CHAPTER IV.

(A). SPIRIT : The Assamese version of the Mahābhārata of the Vaisnava period is very eloquent in the "Bhakti ani Sarana" of the Bhagavata - thus extolling a Bhāgavatī garb to the work. It is thus utilised in preaching Saṃkaradeva's Vaisnadvism. Throughout the whole Mahābhārata, the vaisnava faith is prevalent and the poets exploit the epic in order to propagate the vaisnadvism based on the Bhāgavata purāṇa. Specially, the Vana Parva preaches the utility of surrounding to the feet of Hari by pointing out how the devotee could get blessings and success by devoting to Kṛṣṇa. Even the demons, giants and His enemies of any form succeed in attaining Mukti when they surrender before Him. Some of the verses scattered all over in the Mahābhārata are given below to substantiate the above observation -

"Fenato īśvara Kṛṣṇadeva saṅatana
Satrubhāve mukta hove kariya sravana
Premabhāve smaranara ki kaiho mahattva".

- Bhāgavata purāṇa, vii, 1.29. Kūlācāla Valāha, pp 404.

Such is the Kṛṣṇa, the lord eternal that one's soul is liberated even if one remembers Him as an enemy. What should I speak of the merit if He is remembered in love.

"Dekha kena Hari bhakatāra mahattaka
Yakhe tekkene mātra smaroka Kṛṣṇaka
Vairabhāve bhaya mane yemane temane
Premabhājanīr sima kahibeka kone ".

- Bhāgavata purāṇa, x, 29.15. Kūlācāla Valāha, pp 367.

Behold the power of devotion to Hari, Kṛṣṇa be that only a remembrance with hospitality or with fear or in any other way. Who can describe the limit of gain if the devotion be that of love.

The words of the Bhāgavata are often sumunimented
The child in the womb strikes the mother with its feet and the mother takes no notice of this behaviour.

The demons, giants in the Mahabharata are playing havoc in the world and the gods simply ignore their prowess. But when Krishna sees their oppression and tyranny beyond toleration, He Himself kills them and liberates their souls.

Examples may be cited about the demons who wish to get liberation from the ill-fated and deformed states. They use to behave against Hari and Hari is to take action. The demon Kulścaka, disgusted with his ugly shape, is very anxious to get killed at the hands of Hari. The enmity automatically brings about the spirit of self-surrender to Hari.

So far as the Assamese Mahabharata and the Bhagavata are concerned, the poets frequently and specifically call upon the people to surrender at the feet of Hari at the end of each chapter for peace, prosperity and liberation.

"Bhukuti mukuti gati Hari vine nai
Harik nabhaji matra britha ayu jai."

(There can be no devotion, liberation and destiny besides Hari. The period of life goes in vain without devotion to Hari.)

The religion is based on the praises and devotion to Lord Krishna. For the wide propagation of Nāma dharma (Bhagavatī) the poets have tried to emphasise the importance of taking the name of God and remain ever devoted to Hari.

"Mānavi janan ito devaru durlabha
Hari bhajanar hetu parama sulabha."
(174)

The Mahabharata poet Rama Sarasvatī and other often refer to the Bhagavata purāṇa.

"Mahāpurāṇa karma iñāt āchāi
Bhagavata sāstra aro misārit hovai ".


(The words of the Mahāpurāṇas are to be found here and the Bhagavata sāstra is also assimilated.)

The further support of the Bhagavata spirit, the poets often refer to other sources as well.

"Otha purāṇa yāra saṁhitā Yāmala
Śivadharma Viṣṇudharma Hansakāki vala
Ano sāstrasakalār misārit aḥaḥ
Ramāyaṇa nāptakāṛṇa iñāte uthāi ".

V. 3338-37, Baghāsurā Vadha .

(The eighteen purāṇas are mixed up Yāmala, Saṁhitā along with Śivadharma, Viṣṇudharma and Hansa-kākī sāstras. Even the seven cantos of the Rāmāyaṇa can be perceived here.)

"Agāhārtā sarā ṭu sabāto gahan
Vyāsa mahāmuni ākā kusirā kathān .
Śuka mahānteyā āka niścaya jānilā
Bhagavata sāstrakhano iñāte dekhilā". (V. 3339, Baghāsurā'
(This is a fathomless ocean and is the deepest of all. The great sage Vyāsa has narrated it and the mahanta Śūkha is well-versed in it and has seen the Bhāgavata scripture herein.)

The Bhakti and Śarāṇa of the Bhāgavata are frequently mentioned by the poets, especially in the concluding lines of each chapter. Of course, sometimes, the poets are found to quote from Bhāgavata and give religious Bhāgavati doctrines in the middle to make the theme more Kṛṣṇaite in character.

In the 'Śaṅkī Parva' of both Assamese and Sanskrit origin, Bhīṣma praises and worships god Kṛṣṇa to proclaim Him as the Supreme Lord of the Universe. Bhīṣma surrenders himself at the feet of Kṛṣṇa and prays for Kṛṣṇa's blessings.

Śaṅkharadeva's Vaishnavism is dealing mostly with the preaching of Bhakti and Śarāṇa of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Naturally, the poets and the followers of Śaṅkharadeva are influenced mostly in thought by his preachings. Possibly, Rāma Saraswatī has also given identical verses relating to the surrender to God. Further, the glory of 'Nāma dharma' is found sung everywhere in the epic. Some of the verses show a clear picture of it.

"Hari nāme karā rati
Tebese labhibā gati
Rāma nāma mahāratna
Satvare kariyo yatna
Ketikṣane jāibā mari
Ghūsiyok Hari Hari ".

-W. 1188-89, Adi Parva, Assamese Mahābhārata.

(Be entranced in the name of Hari, then, only you will attain salvation. Try to acquire the priceless jewel of Rāma nāma by uttering Hari. Hari, before it is too late, for death might embrace you at any moment.)

"Namo Nārāyaṇa dukha vināsan
Bhakat vatsala svāmī
(176)

Tāmāra abhai sarana pānkhaje
Śarāṇa pāśilo āṁī ".

V. 1305, Ādi Parva, Assamese Mahābhārata.

( Salutation to thee O' Narāyana! Thou art the destroyer of woes and miseries and ever kind to thy devotees, I surrender and take refuge at thy lotus feet for full security.)

"Īśvara Kṛṣṇar pade layyok sārana
Kṛṣṇa gūṇa nāma kara śravana kārtana".

V. 1985, Ādi Parva, Assamese Mahābhārata.

( Surrender at the feet of the Lord Kṛṣṇa. Listen to recitals of attributes of the name of Kṛṣṇa.)

"Tāmāra dāsara āṁī tāro āṁī kārī
Nāmadhane kīṁi mok layyo deva Hari ".

( Make me servant of the servants of yours. Buy me O' DevaHari, with the price of your nāma.)

"Mor gūṇa doṣa yata thāvā pāch kārī
Vīṣṇur kīrtana kathā sunā karma bhāri
Kṛṣṇese dēvar dēva jānā niśṭa kārī
Pāṭhak Gopānātha kahe bolā Hari Hari ".

V. 1030-31, Sabhā Parva, Assamese Mahābhārata

( Neglect all my faults or virtues. Listen to your hearts content to the tales of Vīṣṇu. Have absolute faith that Kṛṣṇa is the god of all gods. Pāṭhak Gopānātha entreats - sing the name of Hari.)

The poet Rāma Sarasvatī appeals to all to listen to the songs of praise of the name of Kṛṣṇa and escape from the miseries of the world by worshipping Him. The sorrows and miseries can be overcome through aptitude to ' śravana '. So, every one should engage himself in listening, giving up attachments to worldly belongings which are false and temporary.

The worship of god Kṛṣṇa and Rāma was found long ago
in India. There were proofs that Krishna was the hero of gods. The people worshipped this god for his supremacy. Devotion to Lord Krishna was long practical and prevalent specially in Northern India. Of course, it was necessary for some preachers to revive the Krishnaite religion based primarily on Bhagavata. Sankaradeva who was the preacher and founder of 'Nama dharma' in Assam, could give inspiration to his followers.

Rama Saraswati, being a junior, tried to follow in the footsteps of Sankaradeva in certain matters. It was rather a courageous effort for Rama Saraswati who came forward to translate the Sanskrit Mahabharata into Assamese. In the process, he marvellously succeeded in his intellectual efforts in harnessing the essence of the Bhagavata in just proportion and we have the Assamese Mahabharata as the result. In fact, he made this Mahabharata more vaisnavite than before. Copious quotations of doctrines helped give a permanent impression to the reading public.

The vital role played by this voluminous work relating to the preaching of vaisnavism could hardly be ignored.

(W) Sri Sankaradeva and Rama Saraswati

Sankaradeva and Rama Saraswati were in the court of King Naraharayana. Rama Saraswati has made respectful reference to Sankaradeva in his 'Kulacala Vadha' and 'Baghasuresa Vadha' of the Assamese Vana Parva. The references are as follows:

"Srimanta Sankara apuni isvara
Nararupa jata bhaila
Tahanaka nasahi Brahmana sakale
Raja age khala dil".

V. 1844, Kulacala Vadha, Assamese Mahabharata

(The luminous Sakhara is God himself born in the form of man. The Brahmans being jealous of him spoke to the king against him.)

"Srimanta Sankara nama achanta mahanta ek
Jamatvipe vaisnavate sar,"
SuklaDHvaja name Raja
Bhagavata sastre mana var.
Sankarak guru mani maha Bhagavata suna
ArO kara Bharata sravana.

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As there exists Srimanta Sankara, the greatest of the Vaisnavas in the whole of Jambudvipa. Sukladhvaja, the brother of the king, accepted him as his religious guru and listens from him the Bhagavata. He also listens to the Bharata.

From the above respectful reverences it may be surmised that Rama Sarawati probably was introduced to the king Naranarayana by Sri Sankaradeva as a profound scholar and one having great poetic gift. Otherwise the reference here can hardly be accounted for. Nevertheless Rama Sarawati had embraced the Bhagavati bhakti cult preached by Sankaradeva. It is evidenced by the closing verses of each chapter which are exhortations to people to take to the 'Eksaraṇa' i.e., undivided devotion to Krsna and to take His name. This is just after the style and spirit of Sri Sankaradeva. There are very striking resemblance of expressions also in these closing verses. There is however no concrete evidence extant to justify as to whether the poet was directly initiated to the vaisnava 'Eksaraṇa' fold by Sri Sankaradeva. The poet frequently refers to Mukunda Deva by whom probably he was initiated.

Another question arises here, Rama Sarawati might have already attempted versifying portions of the Mahabharata before he was introduced to the king. In fact in the Adi and Sabha Parvas the poet puts his name as Aniruddha and not as Rama Sarawati. He has stated that the Devan, meaning Chilāraī, the brother of Naranarayana, gave him the name of Rama Sarawati. His parents gave him the name of Aniruddha.

Rama Sarawati was deeply inspired with the spirit of
single hearted devotion to Kṛṣṇa and his mission was to preach through his Mahābhārata the Bhūkriti Bhāgavati bhakti cult as taught by San-
karadeva.

But, it is strange that the Carit Puthis did not men-
tion anything about the possibility of meeting of Saṅkaradeva and Rāma Saraswati. However, from the above references, it can be said that Rāma Saraswati was an admirer of the Mahāpuruṣa and revered him immensely. It is also apparent that Rāma Saraswati was entrusted with the work of translation of the Mahābhārata by the king Naranārayana, and he continued it even after the death of the king. He was a contemporary of Saṅkaradeva though much younger in age.

The whole of the Mahābhārata and specially the Vadha-
kāvyas including Baghāsura Vadha, Kulācala Vadha and Vyasasram Parva written by Rāma Saraswati were preserved and read with equal reverence as the Bhāgavata and other vaishnava sastras in almost every sattra of Assam. This is because, these ultimately describe the victory of virtue over vice, and the ways of the benign God in removing evils from the world.

P.T.O.