, Nāpit or hair-dresser. Similarly, he has taken note of various vocational classes such as Naṭa, Bhāṭa, Śilākuṭī Baniyā, Bājaniyā, Rakhiyā, Kaṭak, Gowāl or milkman, Dhobā or washerman, Mālākār, Pohārī or hawkers, Bājikar or magician, Veṣyā or prostitute, etc. in his different works.

Śaṅkaradeva has asserted that even a Candāla, though belonging to a lower caste, can attain to purity by reciting the name of Hāri.\(^1\) From Hariścandra's statement that he was inferior to even a Candāla, we can presume that during the days of Śaṅkaradeva, the Candālas were regarded as an extremely low caste. Similarly, we can understand that during the age of Śaṅkaradeva, the Hāris were regarded as belonging to a low caste from Visvamitra's scolding of King Hariścandra as Hāri.\(^2\)

The Brāhmaṇas or the Dvijas enjoyed a high status in the society. On the occasion of the birthday celebrations of

\(^1\) Hu, vv. 4, 274, 278; Ru-kā, v. 85

\(^2\) H-u, v. 187
Child Kṛṣṇa, the Brāhmaṇas blessed him after reading out the scriptures.¹

Whenever the Rajās and Mahārajās performed some yajña or some other festival, they would entertain the Brāhmaṇas with feast and offer them money, gold, jewellery, etc. In Hariścandra-Upākhyaṇa, we find reference to such a practice of offering gifts on the occasion of a yajña. Besides, Śaṅkaradeva has also depicted the greedy nature of Brāhmaṇas on several occasions.²

The Daivajnās or astrologers also had a high position in the society before performing some yajña, the king would ascertain the auspicious date and hour together with the venue with the assistance of astrologers. We find reference to this in the 'Ureśa-varṇana' of the Kṛtana-ghosa.³

The Kāyatḥas also occupied a high position in the society. Śaṅkaradeva himself mentions this in the Uttara-Kāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa⁴ and the Rukmiṇīharaṇa-kāvyas.⁵ The Kṣatriyās were a heroic people. It was thought unbecoming of them to

1. Bh. X, vv. 208-09
2. Hu, vv. 32-51
3. K-q, vv. 2075-76
4. U-Rāmā, v. 7093
5. Ru-kā, v. 363
be afraid of warfare.¹

The barber or Nāpit performed the job of hair-cutting. This has been referred to in the Uttara-Kāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa in course of a statement that on the occasion of the coronation ceremony of Lava and Kuśā, the inhabitants of Ayodhyā had their hair cut by the hair-dressers.²

In those days, on the occasions of festivals the Naṭa or dancers would perform dances and the Bhāta or panegyrists would sing songs.³ Even in the present day society, we have a class of people known as Naṭa. A class of minstrels known as Bhāta would move about in different kingdoms in those days and sing songs in praise of the king or some God. During the reign of King Naranārāyaṇa there were classes of people known as Naṭa and Bhāta.⁴ We find reference to Bhāta in Śaṅkaraūvā's Rukmiṇiharana-kāvyā as well as in his drama Rukmiṇiharana.⁵

The term Naṭa referred to a dancer and actor who used attractive costumes in performing his dance or role in a drama. Śaṅkaraūvā has noted this in Daśama-skandha Bhāgavata

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¹. Ru-kā, vv. 235, 447-49; U-Rāmā, v. 7283
². U-Rāmā, v. 7380
³. Ru-kā, vv. 66, 198
⁴. KGC, p. 192
⁵. Ru-n, p. 3 (Surabhi nāma bhāṭa), p. 5 (Hāridāsa nāma bhāṭa).
while narrating how Lord Kṛṣṇa dressed himself beautifully like a Naṭa to charm the Gopīs.\(^1\) This appearance of Kṛṣṇa has been described as his naṭavara-veśā.\(^2\) The Naṭa or Naṭis were not held in high esteem by the society. For instance, in Hariścandra-Upākhyāna, Śaṅkaradeva implies this in a simile whereby he says that when Gaṇeśa is worshipped in place of Viṣṇu, it is like installing a Naṭi on the sacred āsana (pirā) rather than the sālagrāma.\(^3\)

We come across references to the profession of sculptors. Besides constructing the plinths of houses by cutting stones, they used to make images of tigers, leopards, lions, birds, etc.\(^4\)

The traders or baniyās used to bring varieties of jewels, pearls, ornamental stones and sell them.\(^5\)

There was also a class of people in society whose profession was to play on musical instruments.\(^6\)

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1. Bh. X, v. 842
2. Bh. X, v. 849
3. H-u, v. 27
4. Ru-kā, v. 198
5. Ru-kā, v. 200
6. Ru-kā, v. 261
In those days, there was another class of people whose function was to act as body-guards to the king or royal officials. Such people were known as guards or rakhiyā or kaṭaka.¹

Those who were engaged in rearing cows and selling of milk, butter, etc., were known as gowāl,² and their womenfolk were known as gowāri or gowāll.³ The name is still prevalent. The milkmen or gowāl were sometimes looked down upon by the society.⁴

In those days, there was a class of people called dhobā⁵ or washermen who would wash the king's clothes and also another class of people known as māll or mālākār,⁶ whose duty was to supply flowers and garlands to the king.

In the Dasāmaskandha-Bhāgavata, Śaṅkaradeva mentions about Pohāris⁷ (pedler of goods). The pohāri is said to be selling fruits and Lord Kṛṣṇa is accepting those in exchange for paddy, gold and silver.

1. Ru-kā, v. 281
2. Bh. X, v. 323; Kotorā-ि, p. 314
3. Bh. X, v. 268; Cor-ि, pp. 298-99; Bhūsana-ि, p. 317; Kotorā-ि, p. 314
4. Ru-kā, v. 285
5. Bh. X, v. 1688
7. Bh. X, 326
Sāṅkaradeva has also noted the display of magic by the bājīkar or magician and has described such magical games as transient like dreams.\(^1\) We come across references to such bājīkar or magicians in the biographies (Caritaputhis) as well. When Sāṅkaradeva was just 22 days old, a magician a Tātakīyā bājīkar displayed dances of magic dolls.\(^2\) We also find references to the presence of vēśyā or prostitutes in the society. Sāṅkaradeva notes that even when these prostitutes find the company of virtuous men, they do not stick to one man.\(^3\)

The system of maintaining servants was in vogue. King Kaṁsa had a dāsī maid-servant named Sairindhri who supplied sweet-scented sandalwood to the king daily.\(^4\) This maid-servant also had a number of female attendants of her own.\(^5\)

There was also the practice of sale of slaves prevalent. In Hariścandra-Upākhyāna we are told that a Brāhmaṇa purchased Hariścandra's wife Śaivyā as maid-servant.\(^6\)

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1. Bh. X, v. 834
2. K-q, p. 22
3. Bh. X, v. 790
4. K-q, v. 1144
5. K-q, vv. 1258, 1267; Bhūsana-j, p. 317
6. H-u, vv. 304-11
Sañkaradeva describes the Buddhist followers of Tantricism who studied the Vāmanaya-sāstra as mleccha and he has noted at several places in his works that God in His incarnation as Kalki will destroy these mlecchas.¹

In the writings of Mādhavadeva also we come across references to different castes like Brāhmaṇa, Kṣattrīya, Vaiśya, Śūdra, Candāla, etc.

The Brāhmaṇas and the Kṣattrīyas have been described as 'puṇya-tanu'² or sacred-bodied. The Vaiśyas, the Śūstras and womenfolk have been characterised as persons engaged in worldly affairs, while the Candālas have been described as an inferior class of people in society. If persons belonging to these classes also are solely devoted to Lord Kṛṣṇa, they too can attain to salvation easily.³ Only the Brāhmaṇas constitute the most sacred of castes,⁴ hence if one sells oneself to make offerings to a Brāhmaṇa, such one will go to heaven like King Hariścandra.⁵ Further, the Brāhmaṇas were entertained by being invited to religious ceremonies like

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1. K-q, v. 14; Keli-n, p. 18
2. N-q, v. 609
3. N-q, v. 608; N-mā, v. 295
4. N-mā, vv. 152-53
5. R-kā, vv. 319-20
pujā, yajña, etc. and by washing their feet. Any neglect shown to a Brāhmaṇa was believed to cause abject sufferings. Those who would speak ill of a Brāhmaṇa were denounced as narādhama or low specimen of humanity. Like the Brāhmaṇas, the Mahantas were also regarded as highly sacred. These Mahantas have been described as full of forgiveness. In the early part of the Rāmāyaṇa Ādikānda, Mādhavadeva uses the term hinajāti or inferior caste in reference to himself; from this it can be inferred that in those days certain castes were regarded as low.

Like Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva also mentions such professional names as bhāta, naṭa, veśyā or prostitutes. From Rājasūya-kāvyā we come to know that women belonging to the royal families used to present their used garments and jewellery to the prostitutes. This was a system prevalent among them since early times. From this, it can be presumed

1. Ā-Rāmā, v. 1126
2. N-mā, v. 157
3. N-mā, v. 152
4. N-mā, v. 9; Ā-Rāmā, v. 1482
5. R-kā, v. 27; Ā-Rāmā, v. 695
6. R-kā, v. 27; Ā-Rāmā, v. 693
7. R-kā, v. 63
8. R-kā, v. 688
9. R-kā, v. 688
that the prostitutes did not have a high status in society. Besides these, there were also two other classes of people - the vyādha¹ who would earn his livelihood by hunting animals and hālowā whose profession was tilling the land.² The baniyās were engaged in manufacturing jewellery made of gold and silver.³ Mādhavadeva also mentions another class - the mleccha, who also could become sacred by reciting the name of Hari.⁴ At another place Mādhavadeva has mentioned two other professional classes, namely, telī (oilman) and māli (gardener).⁵

In his jhumurās, Mādhavadeva is found to have mentioned the professional names gowal and gowalini at several places.

Where bhakti or devotion is concerned, there is no difference between a tribal and a non-tribal. This observation has been made by both Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva in their various works. In this context, we find Śaṅkaradeva mentioning some castes and tribes. Departing from the original which does not contain such names, Śaṅkaradeva

1. Ā-Rāmā, v. 13
2. Ā-Rāmā, v. 747
3. N-mā, v. 581
4. R-kā, v. 152
5. Ā-Rāmā, v. 695
mentions these castes and ethnic groups living in Assam in his version of the Bhāgavata Book II, in these words:

\[
\begin{align*}
kirāta & \text{ kachāri} & \text{ khāsi gāro miri} \\
yavana & \text{ kaṅka} & \text{ gowāla} \\
asama & \text{ muluka} & \text{ rajaka turuka} \\
kuvāca & \text{ mleccha caṇḍāla}.^1
\end{align*}
\]

These castes and tribes have also been noted in history.\(^2\)

System of Marriage:

As in the works of such poets of the pre-Śaṅkaradeva era as Mādhava Kandali, in the works of the neo-Vaiṣṇava poets Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, too, we find depicted the pictures of marriage ceremonies. Such pictures reveal the nature of Assamese marriage ceremonies. Even though there are eight systems of marriage in the Hindu society such as daīva, ārṣa, prajāpatya, etc., in the works of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva we find references to the system of svayamvara, rākṣasa and gāndharva. Simultaneously, we come across detailed descriptions of marital customs and rituals.

1. Bh. II, v. 474
2. Darang Rājyaṃśāvalī, p. 137
In the Rukmini-harana-kavya, Sankaradeva presents a fine description of Kṛṣṇa's marriage with Rukmini under the rākṣasa system of marriage. Prior to the wedding of Kṛṣṇa and Rukmini, Rukmini's father, King Bhīṣmaka had contemplated giving her in marriage in the presence of other kings according to the established customs. But it did not so take place because of Rukma's opposition. The latter wanted to give Rukmini in marriage to his friend Śiśupāla in accordance with due rites. Kṛṣṇa, however, kidnapped Rukmini from the venue of the marriage in accordance with the rākṣasa system of marriage. Similarly, in Rukmini-harana-nāt also, Sankaradeva mentions this system of marriage.

According to the svayamvara system, the bride selects someone and accepts him as her husband out of the many kings and princes coming from different places and gathering at the marriage pandal. We find references to this system of marriage in Śaṅkaradeva's and Mādhava-deva's works.

1. Ru-kā, v. 9
2. Ru-kā, v. 69; Ru-n, p. 6
3. Ru-kā, v. 282
4. Ru-n, p. 17
5. Ru-n, p. 8
6. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 39, 217-20, 954-56
The description given by Mādhavadeva of a svayamvara gathering in the Rāmāyaṇa Ādikāṇḍa shows that Sītā's father King Jānaka, besides building a marriage hall decorated with various precious jewels and pearls by bringing in an architect like Viśvakarmā, had the hall filled up with rows of decorated thrones for the suitor-kings expected to come from various countries. Besides this, he had arranged beautiful houses and sumptuous meals for the kings. Thereafter the messenger visited different kingdoms to inform the kings of Sītā's svayamvara and accordingly the kings assembled at the venue of the svayamvara on an auspicious day.¹ On the eve of the 'svayamvara', the king led Sītā to the marriage assembly to the accompaniment of musical performance on various instruments, while the women accompanied the bride by carrying divyaghāta (sanctified pot) and singing auspicious songs. They were also accompanied by the Brāhmaṇas reciting Vedic hymns, the bhāṭas singing songs and the nāṭis or dancing women performing dances.² In this svayamvara sabhā, in accordance with the vow taken by King Jānaka, Rāma broke the bow of Hara hence Sītā accepted him as her husband by offering him a garland made of gold.³

1. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 956-74
2. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 981-83; Ru-kā, v. 664
3. Ā-Rāmā, v. 1226
On the occasion of Svayamvara, the suitors had to display their physical prowess or merit sometimes—and whoever succeeded in this test was selected by the bride.¹

After the Svayamvara, the father had to present his daughter to the bridegroom in accordance with established customs.²

When a princess attained marriageable age, the father would inform possible suitors with the help of Brāhmaṇas and priests.³ Sometimes the bride herself would invite the suitor for wedding through some Brāhmaṇa or in a letter.⁴ In certain accounts we find the mention of the age of the bride and the groom. Usually, marriages took place between a bride and a bridegroom of tender age⁵ or at best of equal age.⁶ Marriages were arranged between young males and females as at present, in those days, too. The horoscope of the bride and the bridegroom was consulted before marriage.⁷ Sometimes a father would look for a suitable bridegroom for his daughter by consulting his near relations.⁸

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1. A-Rāmā, vv. 1223-24; R-viṣṇ, p. 12; K-g, v. 1942
2. A-Rāmā, v. 223
3. A-Rāmā, vv. 230-31
4. Ru-n, pp. 10-12
5. Ru-n, p. 9
6. Ru-n, p. 5
7. Ru-kā, v. 514
8. Ru-kā, vv. 36-40
The bride was ceremoniously offered in accordance with customary rites prescribed in the religious scriptures and marriage was regarded as an auspicious act. Prayers were made so that there were no obstructions to such an act.¹

Just before the marriage, while necessary materials were collected for the wedding, a messenger was despatched to invite the kings and the princes to attend the swayamvara. The adhivāsa ceremony (auspicious rites) was performed on the night prior to the day of marriage.²

On the day of wedding, the bridegroom's father performed various ceremonial rites such as snāna (bath), dāna (offerings), tarpaṇa (homage or tributes to the manes), nāndīmukha śrāddha, pitṛ-kārya, etc., and consulted the astrologer to ascertain the auspicious time for journey and wedding.³ Before performing the bride's bathing ceremony, she was anointed with tel-kur and paste of grams and turmeric was applied on her body, while the married women would draw water ceremoniously. After her bath, the bride would put on her mekhelā made of worm-silk and other clothes. After plaiting her hair into a high bunch she would fix a mālatī

¹. Ru-kā, v. 56
². Ru-kā, v. 238
³. Ru-kā, v. 252; A-Rāmā, vv. 246-48
flower into it. She would apply vermilion on the parting of her hair, and a mark of sandalwood paste on her forehead, and wear gold ornaments on her hands, ears, neck, hair, etc. The various ornaments used were – a galpatā (some sort of necklace), sātsari hār and pesandār on the neck, balaya or armlet for the arms, Kaṅkaṇa or bangles on the hands, a gold jeṭhi on the forehead, gold rings on the ten fingers and gold-made nepur (foot ornaments) on the feet.¹

After giving the bride a ceremonial bath, she was dressed and decorated with ornaments and a fruit-knife (tāmol-kaṭārī) and mirror (dāpoṇa) were offered into her hands.²

We are also told about auspicious songs sung by the Brāhmaṇa women, performing uruli (huludhvani) by the married women, and playing on musical instruments by the musicians.³

The system of dowry was in vogue in marriages. While Rukmīṇī was given in marriage, besides being adorned with jewellery, various clothes and ornaments were offered as dowry.⁴ While offering dowry, her father Bhiṣmaka had her

1. Ru-kā, vv. 253-58; R-Viṣṇu, p. 10
2. Ā-Rāma, v. 1350
3. Ru-kā, vv. 262-63
4. Ru-kā, v. 739; we find reference to such system of dowry in the X canto of the Bhāgavata as well. ef. Bh. X, v. 22
seated on his lap and one of her hands was joined to Kṛṣṇa's and til (sesamum) and Kuśa grass were placed on the joined hands. At that time the king offered elephants and horses, servants and maids, gold and jewels, etc. as dowry. After this, Rukmiṇī was seated beside Kṛṣṇa and water was sprayed on the tikani or bunch of hair belonging to the bride and the bridegroom; Brahmā recited the mantras and the unmarried women sounded uruli. Married women such as Urvaśī sang songs and verses. Thereafter Rukmiṇī's elder brother Rukmaratha tied up the lagna (moment of conjoin). Just as in our present-day society presents are offered by friends and relatives on the occasion of marriage, similarly the invitees presented various gifts. God Indra presented jewellery, divine ornaments, etc. We come across references to the practice of offering various gifts to the bride on the occasion of marriage by Bāsuki Nāga, Kuvera, Baruṇa, Aṣṭavasu (a class of eight demi-gods), Candra, Sūrya and others. In the Rāmāyaṇa also, Mādhavadeva has noted about the prevailing practice of dowry in connection with the marriage ceremonies.

1. Ru-κα, vv. 755-56
2. Ru-κα, vv. 757-759; Ru-ν, p. 25
3. Ru-κα, v. 760
4. Ru-κα, v. 740
5. Ru-κα, vv. 760-70
of Daśaratha, Rāma and Lākṣmīna.\textsuperscript{1} Just as, in accordance with prevailing customs in Assamese marriage ceremony the bride and the bridegroom offer clothes, money and betel leaf with areca-nuts in a sarāi to the Brāhmaṇas and priests, father-in-law and mother-in-law, and other respected persons and also offer obeisance (pranāma), similarly at the end of Rukmini's wedding also Lord Kṛṣṇa and Rukmini offered obeisance to Brahma, Purandara and other gods and pleased them by offering clothes, flowers, sandalwood paste, Kumkum, betel-nut and leaf, etc.\textsuperscript{2}

It is worth noting that in Assamese social life, betel-leaf and areca-nut are essential. Saṅkaradeva has referred betel-nut and leaf at several places in \textit{Rukminīharaṇa-kāvya}.\textsuperscript{3}

\begin{itemize}
\item It is natural for a mother to feel sad and express her pain while parting from her daughter at the time of marriage and she implores her daughter's mother-in-law to maintain her daughter with affection. This is found in our present-day society as it was true of the society depicted in \textit{Rukminīharaṇa-kāvya}. In \textit{Rukminīharaṇa}, Kṛṣṇa's mother Daivatā tells Śāśiprabhā, Rukmini's mother, in a persuasive tone that she should not worry about her daughter because the
\end{itemize}

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{Ā-Rāma}, vv. 223-24, 1358-63
\item \textit{Ru-kā}, vv. 78-82; \textit{Ru-n}, p. 25
\item \textit{Ru-kā}, vv. 268-69, 781-82
\end{enumerate}
son-in-law regards his mother-in-law dearer than his own mother. We find an almost similar picture in Mādhavadeva's Ṛṣiṛāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa. King Janaka is found there requesting king Daśaratha and queen Kauśalyā to look after Siśā with the affections they showed to their daughter.

In the case of King Daśaratha's marriage, we find the poet depicting the system of ceremonious ushering in of the bride to the bridegroom's household by the latter's mother. After Daśaratha's marriage, his mother Indumāti is seen welcoming her daughter-in-law Kauśalyā and Kauśalyā and Kaikeyi with offerings of jewellery. When Sumitrā was brought, her mother-in-law ushers her in by performing traditional auspicious rites in the company of other married women. Similarly, in respect of the marriages of Rāma-Lakṣmaṇa and Bharata-Satruṣaḥyna, also we have identical pictures. The same practice of ceremoniously ushering in the bride has also been depicted in Rukmnīharana-nāṭ and Rāmvijay-nāṭ. While welcoming the bride, the married women were said to have blessed the bride and the bridegroom by sprinkling rice and

1. Ru-kā, vv. 783-85
2. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 1377-78
3. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 226-27
4. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 258-59
5. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 1461-68
The festivities that follow the day of marriage are known as bāhi-biya in Assamese society. The next day, after performing the ceremony known as Khobā-Khubunī, the bride and the bridegroom are entertained with pāncchāmṛta and the marriage is consummated by a ceremony called Phulasayyā. This has been noted in Saṅkaradeva's and Mādhavadeva's works as well.²

The system of polygamy was prevalent in the society of those days. We have several references in Saṅkaradeva's and Mādhavadeva's works to kings such as Daśāratha,³ Kṛṣṇa,⁴ and others⁵ having more than one wife. However, even when there were several wives, it was the first wife who seemed to have greater claim on the husband. This fact has been clearly corroborated in the drama Pārijāt-harana.⁶

The primary purpose of marriage was that the bride would accept the new household as her own and would make her

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1. Ru-n, p. 24; R-vij-n, p. 17
2. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 653, 1365-66
3. Ā-Rāmā, v. 260
4. K-q, vv. 1770, 1934; Pāri-n, p. 3
5. R-vij-n, p. 11
6. Pāri-n, p. 8
husband as the sole object of her life. She would always serve and attend upon her husband. Besides her husband, she would also attend to her father-in-law and mother-in-laws. She would not neglect her brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law and would also be considerate about the other members of the house. We have reference to such precepts in the Rāmāyaṇa Ādikāṇḍa.¹ In Kālidās's poetical drama, Abhijñāna Śākuntalam we find the great sage Kanva exhorting Śākuntalā like this on the eve of her departure for her husband's house.²

In Śaṅkaradeva's Uttarakāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa, Kālidamana-nāt and Bhāgavata we find the assertion that for a woman, her husband is as good as God and life itself.³ Marriage is also meant to have sons and, in order to have good children, a woman prays to gods or goddesses when such need arises.⁴

As in today's society, in those days also a henpecked husband was not looked upon favourably.⁵ On the other hand, women were taken to be fickle by nature.⁶

1. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 1369-70
2. Abhijñāna Śākuntalam, Act IV, vv. 2-4
3. U-Rāmā, v. 7082; Kāli-n, p. 8; Bh. X, v. 655
4. Kāli-n, p. 5; Cor-j, p. 300
5. Keli-n, pp. 7, 9
6. Keli-n, pp. 7, 9
Even though it was expected that a woman's main function was to serve her husband, the society accorded a high position to a married woman. To have a wife according to one's expectations was regarded as a matter of good luck or the result of prolonged meditation. From this it can be inferred that in ancient times the wife was accorded a high status.

A woman seeking another man's protection other than her husband's was regarded as fallen. Such a woman was denied shelter even by the husband and her sons. The custom of suttee was prevalent in the society of those days. After the death of Lakṣmaṇa, Urmilā sacrificed her life by jumping into the funeral pyre. Śaṅkaradeva describes in his Kṛtana-ghoṣa how after the death of the Yādava like Kṛṣṇa and Balorāma, their wives embraced death on the funeral pyre. In Rāma-vi jaya-nāt we are told that Sītā sacrificed her life by throwing herself on fire so that she could have Nārāyaṇa as

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1. H-u, vv. 443-44
2. H-u, v. 432
3. H-u, vv. 431-33
4. Patni-n, p. 6
5. U-Rāmā, v. 1405
6. K-q, vv. 1923-25
her husband in the next life.¹

Sacramental Rites (Daśakarma):

Since ancient times, the performance of such sacramental rites or daśakarma as garbhādhāna (celebration of pregnancy), simantonnayana (a ceremony observed by woman in the fourth, sixth or eighth month of pregnancy), pumisavana (ceremony performed in the eighth month of a woman's first conception), etc. has been prevalent in the Aryan society. Even though with the passage of time, some of these rites have either lost their appeal or have become obsolete or have got modified, these rites have not altogether vanished from the society. We find some occasional or slight references to such rituals in Saṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva's works.

In the Ādikānda Rāmāyaṇa written by Mādhavadeva we are told how King Daśaratha performed a Yajña by inviting such sages as Vibhāṇḍaka, Rṣyaśṛṅga so that he could have children. In that yajña ceremony the king by lighting the fire at an auspicious moment chanted the putra-mantra.² From out of the fires of this yajña rose a strange male figure

¹. R-vij-n, p. 4
². K-Rāmā, vv. 541-44
with a container full of pāyasa (milk and rice preparation) and the pāyasa was shared by Kauśalyā, Kaikeyī and Sumitrā with due sanctity so as to be able to bear sons. Afterwords, the king entered the inner part of the royal house at the auspicious hour and impregnated the three queens on flower-bedecked beds. In the fifth month the queens were entertained with pañcāmṛta and in the eighth month King Daśaratha performed the pumsavāna festival seeking the blessings of male children.

There is a prevailing belief in Assamese society that great men are born at auspicious moments. Śaṅkaradeva describes the birth of Śrī Kṛṣṇa at an auspicious moment in the Tenth Book of the Bhāgavata. Mādhavadeva has also noted in the Ādikānda of the Rāmāyaṇa that Rāma, Bharata, Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna were born only at that auspicious moment when there was a confluence of the auspicious planet with the star. After the birth of the child, the child was bathed in cold water amidst the playing of various musical instruments was fed with milk and then laid on a soft bed. King

1. A-Rāmā, vv. 629-53
2. A-Rāmā, vv. 664-65
3. Bh. X, vv. 71-74
4. A-Rāmā, vv. 667-73
5. A-Rāmā, v. 670
Dasaratha saw the faces of the children only after taking his bath and ascertaining the auspicious moment for it. On the occasion of the birth of the sons, the Brahmans chanted the Vedic hymns, many gods and goddesses were worshipped; arrangements were made for performance of dance and music and the king made munificent gifts of money and jewels.

In Assamese society there is a custom to perform a child's Jatakarma on an auspicious day. We have references to this auspicious ceremony in Ādikāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa and Śaṅkaradeva's Daśamaskandha Bhāgavata. In the Rāmāyaṇa Ādikāṇḍa, we are told how, while performing the Jatakarma ceremony, the child's future role is ascertained through astrological calculations. In the Ādikāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa, too, we come across a description of astrological reading of the future of Rāma, Laksmana, Bharata and Śatrughna as sons. Similarly, in the Tenth Book of the Bhāgavata there is a reference to performing the Jatakarma ceremony of Śrī Kṛṣṇa by calling in a Brahmaṇa astrologer. Along with jatakarma, certain other rites are also performed. In the same book we are further told how on the occasion of the birth of Kṛṣṇa,

1. Ā-Rāmā, v. 679
2. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 671-84
3. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 685-91
4. Bh. X, v. 241
Nanda arranged a festival and in that festival, besides playing on musical instruments, the relatives visited Nanda's house with curd, milk and ghee as gifts. By spraying curd and milk, curd-wash and butter, oily water and turmeric powder on each other's body, everybody expressed their joy. Besides, after giving a bath to the cows, they applied turmeric powder, oil and scented water on their horns and body. Afterwards Nanda presented the participants in the festival with clothes and jewellery, betel-nut, flowers and sandal wood paste.¹

The Jātakarma ceremony of Rāma-Kṛṣṇa was performed by Vasudeva with the help of the priest Garga and they were adorned with the yajña sūtra. The Brāhmaṇas were adorned with gold ornaments and served with scents, flowers and sandalwood paste. They were also gifted with calves. After performing the jātakarma the sage Garga initiated the child to the gāyatri mantra.² Even now we find a similar picture of jātakarma ceremony of the child in Assamese society. In the Caritaputhi³ we are told about performance of Śaṅkaradeva's jātakarma when he was a child. The Uttarakānda Rāmāyaṇa also narrates about sage Vālmīki performing the Jātakarma of Lava

¹ Bh. X, vv. 140-52
² Bh. X, vv. 1943-46
³ KGC, p. 23
System of Education:

In olden days, education was imparted to a disciple at the household of the Guru and on completion of the educational course, the disciple left the Guru's house after paying dakṣinā (honorarium) to the guru. In the Rāmāyaṇa it is told that after Lava and Kuśa came of age, they were taught about political principles, the Rāmāyaṇa and knowledge of handling weapons by the sage. In the Tenth Book of the Bhāgavata we find it mentioned that after receiving their education from the sage Sandipani, Rāma-Kṛṣṇa paid him his due guru dakṣinā. In Dāmodar Viprākhyāna of Kṛtana-ghosā we are told that Dāmodar and Kṛṣṇa studied together in the household of sage Sandipani and while staying at the guru's house, they collected firewood from the forests for the guru.

We find references to the practice of learning at the guru's household in the Caritaputhis as well. Sañkaradeva

1. U-Rāmā, v. 6751
2. U-Rāmā, v. 6752
4. K-q, vv. 1580-88
studied at the 'tol' of Mahendra Kandali, and Madhavadeva at that of Rajendra Adhyapaka. While getting admitted to a 'tol', the disciple offered rice, clothes, money, etc. to the guru as tokens of honour, and in course of studies by staying in the guru's house, he would assist the guru in performing his household chores. The gurus were well versed in the Vedas and they attained purity by performing yajña and vrata.

The Last Rites of the Dead:

In our society, the last rites of the dead are performed in three different ways: by cremating them on the funeral pyre, by burying them underground, and sometimes by floating them on the river. Sometimes, they are left on the cremation ground. In Śaṅkaradeva's works we find references to the two practices of burning the dead and throwing them into the river. In Hariścandra-upākhyāna we are told that after the death of Rohitāśva, the Brāhmaṇa advised Śaibyā to throw the dead body into the Ganga. The practice of setting

1. KGC, p. 25
2. KGC, p. 62
3. Patni-n, p. 3
4. H-u, v. 365
afloat on a rapt made of banana plants the dead body of a person bitten by a snake instead of cremating it so that some medicineman can cure him is still in vogue in the society. Of course, the dead body of snake-bitten Rohitāśva was later cremated on the funeral pyre.¹

In the Uttarakāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa² we are told that the dead body of Laksmanā was cremated on the funeral pyre and his wife Ürmilā also threw herself on the pyre. Afterwards Rāmacandra performed the last rites of Laksmanā in accordance with the prescribed customs. When a person dies, the near and dear ones of the deceased are overwhelmed with grief and on such occasions it is found that the bereaved members of the family are offered solace by some people. We come across the depiction of such scenes in the Uttarakāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa. When, on the occasion of Laksmanā's demise, his relatives were beside themselves with grief, Vasistha tried to impress upon them that the act of weeping would not do any good to the deceased.³ According to Hindu faith, it is believed that if the last rites of the dead are not performed in accordance with the prescribed rules, the dead will not attain salvation.

1. H-u, vv. 370-72
2. U-Rāmā, v. 7405
3. U-Rāmā, v. 7403
In the Smrtisástra also it has been noted that if the last rites of a dead person are not performed in accordance with the customary rules, the soul of the dead person will not attain salvation or overcome the evil consequences of death. From such observations, one can presume that such a notion was prevalent even during the ancient period.

It was usual that if the dead person had a son, his arrival from a distant place was awaited even if it entailed allowing the dead body to rot, and on his arrival, the rotten dead body was cremated thus performing the last rites. This practice has been referred to in Mādhavadeva's Ādikāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa.1 After the death of King Daśaratha, his sons Bharata and Śatrughna being away in their maternal uncle's home, Daśaratha's dead body was kept for seven days in expectation of their arrival.

Aspects of Social Life:

In the works of Saṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva we come across graphic pictures of social customs and different aspects of social life such as peculiarities of speeches and expressions, manners, family relationships, hospitality.

1. Ā-Rāma, v. 48
entertainments, games and sports, etc.

Since the ancient times, it has continued to remain a part of the prevailing system in Hindu society that the younger ones would show respect to their elders by offering obeisance or pranama, while the elders would offer affections and blessings to the younger. We find references to such customs in the literary works of SankaSaradeva and Madhavadeva. In Prahlada Caritra of Kirtana-ghosa1 we are told how Prahlada prayed to God to bless his deceased father's soul for its wellbeing. In the Ramayana, we find several instances of Rama's devotion to his father, Lakshmana's regard for his elder brother and Rama's affections for his younger brothers. In Rukmini-harana,2 we have evidence of Rukmini's love for her brother Rukmavir. When Rukmi had proposed that Rukmini should be married to Sisupala, Rukmini became so angry that she abused her brother as a sinner, a candala, who is "Satruto agala" (worse than an enemy) and a "dhumketu" (comet).3 However, later on when Krsna chased Rukmi in order to kill him, Rukmini implored Krsna not to kill him and asked Krsna to kill her also with her brother if her request was ignored.4

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1. K-g, vv. 457-58
2. Ru-kä, vv. 574-77
3. Ru-kä, vv. 85-87
4. Ru-kä, vv. 574-78; Ru-n, p. 23
According to prevailing popular beliefs in Assamese society, women are not allowed to look up to the faces of their elder brothers-in-law. That is why when the elder brother-in-law appears before them, the married women cover their faces with the edges of their garments. In Rukminiharanakaavya also we come across a scene in which Rukmini is found covering her face on seeing her elder brother-in-law Balai.\(^1\) There is also the practice of offering obeisance to the respectable elders or gurus before undertaking any auspicious work. In the Rāmāyaṇa on the eve of breaking asunder the Haradhanu, Rāma is seen offering obeisance to sage Visvāmitra.\(^2\)

In the society it is found that whenever a girl attains marriageable age, it is the mother who, as a rule, gets worried more than the father of the girl. On such occasions, the mother raises the subject of the daughter's marriage of finding a fit bridegroom and the father also starts considering the matter by discussing with his son or other relatives. This social custom of the Assamese society finds expression in Rukminiharanaka. When Rukmini became marriageable, her mother Śaśiprabhā gets worried and broaches the subject of finding a fit bridegroom before her husband Bhīṣmaka and the latter, though a king, did not discuss the

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1. Ru-kā, v. 600
2. Ā-Rāmā, v. 1204
subject with his ministers but consulted his son and wife as well as relatives regarding a fit groom for Rukmiṇī. Just as the parents worry about finding a suitable bridegroom for their daughter, similarly it is natural for the elder brothers and sisters also to worry about the same. In Rukmiṇiharana, Rukmiṇī's elder brother Ruknīl has expressed his opinion that Śiśupāla will be the suitable bridegroom for his sister. On auspicious occasions such as wedding, etc. people desire that there should not be any obstructions. In Rukmiṇiharana-kāvya, Ruknīl is found to create obstacles when King Bhīṣmaka desires to given Rukmiṇī in marriage to Kṛṣṇa; hence Bhīṣmaka advises Ruknīl not to create any obstructions to an auspicious occasion.

In the society, along with the custom of offering blessings, the practice of cursing was also in vogue and people believed in both blessings and curses. We have instances of offering blessings as in the cases of Vedanidhi blessing Rukmiṇī, Nārada blessing Kṛṣṇa, Aditi blessing

1. Ru-kā, vv. 35-40; Ru-n, p. 6
2. Ru-kā, v. 51
3. maṅgala kāryata bāpa napāta bighini.- Ru-kā, v. 56
4. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 111-12; K-ṛ, vv. 244-45, 1142; H-u, v. 114; Ru-kā, v. 648
5. Ru-n, p. 15
6. Pārī-n, p. 3
Kṛṣṇa, and Viśvāmitra offering blessings to Rāma and Jaṅaka.

We come across instances of offering praṇāma or obeisance in several works. For instance, praṇāma is offered by Indra to Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa with his wife to Nārada, Rukmini to Kṛṣṇa, Satyabhama to Nārada, Basumati to Kṛṣṇa, Daśaratha to Viśvāmitra, Janaka to Viśvāmitra, Kanakāvatī to Sītā.

While praying for some favour along with offering praṇāma, the practice of putting hay on the head or carrying grass between teeth was in vogue and we find instances of such practice in Rāmviṣaya-nāṭ and Rukminiharana-nāṭ.

The Assamese social tradition of sweet relationship between two mothers-in-law has found clear expression in the

1. Pāri-n, p. 14
2. R-vij-n, p. 6
3. Pāri-n, p. 3
4. Pāri-n, p. 3
5. Pāri-n, p. 3
6. Pāri-n, p. 6
7. Pāri-n, p. 12
8. Ru-n, p. 5
9. Ru-n, p. 8
10. Ru-n, p. 9
11. R-vij-n, p. 15
12. Ru-n, p. 23
conversations between Daivakī and Saśiprabhā in Rukmini-harana-kāvyā.¹

The practice of swearing has been in vogue in the Assamese society since times past. Usually, the practice of swearing is resorted to in the society to imply one's firmness of resolve or to arouse confidence in other's heart. We have instances of such practice in the works of Saṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. From these works it is gathered that, while swearing, a person holds grass in his hand or hay on his head or raises his hands upward. For instance, in Pārījātharana-nāt we are told that Lord Kṛṣṇa, while swearing before Satyabhāma that he would bring her the pārījātā flower placed hay on his head.²

In the society, when somebody is offended with some other person or quarrels with someone, they exchange abusive words or curses between them. Besides, there are some persons in the society who are in the habit of backbiting or provoking ill-will between other persons. Such persons deliberately provoke quarrels between others by practising the habit of backbiting. We find instance of such characters

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¹. Ru-kā, vv. 683-87
². Pārī-n, p. 9
in Pārijātaharana-nāṭ in the character of Nārada. Similarly, instances of curses and abuses as well as quarrels can be found in the exchange of words between Śacī and Satyabhāma in the drama Pārijātaharana and the exchange of abusive language between Kṛṣṇa and Rukmī in the drama, Rukmini-harana. We come across enough examples of such quarrels in a good number of books.

The quarrel between Nanda and Yasodā as depicted in Mādhavadeva's drama, Arjuna-Bhañjana and the exchange of abuse between Yasodā and the gopis in the dramatic piece Cordhara reveal vivid pictures of Assamese rural life. In a similar way in the drama, Pimparā-gucuwā mother Yasodā is found taking her son, Kṛṣṇa to task. Sometimes, battles ensued following such quarrels. For instance, the fight between Kṛṣṇa and Indra in Pārijātaharana-nāṭ and that between

1. Pāri-n, pp. 6, 7, 15
2. Pāri-n, pp. 16-18
3. Ru-n, p. 22; Ru-kā, vv. 47-49, 58
4. K-g, vv. 417, 635; Bh. X, vv. 24, 1247; H-u, vv. 313-16, 369; Ru-kā, vv. 355, 416, 568-69; U-Rāmā, vv. 7194-95
5. Arjuna-n, p. 296
6. Cor-j, p. 301, Bhūmi-j, pp. 303-04
7. Pimparā-j, pp. 306-07
8. Pāri-n, pp. 17-18
Kṛṣṇa and Rukmi in Rukmini-harana-nāt may be mentioned in this context. Kṛṣṇa punished Rukma by clipping his hair and beard, pouring curdy water on his head and pasting lime on his face.\(^1\) In Rājasūya-kāvyā we find that Kṛṣṇa was rebuked by Śisupāla and, in consequence, the latter was killed by Kṛṣṇa.\(^2\)

In Assamese society, while paying visits to the houses of friends and relatives, some presents are made and whenever some guest arrives, he or she is offered appropriate hospitality. We have instances of these social custom in Saṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva's works. In Dāmodar-Viprākyāna we find it narrated that Dāmodar, while on his way to Dvāraka to meet his friend Kṛṣṇa, had with him some quantity of rice preparation (cāul-cirā) contained in a piece of cloth,\(^3\) and when he had reached Dvārakā, Lord Kṛṣṇa welcomed him eagerly and embraced him. Kṛṣṇa made him sit on a gold-laid bedstead and after washing the Brāhmaṇa's feet with his own hands, partook of the water and offered him betel-nut and camphor and welcomed him with scented sticks and burning lamps. Kṛṣṇa's wife, after attending upon the Brāhmaṇa, fanned him with a yak's tail whisk.\(^4\) The next day, while Dāmodar Vipra

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1. Ru-n, p. 23
2. R-kā, vv. 605-38
3. K-q, v. 1583
4. K-q, v. 1587
was taking leave, Kṛṣṇa saw him off. In the same way, in Rukmini-harana-kāvya and the Rukmini-harana-nāt, we find accounts of Kṛṣṇa's attending upon Vedanidhi. Besides showing hospitality to the guests, they were also presented with gold, silver, etc. In Mādhavadeva's Rājasūya-kāvya we are told that, while Kṛṣṇa had been to Indraprastha with his family, they were suitably accorded reception by Yudhiṣṭhira. The householder would attend upon the guests as the saint and in return, the latter would bless the former.

In the Assamese society, as at present, in those days also terms indicative of relationships were in use. For instance, dādā (elder brother), Bhaiāi (brother), mitra (friend), Bihāni (relation between two mothers-in-law), sakhi (friend), etc.

The system of slavery was in vogue. Kṛṣṇa had a thousand maid-servants. The system of buying servants and

1. K-q, v. 1600
2. Ru-kā, vv. 122-55
3. Ru-n, p. 11
4. Ru-n, p. 4
5. R-kā, vv. 252-60
6. R-kā, v. 312
7. K-q, v. 1497
maids was also there. In Hariścandra-upākhyāna we are told how the Brāhmaṇa bought queen Saibya as his maid servant.¹ Similarly, in Mādhavadeva's Rājasūya-kāvya also there are references to servants.² Besides maid-servants, kings and queens also owned a class of helping hands known as 'sevakini'.³

Certain acts are considered heinous or sinful by the society. We have instances of this in Rājasūya-kāvya. In Rājasūya-kāvya, while abusing Kṛṣṇa, Śiśupāla censures such acts as killing of a female (like Putanā), slaughtering of the cow (Ariṣṭa), the marring of gopa women without considering what blood relations he had with them, the violation of Vedic precepts by carrying a gopa woman on the shoulder, the committing of theft out of greed in swallowing milk and milk-products in other's houses and so on.⁴ In the society loyalty of a married woman to her husband is regarded as a great virtue and enough care is taken to practise this virtue constantly. We have reference to the virtue of loyalty to the husband in the Ādi-kānda of the Rāmāyaṇa.⁵ In Hariścandra-upākhyāna, it has been said of the faithful queen Saibya that

1. H-u, vv. 304-11; 369
2. R-kā, vv. 78, 434
3. Ru-kā, v. 252
4. R-kā, vv. 611-17; Ru-kā, vv. 48-49
5. Ā-Rāmā, v. 1105
she had no other concern except the thought of her husband.¹

In the society certain actions are presumed to be anti-social, illegal or sinful. Among such acts, drinking wine,² speaking ill of a Brāhmaṇa,³ having sex relation with the guru's wife,⁴ killing a Brāhmaṇa, patricide, incest, slaughtering a cow, murdering a woman, stealing of gold, committing inimical acts to a friend, etc., were the major ones.⁵ Even slandering some saintly person or priest could attract serious consequences.⁶

A guest was regarded as a god or Dāmodar incarnate by the society. Whenever a guest visited the house, the householder would entertain him by washing his hands and feet. The Rajā-Mahārajās would not only offer the guests the choicest food items, but would also entertain them by arranging dances and music.⁷

1. H-u, vv. 15-16
2. N-mā, v. 156
3. N-mā, v. 157
4. N-mā, v. 173
5. K-q, v. 183
6. Ru-kā, v. 587
7. R-kā, v. 239
We have instances of the prevalence of various games and sports as well as modes of pleasant activities in the society in different books. There are also references to engaging in water sports by dipping into water without any clothes. As instances of this, we may refer to the stealing of dresses worn by the gopīs and the rāsa līlā or sportive activities of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Besides, in those days malla-mahotsvava (wrestling festival) or mālari was organised. While celebrating some wrestling festival, an arena or raṅgaśālā was constructed and it was surrounded by a raised gallery all around. The wrestlers wearing attractive dresses would engage in wrestling in that arena to the accompaniment of rhythmic music of drums and trumpets. The kings and their subjects would enjoy such wrestling bouts by seating themselves on the raised gallery. We have descriptions of various acts of the wrestlers such as throwing the opponent down by striking his knees with the wrestler's or catching him by the neck, or sometimes rolling on the ground by grabbing each other, striking each other with the arms, or biting one with the teeth, etc. Such a

1. Bh. X, vv. 891, 894
2. Keli-n, p. 16
3. K—g. v. 1160; Bh. X, vv. 1749-52
4. Bh. X, v. 325
5. Bh. X, vv. 1820-28
sport of wrestling is still in vogue. In the biographies of the Vaiṣṇava saints we have the information that King Naranārāyaṇa was himself a wrestler and he had a number of wrestlers in his court and occasionally arranged wrestling bouts among them. We have accounts which suggest that sometimes wrestlers would come even from other kingdoms to engage in wrestling bouts with the king's team of wrestlers.¹

In those days shadow-plays of dolls were also in vogue. In the Tenth Book of the Bhāgavata we are told that the Child Kṛṣṇa would dance in response to the gopīs' words and Śaṅkara-deva compares the dancing Kṛṣṇa to shadow-dolls.² We come across a reference to such shadow-dolls in the Kathā-guru-carīta as well. On the Twenty second day since Śaṅkara-deva's birth, we are told that the magician 'Ṭāṭakṛṣṇa' performed a shadow-dance of dolls.³ Though we do not find the practice of performing such shadow-dance of dolls now-a-days, performances of doll-dance and similar entertaining activities are still prevalent in our society.

Accounts of children's games are found in the Tenth Book of the Bhāgavata. Games such as those played by Child

1. KGC, pp. 190-91
2. Bh. X, v. 324
3. KGC, p. 22
Kṛṣṇa, Balorām and other gopa-boys by embracing each other’s body, pushing one by catching hold of the neck, whirling one around by placing one on the head, leaping, dancing to the rhythms of songs or to the tune of the bāhi (pipe), bhantā khelā or competitive throwing of stones or other objects, chasing one blind-folded, playing the king by holding an umbrella upon the head, etc., are still in vogue in our rural society.¹ Sometimes a child would play by holding a mushroom on his head like an umbrella. We have examples of this in the Tenth Book of the Bhāgavata.² Besides these, games were also played by using pot (moṭ) of coloured water on special occasions. One player would throw water at the other’s body. Mādhavadeva renders an attractive account of the coloured water festivity (moṭa khедi) in his Rājasūya-kāvya.³ Kṛṣṇa, the Pāṇḍavas and their women joined the festival and threw coloured water on each other. During a later period, that is, during the early part of the eighteenth century A.D., we have the full account of playing this game by the Tripūrā king on the bank of the Gomati in course of offering pūjā to the god Madana.⁴ Even today such

¹ Bh. X, vv. 716-22
² Bh. X, vv. 1069, 2063
³ R-kā, vv. 670, 674
⁴ Tripura Buranji, pp. 59-60
a game of spraying coloured water on the occasion of Phâkuwâ or holi is prevalent in our society.

B. Political matters:

The literary works of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva do not throw much light on the political situation prevailing during the period under study. Whatever information is offered, is not adequate enough. The prevailing political system being monarchical, usually a deceased king was succeeded by his son or heir to the throne through ceremonial coronation. In such an event, the son or the heir to the throne would inherit all the rights to the father's territorial domain. In this context we may refer to the coronation ceremony of Prahlâda on the death of King Hirânyakaśipu. Besides this, we have references to cases of installation of a person held in high esteem by the king in the position of a monarch. For instance, in Rûkmini-harana-kâvyâ we are told that Viśvaketu, king of Kauśambi, installed Kṛṣṇa as the king by performing the coronation ceremony because till then Kṛṣṇa had not become the king of Dvârakâ, and, without being a king, Kṛṣṇa would not be

1. K-ô, v. 468
allowed to contest for the hand of Rukmini by the conspiring Rukma and his associates. From the account of this coronation ceremony, it is gathered that on this occasion Visvaketu offered tila, kusa and water to Krsna and proclaimed that the latter would have rights to all the assets of his kingdom. Thereafter Krsna was placed on the throne and a white umbrella was held aloft over his head. The subjects chanted the words, 'joy Krsna' (Victory to Krsna) and a festive performance was arranged to the accompaniment of dances, songs and music fit for the occasion of the coronation ceremony.1

In those days, a king had a number of vassals under him. Such vassals were known as samaraja and the chief king was called rajacakravarti.2 The king had a minister with whom he had consultations while running the administration of the kingdom.3 Besides, the king had his court of counsellors.4 The king and the princes had several wives.5 The king enjoyed himself by playing aquatic sports in

1. Ru-kā, v. 182
2. H-u, v. 105; K-g, v. 1926; Bh. X, v. 1033; Ru-kā, vv. 69, 408, 443
3. K-g, v. 1511
4. K-u, v. 1568
5. K-g, v. 1511; Ru-kā, v. 615
association with his wives or drew pleasures by calling in his consorts and engaging in pleasantries with them.¹

Usually, the king would offer gifts and charities to the Brāhmaṇas and other virtuous people.² From Harśacandragupta's upākhyāna we come to know that, while offering all his possessions in charity to the sage Viśvāmitra, the king had to part with his kingdom and even sell his wife.

As regards the duties of the king, in Rājasūya-kāvyā we are told that the king was expected to treat his subjects as his sons and daughters, to hurt none and realize due revenue from his subjects.³

The king's palace was guarded by a sentry and if the king was to be informed of anything, the sentry would get into the royal house and pass on the information to the king.⁴ The messengers of the king would keep him posted with various other information relating to the kingdom at large.⁵ Besides, the king had his informers who used to provide secret information to him.⁶ With a view to earning virtues

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1. K-g, vv. 1511-12
2. K-q, v. 1512
3. R-kā, v. 451
4. R-kā, v. 76
5. R-kā, v. 75
6. Ru-kā, v. 178
or fame, the king would arrange the performance of major yajñas like rājasūya, asvamedha, etc. King Yudhiṣṭhira, overcome with devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa, performed the rājasūya yajña and earned the honour of Rājacakra-varṭa thereby.  

The relations between the king and his subjects were usually very cordial. The kings used to maintain friendly relations with some other kings and the latter would attend the festive occasions like weddings, yajñas, etc., arranged by him. Of course, there were also some hostile kings. Those kings joined hands with others to do harm to or defeat the king. For instance, on the occasion of Yudhiṣṭhira's rājasūya yajña, just as the friendly kings including Kṛṣṇa participated in the yajña, similarly hostile kings like Śiśupāla, Jarāsandha and others behaved in a hostile manner against Kṛṣṇa. Rukmini-harana-kāvyā also testifies that, on the occasion of Rukmini's svayamvara ceremony, kings such as Śiśupāla, Jarāsandha, Dantabakra adopted a hostile attitude towards Kṛṣṇa.

Military arrangements and armoury:

In order to maintain peace, law and order in the kingdom, the king, besides having his ministers and such

1. R-kā, v. 5
other high officials, used to keep an army. The king divided the army into four branches like the cavalry (rāḥut),
elephant riders (māḥut), charioteers (rathī), and infantry (padāṭika) and fought the battles with the four-fold army (caturāṅga dala). In cases of battles, they would use their own flags and kept those flying on their chariots or in front of their camps. Arms and weapons as well as musical instruments were used in warfare. The battles were conducted under the leadership of either some general or the king himself. On the basis of the descriptions given of weapons used in battles, we may prepare a list that includes weapons like bows and arrows, quiver (cokhar, ṭon), club (gadā, parigha, mudgar, muśala), sword and shield (khāndā, kharga, bāru), nāgāpāśa, spear (śel, jāṭhī), axe (paraśu

1. Ru-kā, vv. 480-81
2. Ru-kā, vv. 321, 467
3. Ru-kā, v. 476; K-ṛ, vv. 1316, 1330
5. Ru-kā, v. 260; A-Rāmā, vv. 37, 60, 1235
6. A-Rāmā, vv. 862, 1284; Ru-kā, v. 290
7. A-Rāmā, vv. 1301, 1303; K-ṛ, vv. 194-95, 405-06, 613, 2154; Ru-kā, v. 353
8. A-Rāmā, v. 1255; K-ṛ, vv. 395, 409, 1039; Ru-kā, v. 328; U-Rāmā, vv. 7020, 7188; Bh. X, vv. 25, 1886-87; R-kā, v. 633; Ru-ṛ, p. 22; Pārī-ṛ, p. 11; K-ṛ, v. 397; Ru-kā, v. 510
9. A-Rāmā, vv. 72, 1304
or kūthār),\textsuperscript{1} arrow of still (naraça),\textsuperscript{2} etc.

In descriptions of weapons, we also come across the names of certain arrows possessing special powers such as agnibāṇa or bahnbāṇa (fire-arrows),\textsuperscript{3} cakrabāṇa\textsuperscript{4} (circular arrows), kṣurabāṇa\textsuperscript{5} (razor-arrows), garuḍabāṇa,\textsuperscript{6} baruṇasāra\textsuperscript{7} (rain-arrows), lāṅgalabāṇa\textsuperscript{8} (plough-arrows), ardhacandrābāṇa\textsuperscript{9} (Crescent-arrows), etc. There were a number of weapons which were used after chanting various mantras.\textsuperscript{10} Besides such arrows, weapons associated with the names of gods such as Brahma-astra,\textsuperscript{11} Vaiśṇava-astra, Rudra-sāra, Gandharvabāṇa, etc. etc., were also used in battles.\textsuperscript{12} Like the various

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{1. } Ru-kā, v. 353; K-ū, v. 2136
\item \textbf{2. } Ru-kā, vv. 152, 506
\item \textbf{3. } A-Rāmā, vv. 347, 1305
\item \textbf{4. } A-Rāmā, v. 404
\item \textbf{5. } A-Rāmā, v. 1286
\item \textbf{6. } A-Rāmā, v. 1304
\item \textbf{7. } A-Rāmā, v. 1305
\item \textbf{8. } Ru-kā, v. 319
\item \textbf{9. } Ru-kā, v. 357; U-Rāmā, v. 7225
\item \textbf{10. } A-Rāmā, v. 892
\item \textbf{11. } A-Rāmā, vv. 100, 399
\item \textbf{12. } A-Rāmā, vv. 892-98
\end{itemize}
kinds of arrows, the soldiers would use a kind of protective wear called Kavaca (armour)\textsuperscript{1} to protect themselves. While fighting a battle, various kinds of musical instruments were played so as to inspire the soldiers. Among such instruments, conch shell,\textsuperscript{2} dundubhi\textsuperscript{3} (war-drum), jaydhol\textsuperscript{4} (big drum), gajaghat\textsuperscript{5} (bells), dhākhol,\textsuperscript{6} etc., are the major ones. Just as certain musical instruments were played during battles, so also, after winning a battle, the victory was celebrated in a festive manner by playing upon such musical instruments as mṛdanga, dundubhi, pataha, gomukha, vipaṇci, dotārā, etc.\textsuperscript{7}

It is worth noting that the descriptive accounts of battles which we come across in the works of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva were not the delineations of battles fought by contemporary Assamese kings, since such descriptive accounts only reflected the battles of the purānic age with which we

\begin{enumerate}
\item Ru-kā, vv. 387, 548
\item Ru-kā, vv. 382, 397
\item Ru-kā, v. 392
\item Ru-kā, v. 393
\item Ru-kā, v. 190
\item Ru-kā, v. 283
\item Ru-kā, v. 528
\end{enumerate}
find similarities in the descriptions of battles left by the poet Madhava Kandali of the pre-Sańkarađeva period.

C. Economic Conditions:

Agriculture:

Along with beautiful descriptions of the seasons of the year Sańkarađeva and other poets depict vivid pictures of Assamese rural and agricultural life. The main implement for agricultural practice is the plough. On several occasions Sańkarađeva has referred to words like 'nāṅgal'¹ (the plough), 'nāṅgalar ihmāri'² (plough-share). Sańkarađeva refers to the hard life of a ploughman.

Assam is an agricultural state. Its farmers have to depend on the vagaries of rains constantly. That a good harvest depends on abundant rainfall and in such an event the farmers feel very happy has been noted by Sańkarađeva in the Tenth Book of the Bhāgavata.³ In another context⁴

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1. K-q, v. 1741
2. Bh. X, v. 181
3. vrsti jala pāyā sāsya karai halaphala
dekhi kṛṣakara mane maha katuhala. - Bh. X, v. 784
4. nagara grāmata prakāśila bhūmi
   pakva sāsyē āḍhya hui.
   - Bh. X, v. 831
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Śaṅkaradeva has observed how the beauty of towns and villages is enhanced when these are filled with a good harvest.

The Assamese people regard the cow as goddess Lakṣmī herself. This is because their livelihood is dependent on the cow. Those who earn their livelihood by trading in the cow are known as 'gowāl' and such a community is still existent. It is because of eking out one's living by trading in the cow, that the latter is called 'godhan'. Śaṅkaradeva has referred to godhan in Kālidamaṇḍa-nāt. Usually, people prefer to live in a village which offers plenty of crops and fish. Śaṅkaradeva makes mention of such villages at several places of his works. The practice of rearing silk-worms was in vogue in those days and Śaṅkaradeva mentions this kind of livelihood in the Uttarakāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa. For cultivation raw paddy is sown for seedlings. But if the paddy is fried and then sown it never sprouts. Śaṅkaradeva has referred to this practical experience on another occasion in the Tenth Book of the Bhāgavata.

1. Kāli-n, p. 6
2. Bh. X, v. 1475; U-Rāmā, v. 7034
3. U-Rāmā, v. 7455
4. yene bhajā dhāna gājibe nuhi samartha.
   - Bh. X, v. 914
Trade and Commerce:

We do not have much information on contemporary trade and commerce in Saṅkaradeva's and Mādhavadeva's works. Whatever information is available is scanty. The common people of Assam mostly earned their livelihood by engaging in agriculture while there were some who used to maintain their livelihood by engaging in trade in addition to agriculture. We have references to agricultural and trade practices in Mādhavadeva's songs (Bargīt).¹ In the Hariścandra-upākhyāna there is the reference to the practice of selling and buying of men and women. A Brāhmaṇa bought Saibyā as a maid-servant. Similarly, King Hariścandra sold himself in exchange for money and served as a candāla.² In those days, royal or aristocratic families used to have servants of both the sexes.³ In biographical works on the saints of Assam (guru-carita) we come across quite a good mass of information about the selling and buying of men.⁴ Apart from literature this was found in actual practice also in those times.⁵

1. Bargīt, Nos. 31, 32
2. H-u, vv. 274, 294, 307
3. Ru-n, p. 26
4. Rāmacaraṇa Thākura, Gurucarita, v. 166; KGC, p. 183
5. Prācyā Śasanāvali, p. 72
In Śaṅkaradeva's and Mādhavadeva's works, there are references to gold coins along with cowrie shells used for purchasing goods.¹

In the market, things like jewels and pearls, cocoanuts, cardamom (elāci), nutmag (jāiphal), scent, incense powder, sugar, camphor, etc., were on sale and it was the traders who used to deal in such goods. Besides, women also used to buy jewels and pearls, diamonds, etc., and put them on.²

Even though there is no specific mention in Śaṅkaradeva's and Mādhavadeva's works, on the basis of the references to various professional classes in their works we can presume that these sections of professional men used to earn their livelihood by selling and buying goods pertaining to their professions. For instance, there are the blacksmiths, the potters, the milkmen, and others. The 'potters wheel' (Kumārvar cāk)³ indicates the potter's profession. Besides, it was the washerman's duty to supply cleaned clothes regularly to the king.⁴ Similarly, the flower-seller would

¹ Arjuna-n, p. 293; Pimparā-j, p. 306
² Rū-kā, vv. 200-01
³ R-kā, v. 361; N-mā, v. 593
⁴ K-g, vv. 1125-27
supply flowers to the king.\(^1\) There was a professional class known as dressmaker (besakar) whose duty it was to dress up others.\(^2\) Further, the milk-men would sell milk, curd, and butter, etc., to earn their livelihood.

Food and Drinks:

In \(\text{Sāṅkaradeva's}\) and \(\text{Mādhavadeva's}\) works we come across references to certain food items which are still prevalent in our society.

\(\sqrt{v}\) Boiled rice is the staple food of the Assamese people and it is eaten in combination with such items as milk, ghee, etc.\(^3\) The cowherds, while going out for looking after their cows, would carry such items of food with the help of a carrying bar (śikīyā). Besides these food items, we find references to such a list of food items as - sugarcane, fried rice (ākhai), beaten rice (cirā), ball of confection (lādu), molasses (gur), banana, honey, home-made cakes (piṭṭā), rice pudding (pāyas), paṅcāmṛta, Khīrisā (thickly boiled milk).

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1. \(\text{K-\text{q}}\), v. 1132
2. \(\text{K-\text{q}}\), v. 1130
3. \(\text{Barqīt (M)}, \text{No. 144}; \text{N-\text{q}}, \text{v. 10}; \text{Patnī-\text{-i}}, \text{pp. 2, 4, 7}; \text{Bhojana-\text{j}}, \text{p. 309}\)
preparations of pulses (mug), sugar, sweets (sandes), etc.\(^1\)
Along with these, the Assamese poet also did not forget to mention khār (alkaline preparation) - the favourite item for the Assamese and in earlier times an usual substitute for salt which was a rare thing. Milk,\(^2\) butter,\(^3\) pañcāmṛta,\(^4\) that is, a combined mixed preparation of curd, milk, ghee, honey and sugar was offered to people on the occasion of some religious ceremony, or to a pregnant woman in the fifth month of her pregnancy, or to distinguished persons.

Betel-nuts and leaves used to be a part of affectionate reception in the Assamese society. In the cultural life of the Assamese, betel-nuts and leaves occupy a special position. As an after-meal item or an item of honouring or receiving a guest, and as part of entertainment, betel-nuts and camphor were offered.\(^5\) Betel-nuts and leaves were also used in religious ceremonies, marriages, etc.\(^6\)

\(^1\) Bh. X, vv. 363, 947-49, 1010-11, 1024; K-ğ, v. 1583; Ru-kā, v. 613; Patnī-n, p. 2; Kotorā-j, p. 314

\(^2\) K-ğ, v. 688

\(^3\) K-ğ, v. 691

\(^4\) Ru-n, p. 11

\(^5\) Bh. X, vv. 561, 1439, 1485; U-Rāmā, v. 7451; Ru-kā, vv. 268-69; Keli-n, p. 12; Pāri-n, p. 9; R-kā, v. 435

\(^6\) Ru-kā, v. 782; Ā-Rāmā, vv. 195-96
Further, in the Rukminiharana-nat, we are told how Rukmini attended the royal court after enjoying betel-nut preparation with her companions and there is also a reference to the habit of invigorating oneself before going to the battle field by freshening oneself up with chewing betelnut and leaves.\(^1\) Camphor and betelnuts were offered as a token of love.\(^2\) We have references to betelnut and camphor at many places in the works of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva.\(^3\)

Like rice meal, curd and milk, etc., fruits were also the favourite food of the Assamese people. There are references to a good number of fruits in Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva's works. Among these fruits, mention may be made of madhuphala (papaya),\(^4\) rāmkala (a variety of banana),\(^5\) Sondākala (a variety of aromatic banana),\(^6\) dāb or green cocoanut,\(^7\) tāl (palmyra palm),\(^8\) ām (mango), jāmu (eugenia jambolana), bel (wood apple),\(^9\) bāngi (cucumis melon),\(^10\)

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1. Ru-n, pp. 17, 19, 21
2. Pārī-n, p. 9
4. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 106, 478
5. Ru-kā, v. 28
6. Ru-kā, v. 514
7. Ru-kā, v. 200
8. K-g, v. 1690; Bh. X, v. 1352
9. Bh. X, v. 1319
10. Bh. X, v. 1688
dimaru (ficus glomerata), etc. In addition to these, śilikha (Terminalia citrina), jāinphal (nutmeg), āmlakhi (emblice myrobalan), etc. were so profusely available that with those fruits children would even play games occasionally. From accounts given in the poetic works it is gathered that in royal house-holds or those of the affluent, rich menu like rāja yoga anna or twenty-five different varieties of food preparations (pañciṣa byaṃjana) were also common. Of course, we do not come across the list of those twenty five recipes. Besides, it was the usual practice with sages and sannyāsīs (monks) to live on fruits.

Among the various kinds of food and drink items referred to in the works, those which find frequent mention include anna (rice), dāḍhi (curd), dugdha (milk), byaṃjana (different curries), pithā-panā (various cakes), paramānna (rice pudding), śukla-ceni (sugared preparation), ghol (milk-wash), kṣir and khiricā (highly condensed milk preparations),

1. Bh. X, v. 1835
2. Ā-Rāmā, v. 486
3. Ru-kā, v. 200
4. Bh. X, v. 718
5. U-Rāmā, v. 7270
6. U-Rāmā, v. 6806
7. U-Rāmā, v. 6807
etc.  

There are several references to sādā-rasa in the poetical works. However, it is not clear whether the term meant the six different tastes or flavours like sweet, sour, salty, caustic, bitter and hot or some other varieties of juices. Another food item, ākhai (a preparation of fried paddy), was used on the occasions of religious ceremonies, weddings, etc. as a sacred object besides being eaten. We have reference to ākhai in Rukminīharana-kāvyā. Sāñkaradeva's Uttarakāṇḍa of the Rāmāyaṇa also mentions how ākhai was prepared by frying paddy. Cirā was also prepared by frying paddy. We have reference to this in the Tenth Book of the Bhāgavata.

The use of wine or surā was also prevalent among a section of the society. Those who took wine were looked down upon by the society. Wine was in use among the lower castes of the society such as the Caṇḍālas. We have also

1. Patni-n, pp. 3-4; U-Rāmā, vv. 7273-74; Bh. X, vv. 948-49
2. À-Rāmā, v. 202; R-kā, v. 173; Patni-n, p. 2
3. Ru-kā, v. 441
4. U-Rāmā, v. 7088
5. Bh. X, v. 914
6. K-q, v. 40
reference to a strong brand of wine known as 'bārunī' and it is said that the Yadavas became wild after drinking this wine. Another intoxicating substance called modak has also been mentioned along with wine. Drinking of wine or other intoxicants and their selling were regarded as sinful acts.

The prevalence of food items like fish, meat, leafy vegetables, potatoes, etc., among the common people has been mentioned. Eatable meat usually meant mutton, venison, meat of birds like ducks and doves, etc., and these varieties of meat formed the usual diet of the commoners. The eating of beef was forbidden among the Hindus. The habit of eating beef mixed with wine was prevalent only among the Candalas. Further, it is gathered that eating of dog-meat was prevalent among the mlecchas.

1. K-q, v. 1855
2. A-Rāmā, vv. 477-78
3. K-q, vv. 183-84; N-mā, vv. 478, 480
4. U-Rāmā, v. 7039
5. A-Rāmā, v. 52
6. K-q, v. 119
7. Bh. X, v. 2181
8. K-q, v. 118
In cases of any ailment, Vaidyas or Bejś were engaged for treatment. The Bej (native medicine man) would offer treatment by reciting incantations or by using herbal medicines.¹

The belief that by giving rice to the hungry one can earn virtues is still prevalent in the Assamese society and we have reference to such a belief in Saṅkaradeva's literary works as well.²

Dresses, Ornaments and other Articles of Luxury:

Saṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, while depicting the characters of various classes of men and women, also described the dresses, ornaments and cosmetics, used by some of these characters. It is worth noting here that in cases of descriptions of dresses, etc. the poets are found to have been influenced by the descriptions left by earlier poets or Sanskrit poets. For instance, descriptions of Lord Kṛṣṇa's dresses and ornaments contain references to Kṛṣṇa's wearing of yellow-coloured dresses, adorning his head with peacock feathers, his ears with makara kundalā (ear-ornament looking like an alligator), his neck with a vanamālā (garland with

¹. A-Rāmā, vv. 91, 97, 98, 436
². Patni-n, p. 3
flowers of five colours), his waist and feet with a strings of tinklers or small bells, etc. Even while following such conventional descriptions, the Assamese poet had added descriptive pictures of dresses, ornaments, etc., prevailing in the Assamese society.

Descriptions of Lord Kṛṣṇa's beauty were associated with references to his dresses and ornaments. For instance, it was said that Lord Kṛṣṇa wore yellow-coloured garments on his darkgreen body.¹ On his waist was gilded mekāhalā,² his head was adorned with a bejewelled crown with a garland of golden lotus set on it,⁴ bedecked with peacock feathers,⁵ on his ears he wore makara kūndala,⁶ on his chest a garland of pearls, with pecandār⁷ (a kind of ornament) shining in it. On his neck he wore a garland (vanāmāla) long enough to reach his feet, his broad chest was adorned with a garland of pearls,⁹ his conch-shell-like neck is adorned with

1. K-q, v. 160; Bh. X, v. 1198; N-g, v. 752; Patni-n, p. 5
2. K-q, v. 160; Bh. X, v. 77
3. K-q, v. 170; Bh. X, v. 76
4. K-q, v. 171
5. Bh. X, v. 955
6. K-q, v. 167; Bh. X, vv. 76, 1198
7. K-q, v. 162; Bh. X, v. 1415
8. K-q, v. 163; Bh. X, v. 77
Kaustava jewel,\(^1\) his arms with gold keyūr or armlet, and wrists with gold kaṅkaṇa or bangles.\(^2\) On his neck he wears galpatā and sātsarī ĥār\(^3\) (two kinds of necklace), on his shoulder the sacred thread and yellow coloured cāddar.\(^4\) His thighs are adorned with a gold ornament called horar,\(^5\) his feet with gold-made nūpur (chain of tinkles) and ujhānti (rings for the fingers of the feet).\(^6\) In this way we have accounts of dresses and ornaments worn by Lord Kṛṣṇa from head to toe (mastakar parā pāda pāryante).\(^7\) Some of which may have been used in actual life of those times. We notice a similarity between such descriptions of Lord Kṛṣṇa's dresses, ornaments, etc., and those relating to Rāmacandra's beauty and dresses, ornaments, etc.\(^8\)

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1. Pāri-n, p. 1; K-g, v. 167; Bh. X, vv. 75, 1414
2. Pāri-n, p. 1, K-g, v. 164; Bh. X, v. 77
3. K-g, v. 166
4. K-g, v. 166; Bh. X, v. 1416; R-kā, v. 185
5. K-g, v. 160; R-kā, v. 185
6. K-g, v. 159; Bh. X, vv. 78, 1418; R-kā, v. 186
7. K-g, v. 172; Bh. X, vv. 46-58, 954-57, 1197-1200, 1411-21; R-kā, vv. 44-46, 174-88; Patnī-n, p. 5; Ru-n, p. 3; Kāli-n, pp. 2, 3, 4; Keli-n, p. 12; Pāri-n, p. 10
8. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 554-62; R-vij-n, pp. 3, 9
Besides descriptive accounts of Rāma's and Kṛṣṇa's dresses, we also come across some descriptions of the dresses worn by people of various grades of the society of those days. For instance, while describing the appearance of a mendicant or a Brāhmaṇa, it has been noted that the mendicant became emaciated by their meditation. They wore garlands of rudrākṣa in their hands and necks; they had beards as long as those of goats, long nails and their foreheads were adorned with marks of sandalwood paste or ashes.¹

Śaṅkaradeva, while describing the appearance of the Brāhmaṇa Vedanidhi, observed that his forehead bore sandalwood paste mark; he wore white garments and he carried a bunch of Kuṣa (long, pointed grasses) in his hands.² The sages, however, had tilaka on their foreheads, wore deer or tiger skin, and carried a staff in their hands.³ Even the princes Rāmacandra and Laksmana, after accepting the life of a forest dweller, diverted themselves of royal garments and wore deer skin or garments made of bark.⁴ King Hariścandra, too, replaced his royal clothes with garments made of bark.

1. Patnī-n, p. 2
2. Ru-n, p. 9
3. R-Will, p. 416; R-kā, v. 94
4. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 52, 475
while accepting the guise of a Cāndāla. Lord Kṛṣṇa asked his devotee Uddhava to put on garments of bark before leaving for his heavenly abode or Vaikuṇṭha. Besides wearing tiger skin or deer skin, sometimes they wore kaupina (a kind of short, one-piece cloth tied around the waist). Similarly, the mendicants would also eat fruits, and lie on earth. We find accounts of their dust-covered physique. In the Rāmāyaṇa Ādikāṇḍa, while depicting the appearance of Parasūrāma, it has been said that he had a yajña-sūtra on his shoulder; his head was covered with knotted hair; on his neck was a garland of rudrākṣa; he wore a garment of bark around his waist and a mekhala of kuśa grasses.

The socially depressed classes of people like the Cāndālas used to wear 'lāṅgati' or 'lengti' a one-piece cloth around their waist.

As in the cases of men, we have various accounts of dresses and ornaments used by women. In regard to under-garments used by women, we find references to clothes of silk,

1. H-u, vv. 247, 311, 320; K-q, v. 1837
2. H-u, vv. 181, 333
3. U-Rāmā, v. 6748
4. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 1398-1400
5. H-u, v. 376
but whether such clothes were sāris or mekhelās (women's
dress for the lower part of the body) is not distinctly
indicated in every case. We have come across references on
several occasions to the wearing of mekhelā above such
undergarments. We do not have many accounts of dresses
covering the upper part of the body above the waist. Among
the dresses used by women, we have several references to
'dhauta-vastra', but what was meant by this piece of garment
is not clear. Perhaps, 'dhauta-vastra' meant white clothes.
Usually we have such accounts as noted below of dresses used
by queens and princesses: Queens and princesses would wear
garments made of pāṭ silk and have the bejewelled mekhelā
tied to the waist.¹ Before making any appearance on the
occasion of svayambara, the princess would dress herself up
colourfully and had a wrapper thrown over her body.²

It was a usual practice with both men and women to
wear white clothes before performing any auspicious ceremony.³
Among descriptions of women's dresses, we come across
references to phāli (chadar or wrapper),⁴ silk-sāri worn

1. Ru-kā, vv. 254–55; Ā-Rāma, v. 948
2. Ru-kā, v. 263
3. Ā-Rāma, v. 652; U-Rāma, vv. 7357, 7379, 7411, 1417;
   Bh. X, v. 1285
4. Bh. X, v. 145
like a veil (neta khontā-jāli), saris made of silk (neta śāri), clothes made of pāt silk, kānculi (a piece of cloth covering the breasts), etc. The practice of using the veil by women specially at the sight of elderly, respectable persons, was in vogue in the Assamese society of those days as it is today. In those days, clothes were coloured with śilikhā. Sītā was said to have appeared in the royal court after covering her body with dresses coloured with śilikhā like a mendicant's.

Along with descriptions of dresses, we also come across accounts of various ornaments used by women. From these accounts, we can presume that women were particularly fond of ornaments and they beautified themselves by wearing various types of ornaments on different parts of the body. Among such ornaments, mention may be made of crown for the head, ear ornaments like khaṅjakhili or kuṇḍala, necklaces like galpatā and sātsari hār, pecandār for the chest, bāju or armlet, bangles like kāṅkaṇa and those khāru made of conchshell, gold-made jeṭhi for the forehead, gold rings

1. Bh. X, v. 148; K-g, v. 543; Bh. X, v. 1339
3. Bh. X, v. 279
4. Bh. X, v. 1285
5. Ru-kā, v. 600; U-Rāmā, v. 7057
6. U-Rāmā, v. 7046
for the ten fingers, nūpura - the gold-made ornament for anklets, etc.  

Besides these, women would tie up their hair in knots and would usually fix mālatī flowers on such knots.  

It appears that women had a special attachment for flowers.  

Besides, all married women, in addition to having vermillion and sandalwood paste marks on their foreheads, would also use vermillion on their heads between parted hair.  

Similarly, they would apply añjan or kājal on their eyelashes and ālātā (ālakta) on their feet.  

As in the cases of women, we also find references to men using various ornaments, for instance, kaṅkaṇ keyur, rings, kāṇchi, kiṅkiṇi, etc.  

Besides those, we have references to the practice of using such ornamental items as necklaces made of gaja-mukutā, garlands of kadamba flowers, guṇjāmanī, tulasī beads, etc. Just as using various ornaments, the menfolk also used to have forehead marks like women.

1. Ru-kā, vv. 256-58, 271, 274  
2. Ru-kā, v. 255; K-g, v. 686  
3. Pārī-n, p. 4  
4. Ru-kā, v. 256  
5. Ru-kā, v. 216  
6. Bh. X, vv. 589-90  
7. Bh. X, v. 1821  
8. Bh. X, v. 1792  
9. Bh. X, v. 2118  
10. Bh. X, v. 458  
Appliances for day-to-day use:

Among appliances for domestic use, ghat\textsuperscript{1} (water-pot),
gold-made jhāri (water-pot with a spout) and khuri\textsuperscript{2} (small
cup on a foot), pitchers,\textsuperscript{3} kamañḍalu\textsuperscript{4} (earthen or wooden
water-pot used by ascetic), bhṛṅgār\textsuperscript{5} (a water vessel of
silver or gold with a spout), kariā\textsuperscript{6} (noose for fastening a
boat), bāwkā\textsuperscript{7} or sīkiyā\textsuperscript{8} (a contrivance for carrying loads),
kulā\textsuperscript{9} (winnow), śakaṭa (cart), śalakā (a spike of bamboo),
yuali\textsuperscript{10} (yoke), kuki (a small conical flower basket) and
hākotā\textsuperscript{11} (a hook), ṭokon\textsuperscript{12} (stick), kor\textsuperscript{13} (spade), cābuk\textsuperscript{14}

\begin{enumerate}
    \item K-\textit{g}, vv. 23, 139, 1215; Ru-\textit{kā}, vv. 118, 666, 757, 770;
    H-\textit{u}, v. 289; Ā-\textit{Rāmā}, v. 1307
    \item H-\textit{u}, v. 45; U-\textit{Rāmā}, v. 6795; Ā-\textit{Rāmā}, v. 195; R-\textit{kā}, vv.
    439, 530
    \item U-\textit{Rāmā}, v. 210; Arjuna-\textit{n}, p. 296; Ā-\textit{Rāmā}, v. 1385
    \item H-\textit{u}, vv. 540-41
    \item Ru-\textit{kā}, v. 265
    \item Bh. X, v. 1341; Arjuna-\textit{n}, p. 236
    \item Arjuna-\textit{n}, p. 296
    \item Arjuna-\textit{n}, p. 296; K-\textit{g}, v. 692; Bh. X, v. 265
    \item Bh. X, v. 734
    \item Bh. X, v. 210
    \item H-\textit{u}, v. 365
    \item H-\textit{u}, v. 368
    \item H-\textit{u}, vv. 376, 408
    \item Ru-\textit{kā}, v. 151
\end{enumerate}
(whip), silk-tuli\(^1\) (mattress), \(\text{pira}^2\) (a kind of seating furniture), \(\text{āsana}^3\) (seat), \(\text{simhāsana}^4\) (throne-like seat), etc.

Besides these, \(\text{dīpa-gachā}^5\) (lamp-stand) and \(\text{gandha-dhūpa-dhunā}^6\) (scents, incense, resin) have also been described as articles of day-to-day use. In addition, we also find references to the use of appliances like \(\text{hāndī}^7\) (a kind of large container), \(\text{patā}^8\) and \(\text{patāguṭi}^8\) (grinding devices made of stone), \(\text{ḍheṅkī}^9\) (husking pedal), \(\text{urāḷ}^10\) (a kind of husking device), and \(\text{cāndanī jari}^11\) (a kind of rope). Further it has been gathered that when the king attended the royal court, a white umbrella (\(\text{śveta-chatra}^12\))

1. **U-Rāmā**, v. 7003
2. **Bh. X**, v. 265
3. **Ru-kā**, v. 173
4. **Ru-kā**, v. 229
5. **K-Ś**, vv. 1115, 1608; **R-kā**, vv. 22, 243
6. **Ru-kā**, vv. 66, 200
7. **Bh. X**, v. 283
8. **Bh. X**, v. 283; **Arjuna-n**, p. 292
9. **K-Ś**, v. 126
10. **Bh. X**, vv. 265, 284, 1117
11. **Bh. X**, v. 878
12. **U-Rāmā**, vv. 6778, 7450
was kept above his head and he was fanned with a white cămara or chōwar¹ (yak's tail). In royal courts, etc., a cloth covering called candrātapa² was hung alofts and we still find its use on the occasions of marriage parties and over thāpanā (the altar) in prayer congregations.

As means of transport, people of higher social status would use elephants, horses and chariots,³ while those of humble rank would use boats.⁴ Besides these, carts or śakaṭa dolā or palanquin, buffalo, methon (bison), ass, aśvatara (mule) were also used as means of transport.⁵

D. Religion and Philosophy:

Propagation of Vaiṣṇavism was the major objective of Śaṅkaradeva's and Mādhavadeva's literary works. That is why, even though their works present various episodes of the Rāmāyaṇa, the Bhāgavata and other Purāṇas such episodes were aimed at establishing that Lord Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme God. Even Brahmā, Śaṅkara, Lākṣmi and other gods

1. U-Rāmā, vv. 6778, 7450; K-g, v. 1497; H-u, v. 225; R-kā, vv. 53, 189, 194
2. K-g, vv. 152, 1495
3. Ā-Rāmā, v. 171
4. Ā-Rāmā, v. 491
5. R-kā, vv. 212-13
and goddesses pay their obeisance to Him. Those who offer their sincere devotion to Lord Viṣṇu are freed from worldly sufferings and easily attain to mukti or salvation. Secondly, it is believed that there is no necessity for offering sacrifices of animals to please Viṣṇu. By listening to and reciting his glory (śravaṇa and kīrtana), His attributes or nāma with purity of heart, one can easily attain salvation. We find these religious philosophical ideas in Śaṅkaradeva’s and Mādhavadeva’s works. Of course, it is also a fact that we can learn about many other gods and goddesses as well, besides Lord Viṣṇu, in their works.

During the period of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, in addition to the prevalence of Saivism and Śaktism in Assam, Vaiṣṇavism or what may properly be termed as Tāntric-Vaiṣṇavism was also prevalent in a feeble flow. But Śaṅkaradeva by having recourse to the Gītā, the Bhāgavata and such other books created a strong wave of neo-Vaiṣṇavism. That explains why we can have a good knowledge of Vaiṣṇavism in Śaṅkaradeva’s and Mādhavadeva’s works. Besides, while narrating the story of Lord Viṣṇu, they also describe the ideas regarding Śiva and Śakti. We present below a brief

1. K-q. v. 445
2. M. Neog, Śaṅkaradeva And His Times, pp. 86-88
discourse on what has been described in Śaṅkaradeva's and Mādhavadeva's works regarding Śaivism, Śaktism and other gods and goddesses, besides Vaiṣṇavism.

Śaivism:

Śaivism has been prevalent in Assam since very ancient times. We come to know on the authority of the Kālikā-purāṇa that in the ancient days only Śaivism prevailed in the kingdom of Kāmarūpa. Later on Narakāsura introduced Śaktism in this land. But even though the cult of Śakti was introduced by Narakāsura, Śaivism did not disappear from the land. On the contrary, the fact that the ancient Kāmarūpa kings were followers of Śaivism is proved by the copperplate inscriptions of kings like Bhāskaravarmā, Harjaravarmā, Vanamālavrarmā and Indrapāla and other kings. During the period of Āhom rule as well, Śaivism continued in its hold upon the people. It is evidenced by the burañjīs (chronicles) of Assam and the Śiva temples built by the Āhom kings at the various places of the land.

In Śaṅkaradeva's and Mādhavadeva's works, we observe the lessening of dominance of Lord Śiva and they in their various works have depicted Śiva as Lord Viṣṇu's devotee. For instance Śaṅkaradeva in his 'Haramohana' included in the Kirtana-ghosā has shown the sad plight of Śiva, who had
earlier reduced Kāmadeva into ashes, under the spell of Viṣṇu's māyā as Mohini. Here Śiva's discomfiture at the hands of Viṣṇu has been depicted and finally, Śiva sings in praise of Lord Viṣṇu. The manner in which Śiva had been shown as singing in praise of Viṣṇu here, implied that Viṣṇu was greater than Śiva.

In Vaiṣṇava literature Śiva instead of being depicted as the great Yogi, had been delineated as a poor bhāṅg-addict and peasant god. We have a beautifully depicted image of Śiva as a very poor divine being in Śaṅkaradeva's Rukmini-haraṇa-kāvyā.

In Rukmini-haraṇa-kāvyā we are shown how on the occasion of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's marriage, while other gods were offering various gifts, the poor Śiva lowered his head in shame for not being able to offer any good presents. The narration here depicts Śiva as a very poor god. The garment he wore was made of tiger skin. His body was covered with ashes and dust; his hands carried a 'trisūla' (trident) and a 'damaru' (a kind of small drum); and his only ornaments were a garland of human skulls and a snake. His only property was a bullock. Hence, while Śiva was brooding over what he would present to Kṛṣṇa, the latter with his divine insight could understand Śiva's predicament and said - "dāyāhe lāge nalāgaya ān" (Nothing except kindness is needed).
Siva then felt embarrassed and went away.¹ We find in Haramohana also Siva having a lower status to that of Viṣṇu.²

By repeatedly asserting on various occasions that Siva and Viṣṇu are one and the same Śaṅkaradeva wanted to imply that whoever considered Siva and Viṣṇu as different is a great sinner and such is a person is condemned to hell.³ In Prahlāda Carita again Siva is shown as praising Lord Viṣṇu in his incarnation as Man-Lion (Nara-Simha) by asserting that it is Viṣṇu who causes dissolution (pralaya) in the world.⁴

Sometimes Siva has declared himself a Viṣṇu's servant.⁵ There are also descriptions of Siva's associates in the forms of ghosts and spirits.⁶

Sometimes, Śaṅkaradeva has asserted that Siva is inseparable from his consort Gaurī.⁷

¹ Ru-kā, vv. 771-75
² K-q, vv. 553, 562-63
³ K-q, v. 50; H-u, v. 1; Ru-kā, v. 1; Bh. X, v. 1
⁴ K-q, vv. 428-29
⁵ K-q, v. 527
⁶ K-q, v. 546
⁷ H-u, v. 16
Lord Śiva is usually worshipped in the form of the linga or phallus. Śaṅkaradeva in his Udeśā Varnana has stated in course of discussion the Pañcatīrtha bidhi that if one visits the Śiva temple situated near the Mārkandeya lake and offers pūjā to the Śiva linga installed therein with due ceremonial procedure and moves round the temple one will be favoured with the blessings resulting from performing the Aśvamedha yajña ten times and finally the devotee will have the blessing of being physically united with Lord Śiva.¹ This reveals the divine power of Lord Śiva.

Lord Śiva is worshipped on the Śiva caturdāśī tithi and on that occasion numerous goats are sacrificed.² We have references to the practice of sacrificing goats on the occasion of Śiva pūjā in the Buraṇjīs (chronicles).³ Even today on the occasion of Śiva pūjā, goats are sacrificed in some temples. In certain temples including that at Mahābhairava, Umānanda goats are strangled to death to make such sacrifices.

1. K-q, vv. 2186-90
2. Bh. X, v. 1664
3. Darang Rājvamsāvalī, intro., p. 18, vv. 326-27
Saktism:

According to the Kālikāpurāṇa, it was King Naraka who first introduced Saktism or the cult of Śakti in Assam. This religious faith became so powerful in Assam that the Kāmarūpa came to be regarded as a centre or holy place for Saktism. According to the Kālikāpurāṇa and the Yoginītantra, even though the worship of the Devi or Śakti was rare in other places, she became a household goddess in Kāmarūpa.¹ The Kālikāpurāṇa details the mode of worshipping the Devi with diverse offerings. Among such offerings were the sacrifices of human being as also those of various animals and birds. Such performances of pūjā were also associated with Paṇca-makāra (the use of wine, meat, fish, sex and fried things). As a result of this, a strong blend of tāntric practices and rituals became part of the pūjā ceremonies of the devī, and, in the name of religion blood sacrifice and various forms of heterodox came to the fore. Even though Śaṅkaradeva in his various works has forbidden the worship of all deities including the devī and Śiva and has advocated complete surrender to Lord Viṣṇu alone, he did not entirely leave out the descriptions of the glorious power of the devī as also of Śiva in his works. For instance, in Syamanta-harana

1. 'anyatra virāla devī kāmarūpe grhe grhe'
   - Kālikā-purāṇa, pp. 42, 58; Yoginī-tantra, 1.6.152
Sankaradeva has narrated how the Yaduvas had advised Lord Kṛṣṇa to offer pūjā to goddess Durgā with sacrifices for his well-being on the eve of his battle with Jāmbavān. Similarly, in Rukminiḥaraṇa-kāvyā we are told about Rukmini visiting the temple of Devī Ambikā or Bhavānī and offering pūjā on the day preceding her svayamvara so as to have Kṛṣṇa as her husband. Regarding the mode of worship, it has been stated that Rukmini observing the vow of silence and facing acute sufferings went to the temple of Bhavānī; the Brāhmaṇa women accompanying her sang songs of her well-being; the unmarried girls made the uruli sound (sound produced by the clicking of the tongue); the messenger kept aloft the royal umbrella and the instrumentalists played upon various musical instruments. Rukmini entered the temple after washing her feet with water from the bhrngāra (water pot) and offered pūjā to Devī Bhavānī with diverse offerings.

The Devī is known by different names such as Mahāmāyā, Yogamāyā, Durgā, Bhadrā, Kālī, Kātyāyanī and she lives on pūjās offered by the people. In the Tenth Book of the Bhāgavata, Sankaradeva has narrated that at Nārāyaṇa's command the Devī was born in Yasodā's womb and later on

1. K-q, v. 1458
2. Ru-kā, vv. 262-66; Ru-n, pp. 12, 15, 16
3. Bh. X, v. 55
4. Bh. X, v. 54
when Kamsa threw the child on a piece of stone taking the child to be the eighth issue of Daivakś, the Devī freed herself from Kamsa's hands and took on the incarnation in the Aṣṭabhuja (eight armed) form and made a declaration that Kamsa's killer had been born. After the birth of Kṛṣṇa, it has been said that Nanda called a Brāhmaṇa to recite the Cāndālī for the purpose of Kṛṣṇa's welfare. The unmarried Gopa maids performed the Kātyāyanī vrata (vow) on the bank of the Yamunā in the full moon night in the month of Agrahāyana so as to have Kṛṣṇa as their husband. On the occasion of that vrata (vow) the Gopa maids made an image of Devī and worshipped her with scent, flowers, dhūp (incense) lamps, etc., and offered her various fruits, betel nuts, etc. Durgā is another form of Śakti. Devī Durgā vanquished even the most powerful enemies. Ranacāndī is another incarnation of Devī Durgā. In the Rājasūya-kāvyā it has been stated that King Jarāsandha would perform pūjā at the feet of Ranacāndī after beheading all the imprisoned kings.

1. Bh. X. w. 117-18
2. Bh. X. v. 213
3. Bh. X, w. 888-92
4. A-Rāma, v. 807
5. R-kā, v. 73
Vaiśnavaism:

Even though Vaiśnavaism, like Śaktism and Saivism, was prevalent in Assam since ancient times, it was not as strong as either Saivism or Śaktism in those times. Whatever form of Vaiśnavaism was prevalent, it was Tāntric-Vaiśnavaism. Such forms of Viṣṇu as Bāsudeva, Hayagrīva, etc., were worshipped according to Tāntric rites. Śaṅkaradeva introduced neo-Vaiśnava in Assam by accepting the essence of the Bhāgavata, the Gītā and such other religious scriptures. According to this neo-Vaiśnava faith, Lord Viṣṇu is the greatest among gods. All the literary works of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva were composed centering round the glory and divine qualities of this deity. The delineation of the ten or twenty-four incarnations of Lord Viṣṇu, Matsya, Kurma, etc., and their divine activities in such incarnations have found prominence in many places in Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva's works.¹

According to this religious faith, Viṣṇu is the greatest of gods and He can be attained to more easily by bhakti (love or devotion) rather than by knowledge (jñāna) or rites (Karma). In other words, bhakti has been given precedence over other modes of worship in the neo-Vaiśnava

1. K-g, vv. 1-32; N-g, v. 3
faith preached by Śaṅkaradeva. In Śaṅkaradeva’s Bhakti-Ratnākara, it has been asserted that Lord Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme God or Supreme ‘Guru’. He is the most worthy of all worship. He is the only divinity worthy of worship and is the cause behind the universe. He should not be regarded as merely the son of Daivaki (Daivaki-nandana). He is the ultimate Guru and the Presiding Deity over the universe (Viśva-niyantā). This nāma-dharma as preached by Śaṅkaradeva is known as ekaśaraṇa nāma-dharma. There is a saying which characterises this faith - “ek deu, ek seu ek bine nāhi keu”. In another place Śaṅkaradeva has asserted -

\[
\text{anyā devo deva naktīḥ seva} \\
\text{nākhāibā prasāda tāra} \\
\text{mūrtikō nācāibā gṛho napaśibā} \\
\text{bhaktī haibē vyabhicāra.}
\]

"Do thou not worship any other goddesses or gods, nor partake of the offerings made to them, nor cast your eyes on their idols, nor enter their temples, lest thy bhakti be vitiated."

1. K-g, v. 903
2. Bhakti Ratnākara, 5, 20 ff
3. M. Neog, Śaṅkaradeva and His Times, p. 216
4. Bh. II, v. 545
5. Tr. by M. Neog in Śaṅkaradeva and His Times, p. 216
At another place in his works, Śaṅkaradeva mentions nine modes of bhakti as in the Bhāgavata-purāṇa, namely, śravaṇa, kirtana, smarana, arcaṇa, dāsya, sakhiṭva, vandana and deha-arpaṇa. Of all these nine forms of bhakti, śravaṇa and kirtana (hearing and reciting God’s name) are considered as the principal ones. In the Kali yuga, Kirtana has been given precedence over dhyāna, yajña and pūjā. Bhakti or devotion does not recognise any distinctions of castes. All persons including women, children and the old men, even Candalas have equal right to reciting the virtues of Hari - and everyone can attain to salvation by the recital of Hari nāma. To offer bhakti, it is not necessary to become a god, Brāhmaṇa or a sage. Nor is it necessary to perform meditation or penance or yajña. Nārāyaṇa is pleased with bhakti alone. The Yakṣas, the Rākṣasas, the women, the śūdras of Vraja even animals and birds - all can worship Kṛṣṇa and attain to Viṣṇu’s qualities. Writing on the glory

1. K-g, v. 340
2. 'yadyapi bhakti nava bidha Mādhavara śravaṇa-kirtana tāto mahāśreṣṭhatara'. - Bh. I, v. 38
3. K-g, v. 75
4. K-g, v. 130
5. Bh. II, v. 434
6. K-g, vv. 381-82
of Hari's nāma, Mādhavadeva also in his Nām-ghosa says that the people of socially low castes like the Garos, the Bhots and the Yavanas also can attain to salvation by chanting the name of Hari. Even the great sinners also can be free from worldly sufferings of being by chanting the divine name of Hari. Hence those who do not utter the name of Hari or denounces the devotee only earn sins in their worldly lives. Such is the glory of devotion to Hari that even Bhagavān becomes the servant of the devotee. According to Śaṅkaradeva, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa itself is like the Sun and the quintessence of the Vedānta (Upaniṣada) lies in it. If one can be devoted to Viṣṇu, one can attain to the fourfold ends of life, dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa. If Lord Kṛṣṇa can be pleased, it can bless one with the effects of a hundred crores of yajña ceremonies. Lord Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu Himself is the greatest among the puruṣa; He is the only Truth, while all others are illusory. He is the source of all creation, maintenance and desolution of the world. He creates everything in the form of Brahmā, nurtures everything in the incarnation of Viṣṇu, and destroys everything in his

1. N-g, vv. 476-80
2. N-g, v. 497
3. K-g, vv. 104-06
4. Keli-n, p. 4; Pāri-n, p. 20
5. Bh. X, v. 938
incarnation as Rudra. Whenever the earth is laden with sins, He appears in an avatāra.\(^1\) If a person wants to meditate on Kṛṣṇa, he does not have to visit any holy place by leaving his home. If one can contemplate Him with a pure heart, one can be united with Him while in one's house itself.\(^2\)

In Vaiṣṇavism, the guru has been accorded a very high place. Madhavadeva in his Guru Bhaṭṭimā said that without the grace of the Guru's feet, no one can attain to devotion or bhakti.\(^3\) Śaṅkaradeva also in his Bhakti Rātnākara has written about the guru's eminence by asserting that the guru should be regarded as Hari and by offering one's services at the guru's feet one can be free from the cycle of rebirths.\(^4\)

Buddhism:

A feeble current of Buddhism had been flowing in ancient Kāmarūpa just sometimes before the reign of King Bhāskara Varmā of the 7th century A.D. and we have various evidences of this religious faith leaving a permanent impact.

\(^1\) Bh. X, vv. 81-82
\(^2\) K-q, v. 705
\(^3\) Śrī Śrī Madhavadeva Bākyāmṛta, p. 355
\(^4\) M. Neog, Śaṅkaradeva and His Times, p. 221
on Assam. In this regard we may refer to Śaṅkaradeva's *Kīrtana-ghoṣā* in which he has noted that Viṣṇu incarnated as the Buddha and violated the Vedic norms and by transgressing the Vedic customs kept everyone spell-bound with the Vāmānāya (left handed) scriptures. As a result, people continued to observe the customs and rites pertaining to Pāṣaṇḍa (heterodox) creeds without chanting the name of Viṣṇu. Śaṅkaradeva characterises such people who had discarded Vedic rites as mlecchas, and predicted that at the end of the Kali yuga, Viṣṇu would appear in the form of Kalki and destroy these people to establish Satya yuga. We have reference to this Buddhist Tātakiyā (magicians) in the *Katha-guru Carita* in connection with the stay of the saint in a place called Dhuwāḥāt.

It is noteworthy that, though a historical character, Buddhadeva has been described as another incarnation of the Buddha by the Vaiṣṇava poets like Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva and others.

2. *K-q*, v. 14
3. *KGC*, p. 45
5. *N-q*, v. 3
Other Gods and Goddesses:

In Śaṅkaradeva's and Mādhavadeva's works, besides the gods and goddesses who are central to Śaivism, Śaktism and Vaiṣṇavism such as Śiva, Śakti and Viṣṇu, we also find references to Brahmā, Lakṣmi,1 Sarasvatī,2 Indra, Baruṇa, Yama and others. Like Śiva, Lakṣmi and Śakti, Brahmā also has been depicted as Viṣṇu's devotee.3

Similarly, we also find the names of many other gods and goddesses such as Indra,4 Baruṇa,5 Yama or Dharma,6 Agni,7 Bāyu,8 Candra,9 Viśvakarmā,10 Kāmadeva,11 Gaṇapati,12 Digpālas,13 Yakṣas-Rākṣas,14 in various places.

1. K-g, vv. 391, 704
2. K-g, v. 608
3. K-g, v. 312
4. Ā-Rāmā, v. 112; H-u, v. 20
5. Ā-Rāmā, v. 112
6. Ā-Rāmā, v. 142
7. K-g, v. 1546
8. K-g, v. 1546
9. K-g, v. 1546
10. Ā-Rāmā, v. 128
11. Ru-kā, vv. 24, 276
12. H-u, vv. 20, 25, 53
13. U-Rāmā, v. 7423
14. R-kā, v. 696
Besides these, names of demi-gods and demi-goddesses like Gandharvas, Vidyadharas, Apsarases, Vidyadharis are also referred to.

Similarly, divine powers are found to have been attributed to animals or certain natural objects. For instance, among animals such as Lord Śiva's bullock, Nandi, Indra's Airāvata Elephant, Viṣṇu's Garuḍa, and natural phenomena such as Vasumati or the Earth, Gaṅgā, Yamunā have been deified. Their activities, therefore, are associated with the miraculous on one hand and on the other with human attributes. For instance, the bird Garuḍa is not only the carrier of Kṛṣṇa, he is also Kṛṣṇa's devotee. Similarly, Hanumān is not only a monkey, he is also a devoted follower of Rāma. In the same manner, Śiva's carrier Nandi is also Śiva's devotee.

1. Ru-ḵā, vv. 24, 276
2. Ru-ḵā, vv. 362, 588; Bh. X, v. 73
3. Ru-ḵā, vv. 118, 362, 588; Bh. X, v. 73
4. U-Rāmā, v. 7424; Ā-Rāmā, v. 1035
5. Ru-ḵā, v. 698
6. Pāri-n, p. 3; Ru-ḵā, v. 700
7. Pāri-n, p. 11
8. Pāri-n, pp. 11, 12
9. N-g, vv. 591, 673
The god of Death is Yama or Dharma. Even though there was none who was not afraid of this Yama, Rāvana could vanquish him by virtue of Śiva's boon. The messengers of Yama, god of death, are terrible. Some of them are of twisted faces (beṅkāmuwa). They are of hefty, dark-skinned body, squinted eyes, and they carry ropes and iron rods in their hands. Their very sight makes one lose one's nerves. But those who chant the nāma of Govinda can escape their wrath. Like the messengers of Yama, we have also references to the messengers of Viśṇu. They are blue complexioned, clad in yellow dress, four-armed, one hand carrying a conch-shell, one hand a Cakra, one hand a mace and the fourth a lotus. In other words, the poet has depicted them on the model of the image Viśṇu. The poet has also mentioned about the messengers of Baruṇa. After Kṛṣṇa had held aloft the mountain Govardhana, Nanda, while bathing in the Yamunā, was kidnapped by Baruṇa's messengers.

1. A-Rāmā, v. 111
2. N-g, v. 489
3. K-g, v. 177
4. N-mā, vv. 134-36
5. K-q, vv. 179-81
7. R-kā, vv. 93-94
The Assamese Vaisnava poets have delineated Nārada as a quarrelsome and back-biting person. He wears brown-coloured, knotty hair on his head, clothes made of tiger skin on his body and carries a Vīnā in his hands.

Like the various gods and goddesses, we also come across references to ghosts and spirits, dākinī-yogini (female spirits) in various literary works.¹

In several books there are also references to various materials essential for performing pūjā like rice, grass, etc., besides the names of various musical instruments associated with pūjā. On such auspicious occasions as weddings, rice and grass were strewn over the heads of the bride and the bride-groom.² Offerings were made by carrying tila, kuśa and water in hands.³ A handful of grass and rice was strewn over the head while blessing a person or wishing one well.⁴ This practice is still in vogue in the Assamese society. Obeisance in the gesture of praṇāma was offered to a deity or some highly respected person by moving round⁵ and

1. N-mā, v. 296; Bh. X, v. 192
2. K-ş, v. 1461
3. H-u, vv. 99, 487
4. H-u, v. 479
respects were shown to a revered person by making offerings at the person's feet.¹ We find the mention of moving round a respected person up to seven times.

The ancient practice of performing the yajña ceremony has been referred to in the various works of Śaṅkaraḍēva and Mādhavadeva. There are accounts where yajña was performed in order to have a son.² Yajña was also performed on such auspicious occasions as Svayamvara.³ The sages also performed yajña on their own wishing the well-being of the society and the kingdom.⁴ Various offerings were made at the venue of the yajña and the sages began the performance of a yajña ceremony with a purified mind like that of a Brahmacārī. The Brāhmaṇas ceremoniously performed pūjā before the 'Yajña-puruṣa' by chanting mantras and thereafter at the auspicious moment fire was set in the Yajña-kunda.⁵ At the conclusion of the Yajña ceremony, the sages and Brāhmaṇas were offered worship and, after being showered with flowers and greeted with sandalwood paste, gifts of dresses and ornaments were presented to them.⁶

¹. H-u, v. 249; A-Rāmā, v. 21
². A-Rāmā, vv. 30, 383, 497
³. A-Rāmā, v. 38
⁴. A-Rāmā, v. 908
⁵. A-Rāmā, vv. 542, 44, 909
⁶. A-Rāmā, v. 928
Besides, other persons including even beggars were entertained with meals. It was believed that by performing such yajña, even the impossible could be made possible. For instance, it is described in the Rāmāyaṇa, how, consequent on the performance of a yajña by King Daśaratha, a 'Yajña-puruṣa' offered pāyasa in a container and after eating that pāyasa the three queens of the king bore children.

In ancient times, among various forms of yajña, it was the Rājasūya and the Aśvamedha yajña which were most prominent. Mādhavadeva renders a detailed account of Rājasūya yajña in his Rājasūya-kāvyā. According to that account King Yudhiṣṭhira made elaborate arrangements for this yajña and those who attended the yajña included, besides Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, other gods, the Nāgas, various kings of the earth, the Brāhmaṇas, Vidyādharas, Gandharvas and many other persons of both the affluent and the poor classes. Elephants, horses, rathas or chariots, cows, gold, dresses and ornaments were offered as gifts to those persons. At the conclusion of the yajña ceremony, Somarasa (a kind of liquor) was in accordance with customary practices. In the occasion of the yajña ceremony, Viṣṇu was worshipped at the beginning. In performing the yajña ceremony, the Brāhmaṇas performed a

1. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 637-38
2. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 628-35
yāga known as 'patni-saṁjña' and Awabr̥tha (ritual ablution) mahāsnāna was performed of Yudhisthira with Draupadi and thereafter the Vedic mantras were recited after uniting their hair.¹ King Hariścandra also could go to heaven in the company of his subjects for earning virtues by performing the rājasūya-yajña.² Besides this, we have reference to another yajña called aśvamedha, in the Rāmāyana Uttarākanda. It has been observed in this context that there is no greater yajña anywhere than aśvamedha yajña. One can earn greater virtues in this yajña than in any other yajña ceremony.³ Aśvamedha yajña is the greatest of sacrifices in the world.⁴ We have a fine description of Rāma's performing the aśvamedha yajña in the Uttarākanda Rāmāyana.⁵

Vows and Fastings, etc.:

Besides mentions of the above yajñās, we have also references to vrata (vow), tīrthasāna (bathings at holy places), tapasyā (meditation) in Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva's

1. R-kā, vv. 511-677
3. U-Rāmā, v. 6764
4. U-Rāmā, v. 6766
5. U-Rāmā, vv. 6767-6800
works. Sankaradeva has observed that chanting of Hari's name is superior to homa, vows, baths at holy places or even mahāyajñā. Referring to the practice of Brūhmana's 'bāhravrata' (twelve vows) he has noted that it is inferior to Hari's name. Besides this, we have also accounts glorifying meditation. The gopis could win Kṛṣṇa through meditation. The sage Viśvāmitra wanted to accuse King Hariścandra with the power of meditation. Yaśodā had Kṛṣṇa as her son by virtue of meditation. The Gopa maids performed the vrata of goddess Kātyāyani in order to have Kṛṣṇa as their husband. From an account given in the Tenth Book of the Bhāgavata we come to know that the Gopis performed the pūjā of goddess Kātyāyani by installing an image of the goddess on the bank of the Yamunā for a month and using flowers, incense, lamp, fruits, betelnuts, etc. It is worthmentioning that even today Kātyāyani vrata is performed at Kāmākhyā during the Full Moon day of Agraḥāyana (Āghon) and this vrata in popular parlance is called 'Carā vrata'.

1. Ḥ-u, v. 76
2. K-g, v. 54
3. K-g, v. 442; Bh. X, v. 5
4. K-g, v. 1123
5. Ḥ-u, v. 330
6. Madhavadeva, Barqīta, No. 143
7. Bh. X, vv. 887-93
Many Hindus are found to observe 'Ekādaśi vrata' even today. We have references to this vrata in the Tenth Book of the Bhāgavata. Nanda after observing Ekādaśi vrata performed pūjā at Hari's feet, with various offerings. ¹ Śaṅkaradeva reproved his disciples for this regarding 'Ekādaśi vrata'. The Gopa children also observed vrata on the bank of the river Sarasvatī only by drinking water.² Festivities are an indispensable part of man's cultural life. People in their religious and social life have been in the habit of celebrating various festive occasions from birth to death.

Even though we do not come across clear descriptions of all the festivals in Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva's works, we find accounts of such festivals as are associated with marriage,³ victory of a king in war,⁴ coronation ceremony,⁵ birth,⁶ pūjās,⁷ etc.

Visiting a holy place is regarded as a very virtuous act by the Hindus. Even though the great Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva and other saints had visited various holy places

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1. Bh. X, v. 1166
2. Bh. X, v. 1554
3. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 192-202, 1344-58
4. Pāri-n, p. 20
5. U-Rāmā, vv. 6906-08
6. Bh. X, vv. 140-53
7. Ru-kā, vv. 262-66
in India, it seems as if Śaṅkaradeva did not attach much importance to visiting holy places. According to him, man can achieve salvation at home by chanting Hari's name in the company of bhaktas rather than by visiting holy places. On the other hand, he has asserted on several occasions that India is a sacred land, because this is the country where bhakti is cultured.

The Hindus believe that the rivers like the Gangā, the Yamunā, the Godāvari, etc. are highly sacred and one can earn virtues by dipping in these rivers. Mādhavadeva has observed in the Ādikānda Rāmāyaṇa that great personages take their baths in such rivers. It has been stated that the Gangā had originated from water washed out from Viṣṇu's feet. That is why it is believed that the Gangā is a very sacred river. Like the Gangā, the river Sarayu is also very sacred. In the Rāmāyaṇa the sage Viśvāmitra, speaking on the glory of the Sarayu, tells Rāma and Laksmana that bathing

1. KGC, pp. 147-71
2. K-g, v. 210
3. K-g, vv. 214-15
4. A-Rāma, vv. 769-70
5. K-g, v. 6
6. R-kā, v. 124; N-mā, v. 593
in that river removes tiredness, the bather will become very powerful, he will lose his sense of hunger and thirst and he will not be troubled with any ailment. According to Indian faith, if one takes bath in such rivers, one is freed of one's sins and can easily attain to salvation. Of course, Saṅkaradeva places greater emphasis on the company of bhaktas in preference to pilgrimages to holy places.

Such faith in the glory of a river still prevails in our society. Even today on the occasions of various auspicious occasions, people take their baths in the Brahmaputra, the Baśiṣṭha and the Gaṅgā with reverence. Just as certain rivers are sacred to the Hindus, similarly there are certain other rivers which are sacred to people professing other religious faiths. For instance, the river Jordan is sacred to the Christians, whereas to the Muslims the rivers Tigres and Euphrates as well as Jamjam are sacred. Like the river Gaṅgā, Vārānasi is also very sacred holy place for the Hindus. It is believed that by visiting this holy place one can earn virtues. But Saṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva and such other saintly people have attached greater importance to chanting Hari's name at home than visiting holy places. Saṅkaradeva has observed that one can have God by reciting this name at

1. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 864-66
Similarly, Mādhavadeva has also noted that the virtues one can earn at Varanasi and by bathing in the Gangā are quite negligible in comparison with the virtues earned by chanting Hari's name. Of course, in another context, Saṅkaradeva also opined that one can earn virtues if, after visiting the five holy places one can see Kṛṣṇa's face (Kṛṣṇa mukh) on the twelfth day of the waning Moon in the month of Jēth.

From the above instance we can presume that, even though the Vaiṣṇava saints attached greater importance to chanting and hearing Hari's name at home than visiting holy places, they did not undermine the importance of visiting holy places. For instance, it can be mentioned that the great saint Saṅkaradeva, besides visiting holy places for twelve years during his youth, during his later age also he visited holy places in the company of Mādhavadeva, Rām Rām Guru and others.

1. K-q, v. 705
2. N-mā, vv. 244, 520
3. K-q, v. 2184
4. KGC, p. 33
Popular beliefs:

Since ancient days, we come across various popular beliefs or superstitions in the pages of different books. It is believed that certain auspicious signs or evil omens seen in dreams or in reality have their good or evil effects. We come across such popular beliefs in Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva’s works as well. In Kaṁsatrādyā Gaṇapati Śaṅkaradeva has written that Kaṁsa was beside himself with fear when he heard that Kṛṣṇa had come to Mathurā and he saw certain ominous signs. Those signs were not to see one’s head in one’s shadow, not to find the marks of one’s step in dust or mud, to see two moons in the sky, to find a dead person embracing one in one’s dream, to drink poison after riding an ass, to become naked after wearing a garland of China rose flowers (or phul), to move towards the south all by oneself after massaging oil, etc.¹ It is believed that the appearance of a comet indicates disaster for the country or sometimes an ominous person is called a ‘comet’ (dhumketu). The Gopa maids abused Akrūra as a ‘comet’ for his carrying away Kṛṣṇa from Gokula.² After the fight between Rukma and Kṛṣṇa, the former’s father Bhīṣmaka called Rukma the comet of the

¹ K-q, vv. 1157-59
² K-q, v. 1455
family. In Hariścandra-upākhyāna, the sage Viśvāmitra being the sole cause of Hariścandra's paupery, the former has been called a comet (dhumketu). When a man faces ill fortune, he generally attributes it to divine will. We have references to such beliefs in divine will in Śaṅkara-deva and Mādhava-deva's works. For instance, in Rukminīharana-kāvya, Rukmini having created obstacles to the marriage between Rukmini and Kṛṣṇa, Rukmini speaks of divine will and attributes it to her fate. Again, when there are fights between Kṛṣṇa on the one hand, and Śiśupāla, Jarāsandha and other kings on the other, Rukmini then recalls divine will out of apprehension for Kṛṣṇa's danger. On another occasion, it has been stated that Rukmini could get Kṛṣṇa as her husband because of divine will.

Like divine will, people also believed in waring people of dire circumstances (daiva bāṇi) or 'heavenly voice' (ākāśī bāṇi). We have references to such 'heavenly voice' (ākāśī bāṇi) in Śaṅkara-deva's version of the Tenth Book of the Bhāgavata. While Kaṃsa was driving Daivakī in a chariot

1. Ru-kā, v. 500
2. H-u, v. 112
3. Ru-kā, v. 85
4. Ru-kā, vv. 302-03
5. Ru-kā, v. 211
after marrying her, there was a heavenly voice or prophecy that the eighth child of Daivakî would be the cause of his death.¹ At the time of Śisupāla's birth also, there was a heavenly prophecy that he would die in the hands of Kṛṣṇa.²

Like beliefs in divine will, people also believe in the powers of planets and stars. Among the planets, again, just as the planets Vṛhaspati, Śukra, Candra and Budha are regarded as auspicious, similarly the planets Śani, Ravi, Mangala, Rāhu and Ketu are regarded as having evil influences. Just as people believe that because of the evil eye of Śani, people suffer misfortune, so also there is a popular belief that the evil eye of Śani can cause drought and failure of crops in a country. We have reference in this in the Rāmāyaṇa Adikānda.³ When an evil planet casts its evil eye or when there is any divine will for the bad, it brings about misfortune to man. In the Rāmāyaṇa we are told how King Daśaratha fell into great misfortune by being attacked sour tumour (mahābraṇa) when an evil planet cast its spell on him.⁴

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1. Bh. X, v. 24
2. Ru-kā, v. 372; R-kā, vv. 622-23
3. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 269, 315
4. Ā-Rāmā, v. 433
The practice of going on a journey or performing some good deed after ascertaining an auspicious hour, day, occasion, position of stars, etc. is still in vogue in Assamese society. We have references to such popular beliefs in Śāṅkara-deva and Mādhava-deva’s works. King Dāsaratha set out on a journey for the purpose of his wedding after ascertaining an auspicious moment.¹ It was found on astrological calculations that Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and others were born at auspicious hours or during conjunction of auspicious planets and stars.² Sītā’s svayambara ceremony was held after finding out the auspicious moment and day.³ Lord Kṛṣṇa set out for Indraprastha with pomp and splendour at the auspicious moment.⁴

We have instances indicating deep faith in astrology, palmistry, etc. in the society of those days. In Hariścandra-upākhyāna it is stated that Hariścandra, despite being a king, had to work as Caṇḍāla because there was a particular line on his foot.⁵ After the birth of a child, on a fixed day a horoscope is prepared by calling in an astrologer and

1. Ā-Rāmā, v. 235
2. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 667, 673
3. Ā-Rāmā, v. 374
4. R-kā, v. 190
5. H-u, vv. 409-10
the child is named. With this horoscope the child's future well-being and misfortunes are ascertained. We come across instances of this in the Rāmāyaṇa Ādikāṇḍa on the occasion of the birth of Daśaratha's four sons and in the Tenth Book of the Bhāgavata on the occasion of Kṛṣṇa's birth. Hinduism acknowledges the cycle of rebirths. It has been stated in the Gītā as well that the soul does not die, only it changes the body. There is a prevailing belief in the society that if one does good deeds, one earns virtue (puṇya); similarly if one does evil deeds, that counts for his burden of sins (pāpa). This burden of pāpa and puṇya which is 'karma-phala' is carried over to the next birth according to Indian Astrology. We have references to such a belief, such an idea in various places in Śaṅkaradeva's and Mādhavadeva's works. According to Indian belief, a wife who is loyal to her husband, is united to him in every following birth. We have example of this in Rukminīharana-kāvyā.

1. Ā-Rāmā, v. 685; Bh. X, v. 141
2. "bāsāmsi jīrnāni yathā bihāya
   navāni grhnāti narohaparāni
   tathā ārūrāni bihāya jīrnā
   nyanyādi saṁyāti navāni dehi."
   - Śrīmadbhaṣṭāvottarā Gītā, 2.22
4. Ru-kā, v. 449
Similarly we have references to beliefs in dreams,\(^1\) in mantras or incantations,\(^2\) etc. If a person commits evils or if a son disobeys his father, such a person is condemned to hell.\(^3\)

According to different physical characteristics men are divided into four categories of Hare (śaṣā), Deer (Mr̥ga), Bull (vr̥sa) and Horse (Aśva). Similarly women with different physical qualities are distinguished into Padminī, Citrīnī, Śaṅkhīnī and Hastinī. The first of the four classes of women is very beautiful and lovely and the last one is worst of the four classes recognised in the erotic science. We have indications of such characteristics on several occasions in Ādikānda Rāmāyana,\(^4\) Rājasūya-kāvya\(^5\) and the Tenth Book of the Bhāgavata.\(^6\)

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1. U-Rāmā, vv. 6727-29; Ā-Rāmā, vv. 794-97, 1478-79; K-ç, v. 2128
2. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 791-93, 912
3. Ā-Rāmā, v. 847
4. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 700-07
5. R-kā, vv. 210, 399-406
6. Bh. X, vv. 1788-96
E. Fine Arts:

Music and Dance:

As in the works of pre-Śaṅkaradeva era, in Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva also we have a lot of information about mediaeval fine arts. The great Śaṅkaradeva was not just a religious preacher, but he was also a litterateur, musician, dancer, actor and a painter. Besides composing Aṅkiyā Nāṭ, he also composed Sūtra, gīt and bhaṭīmā, etc. for staging such dramas. For staging the bhāonā of Cihnyāstrā, painted the pictures of seven Vaikuṇṭhas (heavenly kingdoms) and taught dancing to five boys.¹ The fact that both Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva mentioned in their bārgīt and aṅkiyā gīt of aṅkiyā-nāṭs the names of such rāgas as Āsowary, Dhanaśrī, Gaurī, Suhāī, Vasanta, Kedār, Belowār, Lalit, Ahir, etc. and such tālas as Ektāla, Paritāla, Rūpak, Jyoti, etc. makes one easily surmise that both the gurus were well versed in classical music. Hence it is but natural that in their works we can have a lot of information regarding music of the age. Let us first take up the question dance and music. Dance and music are intimately connected with musical instruments. In Śaṅkaradeva's and Mādhavadeva's works we find references to such musical instruments as tāl, kartāl, bhoṭtāl or bhortāl (different

¹. Rāmacaraṇa Thākura, Guru Carita, vv. 1457–60
sizes of symbols), dundubhi, mṛdaṅga, dhāk, dhōl, daṅkā, tawal, damaru, joyadhāl, pāṭaha (all different kinds of drums), śīṅga, beṇu, vamśi, śaṅkha, gomukha (all pipes and wind blowned instruments), dotārā, vlnā, etc. (string instruments) and some other musical instruments. Usually on the occasions of marriage or celebration of some victory, musical instruments such as mṛdaṅga, daṅkā, dhāk-dhōl, gomukh śaṅkha, dundubhi, kāhāli, mahari bheri, etc. were played in accompaniment to dance and music.1 Dundubhi was regarded as a special instrument favourite to the gods.2 When King Daśaratha helped the gods in defeating the Asuras, the gods blew on the conchshell and played on dundubhi and showered pārijātā flowers on the king's head. In more than one drama of Śaṅkaradeva we invariably find the mention of playing on 'Deva-Dundubhi' before the entry of characters like Kṛṣṇa and Rukmiṇī.3 In Rāmayājanāt after the entry of Rāma and Laksmana together with Viśvāmitra Sītā's Svayambara is held and in that gathering, we are told that musical instruments like dhōl, daṅkā, śaṅkha, gomukh, mṛdaṅga tāl, kartāl kāhāl, etc. were played.4 While Lord Kṛṣṇa was dancing on the Kālināga's hoods, the Gandharvas and Vidyādharas played on

1. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 245-46, 255
2. Ā-Rāmā, vv. 416-19; Ru-n, p. 2; Pāri-n, p. 12
3. Ru-n, p. 2; Keli-n, p. 2
4. R-viś-n, p. 8
tāl, kartāl, mṛdaṅga, dundubhi and such other musical instruments. The Gopas while looking after the cattle in Vṛndāvana played on instruments like baṅgāl (flutes), śāṅkha (conchshells), venu, śīṅgā, etc. Again, in Keliopāla-nāṭ we are told about Kṛṣṇa singing on the fifth note (pañcama svara). Musical instruments are inseparably connected with dance. Hence any description of dance also incorporates mentions of musical instruments. In Gajendrapākhyāna of Kirtana-ghosā there is a reference to the Apeśwarases engaged in dancing on top of the Trikuta mountain in Milky Ocean. In Mādhavadeva's Rāmāyaṇa we have reference to the Naṭīs dancing and singing to the accompaniment of mṛdaṅga and tāl on the occasion of Sītā's Svayamvara ceremony.

Architecture and Sculpture:

In Śaṅkaradeva's and Mādhavadeva's works we find fine descriptions of architecture and sculpture. Śaṅkaradeva while describing Hari's temple has given an account of architecture as follows - the columns of the temple are made

1. Kāli-n, p. 6
2. Kāli-n, p. 12
3. Keli-n, pp. 1, 2
4. K-a, v. 482
5. Ā-Rāmā, v. 980
of a precious lapis lazuli (baidurya), the walls are made of crystals (sphaṭika), diamond-made doors have bejewelled panels with attached gold chains; the beams of the house are made of ruby (padmarāga) beads, jewels and gems have been wrought into various parts of the house. Inside the house is hung a canopy (Candrātapa) and pearls and jewels are hung onto it.¹ Similarly, in other accounts we are told about doors made of gold having panels of diamond.² In Kirtana-ghosa we have the description of Kṛṣṇa's residence at Dvārakā which is surrounded by fortification. The columns of the residence are made of coral, beats and curved beats are made of gold, the walls are wrought with highly precious emerald (Indranīl), the doors are made of diamonds and fitted with gold-net work.³ In Madhava-deva's Ādikāṇḍa Rāmāyana we have the following description of the houses built for kings who attended Sītā's Svayamvara - the houses are high and wide, the columns used are made of crystals and being decorated with diamonds, jewels, etc. the houses are shining. Here and there stages (mañcā) have been constructed of gold and silver and various seats have been arranged for the kings to be seated in the Svayamvara gathering.⁴ In those days

¹ K-g, vv. 151-52
² K-g, vv. 333-34
³ K-g, vv. 1489-94
⁴ Ā-Rāmā, vv. 956-60
the houses were so constructed that from the top one could see things at a distance or see some procession moving along the road. From this it can be surmised that either the houses were two-storied or fitted with platforms; alternately, the roofs of the houses were so built that by getting on top of the roof one could see things lying at a distance.¹ From the description given of Kuṇḍilananagara by Śaṅkaradeva, we have a fine example of architectural art. For instance, the houses in Kuṇḍila-nagara are arranged in rows. The roofs of the houses are of white colour - looking like white mountain. The walls of the house are decorated with sculptural works and stone in those walls pichers (ghaṭs), dancers (naṭas), singers (bhāṭas), elephants, tigers, leopards, lions and various birds are depicted. Besides these there are some dolls which have been kept in a way as if these are dancing with hands kept aloft and making various gestures. On top of the houses some golden pots are shining. The town is surrounded by thunder-bolt like firm fortifications.²

Śaṅkaradeva while describing the houses at Dvārakā stated that the houses were made of diamonds, jewels, emerald (marakat), ruby (mānik), gold (svarṇa), silver (rajata) etc.

¹ A–Rāmā, v. 1464
² Ru–kā, vv. 197-99
"The construction of those houses had nothing to do with grass, cane, bamboo and timber." While describing various things in the literary works, the abundance of gold is worth noting. For instance, gold made windows, golden lamp-stand, golden throne, golden beats, etc. The pictures which Śaṅkaradeva thus painted through his pen of the Trikuṭa mountains, of the cities of Kuṇḍila and Dvārakā are only conventional, based on old Sanskrit texts and his imagination. Even though these places painted by him are all studded with the most precious objects, it is quite likely that the houses with which the poet himself was familiar were made of "grass, cane, bamboo and timber."

Histrionics:

Besides architecture and sculpture, we have references to such fine arts as acting in Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva's works. In order to propagate Vaiṣṇava religion in Assam, Śaṅkaradeva composed six dramas including Kālī-dāmaṇa, Pārijāṭharaṇa and Mādhavadeva wrote nine nāṭ-jhumurā including Arjuna Bhaṅjana, Cordharā and got those staged in various sattras and nāmgharas and thereby led a dramatic movement. As a result of this dramatic movement a good

1. Ru-kā, vv. 112-13
number of dramatists who were either their contemporaries or belonged to the subsequent era wrote dramas and helped in achieving excellence in acting. It is worth mentioning that while staging a drama, besides the art of acting, various other aspects of fine arts like dance, songs, musical instruments, costumes and ornaments, masks, scenic designs, etc. were also practised and these gained in simultaneous development.

Saṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva were like the sun and the moon in the firmament of Assamese Vaiṣṇava literature. Their writings occupy a vast part of Vaiṣṇava literature. These writings are as extensive as they are deep and are rich in literary excellence. Besides, from the foregoing discussions, one can conclude that in the works of both these gurus, the various pictures of Assamese life, particularly the pictures of medieval Assamese cultural life have been beautifully reflected.