(A) (i). The Assamese renderings of the Mahābhārata in the pre-Vaisnava
and the Vaisnava periods: The rendering of the Mahābhārata into Assamese was started long ago in the thirteenth century. But only some portions of it were translated by different poets. The whole work was however, taken up in the Vaisnava period. The full credit is due to the poet Rāma Saraswati who shouldered the main responsibility of the translation work.

Three eminent poets who translated some of the episodes from the original Sanskrit Mahābhārata in the pre-Vaisnava period are:—Harivara Vipra, Kawiratna Saraswati and Rudra Kandalī. The 'Jayadratha Vadhā' of the 'Drona Parva' was rendered by Kawiratna Saraswati, and Rudra Kandalī translated the portion of the 'Satyaki Pravā' of the 'Drona Parva'. Kawiratna Saraswati also wrote the 'Sakuntalā' episode in which the character of king Yajāti of the Ādi-Parva is depicted.

Mostly, the kings patronised and encouraged the poets to write the episodes of the Sanskrit Mahābhārata. The time of the compositions can be ascertained from the eulogies of the kings made by these poets in their works. Even the families and names of the poets are mentioned in these eulogies. The most famous poet Harivara Vipra was inspired mainly by the king of Kamatāpura. In the self-introduction of the poet, he writes:—

"Jaya jaya māpavar Durlabhānārayana rāja
Kamatāpure bhailā bhirabara,
Saputawandhave yeve sukhe rājya karantok
Jivantok sahasra vatsara.
Tāhāna rājyat thita sarvajana mononita
Aswamedha Parva madhye sāra,
Vipra Harihara kavi Harira(Gaurīra)carana sevi
Padabanihe karilo praśara". — pp 59, A.S. Itivṛtta

"Hail to king Durlabhānārayana, the great hero of Kamatāpura. May he live
thousands of years and happily, with his sons and friends, rule over his kingdom. Living in his kingdom the Brahmana Harvara, worshipping the feet of Gauri has expressed in verse, the Aswamedha Parva which is appreciated by the saintly people. According to Sir Edward Gait in "A History of Assam," p. 82, "Durlabhanarayana ruled towards the end of the thirteenth century.

Harvara Vipra excelled in his description of the battle, houses, markets, trees and plants, flowers. The pictures on the walls of the palace of Manipura are superb and these cast reflections on the Assamese culture of those days. Of course, it is true that he did not digress from the original Jaimini's Bharata. But he succeeded in attracting the hearts of the people in certain respects. He referred to the battle of Rama and Lava-Kusa just to show the similarity of the war between Arjuna and Vaburuwana.

The Pandavas wanted to perform the horse-sacrifice. So, they decorated a mighty horse and Arjuna followed the horse as the caretaker. There was instruction to punish the person who would dare take away the sacrificial horse. In course of time, the horse reached the kingdom of Manipura. Vaburuwana was the king of that land and his mother Citrangi had happened to be the wife of Arjuna. So, naturally, Citrangi instructed her son to return the captured horse back to Arjuna and ask his forgiveness. But this returning of the horse at the feet of Arjuna was taken as cowardice on the part of Vaburuwana. Arjuna reprimanded and called Vaburuwana an illegitimate child of Citrangi. This humiliation was too much for Vaburuwana to bear calmly. Vaburuwana ordered his soldiers to retaliate and take revenge on Arjuna.

A great battle ensued. The Pandavas suffered heavy casualties at the hands of determined Manipuri soldiers. Arjuna's powerful army was scattered, and subdued Arjuna lamented bitterly when he apprehended of his defeat at the hands of an unknown hero. The poet describes thus:

"Devasur manusyak sabako jinilo rope
Tebese balailo sabyasaci,"
Hastī guci mākhi bhallo go khojat tal gailo
Kacut bhāngilo mai kānci".

"I conquered the celestials, men and the demons in the battle and received the name 'Sabya sāci'. I am turned to a fly from an elephant and I have broken my sword in arcoids and drowned myself in the hoof-prints of the cows.

Figurative languages are used by the poet off and on. The language of the poet very often shows colloquial type. There is distinctive mark in words and style of Harihara which lead it to the language of Pre-Vaiṣṇavite period. The poet mentions the name of 'Gaurī' but he has regard for Viṣṇu and proclaims Viṣṇu as the Supreme god in his kāvya. In the end of each chapter, he appeals to people to pray to Hari. "Kṛṣṇa hona devaka smaribe pāsarili", "Jivantār marantār gati Nārayana", "Upāsīya kha-neka sumara Janārdana", are some typical examples of 'Hari bhakti'.

Kaviratna Sarasvatī had flourished during the reign of king Indranārayana, son of Durlabhanārayana of Kamatāpurā. He composed the 'Ja-yadratha Vadha', a sub-parva of the 'Drona parva'. According to the poet, the king Indranārayana was a devotee of lord Siva. The poet says:

"Nṛpa śīromani deva mahāmāni
Durlabhanārayana rāja,

Tāhāṁ tānai bhaīla dharmamai
Indranārayana Deva,

Yāta sarvakhanasana Indranārayana Deva
Bara denta Sādāśiva
Hauk Nāreswara pāncia Gaureśwara
pitā putre cirañjīva,
Choṭa Śilā nāma āche eka grāma
Jata grāma madhye sāra,
Āchila tāḥat jagat prakhyāt
Cakrapāṇi Śikadār."
(44)

The king Durlabhanarayana is the king of kings, and is highly respected. ....His son, Indranarayana is a virtuous one. He receives blessings always from the Lord Siva. May he be the king of the five Gauras and live happily with father and sons for ever. There is a village named Chotasila which is famous of all the villages and there lived Cakrapani Sikdar who was famous in the world. ....He was the chief of the pundits and dazzled like the unstrained full moon. King Durlabhanarayana praised him again and again. He died and there was sorrow everywhere.)

Kaviratna Saraswati gave a good description of the Jayadratha Vadha in epic style. His description of the "Kailaś" was superb and might be compared to that of "Harmohan" by Sri Sri Sankaradeva. The panoramic beauty of the "Kailaś" garden with numerous flowers and the exact wonderful features of the pramathas, the followers of Lord Siva; the beauty and youth of the females of the city also gave a glimpse of the artists imagination. The homely picture and phrases adopted by Harivaracandra are rarely seen in the writings of Kaviratna Saraswati. "Kaviratna Saraswati's description of the fight in 'Jayadratha Vadha' is very expressive. The selection of words and metre bearing them bring to minds eye the terrible state of the war."

Another famous Mahabharata poet was Rudra Kandalī. According to some compiler of the Caritputhī (biography), Rudra Kandalī's patron

* pp 230, Aspect of Early Assamese Literature- Assamese Version of the Mahabharata by U.C. Lekharu.*
king Tamradhvaja was the son of king Dharmarāyaṇa, a contemporary of Dur-
labhanarāyaṇa of Kamatāpura. However, the poet himself gave the introduction
of king Tamradhvaja.

"Srimanta Tamradhvaja anuje sahite,
Vriddhar samān dharma śisu bāyasata
Buddhit gambhir khamēvanta subha nay
Jāhār yaśaksarva jane prāsānsay.
Visnur bhakat Mahāmāya sar sevak,
purat samān kari daridra pālak.
Dui b'hāirsneha jena RāmaLaksmana
Sabānīhave jīvantok sahasra vatsar".

( The high soul Tamradhvaja and his brother though young are virtuous like old men. They are devotees of both Viṣṇu and Mahāmāya and they protect the subjects like their sons. They bear love to each other like Rāma and Lakṣmana. May they live a thousand years with their friends. )

This poet translated the episode of the entrance of Satyaki, a famous warrior of the Yādava race. He took part in the battle by becoming an ally of the pāndavas. The heroic actions of Satyaki in the upa-parva of Jayadratha Vadha were aptly rendered by Rudra Kandali. Very often, he gave summary and sometimes he was true to the original. The characters and the descriptions of the battle were nicely portrayed by the poet. In certain matters, he has succeeded in attracting the heart of the readers by bringing in homely similes in scenes.

(11) Patronage of King Naranārāyaṇa in the matter of rendering the Mahābhārata into Assamese Verse: Rāma Saraswatī, the great Assamese Mahābhārata poet, was patronised by the king Naranārāyaṇa of Koc Behār. By recognising his talents and wisdom, king Naranārāyaṇa entrusted him to translate the Sanskrit Mahābhārata into Assamese verse. The king had, not only encouraged the poet
in rendering service but supplied him necessary help books and manuscripts and commentaries. He even helped the poet by giving money and placed servants at Rama Saraswati's disposal. The king's patronage becomes evident from the following passages:

"Āmāka karilā ājñā parama sādare
Bhāratar pada tumī kariyoka sare
Āmāra grhate āche tīkā bhāṣya yata
Niyoka āpona grha diloho samaste
Ehi buli rājā save baladhi jorāi
paṭhāilā pustaka save āmāsara thāi
Nānā vastra alaṃkāra dilā bahutara
Dāsa dāsi diyā mana baḍhāilā āmār ".

V.V. 840-841, Puspaharana Vana Parva, Assamese Mahābhārata

(With great courtesy he told: "Please translate the Bhārata into (Assamese) verse. I give you all commentaries that are at my place; take them to your place."). So saying the king sent me all the books on a bullock-cart. He also gave me encouragement, sufficient money, clothes, ornaments and servants.

The king Naranarāyana who was well-versed in all sastras asked questions after hearing the Bhārata. " He used to listen carefully for days and nights together. The persons who could collect and hand over even portions of Mahābhārata to the king, were rewarded to their hearts' content."

"Rāma Saraswati received sufficient money and land from the king which enabled him to live for seven generations."

The king Naranarāyana flourished in the sixteenth century. His rule lasted from 1540 A.D. to 1585 A.D. He patronised Rāma Saraswati. Rāma Saraswati accepted the contract to translate the Mahābhārata. The presence of Śrīmanta Sankaradeva might have encouraged and inspired Saraswati in this great task. Naranarāyana and his brother-general Sukładhvaja gave

*pp 176. Rāma Saraswati and his work by J. Sarma. Aspect of E. Assa. I
*pp 56. V.V. 825-826, Baghāsura Vadha.
enough money and encouragement to the poets. Occasionally they gave rewards for any work on the Mahābhārata. Actually, during the reign of this king, Assamese literature and learning rose to the highest pinnacle. Eminent scholars were entrusted to compose, to translate, to render many sastras (scriptures) for the benefit of the people.

Rāma Sarasvatī also introduced other poets like Kamsāri to the king and got the royal permission and approval to render some verses of the Mahābhārata stories. Rāma Sarasvatī's genuineness and genius were appreciated by the king as well as by renowned scholars. The king and his brother-general epithetted on him some title in recognition of his work. He writes:-

"Pitrīye mātrye Aniruddha nāma dīlā
Kavīcānda nāma mora Dewāne bulīlā
Rāma Sarasvatī nāma nrpati dilānta
Bhāratar pada moka karā bulilanta".

V.V. 1424-1425, Puspaharana Vana Parwa, Assā. Maha.

("My parents called me Aniruddha, Suklādhvaja gave the name of Kavīcānda, the king bestowed on me the name of Rāma Sarasvatī and asked me to compose the Mahābhārata ")

The poet praised the king Naraṇārayana and his brother for their help and patronage in the rendering of the Mahābhārata. A few eulogies about the king are given below:-

"Hail to the unequalled king Naraṇārayana, who is busy day and night with the search for sastras on religion, morals, the purānas and the Bhārata. It is he who has brought to his court all the pundits from Gaura and Kāmarūpa and have placed them in possession of sastras. There in his court, the wise men expound the sastras everyday. I have also been brought there. At the injunction of the king I have composed the verses in great joy ".

"He is patient, forgiving, bountiful and highly saintly and is ever

* Verses 7-9, Ādi Vana Parwa, Assamese Mahābhārata,
full of reverence to Visnu and the Vaisnavas. He worships at the feet of Madhava in every manner. Such a king ordered me ". (Verses 3:54-55, Aivapanam

"Hail to king Narasārāyana versed in all the sastras who takes the greatest delight in listening the sastras (Bharata). Day and night he listen the Bharata ". (Baghāsura Vadha, Vana Parva).

"But Narasārāyana, the greatest of the kings was a saint and he sent for me and asked me to compose verses of the Bhārata. At his word I have composed twenty-four thousand verses. The original work of Vyāsa contains thirty-thousand slokas ".

Rāma Saraswati received patronisation from kings like Raghudeva, son of Sukladhvaja, Parīksitāsanārayana, Dharmānārayana and Sundaranārayana. He had nearly completed the work of translation of the Mahābhārata during the period i.e., the sixties of the 16th century to the forties of the 17th century.

It is doubtful whether the other kings were well-versed in sastras like their predecessor king Narasārāyana. We find one eulogy of the king Sundaranārayana in the episode of Sābitri under ' Santi Parva ' and this is considered to be the writing of Rāma Saraswati in later period ".

Rāma Saraswati accompanied kings from one place to another with the movement of the kings. He went to Vijayanagara with king Raghudeva and to Darrang during the reign of Dharmānārayana.

(iii) Rāma Saraswati, the great Mahābhārata poet: Rāma Saraswati surely occupied a prominent place among the writers of Assam during the sixteenth century. Mostly the poets were generally attracted to the subject-matters dealing with the activities of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Rāma Saraswati himself had the highest esteem for Sankatadeva, the famous religious preacher-reformer of

Assam Vaisnnavism. He not only translated the Sanskrit Mahabharata but also composed some episodes describing strenuous life of the Pándavas in the forests. He attributed the source of his subject-matter to some purânas and samhitâs like Siva purâna, Hamsa-kâki, Yamala-samhitâ which are yet to be discovered. Sometimes, we are led to believe that these stories were his own unique creations based on popular legends and traditionally prevalent in the country. The episodes like Manicanira, Asvakarna, Sindhuyâtra, are really typically Assamese materials rightly fitted in the stories.

The detailed account of the poet's life is not available. His identification can be traced from the writings in connection with the Mahābhārata's rendering. He was a native of the village Camariya of Kamarupa.

"Kāmarūpa madhye grāma nāhike upām
Tate grāma bhailā Camariya yāra nāma ".

(49)

V.V, 1350, Bhīma Parva (Assamese Mahābhārata)

("In Kamarupa, there is a village without parallel, known as Camariya").

Grāma madhye Saroddhara Pacariyā nāma gr yāra
Kaliyuge srestha likhe yāka,
Brāhmaṇa sakale nita Bhagavata avisrama
Carca kare pātiyā sabhāk".

- -Vīrāta Parva : quoted by D.N. Bezbaruah in "Assamiya bhāsa aru sāhityar buraṇji ".

("Counted as the matchless in Kaliyuga is a village known as Pacariya-the best among villages;
there the Brāhmaṇas assemble for continuous holy discussions on the Bhāgavata ").

Rāma Saraswati was the youngest son of Bhima sena Kavisuramâni. The eldest was Kavicandra and Rāma Saraswati was the younger.

* pp 172, Rāma Saraswati and his works by J. Sarma (Aspects of E. As. J.)
@ pp 172, --Ditto--
In course of time, he had two sons. Kavlicandra was the elder and he was pure of mind. Rama Saraswati was the younger.

Kavlicandra, the brother of Rama Saraswati, was a worshipper of Govinga. He was much delighted in the discourse of holy Bhagavata. Rama Saraswati learnt his lesson from his talented brother who inspired him to write the verses.

The teachings of the Bhagavata Purana and other vaisyavite Puranas influenced Ramasaraswati to a great extent. He had also wide knowledge of the Sanskrit works relating to poetry, music etc. When he translated the Vadha kavyas, he inserted some teachings from the Bhagavata and the Puranas.

Mukundadeva was his spiritual guru or preceptor. He got the teaching blessings of his guru for his works.

"Pranamo Mukundadeva mora nija guru ".

V. 88, Vyanjana Parva (D.F.A.S.)

I bow down to my own guru Mukundadeva.

"Pranamo Mukundadevar carane gune nahi samasara
Ama Karatagantra nama dilka Kavlicandra nama ara ".

V.V. 3326, Vijaya Parva. (Assamese Mahabharata)

I bow down at the feet of Mukundadeva who is unequalled in virtue. Mukundadeva conferred on me the titles of Bharatacandra and Kavlicandra.

Rama Saraswati could not complete his works under the patronage of one king. He worked under different kings of the Koc dynasty. He got his freedom in his works and was encouraged in one way or another. He moved from place to place along with the migration of his patron king. He listened attentively to the holy scriptures in Vijaynagara, the capital of king Baghudeva.

* pp 172, Rama Saraswati and his works by J. Sarma (Aspects of F.A.C.I.)
and he also took assignment of translating those into Assamese verse. The last works of Rama Saraswati on the Mahabharata was perhaps on Savitri during the reign of Sunjaranarayan, successor of Dharmanarayana of Pargana.

Of course, it is true that Rama Saraswati could not finish the renderings of the entire Mahabharata. He completed the Vana Parva including Vyasaasram with more verses and parvas, viz., Adi Parva, Virata Parva, Udyoga Parva, Bhima Parva and Karna Parva. Other poets also helped him in these parvas.

Besides Vana Parva, the other parvas were either translated or made paraphrases. But, the irrelevant portions or matters loosely connected to the main story, were discarded and thus the present Mahabharata is made abridged to the one-fourth of the origin. Nevertheless, he was true to the origin. One example may be cited here:

"Dharmamaya bhrkṣa Yudhishthira mahabala
Nakula Sahadeva tāte bhaila phulaphala
Mani ardha sipa mule bhedicho patała
Bhima Dhananjaya dui bhāi bhailā dāla."

V.V. 70-80, Udyoga Parva (Assam se Mahabharata)

("Yudhishthira is a mighty tree of virtue and righteousness. Nakula and Sahadeva are the flowers and the fruits thereon. I am the passing down to Patała and keeping the tree fixed. Bhima and Dhananjaya are the branches.

Rama Saraswati wanted the Mahabharata to be popular book among the masses. So, he deliberately avoided the most theological and philosophical discourses specially mentioned in the Gita portion. To tell the truth, there are only fifty-seven verses of Gita in the Bhima Parva of the Assamese version. Rama Saraswati's purpose was served. The essential portion that might attract and touch the heart of the mass were especially selected for the purpose. He was not contented with what was in the original Mahabharata and he tried to amplify the facts by bringing similar episodes from the holy scriptures like the Bhāgavata to sing the praises and the glories of Lord Krisna.

(51)
He gave a real description of the Pandavas during exile period. His descriptions of some of the episodes of Vana Parva in Assamese version are praiseworthy. The activities of the Pandavas were confined to the meetings of the seers and sages and they had overcome little opposition from the evil-doers as shown in the Sanskrit. But, the Pandavas of the Assamese Mahabharata had to struggle every inch for their survival. Sometimes, they were killed in battles and later on they were restored to life either by the celestials or by Krishna Himself. Once, even the four brothers of Yudhishthira were brought to life with the help of a jewel which was placed around the neck of each one. In Manichandra Ghoṣa parva, Bhima made four brothers and Draupadi alive by touching theirs bodies with a jewel that he managed from the 'Nagaloka'. On the whole, the Pandavas were made instrumental in killing the evil-doers of the world and asked to maintain peace, tranquility, tranquillity and virtue. This divine mission was performed through warfare though they were all Vaisnavas.

The unique creation of the Vadhakavyas is an asset; and their inclusion in Vana Parva has added charm and grace to the Assamese Mahabharata for which the poet has become immortal.

(iv) His Assistants: Rama Sarasvatī was helped in uphill task of translation of the Mahabharata by other poets like Kamsāri, Saṅgara Khari etc. apart from the constant help of his Gopināṭh Pāthaṅka. According Ramayama to Rama Sarasvatī's version, Kamsāri was the most prominent poet whom he introduced to his patron king Narānārayana and secured royal permission. (a) Kamsāri: He was a contemporary of the great Mahabharata poet Rama Sarasvatī. Rama Sarasvatī referred to this poet by writing the following verse:

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Kamsāri pramukhye rśi(kavi) ācha yata yata
Si saveo palavāya karilā pācata
Amāka bulilā pāce saṁśota vacana
Amākro padacaya karibaka mana
Rājata kāhini kari ḍilo katakhāni,
Tarāsava padakari āche mane māni
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He assisted Rama Sarasvatī in translation of the Mahabharata by other poets like Kamsāri, Saṅgara Khari etc.
(The famous risi-like poets like Kamsari who are in the assembly rendered some verses afterwards. They expressed their desire through hints to compose verses. The matter was referred to the king by me and they did verses accordingly.)

Kamsari wrote the Kirata Parva - sub-parva and some portions of the Vīrata Parva which consist of the snatching away of the cows of the North and the South.

He completed the Kirata Parva in seven hundred and twenty-five verses. This parva consists of Arjuna's mastering over celestial weapons in heaven under the guidance of Indra, his refusal of Urvasī, the killing of Nivāta Kavaca and Paulama, pleasing of Sāṅkara (Mahādeva) for the 'Pāñcapata' weapon through actual fighting with Siva and coming back to earth.

Kamsari was considered to be the foremost descendants of the Kayastha family of Yosadhara Khan, perhaps, one of the names of the poet was Gābharu Khan. The poet gives his self-introduction in Vīrata Parva as follows:

"Bhūyār madhyat pravala kulat
Achilanta Siromani,
Śrī Dāmul Dakhā grāma nāme jānī
Achila Satya Bhabani.
Nija kalavaśe āyu avasane
Mrtur samipa jāne,
Iśvarar nāma smarana kariyā
Calilā Viśnu vavane.
Jñānī madhe sāra tāhāne prāvara
Srimanta Gābharukhān nāma,
Haripada sevi mahā yatna kari
Racilā pada upāma ".

V.V. 571-572, Virata Parva, Assamese Mahābhārata.

(Satyā Bhawani, the foremost of the powerful Bhuyan family lived in a village named Dāmul Dakhā. He passed away to the Viśnu-Bhawan by tak-
the name of Lord at the time of his death. His foremost wise son Gābharū Khān wrote the verses carefully by prostrating himself to god."

Kamsārī got himself introduced as 'Kāyastha Kamsari '. Again, he composed his verses at a certain place where Śrī Śrī Madhavadeva established his sastrā. The poet received inspiration in the company of the Vaisnava saint. His description of the battle between the Kauravas and Virāta is plain and pleasing. He has succeeded in showing his mastery over the language. The verses of the Virāta Parva are so pleasantly worked that they provide for both enjoyment and thrill.

Kamsārī was a vaisnava and a devotee of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. He appealed to all to listen to the story of the Bharata which would enable them to get rid of death. He took the name of Rāma and Hari and wanted all to follow the same path for their enlightenment.

"Bolanta Kamsārī sunā baranārī
g ṇukhat neribā nāma
Puruṣa uḍhārā apuniyo tarā
Dāki bolā Rāma Rāma ".

V.V. 714, pp 48, Virāta Parva ,Assamese Mahābhārata.

"Listen, O', Mighty lady, Kamsārī says," Never stop singing Nāma; utter Rāma Rāma and attain salvation - for yourself as well as for your forefathers)."

"Towards the end he gives some particulars about himself, the translation of which is the following:

"Śrī Yosacandra Khan, the chief in Kāmarūpa, adores the feet of Gopāla. He is virtuous, magnanimous, grave and saintly. The world sings his praises. He with the kinsmen protected the friends from the Kirātas who surround the moon-like Kāyastha garden. In the Kauth Kāyastha family was in fitness born Śrīmanta Madhava - may he ever be victorious. In his place (satra) the Kāyastha Kamsārī has composed verses of the Phirata ".

"Śrīmanta Gābharū Khān is endowed with sons and brothers. The
Kayastha Pitambara writes at his words *.

Gopinath Pathaka: Gopinath Pathaka was the worthy son of Rama Saraswati. He helped his father to a great extent. He rendered Drona Parva, Sabha Parva as well as Swargarohana Parva. These were translated during the reign of Dharamnarayan, the king of Darrang who patronised him. The poet gives his particulars in the verses 4011-4012 of the Drona Parva:

"Pāt Chaurā nāme āche eka grāma
Chilā Kaun nāma yāra
Āti bitopana sarva susampanma
Dui jena swarnahara.
Sehi grāmesvar mahā desadhara
Bhīmasena dwijavara .
Yāra yaśa rāsi adyāpi prakāśi
Yena pūrṇa śāsadhara
Kulasāla santa Śrimanta mahanta
Mahagyāni kriyāniṣṭha .
Yāra dāna dharme jagat jurila
Apara yena Vāsiṣṭha
Tāhāna santaki Rama Saraswati
Pathaka Sukładhvajar
Yena Šuka guru Angirā Tamburu
Āno nuhi pāṇantarā .
Tāhāna tanaya āti sisunay
Gopināṭh dwijabare
Hraswa dīrgha chande racilā prabandhe
Kathā Mahābhāratare n,
V.V. 4011-4012, Drona Parva, Assamese Mahābhārata.

( "There is a village named Pātchaurā. It is also known as Silokona. It was very beautiful and looked like two gold-chains. The matter of

the village a great man of the country, was the Brahmin Bhimasena. His praises are still sung. He was like a full moon. He was a man of character, a saint, lustrous, worthy, profoundly wise and knew the injunctions of the sastras. His bounty was known over the earth. He was like a second Vasistha. His son Rama Saraswati was a reader at the place of Sukladhwa. He was like a Suka, an Angirā or a Tamhāra and could be compared to none. His son Gopināth like a child has composed the verses of the Mahābhārata in short and long rhymes."

Gopināth was a brahmin though he could not avail himself of the company of the saints. In Assamese Mahābhārata, he narrated like this:

"Brāhmaṇar ghare janam labhilo
na bhaila sādhura pāś ".

V43, pp. 27, Drona Parva, Assamese Mahābhārata.

Most probably, the poet was also a reader under the king Dharmanarayana. In 266 verse of the Drona parva, he gave a clarion call to all to listen with rapt attention the name of Hari. The reader Gopinath asked the people to worship Hari.

Sometimes, the poet himself used different names like Dvija Gopināth, Gopināth pāthaka and Kandali. Mostly, the informations about the lives of those poets are not wholly dependable. We are to depend solely on the verses of their writings in their these books.

Whatever might be the fact, all poets including Gopināth, were devotees of Lord Kṛṣṇa. They considered themselves to be the servants of the Lord and appealed to the readers to engage themselves in the meditation of God.

Gopināth pāthaka also wrote the "Swargarohana Parva" in 306 verses. He disclosed his identity in verses 171 and 172 (not found in present edition) - "The village named Silakona in Patowana was adorned with Brāhmaṇas. There king Sukladhwa at the time of lunar eclipse made offerings to the Ganges. Living at such a village and observing my own religion I have composed verses of Swargarohana Parva of Bharata in
various short and long metres ".  

Dāmodara Dās: Dāmodara Dās was also a contemporary poet of Rāma Sārvabhoti. He translated Sālya Parva and a portion of Drona Parva. Introducing himself, the poet says:—

"Barpeta nāma grāma anupāma
Madhyata Kāmarūpar.
Niketā jale ardhek candimar
Ākṛti āti suniara.

Sinkera Madhava Rāma Dāmodara
Thākiya pūrbe jahit.
Fāsandhara patha dūr kari Hari
Devaka byakta karilā,
Yāhāra kṛpāta durācara āti
Sāṁsāra simheta tarilā .... 789.
Sahimatā ito dūr kari mahā
Agyān nāma āndhara,
Nailanta bekat Śrī Bhāgavata
Bhattacarīya nāma yāra.
Tāhāna caran renu śire dhari
Mahā murkha Dāmodara,
Parama gahana Bhāratara pada
Karila Sālya Parvar ... 791.

V. V. 788 -791, Sālya Parva, Assamese Mahābhārata.

(Barpeta is an unequalled village in Kāmarūpa. It looks like the reflection of the water half-moon in the water. Previously Sānkara, Madhava, Rāma and Dāmodaradeva lived there singing the praise of lord Kṛṣṇa. Even the most wicked were purged of their sins and with their blessings crossed the ocean of the world. Likewise there flourished Bhāgavata Bhattacarīya; and

pp 247, Aspects of Early Assamese Literature article by U.C. Iekharu.
the most ignorant Dāmodara Dāś having the former's foot-dust on his head makes verses of Salya Parva.)

From his introduction, it is apparent that the poet flourished probably in the 17th century A.D.

A disciple of Bhāgavata Bhattacharjiya as he was, Dāmodara must have been a true Vaiṣṇava.

He praises all the gurus like Śankara-deva, Mādhava-deva, Rāma and Dāmodara-deva who preached vaiṣṇavism. According to the poet, a man could achieve spiritual height by listening to and chanting the names and glories of Lord Kṛṣṇa. The poet's emphasis on the philosophical doctrines in the last few lines of each of his chapters bears striking resemblance with Śankara-deva's view.

Vidyā Pañcānana: Vidyā Pañcānana was also a contemporary poet of Rama Saraswatī. His patron king was Dharmanārayana, the king of Darrang. Dharmanārayana was named by king Swaranārayana of Kcó Bhēr. Some historian opined that this name was originally given by one of the Ahom kings at the the time of subjugation. Whatever might be the controversy, it is true that many poets were favoured and encouraged by the kings. As both Rama Saraswatī and Vidyā Pañcānana rendered the same Bhisma Parva under the instructions of the same king, some people believed these two poets to be the same.

Like other poets, Vidyā Pañcānana also gave his self-introduction in the Bhisma Parva:

"Brhat nagara tastrikarana je sthana
Martye deve yatne taka kaichā nirmana.
Nānā divya patastrā devānga basana
Jito nagaratā sādā hove utapana.

Sehi nagaratā dvijavara āchilanta,
Nāme Kanthābharaṇa ye prama mahanta.
Tahāna kanistha putre guru Gopalara
Nriyat jhari dui carana sunāra,

(56)
In the great city of the Tantras, built by the God Martyadeva, there are produced various silk and other cloths fit for the gods. In that city there was a great Brahman named Kantabharana. His youngest son Vidya Pancanana, having adored the feet of Guru Gopala at heart, composed the character of Ambā.

The character of Ambā in the Bhīṣma Parva was composed in the year 1570 Saka on the 14th day of the dark lunar part of the month of Śrāvana in the Asvini Nakṣatra. The poet finishes the Gita portion in fifty-eight verses (156 to 215).

Vidyā Pančānana, too, wrote a different version of Karna Parva though this is not included in the present edition of Assamese Mahābhārata.

The poet belonged to Barnagar (Brhatnagara).

Rāma Mīśra: Rāma Mīśra was also a Mahābhārata poet. He wrote a different version of Bhīṣma Parva during the reign of Ahom king Jayadhvaja Simha (1650–1663). From the genealogy, it appears that Rāma Mīśra was the son of Mādhava Kandali (Ahom ambassador—not the Rāmāyana poet) and grandson of Bhāratī. Again, Bhāratī was the son of Kalāpakantra who hailed from Narayanaapura of North Lakhimpura.

The poet wrote this parva at the command of the king Jayadhvaja Simha's father-in-law who was also a minister. Probably, the book was composed during 1650–60 A.D. This poet also gave his self-introduction as follows:

Nārāyanapura achileka Vipravara,
Namata Kalāpakantra dvija vamsadhara
Kalāpakantra pahiilanta avirāma,
Tahāna tanaya bhaila haribhāthi nāma.
Bhagavata Sāstra rāta tāhāna tanaya
Mādhava Kandali tāna putra bhailā tay

(There was a Brahmin named Kalāpacandra, a scion of the Brahmin family of Narāyanapura. Kalāpacandra studied indefatigable and his son Harībhāthi took keen interest in the Bhagavata. The son of Harībhāthi was Mādhava Kandali.)

Again,

"Gṛhāśrama dharma ēcbē svakarma ācari
Dutai tanay bhailā kāla avasari.
Kaništha tanaya bhaila Rāma Misra nāma,
Rājāra śvasure sneha kare anupama,
Pada karībāka moka dila anumati.

(In course of time, two sons were born to him during his gṛhāśrama dharma. The youngest son Rāma Misra was loved by the father-in-law of the king who gave permission to me (Rāma Misra) to compose verses).

The Bhīṣma Parva which was included in The descriptive catalogue of Assamese Manuscripts (pp 103) by Hem Goswami, gives 3564 couplets of verses - 1 to 759 and 1980 to 2287 were composed by Rāma Misra and the middle verses from 1 to 1979 of second series were written by Rāma Saraswatī was from 1 to 529 verses.

Now, it has come to light that the Assamese poets who were entrusted with translation works performed their job creditably. Sometimes, the same parva was translated by more than one poet under different patron kings: Dāmodara Dvija: Dāmodara Dvija composed "Śalya Parva". He wrote this parva at the request of king Mākaraśrava of the Koc kingdom. He gave his identification as stated below:

"Brahmanar thāi, yanma ēcho pāi, sanākāre bhailo dvija
Kṛṣṇar carāne bhakati nupaje, erilo svadharmā nija.

Vipra Dāmodara kahe nirantarā, citta savādhana kari
Āpunirtarā puruṣa udihāra, daki bolā Hari Hari".

*pp 116. Asamiya Sāhityar Itivṛtta by Dr. S. K. Sarma.
(61)

I am born of Brahmin family and have become twice-born (brahmin) by virtue of customs. The devotion fails to throw me to the feet of Krishna and I renounce my svadharma. Vipra Damodara proclaims—rescue your fore-fathers by controlling passion and ultimately attain salvation by chanting the name of Hari.

The poet's work is conspicuous and insignificant for which the editor chose the other writings of Damodara Das. The details of the poet's work are not traceable.

Sri Natha Dvīja: The poet translated the Ādi Parva, Draupadi Swayambara and Drona Parva into Assamese. Srinatha Dvīja got inspiration from king Prananaṛayana of Koc Behar during the period of 1625-1665 A.D. The patron kings encouraged him considerably. The poet disclosed his identity as follows:

"Malla mahāpālar kanistha sabodara
Suklādhwaja nāma deva bhoge Purandara
Tahāna pāthaka mahāmātya Bhabānanda
Kāmarūpa dvijakula Kumudinicantra.
Nāmata paniita āri tahāna tanaya
Raghudeva nrpatir pātra mahāsāy,
Tahānda kanistha Rāmeswara Suddhamāla.
Srinātha hāilen jyestha tahara santati.

Prananaṛayana deva āma paramāne
Drona Parva kathā biracila sūtā mane "

(Suklādhwaja, the youngest brother of the king Malladeva, is like Puraniara, the king of the gois. Bhabānanda, the Prime minister, is the reader of Suklādhwaja. This ēvīja is born of the family of Kumudinicantra of Kāmarūpa. His son Pandit Rāi is the courtier of the king Raghudeva. Rāmeswara is the youngest and Srinātha is the eldest son of Pandit Rāi. With the order of Prananaṛayana, the son of Srinātha, I, with an open mind

@ pp 118. Assamīya Sāhityar Itivrtta by Dr. S.N.Sarma.
compose the Drona Parva).

Kaviśekhara: Kaviśekhara, the poet of king Bīrnārāyana composed Kirāta Parva of the Drona Parva of the Mahābhārata. The time of the work is considered to be 1537 saka (1605 A.D.). His manner of writing can be visualised in his self-introductory lines:

"Sindhupakṣa vāna bīḍdhū sākar samai
Makarat deva dinakarar udai.
Guru din pañcamī pakṣa parahana
Kānane kusumākar karila prasthāna.
Sugandha samārā saśādha sañcarila,
Mana mathībāka yena manoja milila.
Jāme jame Bīrnārāyana naireswar
Have jame naratanu Bihāra nagare.
Bhabāmana naṃe Candrasenara manda,
Nīja jharmo keta nīja kulera mandala,
Hena mahāsaya naṃe tanai alapamati.
Bolā Rāma Rāma Kaviśekhara budati."

(In Saka 1537, on Thursday, the sun god was in Makara and the tithi was Panchami of the bright-fortnight of the moon. It was just on the eve of spring. The flowers in the garden were blossoming with fragrance lending their sweet aroma to the breeze which, like Monojo (Cupid), intoxicated the mind. In such an atmosphere the king Bīrnārāyana was born as though to be reborn again and again in this city of Bihāra. Bhabāmananda, the son of Chandrasena, acquired the highest honour by dint of sheer merit. Son of such a great soul, Kaviśekhara, the possessor of little knowledge, entreats all to meditate on the name of Rāma).

Another poet Ovija Kavirāja translated a portion of the Drona Parva and Bhīṣma Parva during the reign of the king Mahīnirānāyana who flourished in 1666-1680 A.D. The poet writes: — "Kamatāra pati Mahīnira

* pp 119. Asamiya Sāhityar Itivṛtta by Dr. S. M. Sarma. (1st Edn.)
The rendering of the whole Mahābhārata could not be complete during the lifetime of Pāma Sarasvatī. His active assistants were Gopi Nath Pāṭhaka, Dāmodara Dās, Viṇā Paṇḍānana and Kāmasāri. Other poets composed some episodes of the Mahābhārata at a later period. Actually, the completion of the eighteen parvas could be done long after the death of famous poet Rāma Sarasvatī. Here is an account of the Mahābhārata poets of later stage as stated below.

Lakṣminātha Dvīja: The poet flourished in the second half of the century. He was the grandson of pandit Sarvānanda of Melesa gaon in Kamrupa. Pandit Sarvānanda received a special prize from the Ahom king Puinra Simha (1696 – 1714 A.D.) for his brilliancy and wisdom. It is mentioned in the history as well as in ‘Sānti Parva’.

In this parva, the discourse is given by Kuru chief Bhism to Yudhisthira to pacify his mental discomfort due to killing of his relatives. The poet analyses the different virtues of a man through small episodes. The various discourses relating to religion, politics, society etc have also been delivered by Bhism from his death-bed. The original Sānti Parva was rendered in toto into Assamese version. The language of the poet Lakṣminātha is very simple and lucid although there is little scope for imagination. He helps the reader in comprehending the most difficult problems and doctrines expressed in a very simplified form. This may be justified from the following example of the simplicity of his language:

"Ati kṣamavanta bhailasa nṛpati, bhaye pāhā barā līlā,
Rhi betu Rājā yudu mahāheka ,bhailyo mile apāya, taryo, A - Līthā.

(If the king becomes extremely liberal, the servants would get indulgence. So, the king should not behave liberally. Otherwise, anger is inevitable.)

Lakṣminātha was a brahmin. He finished his last line by declaring himself as 'Dvīja Lakṣminātha'. Perhaps, he was also a poor brahmin. He dedicated himself at the feet of lord the lord and appealed to all to
have faith in one's devotion for God.

In page number 81 of the Assamese Mahabharata (edited by H. V. Dutta Barua), it may be seen that sometimes the poet used the name 'Dvija Maheswara' in the concluding stanza. Possibly, 'Dvija Laksmi Natha' and 'Dvija Maheswara' were the same poet.

The poet was a sincere devotee of Lord Krishna who called him father and mother and a bridge between the world and heaven.

Prithu Ram Dvija: The poet Prithu Ram Dvija wrote the Mausala Parva of Assamese Mahabharata in the last decade of the 18th century (1798 A.D.). He referred to the time of his patron minister Kalia Phomora during the reign (1795-1810 A.D.) of Swargadeo Kamaleswara Simha. The poet mentioned the minister and his three brothers in his self-identification:

"Jaya yukta pratapavallava mantribara
Sandhikai bamsata janma gunara manira,
Krsnabarna kalahaba tarunimohana
Sakalo sampurqa anqa nahi khati-khuna."

-pp 22, Mausala Parva, V.V.433-34, Assa, Mahabha.

Phimate mantrivara nahnba saidai
Tahana krita am thaki tini bhai
Pharatara sesa katho racilo payara
Dosa kekhi budhajane khemiba amara ."

"VIV. 433-434, pp 29, Mausala Parva , Assa, Mahabha.

( Fail to the minister pratapavallava who is born with virtue in the family of Hamilton. Though black in complexion, women are enamoured of his beauty. His character is taintless and his physique perfect. A minister of his kind is rarely to be met with. He patronised and inspired us (three brothers) to compose the last portion of the Mahabharata. Pardon is asked for the shortcomings which may kindly be ignored.)

The poet also composed the ' Mahaprabhakti ' and 'Swargarohana Parwa '. The Swargarohana Parva was composed during the patronage of
the king. It would be clear from the following lines of the poet in 'Swa-
ragārohana Parva':

"Bhāgavata same śīrṣa nāma śāroddhara,
Bharatara saha same racilo payāra.
Gurura caraṇa dui sāvati dhariya
Mūḍamati śīrya haiyā achoho raciya.

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Prāgyotishpurata ami thāki aprayāse
Rājāra ēdese raco Bhārata harase.

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Madhu māsi sanīvare dui ghati rāti
Rāma kara muni Candre sāke samāpati."

V.V. 211-14, Swargārohana Parva, Assamese Mahābhārata.

( I have composed payara of the last portion of the Bhārata by inserting the
doctrines of the Bhāgavata. A humble disciple of little learning, I have
composed this by hugging at the feet of my Guru. ... I have written Bhāra-
sta granthiky gladly, at the command of the king having lived comfortably
in the prāgyotishpura. ... I was born in the year 1723 Saka (1803 A.D.)
at the second prahara of a saturday.)

The poet, who was a Brahmin, belonged to Bhāravaj gotra or com-
munity. He confessed that he was not well-versed in scriptures (sastras).
Probably, he had a limited family and his two brothers were also living
with him.

Sāgara Khari Daivatā: Sāgara Khari wrote the "Kurmavali Vadha" of
the Assamese Mahābhārata in the same style adopted by Rāma Saraswatī in
Vadha kavyas.

According to professor U.C. Lekharu (Aspect of Early Assamese
Literature, page 235), the poet was a resident of Sila (Barpīta). The
last verse of his writing corroborates this statement though Dr. Satyendra
Nath Sarma, in his "Asamiya Sahityar Itivṛtta", refers to this poet to be
an inhabitant of Darrang district as 'Khari' indicates a title conferred
The story is said to have been taken from the 'Kumuda Purāṇa', but no such Purāṇa is now extant. The poet creditably acquitted himself of the description of the battle between the Kauravas and the king Kurmavali. Ultimately, it was Bhīṣma, the great general of the Kauravas, who killed the king Kurmavali. Eventually, the superiority of the Vaisnavas was shown through this episode.

The poet was also a true Vaisnava. He selected a tale that attracted the attention of the mass people.

Kāvīrāja Mīśra: Scanty information is found about this poet. Kāvīrāja Mīśra was a Vaisnava. He composed the 'Gadā Parva' in 377 verses. He gave his introduction as follows:

"Nai śāstra āśā āti śūnayai
Nije Kavicandra bolo."

(V.V. 377, Gadā Parva; Assamese Mahābhārata) (Having no knowledge of 'śāstras', I am like a chill in wisdom and yet call myself 'Kavicandra').

This Gadā Parva is included in 'Salya Parva'.

Durgā Prasād: The poet had another name known as Devarama. He wrote the 'Sauptika Parva' in the Saka year 1828. The story was related to the killing of five sons of Draupāi along with the massacre of the Panchalas at dead of night.

Gangā Dās: As a poet of the 18th century, he composed a portion of the 'Aswamedha Parva' which contained 3391 verses. Gangā Dās was the son of one Swastivara.

The material was taken from the 'Jaimini Bhārata'. The first portion was written by the poet. The poet sometimes liked to call himself as Gangā Dās. Sometimes used his name as 'Gangā Dās Sen'.

Bhabāni Dās: As one of the Mahābhārata poets of the 18th century, Bhabāni Dās translated an epic of Rāmāyaṇa. He introduced some songs inside his
Subuddhi Rai: Subuddhi Rai was also a poet of the eighteenth century. The last portion of the original 'Aswamedha Parva' of Jaimini was translated by him.

The poet imitated the style of Sukavi Narayanadeva by introducing some songs with rhyme. But, the information about this poet is insufficient to judge his merit. Again, there was little liberty who wishes to be true to the original Phārata of Jaimini.

The royal poets of Koc Behār: Some prominent poets were assigned with the works of translation of Sanskrit Mahābhārata. The patron king was Harendra-nārāyaṇa who flourished probably in the 18th century. During his reign and patronage, Dvija Mahānātha composed "Prasthānika Parva". There were proofs which showed the translations of "Swargarohana Parva" by Madhava-candra, "Sabhā Parva" by Jayadeva and Dvija Prajasundara, "Karna Parva" by Dvija Lakṣmīnātha, "Rūṣṭaka Parva" and "Santi Parva" by Dvija Rāghu-mātha, "Rūṣṭaka Parva" etc by Dvija Kavirāja. The translations are of high standard. It is clear from those references made by the poets, that Koc Behār was an integral part of Kamarūpa. On many occasions, these poets gave their identities either as "Swāmelī Brahmānas" (brāhmins of own land) or the brāhmins of Kamarūpa. Dvija Rāmananda in his "Gaṇa Parva" said:

"Jaya Jalpīsa amśe avan śivā,  
Hareniranārayaṇa yena pañcaśara  
Sobhi śēche śiva śiva Kamarūpa desē,  
Śuvañyaka jagaṇa bhupaveśe"... pp 180. Anotdhat, 1871

(Hail to Jalpīsa, the king Hareniranārayaṇa, who is like a god on earth.
The king with his cupid like beauty has illumined his kingdom of Kamarūpa.  
In the guise of an earthly king, he is lord Śiva, who has brought peace and tranquillity among his subjects.)

The kings of Koc Behār patronised the learned poets whole-heartedly and listened to their writings with rapt attention. Some of the kings were profound scholars and well-versed in scriptures too.