B. CHAPTER – I

INTRODUCTION

(a) LIFE AND WORKS OF KAVINDRA.

Kavindra is credited with the work of 18 parvas of Assamese Mahābhārata in an abridged form. He belongs to the 16th century the date of which calculated on the basis of his patron Parāgal Khān, the commander of king Hussain Shāh (1493-1519 A.D.) of Gaura (now near Māldah, West Bengal.)

It is an established practice of the poets belonging to the Medieval period of Assam to introduce himself (self-introductory with humbleness) in the book the poet associates with. Surprisingly, Kavindra has not mentioned anything in respect of his identity in his Mahābhārata. It is a fact that Kavindra’s Mahābhārata is the only work of the poet so far discovered. But he never fails in his duty to give the identity of his patron Parāgal Khān although very briefly. Certainly he has deviated from the usual procedure of introduction. Naturally, it gives the researcher a hard job to place him in the rightful place in the history of Assamese literature. In the absence of his identity we are to deduce some kind of information on the basis of the circumstantial evidence and the prevailing political conditions of this Koch-Kamata region during the last decades of the 15th century and the first two decades of the 16th century. The mentioning of the name of
Emperor Hussain Shāh of Gaura (a nearby country bordering Koch-Kamatā region) as well as that of his general Parāgal Khān of Chattagram in the very page of the Mahābhārata shows some kind of significance and weight on this issue. Frequent references of Parāgal Khān at the end of some parvas of Kavindra’s Mahābhārata lead us to believe that Parāgal Khān but not his overload Hussain Shāh is the real patron. As the Mahābhārata contains local customs and usage and other socio-religious system of the land of Koch-Kamatā region, we may conclude that the poet is belonged to this western side area. The Assamese language used in the Mahābhārata points directly to the Western side of Old Kāmarūpa with some reservation.

There is historical evidence that there was a cordial relation between the king Hussain Shāh of Gaura and the Kamatā King Nilāmbar. There existed diplomatic relation between the kingdoms of Gaura and Kamatā. Envoys like Rāmdeo- Bhattachārya, the son of Rāmasaraswati along with Nilāi-Cāoliya were sent once by Nilāmbar, the then Kamatā King. Nilāmbar also prayed for the hand of the daughter Garamā of king Hussain Shāh.\(^1\) Then ensued embroils with the Rājās of Cāchār and Kamatā, the central figure being Susūdhi Garamā Kuanri, the daughter of Gaureswar or the Chief of Gaura, and the consort of the ruler of Kamatā.\(^2\)

1. Bhuyān, S K. (ed), Assam Buranji, 1988, p.15
2. Ibid, p.16
She had been expelled from her husband's palace for alleged relation with the youthful son of the family priest, who had been appointed to read out to the ladies of the palace the semi-religious classic Hara-Gauri-Saṁhitā. The matter was secretly communicated by Susuddhi to her father, the ruler of Gaura. The insults heaped upon Susuddhi led to the cessation of friendly relations between Gaura and Kamata. The only Kamata dynasty of which we have any connected account is that for the Khyan, or Khen kings, whose last representative Nilambar, was overthrown by Hussain Shah in A.D. 1498.

After the destruction of Kamatapur by Hussain Shāh of Gaura in 1498 A.D., there existed some of anarchy in Koch-Kamatāpur region. This state of affairs had compelled the poet Kavindra to take shelter in the neighbouring kingdom Gaura having peaceful atmosphere. With the cordial relation in the past, Kavindra, a poet of Kamata, had the privilege of taking shelter in the kingdom of Gaura through old acquaintance. In this way, Kavindra probably got shelter in the court of Hussain Shāh who found pleasure in the company of learned assembly. “He summer’d learned.

3. Bhuyan, S.K (ed) p.131
4. Ibid Introduction, p.xxxii
5. Gait, E.A. A history of Assam, Gauhati, 7th edn, 1997, p 41
The learned editor Gaurināth Sāstrī in his appended "Bhumikā" of Kavindra's Mahābhārata makes certain claims in respect of the poet Kavindra. He is confused over the Mahābhārata poet Kavindra and Kavindra Pātra, the minister of Koch king Naranārāyana (1540-1585 A.D.). This Kavindra Pātra is one of the fore-fathers of Gauripur Rāj family. The poet Kavindra is associated with his patron Parāgal Khān who is alive not beyond the fourth decade of the 16th century. Sāstrī considers the poet Kavindra and Kavindra Pātra as the identical person which is not supported by the history. As three copies of the manuscript of Kavindra was discovered in the library of the Rāj family, Sāstrī jumped into the conclusion without any foundation. The learned editor fails to indentify the poet Kavindra, makes impossible propositions.

Now let us examine the editor's contentions thoroughly:-

a) Kavindra Pātra was the minister of Koch-King Naranārāyana (1540-1595 A.D.) and probably he died sometime before 1619 A.D.7(a)

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b) N.N. Vasu in his "The social History of Kāmarūp" Vol. II has observed these.

I) "All along his long reign Kavindra Pātra acted as his minister". 

II) "Parikhsit started for Agra accompanied by Kavindra Pātra to lay the case before Emperor". On his way back Parikhsit naranarayana unfortunately died of small-pox. Kavindra Pātra informed the Emperor of his death and on his representing to him that the late Parikhsit had no fit successor to occupy his place Kavindra Patra was appointed to the post of Kānungho of the four Sircars." 

III) "..........................Rangamati become the headquater of the Kanungho and Kavindra Patra began to acquire by diverse means, land estates and thus become a powerful Zamindar."

IV) Sāgar Khari Daivājna's 'Darang Rājbāmsāvali' mentions the name of Kavindra Patra in connection with the general Chilārāi's expedition against Hermeswar.

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8. Ibid. reference to king Naranarayana, p 167.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid. chapter vi. p 170.
V) The patron Parāgal Khān of the poet Kavindra is not expected to remain alive beyond the third decade of the 16th Century.

As no mention of the poet is found anywhere in the authentic books, the so-called tail-claim of the learned editor to link Kavindra Pātra as the Mahābhārata poet is untenable. Kavindra Pātra who happened to remain alive in the 2nd decade of the 17th century cannot be associated with Parāgal Khān of the 16th century. So long as Parāgal Khān’s name is connected in the Mahābhārata, Kavindra Pātra cannot come into the picture at all.

Considering all the pros and cons, we come to the conclusion that there are two Kavindras one is the Mahābhārata Poet Kavindra belonging to the 1st quarter of the 16th century and the other is Kavindra Pātra, a minister and Kānungeo who happens to be an ancestor of Gauripur Rāj family and he is supposed to alive to this world upto the first quarter of the 17th century.

According to the printed Mahābhārata, Kavindra begins his Mahābhārata with the salutation, ‘Mangalācarana’ slokas of Purāṇa (Mahābhārata is also a Purāṇa):

Nārāyanaiṁ namaskṛtya naraṁ ca iva naro ṛttam /

deviṁ Sarasvatīśaīva tato jayamudirayet //

As a devout follower of Kṛṣṇa, he also invokes Kṛṣṇa with the following words:
pranāmaho Kṛṣṇa kṛpāmaya avatāra /
yāhāka smarile haya pālaka nistāra //
Kṛṣṇa japa Kṛṣṇa tapa Kṛṣṇa dayāmaya /
Kṛṣṇase jānilē ādyā āra mayāmaya //
pranāmaho Vāsudeva puruṣa pradhān /
pranāmaho Vyāsadeva guṇera nidhāna //

Salute to Kṛṣṇa who is one of the avataras, is kind hearted. By remembering him one gets deliverance from the danger of sin. Kṛṣṇa is the 'Japa', Kṛṣṇa is the 'tapa' and He is kind to all. Kṛṣṇa is the ultimate Reality and God of illusion. Salute to Vāsudeva who is the Supreme Being, the main person. Salute to Vyāsadeva who is the treasure-house of various qualities.

After due salutation to God, Kavindra does not forget to eulogise the emperor Hussain Shāh of Gaura as well as his general Parāgal Khān as both are instrumental in materializing the total shape of a version of the Mahābhārata of 18 parvas in local language. The king shows his magnanimity providing peaceful shelter in his court and extends co-operation in procuring books for consultation in the royal library. Kavindra eulogises both in this Mahābhārata:

kāliyuge avatar gūnera ādhāra /
The ‘avatāra’ of Kaliyuga is the master of qualities whose extensive fame has spread over in this world. Sultāna Alāpadin the lord Gaureswār’s fame has spread over in this world. Laskara Parāgal Khan listens to the story of the Pāṇḍavas who have lost their kingdom. Narrate all these in brief so that I (Parāgal) can listen this in a day through the composition of a Pāṇḍāḷī type writings. By taking his command over his head Kavindra, with utmost care composes this Pāṇḍāḷī.

The important aspect of Kavindra’s Mahābhārata is reflected in the eulogy of Parāgal Khan in Adi parva. By listening raptly to the story of the

14. Ibid op cit vv. 3-11
Pāṇḍavas upto the Virāta Parva Parāgal khān’s inquisitiveness grow more and more and the patron suggests Kavindra to render the whole Mahābhārata into the local language in an abridge form so that he can listen it in a day.

Very little is known from Kavindra’s Mahābhārata about his patron Parāgal khān. In the end of the Sabhā parva however, some sort of identity is given:

\[
Laskar Parāgal Khān \quad mahā dālā Karna Sama
\]

\[
daridra bhujāya nilya nilya
\]

\[
tāhāra ādesā māthe \quad Kavindra Kahila tāte
\]

\[
Sabhā parva kaila viracita // ^{15}
\]

— Laskar Parāgal Khān who is considered benevolent as that of great donor Karna engages in feeding poor people daily. With his command, Kavindra narrates there the Sabhā parva after composing it.

This Sultan Alāpadin is none other than Alāpadin Hussain Shāh. It appears also that although Sayyid Hussain adopted the title of Ālāuddin Abdul Muzaffar Hussain Shāh, he was universally known as Hussain Shāh, and the name is found on various inscriptions on the edifices in Gauda."^{16}

15. Ibid. op. cit. Sabhā parva, v. 908, Tulāpāṭ MS p. 54

Hussain Shāh was the Emperor of Gaura from 1493 A.D. to 1519 A.D. He destroyed Kamatāpur in 1498 A.D. Hussain Shāh's dynasty ruled Gaud till 1538 A.D.

Kavindra is credited with the task of completing the 18 parvas of his Mahābhārata singlehandedly by utilizing the sources available to him during the early part of the 16th century. It is considered as a great contribution towards the enrichment of Assamese Mahābhārata literature. There is one important point to be added to the Mahābhārata of Kavindra. The story involving 'Khātās asura' is incorporated inside Vana parva. Its source is attributed to Yāmala- Saṁhitā as disclosed by Rāmasaraswati, the Mahābhārata poet of King Naranārāyaṇ in the later part of the 16th century. Rāmasaraswati's 'Khalāsura' resembles with 'Khātās asura' of Kavindra. Both sources point that the book involving the story belongs to the Koch-Kamata region.

The researcher has to depend on the authenticity of the editor in respect of other parvas beyond the half of the Asvamedha parva up to the end of Swargārohaṇa parva. Along with the uninterrupted Tulāpāt copy upto the half of Asvamedha parva, a few folios of other copy are also found.

17. Bondopadhyāy, A.C. Madhya Yuge Bangla O Bangali, edn – 1986, P-26,
18. Gait, E.A. A History of Assam, edn – 1997, p-41,
19. Bondopadhyāy, A.C. op.cit
The local five copyists entrusted with the task of copying the manuscript of Kavindra's Mahābhārata, completed their assigned work between 1821 A.D. and 1859 A.D. as shown in the 'Bhumikā' of the editor. All the three copies bear distinctive Assamese letters throughout (the photostate copies of the manuscript will be incorporated in due place). The editor indulged in Bengali transliterated compiled copy which saw the print in 1931 A.D. Incidentally and naturally, this encouraged some vested interested quarters for unwarranted claim.

Subsequent chapters of the thesis will reveal the poet's ability and disclose other peculiarities involving stories and other facts concerning this region.

The researcher takes pains to establish this as Assamese Mahābhārata of the 16th century written invariably in Assamese letters. It is stressed to give the poet the rightful place he deserves as well as to the nature of a Mahābhārata in a regional language.
(b) SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

It is about hundred years that the research in the field of Assamese literature has begun. And hitherto several eminent scholars have traversed the field of Assamese Mahābhārata from different angles but none of them has taken special interest in the Mahābhārata of Kavindra till today. The Mahābhārata of Kavindra presents a wide scope for the study and research.

There have been references to the Mahābhārata of Kavindra in the history of Assamese and Bengali literature although it has not been dealt with in details. Some Bengali Critics, such as, Dr. Dinesh Chandra Sen, Dr. Ashit Kumār Bandopadhyāy, Dr. Sukumār Sen and others have claimed that the Mahābhārata written at the request of Parāgal Khān, the Governor of Chattagram and the copies of the manuscript of which has been collected from Chattagram and other places is purely Bengali. But astonishingly later on Dr. Sukumār Sen has not mentioned anything about the Mahābhārata of Kavindra.²⁰ Contrary to this, Assamese authors and critics like Dr. Satyendra Nāth Sarma, Dīmbeswar Neog and other have claimed that the linguistic peculiarities of Kavindra's Mahābhārata has shown to be Assamese

The work aims to ascertain and establish which one of the claims is relevant and justified. In order to arrive at a goal it is necessary to pursue and make critical study of the manuscript of Kavindra's Mahābhārata available in the custody of the Rāj Family of Gauripur. Over and above, the printed 'Aṣṭādaśa parva Mahābhārata' of Kavindra compiled and edited by Gaurināth Sāstrī published from Dhubri in 1931 A.D. will help to pursue the project. In this context, it will be wise on the part of the researcher to explore the potentialities lie inside the copied manuscripts of different times.

Depending mainly in the three manuscripts of Kavindra's Mahābhārata, Sāstrī gathers and assigns the time of copying one of the manuscripts to 1785 A.D., another to 1825 A.D. although there is doubt about the veracity of the editor because of his suppression of the fact that these manuscripts bear the characteristics of clear Assamese peculiarities of words, verbs, case-endings, conjugation system etc. invariably. But Sāstrī had given the names of these copyists along with the date saka 1781, sal 1188 corresponding to 1859 A.D. & 1821 A.D. It is interesting to note that Sāstrī not only prints Kavindra's Mahābhārata in Bengali letters but also gives Bengali meaning being unable to comprehend most of the words, conjugations and other peculiarities. So to say this printed Kavindra's Mahābhārata
is clearly in the transliteration of Assamese Mahābhārata. In a way he distorts the whole thing with some ulterior motive. Our contention will be clear with the manuscript copy up to Asvamedha parva, as beyond this we do not get other copies of the manuscript. For the rest of the parvas i.e. Acāryya parva, Muṣala parva and Swargārohaṇa parva we are compelled to depend on Śāstri's printed book with reservation. The length – breadth wise measurement of 'Tulāpāt' MS. is 13.5 inches (length) by 4.5 inches (breadth) and each folio contains 10 lines in most case except one or two which has shown 8 or 9 or even 11 lines. 10 lines are generally accommodated in each folio of 'Tulāpāt' MS. The study will be taken in right earnest with the help of references made in books and articles of eminent scholars of both Assamese and Bengali literature.

The literary and field works will help me in pursuing my research project. I hope to collect the materials for the work and these will give immense pleasure to establish the aim of the research project within the stipulated time. The findings and datas recorded in the preface by Gaurināth Śāstrī and provided by other erudite scholars of both Assamese and Bengali will be utilized in the research project.
B. CHAPTER – I

(c) OBJECTIVE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

The objective of this thesis is to make an attempt for the first time to explore a detailed and critical study of Kavindra’s *Mahābhārata* depending on the copies of manuscript kept in the custody of the Royal family of Gauripur and the printed form of the *Mahābhārata* of Kavindra compiled and edited from three separate ‘Tulāpāṭ’ copies of the manuscript.

The study of the *Mahābhārata* of Kavindra is very essential, because
(a) The detailed study of this *Mahābhārata* will pave the way for comparative study of *Mahābhārata* of the North-East Region, i.e. Assamese and Bengali *Mahābhārata* with respect of Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*.

(b) This study of the *Mahābhārata* of Kavindra will give the scope for study of language, culture and customs prevalent in the society and the locality where the poet lived on and rendered the *Mahābhārata*.

(c) The study of the *Mahābhārata* of Kavindra will help to detect the interpolation of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and subsequently leads us to the *Mahābhārata* written in the language of the North Eastern states.

(d) At last, the study of Kavindra’s *Mahābhārata* will open a new dimension in the field of literature of *Mahābhārata* in regional language.
B. CHAPTER – I

(d) HYPOTHESIS:

The primary hypothesis of this research is that Kavindra renders the whole of the Sanskrit Mahābhārata for the first time in a regional language although an abridged form as early as in the 16th century A.D. keeping intact all of eighteenth parvas of the Sanskrit Mahābhārata.

The second hypothesis is that Kavindra is a Sanskrit scholar and a creative poet. He has rendered the original Sanskrit Mahābhārata into the regional language in an abridged form successfully as suggested by his patron. The creative capability of Kavindra makes him Mahābhārata poet even earlier to Rāmasaraswati, the Vyāsa of Assamese Mahābhārata, under the patronage of king Naranārāyaṇa (1540 – 1585 A.D.).

There is no historical evidence to show that Kavindra was a Mahābhārata poet of the sixteenth century. The discovery of Kavindra's Mahābhārata bearing the name Parāgal Khān draws attention of educational world of the North-east region to rise from slumber to claim over the work and the poet.
(e) METHODOLOGY:

The topic of the research aims to study critically the Mahābhārata of Kavindra. To establish the aim the research scholar will take pains and much interest to collect data and materials from different available sources. The manuscript 'Tulāpāt' of Kavindra's Mahābhārata will be the original source of thorough study which will give more impetus to the researcher than before. Secondly, the published work of 'Astādasā parva Mahābhārata' of Kavindra will enable the researcher to have first hand knowledge of the contents inside the said Mahābhārata through a comparative study of the manuscript and the printed form. In addition to these documents the references of the different eminent scholars of Assamese and Bengali literature along with other available materials shall be taken into active consideration. As the present study will be a great historical importance, a historical survey of medieval age will be carried on to place Kavindra in the map of the history of Mahābhārata literature. Nevertheless, it is imperative that an exhaustive use of periodicals, magazines etc. in different libraries is essential to establish the aim of the work. No stone will be unturned until the goal is achieved.