Within the next one hundred years after the death of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, the new Vaiṣṇava literatures had been flourishing well. During this period, Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva were treated as avatāras. Immediately the writings of the biographies of these Mahāpuruṣas were started. These biographies were gradually accepted as religious scripts. The entire old biographical literatures in Assamese are of two types - prose and verse. Most of them are in verse. Some of these are already published, while others are still in their medieval manuscript form, preserved in the precincts of the saṭras. The principal theme of those biographies is to explain the lives of the Vaiṣṇava gurus.

The principal caritas were written centering Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva and Harideva - propounders of the Bhāgavata based on Vaiṣṇava faith and some of their biographies were also written centering the prominent immediate followers of these four gurus. All the caritas of this period can be divided into three groups, viz,

(A) The caritas of the two gurus.
(B) The caritas of other gurus.
(C) The caritas of their successors.
1. **Mahāpuruṣa Śrī Saṅkaradeva āru Śrī Mādhavadeva caritas by Daityārī Thākur** — The earliest carita or hagiography of Saṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva is by Daityārī Thākur. At first the title was "Mahāpuruṣa Saṅkaradeva O Mādhavadevar Jīvana Carita". Second time, it was published under the title "Mahāpuruṣa Śrī Śrī Saṅkaradeva-Mādhavadeva carita". For the third time it was published under the title "Mahāpuruṣa Śrī Saṅkaradeva āru Śrī Mādhavadeva carita". Of these three editions, Nath only mentioned how he has made the chapter-divisions and he has numbered the verses separately. Others are silent about these matters.

Daityārī Thākur was the son of Rāmacaraṇa Thākur, the nephew of Mādhavadeva. It was supposed that Daityārī was born in about 1486 saka and calls Mādhavadeva his own preceptor but this does not necessarily mean that he received ordination at Mādhavadeva's feet. In his caritas, Daityārī mentioned the name of Caturbhuja Thākur, when he was in the Tamranga satra. Caturbhuja Thākur died in 1648 A.D. So, it is supposed that this biography was written in the 4th or 5th decade of the 17th century.

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1. Edited by Haribilas Gupta, Tezpur, 1990.
2. Edited by Rajmohan Nath, Sylhet, 1947.
3. Edited by Harinarayan Dutta Baruah, Nalbari, 1957 A.D.
5. Satyendranāth Sarma "Asamiyā Sahityar Samiksātmak Itibṛtta", P. 158
The author mentions that he has undertaken this work because many elderly persons have advised him to put together in verse all about two Mahāpuruṣas.

"Minoti bacane bolo śunā sarbajan,
Kato mahājane mok bulilā bacan,
Duyo Mahāpuruṣar kāthā jato jato,
Padabandhe ekštān kariā samasto.\(^6\)

(Everyone please listen to me, as I am writing down the wise orders of the great men as told me.)

He has says that he has undertaken the help and consent of Budhir-Po-Govinda Ātai, the adhikāra of Madhupura satra at Cooch-Bihar\(^7\). Govinda Ātai also helped him with materials and approved the idea of writing a biography. He refers to the divergent accounts of various incidents that were prevalent among different circles. He regrets that he could not record all the incidents occurred in the lives of the two saints in all their versions and sincerely apologizes for any displacement that there might be in his carita. Here also we get a vivid description about Mādhavadeva. The reason is that the relationship between the two gurus was so intimate, and the two were so attached to each other that it was hardly possible to go to the life-story of one without going to the life-story of the other.

The work does not afford a detailed account of Śāṅkara's ancestry and early life but particulars increase in volume with

\(^6\) Daityārī Ṭhākur "Mahāpuruṣa Śrī Śrī Śāṅkaradeva-Mādhavadeva carita", P. 2
\(^7\) Ibid., PP. 414 - 415
the years of Śaṅkara's life. He deals with Madhavadeva's life rather elaborately. Regarding the forefathers of Śaṅkaradeva, he does not go beyond Landādeva, Śaṅkara's predecessor of the fifth generation. Daityārī also does not mention the month and date of birth of Śaṅkaradeva, the name of his mother, the age at which he lost his parents and also the name of his teacher. On the contrary, he describes vividly how Madhava spent his childhood and how he was treated coldly by his relatives etc. We also get from this carita when and how Madhava had meetings with Śaṅkara and became his disciple and how they preached Vaiṣṇavism by overcoming all obstacles. He also narrates how Harisimha Bora and Ghaghari Majhi helped Madhava and his father in their distress. According to Daityārī Madhavadeva met Śaṅkaradeva at Dhuwahata when the Ahom invasion took place. But according to Ramananda, the Kachari invasion was taking place in the region. As a biography, we find some supernatural elements to prove the divine power of the two gurus. It is only to attract the common people to the field of the preachers. But it is accepted by all that this carita is much valuable. The nature of the author's description have made it fully poetic, besides the events are described nicely. So, this carita is substantially dependable.

2. Śrī Śrī Śaṅkaradeva by Bhūsana Dvija - This is the only printed version of the MS by Durgadhar Barthakur (1925). The editor does not say whether the title of the MS was original or chosen by himself.

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8 Anjali Sarma "Among the Luminaries in Assam", PP. 34-35
9 Maheswar Neog - op. cit., P. 158
Bhusana's grand-father Cakrapani was a Brahmin scholar, priest-hood was his chief means of livelihood. He gave up his priestly profession and soon became Sankara's disciple, before Sankara went on pilgrimage for the second time. Cakrapani had two sons - Rama and Vaikuntha, Vaikuntha's son Bhusana Dvija composed a short biography of Sankaradeva at the request of Ramananda, the brother of Narayana Thakur. Like Daityari, Bhusana also mentions that for want of any model, he finds it difficult to shape it to his satisfaction.

It is supposed that this biography was composed during the period between the death of Purusottoma Thakur (1538 Saka) and Caturbhuja Thakur (1570 Saka). After the death of Purusottoma Thakur, Caturbhuja Thakur established the Visnupur satra in Tamranga. At that time Bhusana wrote this carita.

Bhusana and Daityari differed in some cases where they gave description of Sankara's first wife and parents, though their biographies appear to be written almost at the same time. Bhusana also said that Sankara's parents were alive at the time of his going to school and were dead after Sankara's first marriage. He could not recollect or gather an authentic, properly verified and consolidated account of Sankara's life and so his narration remains

10 Bhusana Dvija - *Sri Sri Sankaradeva* P. 12
sketchy. He is perfectly conscious of his own limitations and admits that he has not been able to treat his subject in perfectly beautiful verses. He discusses very briefly most of the events of Śaṅkara's life, his motto might be being to tell everything in brief.\textsuperscript{12}

There is something unique in the method of presentation of materials, so far as Śaṅkara's early life is concerned. In this carita, the meeting with Caitanya is shown which took place during the second pilgrimage. Besides this the meeting of Śaṅkaradeva with Rūpa and Saṅatana's guru is also shown. This is very brief. Compared with other caritas, supernatural elements also seem to be very scanty. Bhūṣana concludes the carita with the death of Śaṅkaradeva. As a biography, it is more or less successful.

There have been two printed editions of this work, one by Haribilas Gupta (1900) and the another by Maheswar Neog. But the chapter-division is not made anywhere. Only Neog has put all the genuine verses in his edition (1957).

3. Śṛī Guru-carita by Rāmānanda Dvija:

Rāmānanda was the son of Śṛī Rāma Ātā. Rāmānanda wrote this book at the request of an Ahom minister Ātan Bāhgaḍiyā Burāgohāinī. But as there is no specific mention of this person in the book, Neog draws the conclusion that

\textsuperscript{12} Bhūṣana Dvija - op. cit., P. 30
Rāmānanda must have completed the work after the death of the Burāgohāin, around 1679 A.D.¹³ This work gives an account of Śāṅkara, Mādhava and Gopāla Ātā of Bhavanipur. The work is supplemented with an account of the later life of Gopāla Ātā written by Rāmānanda's son Rāmagopālā. The author pays homage to Śāṅkara. He regards him not as a human being but as an incarnation of God. For that reason, he refers some ślokas from Gītā¹⁴ to prove the divinity of Śāṅkaradeva. He also gives many vivid descriptions of the two Mahāpurusas and the incidents faced by them in their life time. As Rāmānanda was a pontiff of the Kāla-Sāmhati branch of satras, his work came to be confined mostly to the circle of his school of satras and their laity. As early as 1898 a writer in an Assamese monthly pointed out that Rāmānanda's carita was not acceptable to all sections of Vaiṣṇavas and that it contained many baseless and incorrect statements.¹⁵ According to Rāmānanda, Śāṅkara met Caitanya at Puri during his first pilgrimage, whereas according to all other caritas, this meeting took place on the second pilgrimage only. Biman Bihari Mazumdar gives a lot of evidence to show that in the first pilgrimage, there was no such meeting. He also says that Caitanya was not alive during the second pilgrimage of Śāṅkara.¹⁶

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¹³ Maheswar Neog, "Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Assam" - P. 12
¹⁴ Canto IV, Śloka - 7
¹⁵ Laksminath Bezboroa "Śāṅkaradeva", P. 30
¹⁶ "Caitanya Cariter Upadāṇ", P. 509
Rāmananda collected informations from his father and his father Śrī Rāma Ātā did not came in contact with Śrī Saṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. So, it differs with other caritas in many ways. But with his underlying faith in the great-masters, Saṅkara, Mādhava and Gopāla Ātā he undertakes his task in right earnestness and constantly looks upon Saṅkara as an incarnation of Kṛṣṇa. This can also be regarded as one of all the valuable works of this period. Though the chronology of the events is not maintained, yet the author successfully depicts the subject as a great religious preacher against the background of his age in a lucid style. Maheswar Neog's conclusion is therefore, an apt one for such a work.

"Rāmananda's sincerity of purpose and scholarship give a permanent value to his work."

4. Guru-Carita by Rāmacaraṇa Ṭhākur - The editor does not make any mention whether the title 'Guru-Carita' and the sub-title 'Śrīmanta Saṅkardevar Līlā Carita' were added to the MS by himself or the MS itself had contained it. But he states that the MS was commonly known among the Vaiṣṇava followers as 'Bar-Carita'. The verses are numbered. We do not know whether this numbering was done by the editor or not.

17 Satyendranāth Sarma, op. cit., P. 207
18 Rāmananda Dwija, "Guru-Caritra," PP. 33, 43.
19 Maheswar Neog, op. cit., P. 13
20 Harinarayan Dutta Baruah, Nalbari, 1957 A.D.
Like the others carita writers, the author also shows his subject as an incarnation of God, so he uses some supernatural elements. The author describes the lineage of Saṅkara from his great grand-father Lāṇḍādeva. As regards the facts of Saṅkara's life, the author differs with others. The author says that Saṅkara's mother died on the fifth day of his birth, but Dāityāṇi says that his mother died a Sati after Vanagaṅgīri's birth. Again Rāmānanda says that Saṅkara's mother died a Sati when Vanagaṅgīri was two years old.

The author shows how Saṅkara did not like the worship of Śakti, because in this Śakti-pūja, the worshipper has to suffer untold misery. To prove Saṅkara's super human quality, the another tries to connect stories while narrating the pilgrimage to various sacred places. However, many critics like Dimbeswar Neog regard this carita as authoritative and the earliest. We have the information that dowry was prevalent in Assam but it was not compulsory. In the description of the marriage scene of Saṅkara's parents, the author followed Saṅkara's "Rukmiṇī Harana Kāvyā".

There are some reasons for doubling the authorship of this biography. Firstly his son Dāityāṇi did not mention anywhere that this carita was previously written by his father.

22 "Asamīyā Sāhityar Adhyayan", P. 174
23 "Guru-Carita", P. 64
Secondly some prophetic utterances are also to be found which refer themselves to a date later than Rāmacarana. Here the author's purpose is to show his subject as a superman and also to show that it is the offspring of Śaṅkaradeva who would have to be at the helm of this religion in the succeeding periods.\textsuperscript{24} At some points the language and style seems to point to a very late date, and it would perhaps be appropriate to place it posterior to the 'Kathā Guru-carita'.\textsuperscript{25}

According to the author, Śaṅkaradeva was born on the 5th of Ṛṣvina Friday, the 10th day of the bright moon.\textsuperscript{26}

Regarding the death of Śaṅkaradeva, the author states that Śaṅkaradeva died on the second day of the bright lunar fortnight in the month of Bhādra.\textsuperscript{27} In this work, all the social customs and religious rituals of the then Assam are vividly described.\textsuperscript{28}

(B) THE CARITAS OF OTHER GURUS

After Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, we find the caritas of Dāmodaradeva and Harideva. Dāmodaradeva preached the religion next to Mādhava. Though not basically different, his religion varied in minor matters of rituals. This new guru

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} Rāmacaraṇa Thākur, op. cit., PP. 829, 831
\item \textsuperscript{25} Maheswar Neog, op. cit., P. 24
\item \textsuperscript{26} Rāmacaraṇa Thākur, op. cit., P. 77
\item \textsuperscript{27} Ibid., P. 847
\item \textsuperscript{28} Ibid., PP. 137-38
\end{itemize}
insisting more on Smārta observances. The followers of Dāmodaradeva came to call the sect established by him, the Brahma samhāti. The first biography of Dāmodaradeva is,

1. Guru-Līlā by Rāma Rāya - It's editor Sarat Chandra Deva Goswami does not evince his worthiness as an editor of an old manuscript. There is no editorial note to show where he got this manuscript. There are chapter divisions. But the editor is also silent about the divisions of the chapters. At the end of this book, it is stated that this work was composed during the adīkāra Arjunadeva, the son of Viśvarūpa, a royal officer in the court of the Koch-King Candra-Nārāyaṇa (1640-60 A.D).\textsuperscript{29}

According to the author, Dāmodaradeva's father was Satānanda and his mother's name was Susilā. In this carita also, the author said that God in the form of Śāṅkara emitted came to this earth to preach his religion. In this carita, we find that Dāmodaradeva went to the west in search of a guru and then met Caitanyadeva and accepted him as his guru.\textsuperscript{30}

But this view of Dāmodaradeva's accepting Caitanyadeva's religion is too far-fetching to be believed. In this biography we also find a description of the meeting between Śāṅkara and Caitanyadeva. He shows how Śāṅkara was respectful

\textsuperscript{29} Satyendranath Sarma - op. cit., P. 207

\textsuperscript{30} Rāma Rāya, "Guru-Līlā", PP. 42, 90
to Caitanya. But Maheswar Neog opines that this meeting also has taken a new colour in the hands of the biographers of Damodaradeva.

This biography also throws light on the religion as preached by Damodara, rather clearly. Though he laid stress mainly on listening (Sravana), as a way of the worship of Lord Krsna, yet he advised his disciples to practise all the nine ways of worshipping God. The author also uses supernatural elements like all other biographers. All through the work, the author is intent on showing how the Damodara-cult was separately growing up. But it is also true that Damodaradeva had a good relation with Sankaradeva. Nowhere in the biography there is any show of ill-feeling to or jealously against the Sankara-cult.

2. Sri Sri Damodara-carita by Nilakantha Dasa - The editor Sarat Chandra Goswami finds out from internal evidence that the book was written about 1720 A.D. He said that the present version was made out of five old manuscripts of the text, yet he could not say that the version is faithful to the original. He admits that the himself has not seen any of the existing MSS. According to the author, the parents of Damodaradeva belonged to a place called Ratnapitha to the north of Hajo and

31 Ibid., P. 41
32 "Sri Sri Sañkaradeva", P. 155
33 Rama Ray, op. cit., P. 97
34 Ibid., P. 136
35 Nilakantha Dasa, "Sri Sri Dāmodaradeva-carita" Preface, P. 45
then shifted to Nalaca near Bordowa and they became friendly to Sāṅkara-deva. In connection with the birth of Dāmodara-deva, the author also used some supernatural elements. The author also tells us that after the meeting of Sāṅkara with Dāmodara-deva, Sāṅkara asked him to recite the Bhāgavata. In reply, Dāmodara is stated to have said,

"Yours is the land where a tree of bhakti can grow."

From that time their friendship grew deeper. Nilakantha also narrates the philosophy of Dāmodara's dharma. We know from this carita that he was appointed as adhikāra of Patbasi satra, which was the main satra of the Dāmodara-cult.

The work ends with a death-scene of the subject. Now we come to the next guru Harideva.

3. Śrī Śrī Harideva-caritram by Vāneśvara Dvija and Divākara Dvija

This carita is published by Harinarayana Deva Goswami and Karuna Kanta Barua. The first part is in Sanskrit verse entitled 'His Holiness Śrī Śrī Hariguru carita'. The writer's name is given as Vāneśvara Sarma. It contains four chapters. The life of Harideva is covered in this section. The second part is called the fifth chapter. This part is an Assamese verse and is stated to have been written by Divākara again and again in the next of various sections. There is no chapter-division. In this part also, the life of Harideva is retold.

36 Ibid., P. 49
37 Ibid., PP. 145, 146
Regarding the birth of Harideva, the month and tithi are mentioned, but the year is not mentioned. In the Preface, we find the year 1415 śaka (1493 A.D.). Here in this carīta, we find that Harideva's father dreamt a dream that a Mahāpurūsa would be born in his family. According to the author, Harideva appointed his daughter Bhuvaneśvarī as adhikāra at Maneri satra and thus he first placed a woman in a satra. The author also states that Harideva met Śaṅkaradeva at Puri and from Puri both of them to see Caitanyadeva. But Caitanyadeva did not give interview to Śaṅkara, as he was not a Brahmin. But this cannot be believed because Caitanya embraced even a Muslim.

To show him as an incarnation of god, the author states that after his birth, he did not take his mother's milk for three days, because her bhakti was not adequate. So it is clear that the author's interest lies in placing his hero as a superman. The work is far away from being a reliable work.

4. Mahāpurūsa Śrī Śrī Harideva by Vanagaṅāgiri - This is the only printed edition of the manuscript which was in possession of a follower of Harideva, Surya Kanta Goswami. He offered the MS. to the Bahari satra for publication and then Sivanath Talukdar and Kamaleswar Sarma published in 1960 A.D. This

38 Dvija Vāṇeśvara and Dvija Divākara, "Śrī Śrī Harideva-carī- tram", Preface, PP 8.69
39 Ibid., P. 84
40 Ibid., Preface. P. 16
41 Ibid., P. 70
work has no chapter division.

The author states that Harideva was born in 1348 Śaka in the Śukla pañcamī tithi of Bhādra at Narayampura of upper Assam.  

In this work we find that his father had a meeting with Śrī Kṛṣṇa in a dream that God Viṣṇu would be born in his house. Even the date and kind of death of Harideva have been shown to be predicted by god Śiva. Thus the author tries to prove him as an incarnation of God like the other carita writess of medieval period.

(C) THE CARITAS OF THE SUCCESSORS

Now we shall discuss about the caritas of some important successors of these four gurus.

1. Śrī Śrī Vaiṣṇigopāladevar carita by Rāmananda Dvija - It is edited by Maheswar Neog. In the preface he editor mentioned how he got the MS. There are chapter-divisions, titles and verse-numbers from the beginning to the end. The time of the composition of the work is 1811 A.D. The author of this work is the son of one Cakrapāṇi, a follower of Vaiṣṇigopāladeva. He skillfully describes the eventful life and teachings of the famous Vaiṣṇava saint, Vaiṣṇigopāladeva. The author mentions in this carita that the mlecchas filled the whole kingdom at the

42 Vanagaṁāgīrī, "Mahāpuruṣa Śrī Śrī Harideva", P. 17
43 Ibid., P. 142
44 In 1956 A.D.
time of Gopāladeva's birth. Śaṅkaradeva suffered great miseries at the invasion of the Ahoms, yet he did not lose faith in Hari. From this the editor finds out that this was surely the invasion of the Koches so Neog finds out that Gopāladeva was born in the bright full moon in 1543 A.D. His mother's name was Yamunā.

According to this biography Gopāladeva went to Barpeta to meet Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. There he was initiated by Dāmodaradeva. The author also shows how Gopāladeva was helped by the Bhuyāns in his early stage of preached his religion, the administrative system of the satra under him and the daily religious observances there. Gopāladeva is also shown here as mastering the essentials from religious books for use among the masses. The author also mentions the way of eating, sleeping and similar habits that he ate boiled rice once a day with ghee, without fish or meat.

This work traces the development of Śaṅkara's religion after him and also uses many small or apparently irrelevant incidents or details of the subject's life and times. This is one of the best hagiographies of the Vaiṣṇava period for its emphasis on delineating the life and character of the subject.

45 Ramānanda Divja,"Sri Śri Varāgopāladevar carita", P. 6
46 Ibid., Preface, P. 9
47 Ibid., P. 167
48 Ibid., P. 146
49 Ibid., P. 79
3. Badalā Padma Ātār Ĉaritas by Nityānanda Ātai—It is called "His Holiness Śrī Śrī Badalā Padma Ātār Ĉaritas". This is the only hagiography of this man and this is the only MS. of that. The MS did not contain any date of composition. But the editor states from internal evidence that it must have been composed in 1692 A.D.\(^5^0\). There are chapter-divisions in it.

The author begins this work with a salutation to Lord Kṛṣṇa, Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. He also tells that Padma Ātā was born in 1468 Śaka (1546 A.D) in the month of Jyaistha. His father's name was Titā Comdār and mother's name was Satyā. He also shows that Lord Kṛṣṇa prays for a place in Satyā's womb.\(^5^1\) In order to prove his divinity, the author shows that in his childhood, when he was asleep, one day under a tree, he was given a shade by a snake.\(^5^2\)

Padma Ātā led a very pious life. He has been shown as being helped by God in need. The carita helps us to know how Padma Ātā went to Mādhava's place, how Mādhava initiated him to his religion and gave him the Mālā and the Tāla (the garland and the cymbals) which he had inherited from Śaṅkaradeva.\(^5^3\) But as a biography, it is devoid of any bright quality. The style is also a commonplace one.

\(^5^0\) Nityānanda Ātai,"His Holiness Śrī Śrī Badalā Padma Ātār Ĉaritra". P. 6
\(^5^1\) Ibid., P. 7
\(^5^2\) Ibid., P. 10
\(^5^3\) Ibid., P. 130
4. **Śrī Śrī Vanamālīdeva-caritra** by Ramākānta Dvīja—The editor informs in his preface that there are three manuscripts of the same book. The present book is printed from the MS found at Barpeta satra. There are chapter-divisions with titles to each. The verses are numbered.

Vanamālīdeva was born in the month of Māgha. From childhood, he had an extraordinary power of memory. Vamsīgopāladeva was also astonished to see his power of remembrance and said that Hari must be there in his heart. His father was Yadudeva.

The author gives a detailed description of his life. We come to know from this carita that he led a very pious life. He composed a religious verse-book based on the Bhāgavata. According to the author, he was not very strict regarding religious observances. He himself observed Vedic rites. The religious customs observed at that time are also mentioned here.

5. **Śiyālā Vaiṣṇavar Carita** by Kavi Sucandai—This carita is written on the life of a Vaiṣṇava devotee named Saṁvatsara. After his birth, he was taken away by a fox and spent had to

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54 Sarat Chandra Goswami, Jorhat, 1956.
55 Ramākānta Dvīja, "Śrī Śrī Vanamālīdeva-caritra" P. 23
56 Ibid., P. 92.
spend for a year under a female fox in her den. This story is also found in the 'Kathā-Guru-carita'. So, he was popularly known as 'Siyāla Vaiṣṇava'. In this carita, we find that the activities attributed to him as a Tantrik.

6. Bhavisyat Kathā bā Santa Carita by Mahākavi Kavicandra—
   In this book, the author shows how the different gods like Śiva, Viṣṇu and Nārada came to the earth to preach Vaiṣṇavism in the form of Śaṅkara, Dāmodara and Vaṁśdeva.

7. Guru-Vaṁnā by Aniruddha Dāsa—Aniruddha Dāsa was another notable biographer who in his Guru-varṇā has given a sketchy reference on the lives of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. But the main theme of this book is, however, on the lives of Puruṣottama and Caturbhuja Thākur.

Prose biographies: Over and above the biographies in verse, some followers of the Vaiṣṇava religion wrote biographies in prose also. In the early part of the 16th century, Assamese prose was first traced in the plays of Śaṅkaradeva. But in the late 16th century, this prose was used by Bhaṭṭadeva. Then after Bhaṭṭadeva, prose was also used for narrative purposes in the Ahom chronicles and in the late medieval age, we have the prose biographies of only the two major saints—Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. In prose, we find only the Kathā-Guru-carita,

57 PP. 282 - 283.
'Bardowā Guru-carita' and 'Santa — sampradāya-kathā'. This small number of caritas indicate that prose was used for limited purpose in the medieval age and surely it was not a popular medium of literature.

1. Kathā-Guru-carita — The scholar and critic Bani Kanta Kakati has collected this carita from the possession of the Satrādhikāra, Caturbhujā Misrā of Barpeta Satra. We find in the Foreword that the original manuscript was written on 150 folios of strips of Śāci barks. There was no mention of the author anywhere. Bani Kanta Kakati, Birinchi Kumar Barua and the editor Upendra Chandra Lekharu also are silent about whether this title of the MS was there in the original or supplied by somebody. But the editor comes to the conclusion that this work must have been written at the end of the 17th century or the beginning of the 18th century.

This carita mainly tells about the lives of the two saints — Sāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. The work opens with the life of Sāṅkaradeva with a description of his predecessors. The author uses many supernatural elements. After Sāṅkara's birth, several miracles happened. Like the other caritas, we find here how Mādhava's father Lāmkaṇa Govinda Ātā came to Kamarupa from Banduka, how he married Manoramā and how Mahāpuruṣa Mādhavadeva was born. The author shows several

58 Ibid., PP. 21 - 24
miracles after the birth of Śaṅkaradeva. In the childhood of Śaṅkara, his grandmother Khersuti, on seeing his supernatural power, began to believe his divinity. In the case of the child Madhava too, the author brings in some super-human activities in order to attribute divine qualities to him.  

It gives a faithful account of the Vaiṣṇavite faith and movement of Assam and the organisational aspects of satra institutions and their administration, method and procedure. It throws light upon the economic condition of the then Assam and also narrates the events of the 15th and 16th centuries. It recounts the incidents relating to the alliance of Gauḍa and Kāmata, conflict between the Koch King and the Cooch-Bihar and the Ahoms etc etc. This carita can be regarded as the combination of biography, history, tales and stories etc. The prose is also dignified, varied and lively. Even then, it cannot be said that this carita is always authentic in all matters. The authors obviously are not contemporaries of the two gurus. So, it raises certain questions about the sources of the information supplied here.

But we must say that it is a work that depicts the lives of the two gurus in the most lively way. It is a unique work amongst the medieval Assamese biographies, not simply because it is written in prose, but because it is written in an

59 Ibid., PP. 52-55
extraordinarily simple and yet pleasant style. The language of this work is the language used in our day-to-day domestic life. Typical words used in Kamrup like āpi, dāur māile make its language meant for the common people. The style of narration is such, as if, an elderly person is narrating the events and the bhaktas are listening.

Though it cannot be said that this carita is always authentic in all matters because the authors are certainly not contemporaries of the two gurus, yet, to sum up we must say that it is the best of all the biographies of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. It is also very trustworthy among the biographies of the Vaiṣṇava saints of Assam hitherto discovered. It is an attempt for giving the most detailed accounts of the lives and careers of nine gurus, nine Ātās and a lots of Vaiṣṇava bhaktas.

2. Bardowā Guru-carita - It is another prose-biography of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhava-deva. This title has been given by its editor Maheswar Neog since its manuscript was preserved in the Bardowa satra. It was first published in the Bānhī (the monthly edited by Bezbaroa) from 1910 A.D. to 1914 A.D. in serial. This work was published in thirty-eight instalments in the Bānhī.

The editor writes in his preface that he himself has not seen the original MS of Bordowa. But it is evident, that

60 Ibid., P. 60
61 Ibid, P. 53
the original form and content of the carita had not remained intact in the hands of Puwaram Mahanta when he copied it. In all probability, the original has been greatly abridged here and on such occasions modern words or idioms have entered the work.62

This work begins with a mention of the four prophets of God, with Śaṅkaradeva of the East as one of these four—the other three being Kṛṣṇa-Caitanya in the West, Rāmānanda Swāmī in the South and Harivyāsa in the North.63 Here also, the genealogical line of Śaṅkaradeva begins from Prema Pūrṇānandagiri. The life-stories of the two saints here are almost similar to those of 'Kathā-Guru-carita'. From the beginning to the end, a distinct supernatural tone prevails in this work. The mode and style of presentation is also similar to Kathā-Guru carita', which proves that this was a later work. As a biography of the two saints, it has nothing original in it. Its style of presentation is also borrowed.

3. Santa-Sampradāya-Kathā (Etakā Mahantar Caritra) by Govinda Dāsa - It is a short but reliable account of the Śaṅkaradeva movement. It also deals with a detailed information about the spread of the satra system. Govinda Dāsa was a worshipper of Vanamālideva. He composed this work in the very early years of the 18th century in the Daksinpaṭ satra. He admits that he gathered informations from the elderly Vaiṣṇavas and the

62 Anon, "Bardowā Guru-carita", Preface, P. 20
63 Ibid., P. 38
Mahantas who assembled on the occasion of King Rudrasimha's dedicating of the Jaya sāgara shrines to gods.

(B) BENGAL

In the medieval period of Bengal, centering Caitanyadeva, people were inspired with a new zeal. He very intensively inspired the sensation of the people all around. As a result, a good number of poems, songs and kāvyas were composed. This biographical literature, which was brought by the Vaiṣṇavas in the Bengali literature, gave it a new shape. Though Caitanyadeva was an incarnation, yet his plays in the Bhāgavata were well described in these biographies. He did it as a human being.

There are about ten biographies of importance on Caitanyadeva, four in Sanskrit and six in Bengali. The first of the Sanskrit biographies went by the title Murāri's Kaṭcā by Murāri Gupta, a friend and admirer of Caitanya. Therefore, the materials contained in the Kaṭcā had historical importance and it became the guidelines for other biographers to produce their similar works in Bengali. Moreover, Murāri Gupta being held in high esteem for his learning, the later biographies had no hesitation in accepting and following what he had written.

BIOGRAPHIES IN SANSKRIT

1. Kaṭcā by Murāri Gupta - The first of the Sanskrit biographies
went by the title karçā\textsuperscript{64} written by Murāri Gupta, a well-known scholar and a next-door neighbour of Caitanyadeva. Murāri had the good luck of being a friend and admirer of Caitanyadeva. Evidently the materials contained in the karçā had historical importance and it became the guiding lines for other biographers to produce their similar works in Bengali. According to Sukumar Sen, there are seventy-eight cantos, and one thousand nine hundred and six ślokas. He also opined that this vast book cannot be regarded as a karçā.\textsuperscript{65} Sri Kumar Bondyopadhyay said that this great kāvyā has written in the type of Bhāgavata.\textsuperscript{66}

This is considered by most of the scholars as the earliest as well as the well-informative and authentic biography of Caitanya. It contains by far the uncontroversial account of the family life of Caitanyadeva including his early days of various activities. Hence this karçā stands as one of the best original source materials for Caitanya's life and personality. Inspite of its pious attitudes, it gives a vivid and somewhat human account, not too much overlaid with theology of the Navadvīpaliśa of Caitanyadeva. Murāri had written a few songs in vernacular of which about twelve songs are now known to us. Most of these songs or poems deal with the life of Caitanyadeva.

\textsuperscript{64} Comes from the Sanskrit word "Kṛta-Kṛtya" and Pārśka\textacuteacute word "Katakacca". This "kata" means 'original draft'.

\textsuperscript{65} "Bāngāla Sāhityer Itihās", Vol I, Pūrvedha, P. 318

\textsuperscript{66} "Bānglā Sāhityer Bikāser Dhāra", Vol I & II, P. 100
2. Karca by Svarupa Damodara - Svarupa Damodara wrote a Karca on the life of Caitanya, but the copy of this work is not, however, available but from copious references given by other writers, one has no reason to disbelieve its authenticity. Svarupa was one of the main disciples who looked after the Master during the middle and last period of his life and, therefore, the records kept by him go unchallenged. Svarupa hinted that Caitanya was a joint incarnation of Radha and Krsna. Murari in his Karca wrote Caitanya's "Adalilā" and Svarupa wrote 'madhya' and 'antalilā'.

3. Caitanya-candrodaya and Caitanya-caritamrta by Paramananda Sen - At the age of seven, he saw Caitanyadeva at Puri and at the touch of the Master's feet, the child uttered a famous Sanskrit verse which praised Krsna as the ear ornament of the Gopies and earned for him the title of "Kavikarṇapūra" or "ear ornament of poets". This beautiful title was conferred upon the boy by Caitanya himself for his wonderful skill in verse.

His earliest poetical effort appears to be his Sanskrit "Caitanya-caritamrta kāvyā" in which he declares himself as a child. The year of its composition is probably 1542 A.D. (1464 Śakābda). The author himself stated that he based his work chiefly on the account of Murāri Gupta who knew Caitanya in his boyhood and youth. Kavi Karṇapūra presents Caitanyadeva as the blessed saviour and incarnation of Kṛṣna as well as the hero of a religious kāvyā. It had twenty cantos.

68 Ibid., P. 323
His another drama was written in Sanskrit, and it was named "Caitanya- candrodaya". This was probably composed in 1572 A.D. (1494 Sākāda). This drama was written at the request of Pratāprudra, who appeared as one of the important characters of the play. Most of his descriptions were based on fiction. In his drama, we find many things regarding religion and bhakti-cult. His main aim was to describe Caitanya's biography. In poetic diction, this drama has acquired a special position and from the actual biographical point of view, it can be taken as authentic because the author had some contact with Caitanyadeva from his childhood.

"Gauragoṇoddesaḍāḍipikā" is another small book. In this book we find some reference from Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Caitanya chandrodaya, Murāri's kaṛça and also from the kaṛçā of Svarūpa Dāmodara. Śrīnāth Ācārya from the South was supposed to be his preceptor.

4. Caitanya- candraṁrtam by Probodhānanda Sarasvatī: He lived in Benāres. He was a great devotee of Caitanyadeva and composed a book named "Caitanya- candraṁrtam" praising Caitanyadeva. From literary sense, his poems are not appreciable, but from the view of his devotion towards Caitanya, they have earned much fame for him.

69 Ibid., P. 322.
1. Caitanya-bhāgavata by Vṛndāvana Dāsa - This is the first biography of Caitanyadeva in Bengali. It is supposed that this work was composed in the year 1541-1542 A.D. - during the lifetime of Nityānanda of whom Vṛndāvana Dāsa was the disciple. It dealt exhaustively with the first part Caitanya's life and is more biographical than philosophical and as it refers more with what Caitanya did than what he preached. Hence the criticism is that the book was imperfect and it omitted all proper descriptions of the later part of the Master's life. Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāj was, therefore, entrusted with the composition of a work dealing with the life and teachings and specially the part of the Master's life; and thus "Caitanya-caritāmṛta" came into being.

Vṛndāvana Dāsa was one of the premier followers of Caitanyadeva. His kāvya is a recognised master piece of Bengali literature. Most of the books available on the biography of Caitanyadeva belonged to "Caitanya-bhāgavata." In this biography, though we do not find the complete life and teachings of Caitanyadeva, yet his early life has been very brilliantly described. It is said that Vṛndāvana Dāsa composed this kāvya at the request of his guru Nityānanda.

70 Biman Bihari Majumdar "Caitanya Cariter Upādān", P. 175
"Antaryāmi Nityānanda balilā kautuke,
Caiyanya caritra kichu likhite pustake."71

(Omniscient Nityānanda humourously said that something about Caitanya should be written in the form of books).

This book became the most valuable and authoritative record of the earlier part of Caitanya's life at Navadvipa. He puts special emphasis on incidents of Caitanya's life, connected with Nityānanda. He believed in the identity of Caitanya and Kṛṣṇa.

This biography was first known as "Caitanya-āṅgala" and this was the original name given to the kāvya by Vṛndāvana Dāsa. Afterwards Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāj who revered VṛndāvanaDāsa as 'Vyāsa of Caitanya-caritā', gave his kāvya the status of Vyāsa's Bhāgavata Purāṇa and henceforth this famous kāvya became to be known as 'Caiyanya-bhāgavata'.

Vṛndāvana Dāsa regarded Caitanya as god incarnate. We find this strong belief and regards althrough the biography. His strong belief in this regard and his love and devotion for Caitanya flow from the beginning to the end of the biography, and so it has been made it so sweet and elegant. He himself did not see the Navadvi. pali of Caitanya, but the portrait he has drawn about him, is bright, true and unique. Even though he

71 Vṛndāvana Dāsa "Caitanya-bhāgavata" - Ādikhaṇḍa, P. 3
believed Caitanya as an incarnation of God in heart and soul, he was not blind to the realities of life and has, therefore, portrayed Caitanya as a man, and not as god in his kāvya. We also find here a real picture of the then prevalent social life of Bengal.

The elaborate and attracted description of the ḍās and greatness of Nityānanda which were furnished by Vṛndāvana Dāsa were lacking in the drama of Kavikarṇapūra. Thus we can easily determine the superiority of Caitanya-bhāgavata from that of Murāri's karcā and Kavikarṇapūra's drama. The spread of Caitanya-bhāgavata far and wide is the vivid example of its popularity and superiority. On the other hand, Caitanya-bhāgavata is the first Caitanya-biography of which Kaviḍāj Gosvāmī has written.

"Manussye racite nāre yaiche grantha dhanya,
Vṛndāvanadāsa mukhe bakta ŚrīCaitanya"72

(VṛndāvanaDāsa was appreciated as he write a book which could not have been written by human beings).

One of the chief characteristics of Caitanya-bhāgavata is its historical importance. While describing Caitanyalīlā in Gauḍa, he has given a very correct and lively social and cultural picture of Bengal in general and of Navadvīpa in

72 Kṛṣṇadāsa Kaviḍāj - "Caitanya-caritāmṛta" - Ādilīlā, P. 37
particular of the 16th century. This is a rare thing in medieval biographies.

In this kāvyā, Vṛndāvana-Dēsa has given the priority to Gītā's rebirth theory that He (Kṛṣṇa) will appear in every age.

2. Caitanya-maṅgala by Jayānanda: The work of Jayānanda is the second Bengali biography of Caitanya. The exact date of its composition is not known. But he wrote this book after Vṛndāvana-Dēsa. So, it is supposed that it was composed between 1550 A.D. and 1560 A.D. 73

The first light on Jayānanda's "Caitanya-maṅgala" was thrown by Nagendranath Basu in the journal of Bangīya Sāhitya Parisāṭ in 1304-05 Bengali year. Again it was he, who, with the help of Kalidas Nath, edited Jayānanda's work in 1312 Bengali year. His work at first made deep impression in the minds of the people for the novel information and events of Caitanya's life contained by it. The most important of these is that which relates to the disappearance of Caitanyadeva. There are some novel informations given in his work. But on careful examination these have not been proved to be true.

(1) According to him Caitanya's ancestral place was the village of Jāzpūr in the district of Shylet, which is not correct.

73 Sukumar Sen, op. cit., P. 371
(2) He said that the ancestors of Caitanyadeva fled from Jazpur (Orissa) to Shylet in fear of the king Vramar. This is also not true.

(3) It was known to all that Sacidevi took initiation from Advaita Acarya, but according to Jayananda she was the disciple of Pandit Gosain.

"Pandit Gosain jar mantra diksha data" (Pandit Gosain was her guru for initiation).

This is also not true. The fact is that he took up the work as a vocational palagan not out of love and devotion for Caitanya. So, he brought in imaginary and miraculous legends or fables for the pleasure and satisfaction of the audience for whom the palagan was written. In spite of its largest circulation, this work did not gain much favour of the orthodox followers of Caitanya. The reason is that Caitanya did not manifest any repugnance in the presence of women. Jayananda also mentioned the cause of death of the Master which is nowhere mentioned by any other biographer.

As a biography also, it is not authentic and Jayananda also did not claim it to be an authentic biography. It is, however, in many respects more interesting, being independent of Vaishnava orthodoxy.

74 Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay, op. cit., P. 403
75 Jayananda, "Caitanya-mangala", Adikhand, P. 2
76 Ibid., Sannyasa khanda and Utkala Khanda, PP. 14-15
3. Caitanya-caritāmṛta by Kṛṣṇadasa Kavirāj - It is the third and the most important of all the biographies of Caitanya. It is said that Kṛṣṇadasa started writing this book when he reached the ripe age of seventy-nine years. He was born in about 1496 A.D. in Bengal and came in contact with Nityānanda, the famous exponent of Caitanya-cult. It took nine years for the old man to complete the book.

Kṛṣṇadasa Kavirāj was the best among all the biographers of Caitanyadeva. This kāvyā is the most authentic of all the works on the life and philosophy of Caitanya. He did not mention the name of his guru anywhere. But he mentioned the names of six Vaiṣṇavas-Sanātana, Rūpa, Raghunātha Bhāṭṭa, Raghunātha Dāsa, Gopāla Bhāṭṭa and Jība as his dikṣāgurus.

"Eichay guru śikṣāguru je āmār"?

(These six gurus are my dikṣāgurus)

But it is supposed that Nityānanda was his dikṣāguru because at the beginning of his kāvyā, he says -

"Nityānanda Roṣ prabhur ṣvarūp prakāsā. 
Tār pādapadma bondo jār muṇi dāsā."

(I am the servant of Nityānanda prabhu and I pray to him).

77 Kṛṣṇadasa Kavirāj, "Caitanya-caritāmṛta" Ādīllā, P. 1
78 Ibid., P. 1
Srī Srī Caitanya-caritāmṛta is the store-house of biographical and religious interest and glory of Vaiṣnava literature. It is an epoch-making work containing as it does the most authoritative biography of the Lord of love and forming a compendium of the vast, complex and heaven-creating Vaiṣnava literature of Bengal which is still an un-tapped source of divine love, and the deepest mysteries of love. In marvellously lucid and simple language which breaths the intense devotion of the author in every sentence, this work gives an exposition of Vaiṣnava faith in the form it took in Bengal in the 16th century based on the spiritual realization of Lord Caitanya himself. Besides, it is an authoritative work on Caitanyadeva's life. It is the principal religious book of the Gaṅgay Vaiṣṇavas and gives the most faithful description of the life and teachings of Caitanya. It also describes the various phases of Caitanya's life, specially the true doctrines of the Vaiṣṇava religion which is based on Bhakti. The book is divided into three parts—Adi-līlā, Madhya-līlā and Anta-līlā.

(a) In the Adi-līlā, we find an introduction regarding Vaiṣṇavism and a description of the events of Caitanya's life from his birth to his initiation as a sannyāsī. Here we also find the religious condition of Bengal before Caitanya's birth and also the consequent necessity of his appearance to reform it. This part can be termed as Caitanya's "Nadiālīlā". 79

79 Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay, op. cit., P. 424.
(b) The "Madhya-līlā" gives an account of Caitanya's life of six years after initiation and also gives a detailed description of his pilgrimage in different holy places. Here the author also describes vividly the "Gaurīya Vaisnava cult". So, this chapter is very important.

(c) In the "Anta-līlā" we find the various phases of Caitanya's life, his religious ecstasies and the doctrines of Vaisnava religion.

Like the Gītā, the Bible and the Korān etc. Śrī Caitanya caritāmṛta is also a work of worldwide importance and the study of the work is bound to open to the earnest readers of all lands and faiths the deepest secrets of divine love. The study of the book will provide the reader with the magic-key into the mysterious depths of divine love, and insight which is sought today by the earnest seekers of all faiths. According to Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Radhā is the ultimate development of love to Lord Kṛṣṇa. She is energy divine called 'Hladini' and hence Radhā-Kṛṣṇa are one and the same. But for the sake of the divine play, they are separated into two bodies.

'Radhā Kṛṣṇa ek atma dvi deha dhari'\(^80\)
(Radhā and Kṛṣṇa are of one soul possessing two bodies.)

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\(^80\) Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāj, op. cit., Ādi līlā, P. 13
But now in Kaliyuga, in order to realise that Lord Kṛṣṇa may have a taste of the love and feelings that Rādhā felt for Him, they two have been united,

‘Ras āsvādite doṁhe haila ek ṭhāṁ’.  

(They have been united together to taste the love.)

Thus Caitanyadeva is a joint-incarnation of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāj wanted to propagate his view which was also supported by Svarūpa Dāmodara in his kārca. The main teaching is that Kṛṣṇa incarnated Himself as Caitanya both with the body and soul of Rādhā in order to have a practical realization of the feeling of joy and love. This was a new turn which Vaiṣṇavism took in Bengal when it merged itself into the cult of Caitanya. It became a phenomenal work.

4. Caitanya-maṅgala by LocanaDāsa — The fourth biography of Caitanyadeva is Caitanya-maṅgala by LocanaDāsa. He wrote this kāvya at the instance of his guru Narahari Sarkar. The poet does not compare it favourably with Vṛndāvana Dāsa as a biographer of Caitanyadeva, but undoubtedly he was a great poet. The work is more poetical than historical. Its author was also a well-known composer of Bengali Vaiṣṇava songs. It presents the ascetic Caitanya in more romantic light. As a record of incidents, it does not add satisfactory materials to the information contained by other biographies, and specially with regard to the devotional phase of Caitanya's life at Puri.

81 Ibid., P. 13
82 Sukumar Sen, op., cit., P. 345
The exact date of its composition is not known. According to Dinesh Chandra Sen, it was written in 1575. Regarding the source of the work, the poet himself has admitted that he was encouraged by Murāri Gupta's karčā. As a matter of fact, Locana Dāsa has given a completely new picture of Murāri Gupta's historical and authentic karčā with the help of his poetic imagination. The influence of Vṛndāvana Dāsa is also immensely felt in different portions of the work, specially in the descriptions of the path on way to Gaya by Caitanyadeva. In fact, even though this work was intended to be a pālāgān like Jayānanda's work, it can really be accepted as a biography rather than a pāncāli because the author was not a mere vocational singer like Jayānanda. He was a sincere Vaisnava.

The author's main purpose was not to narrate the events of the life and character of Caitanyadeva, but for establishing his Master's philosophy of "Gaur Nāgarī" and giving an estimate of the contribution of his Master in the propagation of Vaisnavism. This 'Nāgarī Bhāva' is not found in any other biographies.

5. Karčā by Govinda Dāsa - The fifth biography on Caitanyadeva was written by a blacksmith, named Govinda Dāsa. The work deals with the early part of Caitanya's life prior to his renouncing the world. It is said that Govinda Dāsa came out of

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83 "Banga Bhāsa O Sāhitya", Vol I, P. 370
84 The word 'Pāncāli' has come from the Sanskrit word 'pāncālikā'. According to some, this type of pālāgān was in vogue in Pāncāl region. So, it is called pāncāli or pācāli.
his family and served as a servant under Caitanyadeva for a year. He also accompanied his Master during his tour over South India and used to keep secretly the accounts of the activities of his Master. So, it presents a plain and vivid narrative by a sincere lover of the Master. But this book has not received the approbation of all sections of the Vaiṣṇavas and many people doubt the originality of the book.  

6. Gaurāṅga-Vijaya by Čūrāmanī Dāsa - This is another biography on Caitanyadeva written by Čūrāmanī Dāsa during the second half of the 16th century. Its another name is 'Bhubanmangala'. In this carita the poet says,

Suswapaṅa Kahiūche Nityānanda Rāe 
Čūrāmanī Dāsakahe ai bharasae  

(In his dream, Nityānanda advised Čūrāmanī Dāsa to compose this carita by dint of which the writer was encouraged to compose this).

The author proposed to narrate the life of Caitanyadeva in three parts, but the first part of the book has been recovered only. In respect of facts, this book is also not considered reliable by the scholars.

Besides these caritas, we also find some minor caritas of Caitanyadeva written in Sanskrit, Oriya and Bengali which are found in the history of literature written by Sukumar Sen, Asit Kr.

85 Sukumar Sen, op. cit., P. 375
86 "Gaurāṅga-vijaya", P. 52
Bondyopadhyay etc. These are -

1. **Caitanyavilās by Madhava** - Most probably, this biography is the Oriya translation of LocanDāsa's Caitanya-maṅgala. 87

2. **Caitanya-bhagavata by Iśvara Dāsa** - This is another biography of Caitanyadeva. But it has no historical value.

3. **Jagannātha-caritāmartha by Divākar Dāsa** - The first seven chapters of this biography contain the description of Caitanyadeva.

4. **Gaurakṛṣṇadāya-kāvyam by Govinda Deva** - This kāvyam is the Sanskrit translation of Kṛṣṇadāsa's Caitanya-caritāmrta. 88

5. **ŚrīKṛṣṇa-Caitanyadāya-āvalī by Pradyumna Miśra** - The writer was the son of Caitanya's uncle Kāṅsāri.

6. **ŚrīKṛṣṇabhajanāmrta by Narahari Dāsa** - This book is written in Sanskrit. In this book, Narahari recognises Caitanyadeva as an incarnation of ŚrīKṛṣṇa. The writer is also one of them who believed Caitanya as God even during his life-time. This is written both in prose and verse. 89

**OTHER MINOR BIOGRAPHIES OF THE GURUS**

(A) **ASSAM**

Besides these biographies of Assam which have been thoroughly dealt with, we find some other minor biographies

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87 Asit Kumar Būndyopadhyay, op. cit., P. 481
88 Ibid., P. 481
89 Sukumar Sen, op. cit., P. 361
which are found in the history of literature written by the scholars like Maheswar Neog, Satyendranath Sarma etc. These are,

1. Guru-caritra by Damodara Das - Damodara Das wrote a biography of Sankaradeva named 'Guru-caritra'. This carita was kept with Pandit Hemacandra Goswami.

2. Damodara-carita by Srikrshna Misra - He wrote a biography of Damodaradeva.

3. GopalaAta-carita by Ramagopala - Ramananda Dvija's son Ramagopala writes a carita on Gopala Deva. In this carita, he gives a detailed description of Gopala Ata - specially the last part of his life.

4. GopalaAta-carita by Puranandana - Puranandana also wrote another carita of Gopala Ata.

5. Rama-gopala-carita by Jaynaryana - Here the author describes vividly the lives of SriRamadeva, Ramananda and Ramagopaladeva.

6. Gopala-Atar-carita by SriRamaJadumani - We find the name of another carita of Gopaladeva of SriRama Jadumani.

7. Laksmipati-caritra by Jaynaryana - Jaynaryana - the son of Laksmipati (or disciple of Laksmipati) wrote a biography of his father or guru.

8. Govinda-carita by Bhavanananda Misra - Most probably Bhavanananda wrote this carita at the time of King

90 Maheswar Neog, op.cit., P. 168
Candranārāyaṇa (1643–60) of Darrang. 91

9. Gopīnātha Thākurdevar carita by Sarvānanda - In this carita, the author gives the description of Jarabari satra.

10. Vinanda Shyāmadevar-caritra by Premahāradeva (of Namati Satra) wrote the biography of his father.


12. Jadumani - Ramananda - caritra by Caturbhujā Kāyastha - Caturbhujā Kāyastha of Majathai Ceca satra wrote this carita.

13. Aniruddhadevar-caritra by Cidananda Deva - In 1802 Śaka, Cidanandadeva wrote this carita. Here he gives the description of the history of Mayamara satra.

14. Ratikāntadevar-caritra by Uditarāmadeva - Uditarāmadeva of Lendi satra wrote the biography of his father Ratikāntadeva.

15. Anantarāi-carita by Bhadracāru - Thākur carita and Āai Kanakalatā-carita by Vidya Ojha - These caritas give us the broad outline of the grandsons of Saṅkaradeva.

(B) BENGAL

Similarly, in Bengal also, we find the names of other gurus and other minor caritas which are mentioned in the history of literature written by the scholars like Sukumar Sen, Asit Bondyopadhyay and Bhudev Choudhury etc. But the supernatural

91 Ibid., P. 168
elements that we find in the Caitanya caritas, were gradually reduced in the later caritas. Among there, we first mention the name of,

1. Advaita-prakās by Isānānāgar - This is a biography of Advaita Acārya. In this work, the name of Advaita is Kamalākṣa. This is divided into twelve divisions. Its style and language is modern. Here the author has been influenced by 'Caitanya-caritāmṛta'.

2. Advaita-maṅgala by Haricaraṇ Dāsa - Haricaraṇ was a disciple of Advaita Acārya. He collected his materials from Advaita's maternal uncle Vijayapuri. This carita contains less than eight-thousand and five-hundred lines. The author does not treat his guru as a human being, rather his guru is looked upon as an incarnation of Vasudeva. We find no artistic characteristic in this book.

3. Advaita-vilās by Narahari Dāsa - This work is supposed to be written in the 17th-18th century. Here the author describes only the childhood activities of his guru.

4. Advaitaśatak by Shyāmdāsa Acārya - The biographer was one of the principal disciple of his guru Advaita Acārya. But we do not have any such work under the expression of the

92 Sukumar Sen, op. cit., P. 383
93 Ibid., P. 383
author's name. However, we find a reference of this carita in Haricaran's 'Advaita-mangala'.

3. Sītācaritra by Loknāth Dāsa - This is a biography of Advaita's wife Sītādevī. In this work, these are quotations from 'Cārvāka-bhāgavata' and 'Caitanya-caritāmṛta' and so it appears that this was written after 'Caitanya-caritāmṛta'. It also contains the events of greatness and godly qualities of Sītādevī and her two disciples - Nandinī and Jāngali.

5. Sītāgunakadamba by Viṣṇudāsa Acārya - This is the second biography on the life of Sītādevī by her disciple Viṣṇudāsa.

Next to these gurus, we find the caritas of another Vaishnava leaders of that period. These are,

1. Narottoma-vilās by Narahari - This is written by Narahari, a disciple of Narottoma. It consists of twelve chapters. Though it is small in size, yet it contains the sketch of Narottoma's whole life.

2. Srinivāsa-carita by Narahari - This is Narahari's another work. It also depicts the life of Srinivāsa.

3. Gauracarita-cintāmani - Narahari writes this carita in the style of music. So, various rāgas and rāginīs are mentioned here.

4. Bhakti-ratnākar - This is Narahari's another work. It is a very famous book, it contains the history of the ancestors of Jīva Gosvāmī, the Gosvāmīs of Vṛndavana, the life-story
of Śrīnivāsa and his father, and also other important matters regarding Vaiṣṇava life and history. According to some, this book was written in the first part of 18th century.

5. Premvilās by Nityānanda Dāsa - In this biography, the writer writes about the events on the life of Śrīnīvāsa and Śyāmānanda. This book is looked upon as an ideal one and also an authority on Vaiṣṇava dharma, literature and biography.

6. Rasik-māṅgala by Gopijana-ballava Dāsa - Here the author describes the lives of Rasikānanda and Śyāmānanda. It is written in the style of a māṅgala-kāvyā.

7. Śyāmānanda-prakāś by Kṛṣṇacarana Dāsa - In this biography, Śyāmānanda prabhu's life specially his renunciation of all sensual pleasures (Vairāgya) has been described.

8. Bhaktamāl by Lal Dāsa - His another name is Kṛṣṇa Dāsa. In this book, he takes the help of Hindi 'Bhaktamāl'. Here the author mentions the names of Mahārāja Nandakumāra, the King Ravindranārāyaṇa Roy etc. This book is favourable to the Bengali Vaiṣṇavas.

IMPORTANT FEATURES OF THE MEDIEVAL BIOGRAPHIES OF ASSAM AND BENGAL

Predominance of religious ideals of both Assam and Bengal:

The medieval biographies of Assam and Bengal are mostly the biographies of different medieval saints of Assam and

94 Bhudev Choudhury "Bāngla Sāhityer Itikathā" Vol I, P. 300
Bengal. Most of them were regarded by their followers and the biographers as incarnations of God. Every sect tries to show its guru or gurus as superior to the gurus of other sects. So, they gave free play to their imaginations, using miraculous and supernatural elements, even using authentic materials of their saints' or gurus' lives. So, supernatural elements as well as the divine qualities attributed to the heroes are ignored. The powerful impression made by these two great personalities inspired their biographers to give sincere expression to their human love and admiration.

**Incarnation of God:**

(A) ASSAM

The early group of caritas of Śaṅkaradeva by Daityārī, Bhusāna, Rāmānanda etc. consider Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva as incarnations of Viṣṇu although they never lose sight of the man in them both. Daityārī, at the beginning of his work, compares Śaṅkaradeva with that of Kṛṣṇa. Rāmānanda also regards his subject not as a human being but as an incarnation of God. He proves that Lord Kṛṣṇa wanted to come as 'avatāra' to reassert the place of 'dharma' in Assam at that time in the person of Śaṅkara. He is engaged in showing Śaṅkara in his divine qualities and for this reason, he constantly looks upon his subject as an incarnation of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Rāmacarana also shows in every step of Śaṅkara's life-history, the resemblance of Kṛṣṇa

95 *Guru-caritra*, P. 7

96 Ibid., P. 33 - 43
of the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa. So, we find that the medieval biographers repeatedly speak of Śaṅkara's God-like powers (Īṣvara-Sakti). In the case of Harideva also, we find that Vanagañagiri, from the birth till death of his subject, tries to show him as an incarnation of God Kṛṣṇa.

(B) BENGAL

Most of the biographers except Cūrāṇidāsa considered their hero as an incarnation of God. Murāri Gupta begins his karčā with a deified picture of Caitanya as the incarnation of Viṣṇu and gives miraculous legends as a proof of his divinity. Kavikaraṇapura also in his kāvya and drama presents Caitanyadeva as a blessed saviour and incarnation of Viṣṇu as well as the hero of a religious kāvya. Vṛndāvana, Dāsa97 and Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāj98 started their work with the process of deification about Caitanyadeva and the Caitanya legends must have been properly developed and completed. As such both of them in their works readily accept all supernatural stories about Caitanya and strive to figure him with divine adoration. They considered Caitanya as none but ŚrīKṛṣṇa of Dvāparayuga. But in "Gaurāṅga-vijaya", Cūrāṇidāsa did not try to establish Caitanya as one incarnation of god.99

97 "Caitanya-bhāgavata", Ādīkhandā, P. 1
98 "Caitanya-caritāmṛta", Ādīkāla, P. 5
99 Sukumar Sen, op. cit., P. 367
Religious ideals and doctrines:

(A) ASSAM

In the different biographies of Śaṅkaradeva and Madhavadeva also, besides getting a full and thorough picture of their own lives, we get a full account of the Neo-Vaisnavite movement in Assam and the Mahāpurusiya philosophy. We also find the history of the satra institutions of Assam and their place in propagation of the Mahāpurusiya dharma. From the days of Śaṅkaradeva and Madhavadeva, the telling of the story of the guru and listening to it became a part of the daily religious duty of the satra cleries. It was this practice of narration that inspired some of the biographers to compose their works in verse.

(B) BENGAL

The medieval biographies are full of religious ideals and doctrines of the Vaiṣṇava cult. Those biographies while giving the details of the lives of Caitanyadeva and others, explain the Vaiṣṇava devotional sentiments, practices, theology and philosophy of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism. The greatness of Kṛṣṇadāsa's 'Caritāmṛta' consists not so much in the literary skill or interest with which the story of the great Master is told as in the profound scholasticism with which it presents the entire theology of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism in the life of the Master. From the other biographies, also we find discussions in this regard as well as in regard to bhakti, mukti, prema and other aspects of the Vaiṣṇava dharma.
Supernatural elements:

(A) ASSAM

The biographies of Assam are also rich in supernatural elements. In Daityāri's carita, we find that one day Mādhavadeva was cooking his meals when suddenly God Hari appeared before him. After taking his bath, and putting on apparel, God was found to be in only one wooden sleeper. Then Mādhava offered another slipper to Him. But God refused to put His bare foot there and said that He would put it on only when the person who had offered Him the first slipper would again offer Him the second.\(^{100}\) In Bhūṣana's carita, compared to other caritas, supernatural elements are scanty. In Rāmananda's work, the author gives some instances to establish Śāṅkara's divine power. One is that Cāndasaī, the Muslim disciple of Śāṅkaradeva, had seen him once as Caturbhuja,\(^{101}\) or the four-handed. In Rāmarāya's work also, we find that the author uses freely the supernatural elements which is a general characteristic of that age. In the case of Harideva also, a host of stories have clustered around him. In the 'Kathā-Guru-carita' the author lavishly uses supernatural elements in the description of the predecessor's origin in Kanauj.\(^{102}\) In Vanagaṅāgīri's carita the supernatural elements are more in abundance than in other caritas. In the 'Badalā Padma Ātar carita', also, the subject is shown having

\(^{100}\) Thakur, op. cit., PP. 259-260

\(^{101}\) Guru-caritra. P. 38

\(^{102}\) PP., 3-5
many supernatural qualities. The main reason is that the aim of such biographies cannot be the portraiture of the man, but to attract the common people to the fold of the preachers.

(B) BENGAL

In Bengal also, we find these supernatural elements to the caritas. The 'Barāṇa Avesā' of Caitanyadeva is found in 'Caitanya-bhagavata'. The author (Vṛndāvana Dāsa) also brought in other imaginary things such as the signs of flag and cakra on the foot prints of Caitanyadeva in the house of Jagannātha Misra. Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāj also has put in such elements in his kāvyā to prove Caitanya's divinity. These are cutting the head of a Buddhist pandit and getting his new life and showing Caitanya's four-armed image to Kāśī Misra and Pratapa-Rudra and his going out of the room inspite of the three doors are kept closed.

Pūrāṇic influences upon the biographies:

(A) ASSAM

We observe the influences of Purāṇas in the medieval biographies of Assam. In Daityārī's caritā, we find that when Madhava met Saṅkaradeva and after a day-long argument he bowed down before Saṅkaradeva, then Saṅkaradeva uttered a śloka.

103 Vṛndāvana Dāsa, op. cit., Madhyāline, P. 125
104 Ibid., Adikānda, P. 21
105 'Caitanya-caritāmṛta', Adilīla, P. 198
106 Ibid., Madhyalīla, P. 198
107 Ibid., P. 593
from his favourite Bhāgavata (canto IV, 31, Sl. 14). Rāmānanda also refers to that famous śloka from Gītā (canto IV, Sl. 7) to establish Śaṅkarā's divine origin. In Ramacarana's carita also, there are several passages which invoke the authority of Purāṇas for certain episodes in incorporated into the biography. These are Chanda-Purāṇa, Matsya-Purāna and Śiva-Purāṇa etc. It proves that the biographies of Śaṅkaradeva were all influenced by Purānic episodes, mythologies and legends.

(B) BENGAL

In Bengal also, Murāri's kārca, though offered as a kāvya, followed the method and manners of Purāṇas. Though the work was undertaken according to the direction of Śrīvāsa, the general frame of work consists of the device of a narrator (Murāri) and a listener (Dāmodara Pandit) which is common mostly in the Purāṇas.

Vṛndāvana Dāsa's kāvya has been written perfectly in the Purānic attitude. He has narrated "Gauralīlā" in his kāvya according to the same style as followed by Vyāsadeva while describing "Krṣnalīlā" in "Śrīmadbhāgavata". He read thoroughly the Bhāgavata and the Purāṇas. His aim was to compare Caitanyadeva with that of Krṣna and Rāma-Laksmana. So, he quoted some ślokas from the Bhāgavata and the Purāṇas in his kāvya.110

108 Thākur, op. cit., P. 69
109 'Guru caritā', P. 37
110 Sukumar Sen, op., cit., P. 327
Jayananda also tells us that as his work was composed in the form and manner of a palagan, yet the Puranic matters were not out of place. So, in his kavya, we find the tales regarding the king Dhruva, the myths of Jāra-Bharat and also about the establishment of the Jagannātha temple by king Indradumna etc.

Locana Dāsa also cited many ślokas from the Bhāgavata, Brahmaśamhitā, Bhabisya-Purāṇa, Nārada-pancarātra etc. 111

The subject-matter of Kṛṣṇa Dāsa’s kavya includes ideals from Vedas, Purāṇas, Upaniṣadas etc. The poet has used Sanskrit and Prākrit ślokas nearly one thousand and eleven times. More than half of the ślokas of his kavya are from the Bhāgavata. Besides, these are from the Gītā, Brahmaśamhitā, Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata, Viṣṇu-Purāṇa, Kūrma-Purāṇa, Padma-Purāṇa, Nṛsiṁha Purāṇa etc. 112

Style, Manner and Presentation:

(A) ASSAM

The Neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement sheared by the saints created an unprecedented zeal for the culture of religious literature. In the wake of this movement, a rich biographical literature centering round the carrier and personality of Saṅkaradeva was born. Within a few decades of his death, his

111 Asit Kumar Bāndyopadhyay, op. cit., P. 384
112 Sukumar Sen, op. cit., P. 347
life and lives of his followers were found to be written in verse. These early examples were emulated by later writers in their biographical works in verse and prose which were multiplied with the advancement of time. With the growth of sectarian propensities some spurious works also came into being, and these tried to twist the history of Vaiśnavism to the advantage of interested parties.

In Daityāri's carita, we find that the author not only shows the two gurus as preachers but also as men of flesh and blood. And it is here that the special merit of the author lies. To show the human aspects of the two gurus—Daityāri meets them in many small details. He vividly shows how Mādhava went too late to his chosen bride's house, and how he declared that he would shift to a distant place Banduka after his marriage with the bride. The parents of the bride got frightened and refused to give their daughter in marriage with Mādhava. In another place, the author shows how Śaṅkara suffered from mental agony as his dearest Mādhava and Rāmadāsa did not return from the field when a heavy hailstorm broke out.113

Bhūṣāna mentions that for want of any model, he finds it difficult to shape it to his satisfaction. So, there are certain matters in his work which if admitted, would disturb the generally accepted chronology of events in Śaṅkara's life.113

113 "Mahāpuruṣa Śrī Śrī Śaṅkaradeva-Mādhavadeva" carita, p. 104.
It is for this reason that his narration remains sketchy. He is perfectly cautious of his own limitations and admits that he has not been able to treat his subject in perfectly beautiful verses. His work suffers from a lack of authenticity. Regarding some events of Śaṅkara, the author differs from other carita-writers. For example, the meeting of Śaṅkara with Caitanya is shown to have taken place during the second pilgrimage. He shows that Śaṅkara had met Rūpa and Sanātana's guru, but Daityāri and Rāmacaraṇa mention that it was not their guru but their nephew.

Rāmananda Dvija states that he depended mainly on his father for the materials of the biography. He was probably not aware of the early biographies. So, he has created some confusion in the chronology and details of events of Śaṅkara's life. There are also differences in certain facts about Śaṅkara's life or relations.¹¹⁴ This carita stands out as a very significant carita. The author evinces some skill in marshalling other historical matters such as the rise of king Visvasimha to power and even ventures into the field of Indian history of Pathan and Mugal rule. While writing about the debate between Śaṅkara and his anti-Vaisnāvite Brahmins, the author reproduces the philosophy behind Śaṅkara's religion. And this is done in a very simple language. The author successfully depicts here the subject as a great religious preacher against the background of his age in a lucid style. So, this work can be regarded as a valuable one among the works of this period.

¹¹⁴ "Guru-carita", Preface. VII
Rāmacarana, in his carita, includes almost all the events of the subject's life. Regarding religious matters, he also shows his adequacy of knowledge in handling them, because those matters have been discussed in a frank and elaborate manner. He is also lavish in describing various incidents of Śankara's life and for this, he even goes to tell tales wherever necessary. It is for the richness and profusion of materials that the Vaiṣṇava followers regard this carita superior.

The "Katha-Guru-carita" is the most voluminous and complete work among the biographies of the Vaiṣṇava saints. It gives detailed accounts of the lives of the saints and their disciples. It also gives a history of the Vaiṣṇava faith and movement and also the social and economic background of the period. The writing in prose form of the work is dignified, varied and lively.

(B) BENGAL

Murāri wrote his karca in the right epic style. The verses are quite smooth and not even devoid of intrinsic merit. Murāri possesses considerable narrative skill and his simple descriptions are often vivid and picturesque. His manner of presentation is very often direct and forcible and wisely avoids the retorical elaboration of the later kāvyas.

Locana's work is more poetical than historical. The undoubted lyrical qualities of his biography are expressed by
professional Vaishnava singers by using the same verse. The style is just like a "Mangala-kavya".

Jayananada's kavya is divided into nine parts or khandas. The author yields to the general tendency of accepting a large number of legends and fables. It was also composed in the form and manner of a palaagan.

In Vrndavana Das's kavya, the early life of Caitanya has been brilliantly described. The author's love and confidence are present throughout the entire volume of the book, and he has made the work so sweet and elegant. In this work, it seems as if Lord Caitanya has turned into a man. He is not an incarnation but simply a loving son of a mother. Specially in that scene where Caitanyadeva is departed from his mother Sacidevi. Inspite of supernatural and imaginary elements, the poet has not forgotten Caitanya - the man and Saci - the mother. By his simple narrative and picturesque presentation, he makes his work popular.

In Krsnadasa's "Caitanya-caritamrta" the poet cares little for the picturesque, poetic or human possibilities of the theme. It is by far a profoundly laborious and learned work and the most authoritative biography of Caitanyadeva. It should be remembered that it is not a 'carita', but a 'caritamrta', written more from a devotional point of view. The picture of a life, which is
very poor in striking external incidents but rich in impassioned
religious consciousness, is marvellously well drawn. It is a work
of rare merit, and it, gives a complete exposition of the scholastic
Vaisnivism. So, in the language of Sukumar Sen, we can say that
'Caitanya-carita-mrta' is a great book of a great writer for the
great listeners". 115

Life presented in profile:

The medieval biographies of both Assam and Bengal are
mainly biographies on the lives of saints. The saints were
regarded by the biographers as incarnations of God. So, they
brought in all sorts of supernatural and mythological elements to
prove their divinity. For this purpose, the biographers present
only a partial or one sided view of the lives of the saints and
not a complete allround picture. These types of literature contain
historical materials but the extent and the value of such
materials are immensely variable.

(A) ASSAM

The different biographies of Sankaradeva and
Madhavadeva called carita puthis are also, not strictly speaking,
biographies though they give a true and correct historical
account of their lives and career. The two gurus are looked upon
by their disciples as avatāras. Their different activities appear
to be almost like the child frolics of ŚrīKṛṣṇa. So, these
caritas may rather be termed as 'hagiographies'. A sense of
hero-worship colours the biographers' approach to the lives of

115 "Bāgāla: Sahityer Itihās" Vol I, Pūrvārdha, P. 351
of the saints, so here also we get a partial view of their lives.

(B) BENGAL

The different biographies of Caitanya deva are also not giving full history and correct account of his allround activities. These are written only from the devotional point of view. Thus we get the impassioned religious consciousness, where everything is coloured by the rasa-śāstra and theology of the Vaisnava Gosvāmīs.

Digressive elements:

(A) ASSAM

In Assam, the biographies of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva and their disciples contain digressive elements in the sense that they supply us with so many things not connected with the biographies of the saints. They also provide us with much information regarding the then Assam. They also give full details of the religious ideas of Assam in pre-Śaṅkara period and also furnish us with the full history of the rulers of Assam and Cooch-Bihar of that period.

(B) BENGAL

In Bengal also, the digressive elements have been presented in different biographies of Caitanya deva. These biographies endeavour to supply us with some other very important things which are in no way connected with Caitanya's life. Thus they provide us with a good deal of information
regarding the then conditions and contemporary records. Some of them take us outside Bengal and give us glimpses of men and manners in Southern and Western India. They depict in vivid outline the attractive figure of the leading actors in the scene. They also give us the background of the movement.

A comparative study:

The medieval saints of both Assam and Bengal were mostly Vaiśṇava saints, and as such, their different activities and the philosophy of the Vaiśṇava-cult preached by them were more or less the same. They lived almost in the same period and the backgrounds of their movements and the political, social, economic conditions were also almost the same.

Again, almost all the biographers looked upon their gurus as incarnations of God and the sources on which they depended were also the same. Thus, we find that the common features of the biographies were the following,

1. Supernatural elements.
2. Influence of Purāṇas.
3. Pre-dominance of religious or sactarian ideals.
4. One-sided view of life that is life presented only from the devotional point of view.
5. Digressive elements in the biographies not connected with the lives of the saints.
We have also seen that the causes of such similarities lay in the fact that the lives on which these were written, preached more or less, the same philosophy and religion. The materials and sources on which these biographies were written were also more or less the same.