Poetry, like all other arts, is a product of men's tireless pursuits after the good, beautiful and truth. In all ages and in all countries, men have made these pursuits through the medium of poetry to obtain pleasure and relief. Man's life on earth is not an endless May-game; the part of sorrow and suffering is greater than the part of happiness and enjoyment. The hardness of life, the harshness of worldly calamities make the life of a man, dull, painful and unworthy of living. To avoid the hardness and harshness men generally run after some aesthetic wealth.

This pursuit of wealth is a search from heart within. This aesthetic wealth when procured not only consoles a man on his hazards and sorrows, but develops a genuine goodliness and godliness in him. The quest for aesthetic wealth impells a human being to run after the beauties of nature, the lovely hills and dales, the blue sky, the golden stars with their frequent twinklings, the Sun and the Moon, the many-coloured rainbow, the murmuring brooks, the sweet cooing of the birds and the pleasant sight of the beasts. Apart from nature, his aesthetic search leads a man to the happy bonds of love and friendship and to the mysterious experience of God. Poetry,
speaking generally, is such a pursuit after some aesthetic wealth. The quest for an aesthetic pleasure in poetry brings beauty and hence sublimity to it. Beauty is a stepping stone to sublimity. 'Sublimity' says Longinus, 'is the echo of a great soul'; and the greatness of the soul or the elevation of the soul is made by things of beauty. 'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever', remarked Keats, and this eternal joy based on the happy reflections on life and nature chiefly contributes to the making of poetry.

The chief tool of the poet in making poetry is sentiments, i.e., his lofty imaginations or emotions. This earth with varied colours and gifts arouses different sentiments or emotions in the mind of a poet. Moreover, the world has some peculiar gaits and characteristics. The poet is warmly alive to the different aspects of it. He enjoys its hopes and beauties, sympathises with the sorrows and the griefs, and is enamoured with the charms of the world. In this connection, the legendary story of Valmiki's sorrow at the death of a bird in union, and the subsequent rise of poetry in the grief-stricken heart of the sage is worth-remembering. With his lofty gift of imagination, the poet heightens the sentiments of the readers too. The readers respond to the
poet's invitation, and they too share the joys and sorrows equally with the poet. The greater the poet's power of invocation, the quicker and longer the response from the readers. If we view closer, the popular admiration of the great epics, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Iliad and the Odyssey, we find that the superb poetic excellences of their respective authors could heighten the sentiments and flare up the emotions of their readers, which resulted in an easy access and long retention of the subject-matters in the hearts of the readers. The nine-fold division of sentiments (Nava-Rasa) by the Sanskrit Alamkariks is therefore worth-noticing, and their basic allegiance to the doctrine of sentiments in judging the merit of a poetic piece is of high value. In all ages and in all countries the emotions of joy and sorrow, which are the principal emotions of the human mind, are the same. Looking at the literary heritage of the different countries of the world, we see the same flow of human emotions. To be precise enough, it is the language that changes, the basic elements of literature remain the same everywhere.

India has a glorious literary heritage from the time of the Vedas. Ancient Indian Literature thrived on the rich soils of the Sanskrit language. Now, the Indian literature is divided into a dozen of regional languages, thus
widening the scope for a fuller growth of the great Indian heritage. Assamese is the eastern-most branch of the Neo-Indo-Aryan language. The formation of this language is as old as Seventh Century A.D. The long range of centuries, from seventh to thirteenth, contributed chiefly to the growth of the language, and hence in this formative stage, no literary or poetic piece with genuine Assamese stamp and colour could take shape. The only specimen of Assamese poetry of this stage is borne by the Carya-ditis and the Krsna-Kirtana of Badu Candidas. A larger part of Assamese Folk-Poetry and the aphorisms of Daka too, germinated in this formative period. Assamese literature in general and poetry in particular clearly emerged out in the fourteenth century.

The creative urge within the Assamese people is very high. Not only in the field of poetry, but also in all the domains of art and literature Assamese people made rich and varied contributions from a distant past. In painting, in temple sculpture, in drama and in the muses this eastern-most state of India has contributed a lot to the Indian synthesis. Assamese people are great lovers of poetry and they possess a strong liking for verse-narratives. They compiled not only their histories and religious books in verse, but
even the books on Mathematics, Astronomy and Music were
written in verse. The general atmosphere in which the Assa­mese people live is truly poetic. They live amidst the
infinite variety of life and nature. A green panoramic car­pet embraces the whole valley. Through this green carpet,
the mighty Brahmaputra with its swirling currents passes
majestically. The enormous blue-hills spreading upto the
distant horizon presents a very beautiful scenery. The
change of seasons brings powerful montages of image into the
landscape. During the autumn, the Assam sky turns into a
blue beautiful picture, half painted, half suggested, of an
indescribable splendour. Assam enjoys a long and heavy rainy
season. In this season, the rivers gain their youth and they
suggest a romantic yearning for the Unknown. Beautiful flow­ers with their optimum richness of colour and variety, fine
birds and beasts with peculiar charms of their own, feed
the poet's eyes with beauty and wonder. Love for nature is
depthy imbied in the hearts of the Assamese people. Nature
is not only the source of inspiration for them, but she is
a source of their livelihood too. Assam being an agricul­
tural country, the fields, the rivers and the sky are their
constant companions. Living amidst an warm affection of
nature the Assamese people are enjoying a fine sense of
Assam is a land of heroes. Right from king Narakaśura down to the heroes of forty-two, there is a long and continuous line of heroes and patriots. Assam is the only state in India, which could boldly defy even after seventeen invasions, the sway of the mighty Mughals. The tales of heroes and patriots have supplied a great lot of materials for the making of poetry. Naraka, Bhagadatta, Bana, Bhaskaravarman, Jaymati, Lācit Barphookan, Mūla-Gabhāru, Manīram Dewān, Piyali Phookan, Kanaklātā, Kuśal Konwar are only a few of those illustrious names who had received eloquent tributes from the poets' lips.

Assam saw the rise and downfall of many big kingdoms and small principalities; these kingdoms and principalities left behind enormous materials for the poets. We have the long chronicler poetry on the Darrang kings in a very urbane manner. The chronicler narratives of the illustrious Ahom kings were also written in verse.

Assam is a meeting ground of different races and cultures. The amity between the peoples of the hills and the plains in the past contributed a lot to the growth of Assamese culture. The heroic Shan invaders of the old Shan province, for example, gave many things to this state. Even the present name of this state, Assam, owes its origin to the Ahoms or the Shan people. The high Hindus coming from
the mid and northern India brought with them different cultural and religious feelings. With the advent of the Vaisnavite renaissance in the fifteenth century and with the efforts of Śāṅkara-deva, the proper blending of these different peoples took place. Śāṅkara-deva's religious teachings left no room for the difference of caste or community. The Bhāgavatī Vaiṣṇava Dharma, which he preached was liberal in outlook; to this fold of religion Śāṅkara-deva attracted peoples from different faiths, castes and communities. Śāṅkara-deva inspired a spiritual awakening in the people and the spiritual urge gave rise to a very rich branch of Assamese poetry, in the form of Vaiṣṇavite poetry. The rich heritage of the people as well as a steady royal patronage helped Assamese poetry to flourish in abundance.

II. The Earliest Trace

The merit of a poetic piece is discerned from two different aspects, historical and literary. The Cāryās (Dohās) the Kṛṣṇa-Kirtana and the aphorisms of Dāka, which represent Assamese poetry of the formative stage, are better specimens from historical point of view; but at the same time they exhibit some poetic gifts of excellent order.
The Caryas are to a great extent mystic and symbolic and they embody the tenets of Sahaja yāna, a minor Buddhist cult practised in ancient Assam (Kāmarupa). The Caryās are popularly known as Dohās, and it is interesting to note that these are claimed by the most of the North-Eastern languages as specimen of their old linguistic forms. But Dr. B.K.Kakati and Dimbeswar Neog have pointed out after clear grammatical analyses that the Dohās register more intimate linguistic affinity with Assamese than with any other N.I.A. language.

Historians of Assamese literature are now of one accord, that atleast four composers of these Dohās, namely Minanātha, Matsyendranātha, Luipā and Sarahapā belonged to Kāmarupa. The following extract from Caryā 28 testifies the symbolic and metrical beauties of the Caryās.

( RĀGA BALĀDDI : SABARA PĀDĀNAM )

Uncia uncā pabata tahī basai Sabaribāli,
Moraṅgi picca parahīna Sabarī gībata guñjari mālī.
Umat sabaro pāgala Sabaro mā kara guli guhāyā tohouri,
Nia gharānī nāme Sahaja sundarī.
Nānā taruvar maulī lare gaanata lāgēlī dāli,
Ekeli Sabarī e bana hindai karna kundalavajradhārī.
(The Doha describes the love-play between Šabara and Šabari. Their abode is the mountains and hence the scene opens with a description of the mountains.)

There are rows of high mountains. The Šabari girl resides there. She is clad with peacock feathers and her neck is bedecked with a garland of Guñjāra jewels. Oh! the intoxicated mad Šabara, pray, don't shoot your bullets at her. Because she is none else but your own wife Sahaja Sundari. The tops of the different trees are fluttering and their branches are touching the sky. The Sabari girl is roaming about in this forest all alone, wearing kundala on her ears and a vajra.

This Doha carries a very rich symbolic meaning. According to Dr. M.M. Sharma the Šabari girl is the symbolic representation of the Kundalini and the intoxicated mad Šabara is the Śādhaka who is carried away by the illusory worldly pleasures. For the Śādhaka the Kundalini is important and the poet suggests that the Kundalini should not be allowed to remain suppressed. To the Śādhaka the Kundalini power is as dear as one's own wife. Likewise the epithet of the branches of different trees dancing and touching the sky
indicates the mind's elevation to the great Lord (Paramesvara) who, being the bhūmā (infinite), is symbolically represented by the sky.

The Kṛṣṇa-Kirtana composed on the erotic adventures of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā is complete in ten khandas (cantos). This book represents nicely the earliest form of Assamese poetry. As the book was a Pre-Śaṅkara writing, the presence of Rādhā is welcomed here. The following extract from the Naukā-khanda represents the subtle and homely language of the Kṛṣṇa-Kirtana:

Yamunār jale talbal kare nāoe,
Dheu dekhi mor hāle sava gāe.

= The boat trembles on the waters of the river Yamunā, my body trembles (with fear) at the sight of the big waves.

The scope of the present work does not permit us to deal with the poetic gifts of Cāndīḍāsa in detail; but one thing may be mentioned here, that Cāndīḍāsa's description of nature was of a superior order and he showed mastery in making rhymed verses.
The aphorisms of Daka are more Assamese in tone and temper than the other works mentioned earlier. The language of the aphorisms has undergone changes in different times. The stamp of development of language is evident in these lines.

Hīrā mānīk thāke apār,
Bhāt nahale marānehe sār.
Nāṅgal baladat sābāre ās,
Yār nāi tār sarbanās.
Jethmāṅ gal binā nāṅgale,
Tār kṛṣi kimate phale.
Sāonar kāṭhiyā nahay dhān,
Āhinār goc bīphal jān.
Āhin kāṭi rākhībā pā尼克,
Yenekai rajāi rākhe rānik.

The above stanza depicting some suggestions on cultivation displays a language which is very near to the present Assamese. In respect of grammatical construction and methods of composition the above stanza has no difference with the present-day Assamese. It was so, because the practical suggestions embodied in the aphorisms had a popular ground to flourish. They ran through the lips, generations after generations, and in doing so, they acquired the polish of
the language, with the progress of years. The aphorisms of Dāka carry suggestions relating to Religion, Law, Agriculture, Marriage, House-hold duties, Climatology, Astrology and Politics. Dāka's words are, till to day, taken with great respect. "Dākar vacan Vedar bānī", (the sayings of the Dāka are as important as the words of the Vedas) is the popular notion. Alliterative in presentation of words, aphoristic in meaning and highly laden with practical suggestions, these sayings of the Dāka are running through the ages, imparting advice, instructing the do's and don'ts of everyday life. The aphorisms of Dāka and the Kṛṣna-Kīrtana have one major contribution to the growth of Assamese poetry. The rhyme and metres of the later Assamese poetry had their origin in these aphorisms and verses.

The next important branch of Assamese poetry is Folk-poetry. Folk-poetry is essentially the poetry "of the people, by the people and for the people". The joys and sorrows, the beliefs and superstitions and the culture and religion of the people, therefore, receive due representation in these songs. The folk-songs have an advantage that since the authorship is not to be made known, the authors have no liability or responsibility for the quality of the composition. They can indulge in a free play of
poetic imagination which helps them in producing genuine and sincere pieces of poetry. The extent of Assamese Folk-poetry is very rich and vast; it comprises of the Folk-songs of the following nature:—

(1) Bihu-git and Ban-git (Songs chiefly associated with the Bihu festival and the pastoral life).

(2) Biya-nam (Marriage songs).

(3) Ai-nam (Songs addressed to the Mother Goddess).

(4) Dhai-nam (Lullabies and Nursery rhymes).

(5) Nao-khelar git (Songs of Rowing).

(6) Bara-mahi and Vilap gits (Songs of seasons and lamentation).

(1) Bihu-git AND Ban-git

These songs are chiefly associated with the Bihu festival, and these songs abound in joy and merriment. These songs portray youth and love; with sincerity and without any artificiality. The folk-poets took life easy. They could fairly compromise with any circumstance. God had an abiding influence upon their minds. Any accident, any mishap on their lives, they believed, were God-sent and God-ordained, and as such a sense of submission was distinctly heard.
If God would have carried me away
in my childhood,
I would have been buried in a ditch;
Now 0 God! you are poisoning my life,
in these days of happy youth.

So sings, a poet lamenting over his hard fate in the days of his youth.

In folk-poetry, love has not been spiritualised.
The poets had no direct, positive philosophy of love (Romantic or Platonic); rather they took love to be a thing of common experience. But they understood the universal and all-embracing power of love. In one of the Bihu songs, it is said—"Why should we not make love, even when the high gods make it"? As these songs are of youth and love, so, these are also of courage and denial. A young man charged with the powers of love, grows courageous and ventures to deny all the binding forces of caste, creed and religion. In one of the Bihu songs, the bold young lover pronounces:

Looking unto you, while I crossed a stile,
A prickly thorn, pierced in my foot,
0, what can your Kalita caste do?
If you and I are one?
These songs originated among the pastoral people and hence they are nurtured by the words, similes and symbols taken from the field of agriculture or nature. Drawing comparison between the dresses of the banyan tree and of the lover, one poet remarks:

The banyan tree adorned itself with new leaves,
My beloved adorned herself with red riha.

The red riha (similar in colour to the new leaves) is the symbol of youth. In the full bloom of her youth, the Assamese woman also puts on an upper garment called riha. In another Bihu-song, a poet says:

The elephant drank water at its pleasure,
And the horse drank with pause;
My love drank from the spring of love,
By planting his feet on the steep bank.

All the actions in this song are narrated by the word "drank"; but drinking of the lover, from the spring of love is very much symbolic. It means more than it tells, and enriches the whole imagery with an idea of sex.

(2) BIYA-NAM

The Biya-nams (marriage songs) speak of the controlled and happy love within the family campus. With these songs nice conjugal bliss is wished and welcomed to
the life of the couple. In Assam, the marriage is more a religious than a social affair. It was more so in the days of the past. In these songs, the bride and the bridegroom are given the noble status of the gods and goddesses, like Rama and Sītā, Kṛṣṇa and Rukmīni, Śiva and Pārvatī. In later days, Assamese marriage songs reflected the influence of Sanskrit poetry (like that of Kālidāsa's Kumārasambhava) and Assamese Vaisnavite poetry. The marriage is an affair of mixed happiness. The bride has enough reason to be sad to depart from her old home and to proceed to a new one which is completely unknown to her. And, at the same time, she has sufficient ground to be happy, being welcomed by her man and the family. While in her mind, the much cherished picture of a new life and new home creeps in, the old familiar faces of her dear ones, and her familiar pets and objects slowly and sadly slip away:

At the gate, under the areca palms, is the loom,
Her shuttle clatters, her bangles clang,
But not to be heard is Aideo's voice;
When a child the little girl asked her mother,
"What would you give as my dowry ?"
"My daughter the youngest, you would take a gold Dorpati, also mañrā-kāthis."
In the main-house weep the neothani and the Jatar
For they hear the dear girl is going away,
The letais and cherekis weep on the ceiling,
The mother weeps in the store-house,
In the assembly, weeps the father, oh, why should
They weep at all?

One popular aspect of the marriage songs is the songs of teasing. The singers with their songs, tease either the bride or the bridegroom, or someone else from the audience, and make funs thereby. Tenderness of feeling and expression is the greatest merit of the marriage songs. In marriage songs, the maximum sentimental appeal is noticed. There is scope for depicting all the nine principal rasas and the different bhavas. Primarily, the marriage songs are concerned with a couple — a couple in way to love. Thus they abound in conjugal love, Svngara; then again the bride who goes away from the family of her parents evoke a lot of filial love and love between brothers and sisters, leaving much scope for the delineation of Vatsalya and Sakhya bhavas. The bride-groom is treated as Siva and the bride as Parvati. Siva with all his ugliness, evokes hasya while with his filthy associations evokes vibhatsa and with his terrible associations with snakes and the cemetaries and goblins evokes bhayanaka and so on.
(3) AL-NAM

The Tantric cult gave rise to a host of goddesses in ancient Assam, and one of those goddesses is Āi (The mother). She is principally the goddess of small-pox. It is a popular belief with the Assamese people, that small-pox is created by her influence. To propitiate her and to get relief from poxes, the women devotees sing Āi-Nām. Simple in narration but highly laden with devotional colours, the Āi-Nāms have been reigning over the hearts and the lips of Assamese women for long ages. These Āi-Nāms may be regarded as the earliest traces of Assamese Sākta poetry. Dīmbeswar Neog, commenting on the beauties of Āi-Nāms has said, "Like most other folk-songs, the Āi-Nāms are most beautiful and show high poetic imagination with exquisite beauty of language". According to these songs, Āi has seven sisters and her abode is in Phul-bāri; still, she is none but a local manifestation of the goddess Śītalā or Pārvatī. Apart from their religious or cultural bases, the most attractive feature of these songs, is, the rhyming pattern which is full of alliterations.

(4) DHĀI-NĀM

Assamese poetry is rich in lullabies and nursery-rhymes. The child's world, is a world of fancy and imagination. Both the animate and inanimate objects are of equal
importance to him. The following example, from a nursery-rhyme, represents the dramatic conversation between the child and the Moon.

Jonbāl dear, let me have a needle.
Why a needle ?- To sew a wallet.
Why a wallet ?- To fill with coins.
Why coins ?- To buy an elephant.
Why an elephant ?- To ride about.
Why to ride about ?- So I become a big person.
What a big person does ?- He is allowed to beat
Upon the drum at evening dudum-dum.

Another example of such delightful nursery songs is the conversation between the child and the flower; wherein the child interrogates the flower for non-attaining bloom.

'O bud, 0 bud, you do not blossom; why ?'
'The cow eats my leaves; blossom why should I ?'
'O cow you eat leaves; why ?'
'The cowherd does not keep me; why should not I ?'
'O cowherd, 0 cowherd you keep not the cow; why ?'
'The cook does not give me food; why should I ?'
'O cloud, 0 cloud, you often rain; why ?'
'The frog cries; why should not I ?'
'O frog, 0 frog, you often cry; why?'
'The practice of my ancestors why should leave I?'

It is believed that the lullabies and the nursery-songs are the oldest branch of Assamese folk-poetry. These songs being songs for the children, offer very little scope for a rhetorical diction, and hence they follow a very simple style of narration. The "pleasant illogicality" of the child's mind is nicely reflected in these songs.

(5) NāG-KHELAR GIT

The boat-men, while rowing, sing. These songs like other folk-songs are of high beauty and great appeal. Though apparently work-songs, these boat-men's songs do not lack in the power of entertainment. The Assamese are a river-loving people. From very ancient times, boat-trips along the rivers were a nice sport. Major John Butler visiting this state in the nineteenth century, noticed the boat-trips of the then people. In tone and temper, these songs have close affinity with the Bhātiāli songs of Bengal.

(6) BĀRAMĀHT AND VILĀP GĪTS

These songs record the sorrows of women long separated from their husbands. In ancient Kāmarupa (the present lower Assam) the merchants generally went to trade for long
days to the distant countries, leaving their young wives behind; thus, the wives had enough grounds for lamentation. In the Baramahi Gīts the sorrows of the women are linked with the change of seasons. This may be, mentioned here that the change of seasons had inspired numbers of poets to record down the changes in their poetry. Not only the great Kālidāsa but also many more poets accepted the change of nature as the theme of their poetry. It is natural that the folk-poets, whose life and dwelling are amidst nature’s plenty, keenly welcome the changes of nature in their poetry. These songs are interspersed with the sentiments of love, hatred, heroism and adventure. On the other hand, they refer to the super-natural ghosts and witches. Miraculous actions through magical devices by the heroes are often referred to. The flight of imagination of these poets was no less. The rhyming scheme is also entertaining. The pathos of a woman, long separated from the husband, is drawn nicely in the following lines (from a Vilāp Gīt):

Sārāir guā-pān     Sārāite śukāba
    nuśukāi karibaki?
Abhāgīr kapaḷat     sukh nelekhile
    kapālat lekhile ki?
Pāṭī pari pari      nosōo ājīr para
    nosōo pāṭi-dhāri pari,
Abujan kōvarak      bujāba nowāri
    phulate karile bāri.
The betels and the leaves will wither in the tray. What else will they do but wither? To me, an unfortunate happiness was not ordained. Oh, what was ordained to my fate? From this day, I will not spread the mat (for sleeping), neither shall I arrange the bed. I could not bring to my arguments, that arrogant prince. Alas, he had made me a widow in the teens.

Another important feature of these songs is a story-like narration.

The other songs and poems comprising the rich treasury of Assamese folk-poetry are:

(a) The legendary songs, like the Kamalā Kūvarī Git (song of princess Kamala); Manikowarar Git (song of prince Mani), Phulkowarar Git (song of Phulkowar).

(b) Songs of animal hunting, like the Kheda Cikārar Git (songs of elephant catching), Harinā Pahur Git (songs of the deer).

(c) Tokārī Git (songs sung to the accompaniment of the string instrument called Tokari).

(d) Dehavicārar Git (songs of the mysterious search of the body)
(e) Hara-Parvatir Git (songs on Hara-Parvati).

(f) Sadāśivar Nām (songs on Lord Sadasiva).

(g) Apesvarār Git (songs on the Apesvaras i.e., apsarasas or nymphs).

(h) Subacanir Git (songs on goddess Subacani).

(i) Lakhimi-Sabāhar Git (songs of the Lakhimi festival).

(j) Gosāi-Nām (songs of God).

(k) Bhekuli-Biyār Nām (songs of the frog-marriage).

(l) Dhol-Kholar Malātā (Balladic songs sung to the accompaniment of the drums called Dhol and Khol).

(m) Tatir Jhunā (weaver's songs).

These songs with their spontaneous outbursts and sincerity of appeal have been delighting the people, through the centuries. These songs are not the work of one generation, but they are handed down from one generation to another. This transmission has given folk-poetry newer polishes. Dimbeswar Neog observes: "So like other peoples of the time, the oldest Asamiya people were 'singing folk'; but the songs were not recorded till of late, with the result that they have suffered immense change, so-much-so that their identities now seem to be lost. So while we may not
deny that some of the songs, ballads and folk-tales of nature-myths must have first been produced even about thousands of years ago, we have really small means to identify them to-day and are hence unable to place them in that remote period. For being transmitted orally from generation to generation, they have probably lost their primitive forms and have by and by become modernised till some of them are now recorded."

A Note On The Later-day Assamese Folk-Poetry.

Folk-poetry, indeed, follows the course of creation and recreation. With the advent of years, Folk-poetry has to face new ideas and experiences. Some of them are absorbed and happily blended into it. In the later-days folk-poetry absorbed the following elements:

(i) The Krsna element: The Krsna cult gained its proper place and prominence in the hands of the Vaisnavite poets in the sixteenth century. Assamese Vaisnavite poets had the deepest conviction that Krsna is but the Lord Himself (Krsnastu Bhagavān Svayam). Naturally, folk-poets were influenced to a great extent by the personality of Krsna and they adopted Him to folk-poetry. Moreover, the popularity of the devotional songs on Krsna, like the Bargits made Krsna all the more popular. Krsna became the indispensable hero of Assamese life and society and of
art and poetry. It is interesting to note that to the folk-poets, Krsna's life as a man or more particularly as a child and a youth mattered much. In one of the boat songs, Krsna (Kānāi) is represented as a boat-man and he is persuaded by Rādhā with her devoted appeal, to take her to the other shore:

Kānāi pār karāhe, belir diki chāwā;
Naṣṭa hailā dudher bhāndār, bāzār gailā baiyā.
Kāthar deśat thākā (Kānāi) kāthar kibā dukh;
Bhaṅgā naukāt pār kari kibā povā sukh.

=Kānāi, I request, please boat me to the other bank. Look at the Sun (it is about to set). The milkpots are now wasted, the market is over. You reside in a place full of woods. What paucity of woods is there? What pleasure do you derive by carrying (us) on the broken boat?

It is pleasant to note that the folk-poets could also influence the Vaisnavite poets. Śrīdhar Kandali, in his tiny poem Kān-Khovā (The Ear Eater) has taken recourse to folk-motif to portray the life of child Kṛṣṇa. One day, mother Yaśodā, persuading her child to sleep, sings:
Sleep ye, O, Kanāi,
Ho, the ear-eater comes;
Devouring the ears of all children
He is now coming to thee.

It is easy to guess, that the poet tried to exercise the poem, through the local boyish sentiment of an imaginary ear-eater. In some of the folk-songs Kṛṣṇa's cow-herd life is often referred to. To the folk-poets, the life of child (human) Kṛṣṇa was much more important than that of Kṛṣṇa the God-incarnate.

(ii) The Historical Elements: History reflects the spirit of the age. In different ages of Assam's history, many events both happy and otherwise, with far-reaching consequences took place. The folk-poets, showed their due loyalty to such historical events and personalities by composing songs. The most popular folk-songs, with historical backgrounds are:

(a) Badan Barphukanar Gīt (song on Badan Chandra Barphukan, the then viceroy at Gauhati who caused the Burmese to invade Assam).

(b) Manirām Dewānī Gīt (song on Manirām Dewān, the first martyr of the national struggle for independence in 1857).
(c) Jaymati Kūwarîr Git (song on princess Jaymati, consort of prince Gadāpāni, who sacrificed herself at the altar of devotion for her husband).

(d) Padmākumārīr Git (song on Padmākumāri. The theme herein is the rebellion of the Dundiās).

(e) Mayāmariā Ranuwar Git (songs of Mayāmariā soldiers, on the event of Mayāmariā rebellion).

(f) Gaurināth Sinhar Git (songs on king Gaurināth Sinha).

(g) Nāharar Git (songs on Nahar).

(h) Cikan-Sariyahar Git (songs on Cikan Sariyah).

Of all these songs, the first two are full of pathos and patriotic sentiments. These two songs slowly and sadly unfurl the history of sunset of the illustrious Ahom kingdom. The construction of these songs is in the ballad form, but the metres are not equally regular. The poetic beauty of these songs lie in their utmost simplicity and homely diction. In Manirām Dewān's Git, the poet laments over his hard fate, thus:

Manirām! you smoked the golden hookāh,
Manirām! you smoked the silver hookāh.
What treason did you commit to the Royalty,
The hanging rope came to your neck.

The element of history is equally strong in all the other songs mentioned earlier.

(iii) The Muslim Element: In the Ahom age, a few Muslim religious leaders like the Azan Pir, received the patronage of Ahom Kings. These Assamese Muslims, composed many valuable songs in the line of Assamese Vaisnavite lyrics. The songs are called Zikirs and Zaris. Mainly religious in tone, and composed in the popular metres of Vaisnavite songs, these songs are laden with high spirituality. The Zari songs are, however, a bit different from the Zikirs, as they dwell chiefly on the Karabala theme. A big number of Arabic and Urdu words found their way to the Assamese language through these songs.

(iv) The Gandhian Element: Gandhi and his non-violent war for India's independence is a thing of recent memory. Still then, the popularity of the Father of the nation inspired the local folk-poets to portray him into poetry. Gandhi was a giant among men and his all embracing personality was nicely reflected in these songs. According to the folk-poets, Gandhi commanded respect even from the flower trees.
By the side of the prison house
The Champa and Nageswar stood,
Even those trees bent their heads
To salute Gandhi.

The folk-poets had great reverence for Gandhi and saw the same spirit of reverence for the Father of the nation even in the Nature. Advent of Gandhian element in folk-song resulted in a dozen of Gandhi verse, with the theme of Gandhi in the line of Maniram Dewanar Git or Kusal Kowarar Git. Further, the Gandhi theme found an extensive place even in the Bihu songs and the Marriage songs. Folk-poetry is always ready to absorb newer elements into it. Ranjit Borpuzar, the martyr of Language disturbances of 1960, has also been shown due respect by the folk-poets. Our scope, however, does not permit us to discuss in detail all aspects of Assamese folk-poetry. The influence of folk-elements on the later-day poetry, especially upon the songs, is very high.

III. The Fourteenth Century Back-Ground

The fourteenth century, as mentioned earlier brought new messages for Assamese poetry. The Classical age of Assamese poetry, in fact, began in the fourteenth century. Poetry by this time soared high from the folk-myths and motifs to
the towering height of the great Indian epics. The poetry of this age, was by and large, the translation and reproduction of epic themes and classical manoeuvrings. The oldest written specimens of this period are Prahlād Caritra and Hara-Gaurī Saṃvād by Hema Sarasvatī, believed to be a court poet of king Durlabha Nārāyaṇa of Kamatāpur. The other poets of the age under review, traced up-to-date, are:

Rūdra Kandāli,
Harīhara Vipra,
Kaviratna Sarasvatī
and
Madhava Kandāli,

The poetry of these poets, bore some common features:

(i) The subject matters of their poetical works were collected either from epic or puranic sources.
(ii) The absence of a definite religious philosophy. Though the presence of mediaeval gods and god-incarnates were there, still the poetical works maintained a non-vaishnavite tradition. These compositions may conveniently be called pre-vaishnavite poetry.
(iii) Pre-dominance of story-element.
(iv) Attempt to bring poetry nearer life by imposing local stamp and colour to the epic narratives and by using a homely diction.
(v) Keen devotion to descriptions of nature.
(vi) Occasional recourse to exaggeration, where permitted, without infringing the poetic embellishments.
(vii) Simplicity of style and expression.
(viii) Versification of these works was based generally on Pada or Payāra (8+6), Dularī (6+6+8) and Chābi (8+8+10) metres. The growth of these three popular metres is important also for the fact, that the later poetry (chiefly Vaisnavite) was done principally on these metres.
(ix) Like the similarity in metres, similar devices for rhetorical expressions were practised. Alliteration (anuprās) simile (upamā) and metaphors (rupak) were common practice, for all these poets.
(x) Abundant use of original Sanskrit words.
(xi) Their poetic creations paved the way for a firm-footing of the language. The richness of the poetry (arising out of themes, vocabulary, rhetoric and metrics) enriched immensely the language of the time.
(xii) Most of the poets, referred to above, received royal patronage. The chief patrons of this period, were the kings Durlabh Nārāyana, Indranārāyana and Tamradhvaja of Kamatā lineage and the Borāhi king Śrī Maha-

Hema Sarasvatī’s Prahlāda Carita is a small narrative poem with the story of Prahlāda which upholds Viṣṇubhakti and denounces Vāmanayā. But Hema Sarasvatī’s poetic fame shines brighter in Hara-Gourī Samvāda, where he deals with Śiva’s penance, his marriage with Parvati and birth of Kārtikeya. The Saivite influence is predominant in this book.

Rudra Kandali’s Śatyaiki-Pravesa develops chiefly on a minor episode from the Mahābhārata, where Śatyaiki’s heroic warfares are narrated in a simple manner with homely diction.

Harivara Vipra, deals with the valiant fight of Vabruvahana, king of Manipur with his father Arjuna, in his poem, Vabruvahana Yuddha. The source of this poem is taken from the Jaiminiyasvamedha Parva. His another work, on a parallel theme is Lava-Kusar Yuddha. It narrates the heroic fight between Rama and his sons, Lava and Kusa. The source here too, is the Jaiminiyasvamedha Parva.

Kaviratna Sarasvatī in his Jayadratha Vadha reproduces the Mahābhārata story of the killing of Jayadratha. His special merit is noticed in his descriptions of Nature.

Mādhava Kandali was the brightest luminary of this period. Śaṅkaradeva paid tributes to him as his “unerring predecessor”. Mādhava Kandali translated the whole of the Rāmāyana, into Assamese, displaying his superb craftsmanship.
Madhava Kandali's translation of this great epic is regarded as the earliest translation in the modern Indian languages. His translation is lucid and forceful. The poet tried to preserve the epic grandeur of the original, but sometimes he employed local colours to it, to make it nearer to the people for whom it was meant. Assamese way of life and Assamese flora and fauna secured an easy access to his poetry. He always excels at depicting the self-denial and suffering of woman in love. Describing Sita's reaction to Rama's proposal to leave her behind in the capital, Kandali says:

Sūrya abihane yena nosobhay dina,
Rajani nosobhe yena Sasadhara hina.
Basantā nosobhe bine kokilara role, 89
Nisphala jīvana Prabhū, tumī bine kole.

= The day loses all its charms, in the absence of the Sun. The night loses its glory in absence of the Moon. Without the cuckoo's sweet voice, the spring is useless. My life is all doomed, without you, O! my Lord.

Dr. Maheswar Neog, while discussing the Assamese literature of the pre-Sankaradeva period observes: "Madhava Kandali's
work on the whole carries the impression of real life, of engaging story-telling and fine poetry. It is in the hands of Kandali that the rather artificial language with occasional betrayals of the colloquial, which was employed in the religious, biographical and even historical literature of Assam till the advent of British rule, was set and standardized. This is a language embellished with a music of its own, with but simple figures of speech like alliteration, simile and metaphor. There is also an amount of conventionalism in the use of these figures of speech."

The Manasa School

One important aspect of the fourteenth century Assamese poetry is the poetry on the serpent lore. Fear for snakes in the hearts of the people in India in the far-olden times, gave birth to the worship of the snakes. It is therefore natural, that snakes were worshipped in this part of India, also. The serpent goddess in ancient Assam, was known as Manasa. "Manasa is even to-day a living and powerful cult in Assam, and she is worshipped with much adoration and ceremony, particularly in the districts of Kamrup, Goalpara and Darrang. She is generally worshipped in the months of Asadha and Sravana, particularly during the time of pestilence and disease. She is then invoked
as the goddess Mārai. Buffaloes, goats, pigeons are sacrificed before her." During the days of her worship certain songs are sung with musical instruments and dancing movements. The poets of these songs of Manasā-worship are known as Manasā poets. Manakara, Durgāvara, Sukavi Nārāyanadeva and Sasthīvara are the principal poets of this school. Though a very high standard of poetic discipline was not maintained by them, yet they could rise to the taste of the then society. The wonder and fear for snakes, were relieved by the erotic and the comic narratives, found in them.

The Choral Songs (Oja-Pali)

Another popular institution of poetry was the Oja-Pali. The Oja-Pali is a village chorus-party consisting of four or five members. The leader is called the Oja (the expert) and the other singers Palis (assistants). The Oja-Pali songs gave rise to a new trend in lyrical poetry. The Oja-Pali poets had to select popular themes and to ascribe musicality to them; they therefore had to collect their matters from the popular Manasā lore, the Ramāyana and the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Manakara wrote the Mahākari on the Manasā theme, Durgāvara's Durgāvari develops on the same theme with
some additions, and his Giti-Ramayana collects matters from the Ramayana. Pitambara Kavi in his Usā-Parinaya makes use of the Bhāgavata sources. Pre-vaisnavite in tone and temper, these songs did not indulge in propagating high ideals; rather they fed the sentiments of the common men. These songs were to a great extent erotic, comic and sensuous and they stood much closer to flesh and blood. Of all the choral-poets, Durgāvara was the most gifted one. His power of lyrical composition saw no parallel. The luxuriance of the contemporary Assamese verse, is well expressed, in the following extract, from his Rāmāyana songs:

Mayo bane yāo Svāmī (he)
E Svāmī nakara nairasa
Tomāre lagate Svāmī
Khātim banabasa (he)

Opare Suruyar chatā
Tale tapta bāli (he Ram)
Kimate calibā Sītā
Sukomala bharī (he)
Āge yāibā Ramacandra
Madhyata Jānaki (he Rām)
Tāra pāche cali yāibā
Laksmana sārathi (he)
Dandaka banate ache
Simha byāghra hāti (he Rāma)
Kimāte calība Sītā
Nāri bhirumāti (he)

Sītā : I shall also go to the forest. O Lord,
O Lord, disappoint me not,
With thee, O Lord,
Shall I suffer exile.

Rāma : Up above is the burning sphere of the Sun
And heated sand below;
How shalt thou walk on, O Sītā
Thou hast got but delicate feet.

Sītā : Rāmachandra will march first,
Jānaki in the middle,
Behind them will step out
Laksmana, (our main prop).

Rāma : There in the Dandaka forest abound
Lions and tigers;
How shalt thou go, O Sītā
Thou art but a timid lass.
Another important aspect of the choral songs is their rich classical melody. The poets have given definite instruction, regarding the melodies (Rāgas) of their songs. The application of the prescribed ragas in the choral songs exhibit the richness of Assamese music in medieval times and its all India affiliation.

One thing here needs some explanation. Though grouped under the single heading 'the fourteenth century background', yet, some of the compositions dealt with in this section were produced even as late as in the sixteenth century. But in spirit and style the poetry of this whole period display certain common features as enumerated earlier in this section which bring them closer to each other, and at the same time make them different from the Vaisnava poetry, which evolved late in the fifteenth century.

IV. The Vaisnavite Poetry

The fifteenth century was a remarkable time for Assamese poetry. The great Vaisnava poets Saṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva were born in this century. A renaissance in the form of Vaisnava movement swept over the whole of India in this century and Assam too, was not left out. This Vaisnava renaissance inspired a separate school of poetry,
which goes by the name of Assamese Vaisnava poetry. The commonest features of Assamese Vaisnava poetry are:

(a) Supremacy of Bhakti as a religious method.
(b) Belief in one God-Head Krsna or Rāma. The advocacy of non-dualism (advaitavāda) of Vedānta.
(c) The expression of lofty philosophy through very simple language and common illustrations.
(d) Poetry taken as a medium of preaching religious faiths.
(e) The growth of definite forms for poetry, like the Gitas (songs), Kavyas (epic-narratives), Ankiya-Gitas (songs of the Ankiya dramas), Upākhyānas (long-narrative poems) and Bar-Gitas (Rymes).

Saṅkaradeva (1449-1569) was by far the most outstanding Vaisnava poet. His poetical works comprise,

Hariṣchandra Upākhyāna (The story of king Hariṣchandra),
Rukmini Harana Kavya (Klopmenent of Rukmini), Balicalana (Deceit upon Bali), Amrita Mathana (churning the nectar),
Gajendra Upākhyāna, (story of Gajendra) Ajāmila Upākhyāna (story of Ajāmil), Bhakti Pradīpa (The candle of Devotion),
Nimi-Nāvasiddha Samvāda (The dialogue between king Nimi
and nine Saints), Kirtana, Gunamala, Barga (Hymns), Bhatima and the translations of the Bhagavata (Books I, II, X, XI and XII) and the Ramayana (Uttarakanda). Bathed in a warm and comfortable glow of devotion Sankaradeva's poetry is a specimen of high poetic excellence and deep-rooted religious faiths. Sankaradeva collected not only the materials of his poetry from the ancient classics of India, but also in the use of rhetoric and metrics, he derived a lot from ancient Sanskrit literature. "Most of the imageries, expressions, ideas used in his poetry were drawn from the inexhaustible source of Sanskrit poetry." Alliteration, as a figure of speech, was very popular with Sankaradeva. He was essentially a religious poet. The preaching of the Bhagavati Vaisnava dharma was his prime business. But the poet and the preacher had so uniformly combined in him, that his poetic inspirations slowly and gradually lift the readers to the state of the bliss supreme.

Sankaradeva could delineate all the principal rasas, marvellously well. The heroic adventures of Krsna in Syamantaka Harana is delighting and shows Sankaradeva's expert handling of the Vira rasa. Specially the duel between Krsna and Jambavanta, is all the more interesting;
“Hena śuni Jāmbavanta dhilā mahā balavanta
N 참고 svāmika pāche dharilanta yuddha kāche
Sāmānya manusya buli mahākrodhe gailā jvali
Nājāni prabhāva āti lagāileka hatāhati
Duyo hayā mahā krūḍda lagāileka ghora yuddha
Duyo mātaṅgara līla bariṣe parvata silā
Kato beli hāne gācha kato kope cahe kāsa
Yujilanta mālā bandhe dhari bhari bhari chānde
Duilo duiko nāhi tuṣṭī hāne vajra sama muṣṭī
Māmsara kārane yene yujanta duigoṭa sena
Keho bale nui keśa yujanta āṭhāiṣa dina”
== "Hearing this Jāmbavanta, of immense strength,
made a dash,
Knowing not Him to be the master,
even Him he caught for a duel.
Taking Him to be an ordinary mortal,
He flew into a fierce rage.
Knowing not His supreme power,
He began to exchange blows, with Him.
Both of them grew exceedingly angry,
and began a terrible duel.
It was as if two elephants were at play,
and mountain rocks began to fall in showers.
For a while, trees began to be hurled.
With consuming anger, each would sometimes
close on the other,
They also closed on each other in wrestling fashion,
catching and catching yet again and fighting by
planting their feet.
None is satisfied with the inflictions on the other.
Each struck the other in thunderous blows.
It was as if two eagles were fighting
for the one and the same piece of meat.
None of the two was inferior to the other
in strength,
And for twenty eight days they fought on."
"Seeing a tall tree, the beautiful damsels asked: Hear me, 0 you banyan tree, Did you see Nanda's son on the way? He stole away my soul. 0 you Kurubaka, Asoka and Campa trees, speak you to me and show compassion. 0 you Tulasī tree, give me a reply, you are the beloved of Govinda's feet. 0 Jāti, Yuthi and friendly Mālatī creepers, Did you attain the supreme way at Krishna's touch?"
O Ama, Jāma, Bela and Bakula trees,
benefactors like you none else are.
At Krishna’s absence we see darkness all round;
Say where has the soul of my life gone?"

In the Bagîts Šāṅkaradeva’s devotion to the Almighty
and his loyal submission to Him, to get away from the fever
and fret of life are beautifully expressed.

RAGA : KEDARA

Pāve pari Hari karoho kātari prāna rākhābl mora
Visyā vīṣadharā viṣe jara jara jīvana nārahe thora

Aṭhira dhana jana
jīvana yauvan
aṭhira ehu saṃsāra

Putra parivāra
savahī asāra
karabo kāberi sāra

Kamala-dala-jala
citta caṅcala
thīra nahe tila eka

Nāhi bhayo bhāva
bhoge Hari Hari
parama pada parateka

Kahatu Šāṅkara
e ḍukha saṅgara
para kāra Hṛṣīkēsa

Tuhu gati mati
dehu Sripati

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tattva pantha upadesa
Falling prostrate at Thy feet, 0 Lord, I make entreaties that thou may preserve my soul. My life is poisoned with the venom of the serpent of worldliness. It cannot stand any more. Wealth and family are illusory, So are life, youth, and this our world. Wife and children are all insubstantial. Upon whom shall I rely? My soul is as fickle As water on floating lotus leaves, And never at rest for a moment. Drowned in the enjoyment of worldly pleasures, I could not touch Thy supreme feet. Sankara prays: O Hrisikesa, Steer me safe across this sea of sorrows, 0 Sripati, Thou art my mind and destiny. Give me the doctrine and the way, In the path of spiritual progress.

Sankaradeva was the pioneer as well as the founder of the Assamese school of Vaishnava poetry. Under his kind feathers a number of good poets began their trade. One such poet was his devoted disciple Madhavadeva (1489-1596). Originally a
Sakta by faith, Madhavadeva was initiated into the Vaisnavite faith by Saṅkaradeva himself. Rājasuya Kāvyā, the Nām-Ghoṣā, Bargīt and translation of theĀḍikānda of the Raṅgāyana, are Madhavadeva's poetical works. Though he followed Saṅkaradeva's ideal, in selection of themes, form and technique, yet, sometimes he proved himself to be more gifted even than his preceptor. Specially the voice of his divine serenity as manifested in the Bargīts has the power to shake the soul. He composed these Bargīts, being advised by Saṅkaradeva. Like Saṅkaradeva, Madhavadeva too was influenced by the Vedānta philosophy. Madhavadeva's particular favourite was child Kṛṣṇa. In most of his songs and dramas child Kṛṣṇa is his prime-mobile. The following is a beautiful specimen of the Bargīts having child Kṛṣṇa as their theme:-

RAG : SYAM

Tejare Kamalāpati parabhāte ninda :
Teri canda mukha pekho uthare Govinda. (Dhrung)

Rajani bidūra diśa dhavalī varāna :
Timira fālā bājha rabira kirāna.
Satapatra bikasita bhramara urāi :
Vrajabadhū dadhi mathe tuā guṇa gāi.
Dāma Sudāma dāke teri laiā nam :
Hera dekha uthia āsilā Balaram.
Nanda gela bāthāne goāla gela pāl.
Surabhi cārite lāge uṭhāre Gopal.
Kṣīra lavanu laiā sīṅgā beta venu ;
Sakāle melio batsa hāmbālāve dhenu.
Kahaya Mādhava māi kino tapasāilā ;
Trijagata pati Hari rākhowāla pāilā.

= 'It is morning, O Kṛṣṇa, leave off your sleep. Get up, O Govinda, and let me see your shining face (chorus).
The night is off, and the (ten) directions assume the white hue. The rays of the sun penetrate the darkness (of night). The lotuses are blossoming (and) the black bees are flying (round). Women of Vraja are churning milk by singing your glories. Dam and Sudām are calling you by name.
So there comes Balorām to you. Nanda has left for where the cows are being milked and milkmen are driving their team.
Rise up, O Kṛṣṇa, to keep your cows.
Take cream, butter, horn and flute; and untie the calves, for the cows are lowing.
Mādhava says, 0 mother (Yasodā),
what merits must you have acquired
that you have got the Lord of the
three worlds to keep your cows.'

The other contemporaries of Śaṅkaradeva were Ananta Kandali, Rāma Sarasvatī and Śrīdhar Kandali. They contributed their mite towards the construction of the high edifice of Vaisnavite poetry. Our scope, however, does not permit us to dwell at length on their poetic creations. The post-Śaṅkara Vaisnava poets too, carried far beyond the centuries the universal love and religion preached by Śaṅkaradeva and it continued up to the beginning of the eighteenth century. Like Śaṅkaradeva and his contemporaries, these poets too, made translations and adaptations from the Sanskrit religious classics, and they were keenly guided in the use of rhetoric and metrics by Śaṅkaradeva, and his contemporaries. Of the Post-Śaṅkara Vaisnava poets, mention may be made of Gopāla Misra (Ghoṣā Ratna), Gobinda Misra (Padya Gītā), Gopināth Pathak (translation of some cantos of the Mahābhārata), Dāmodara Dvīja (translation of some cantos of the Mahābhārata), Bidyā Pañcāhan (translation of some cantos of the Mahābhārata), Rāma Misra (Hitopadesha, Putalā Caritra), Srināth Dvīja (translation of some cantos
of the Mahābhārata), Kavisekhara (translation of some cantos of the Mahābhārata), Kalāpa Chandra Dvīja (Rādhā Caritra), Anirudha Kāyastha (Bhavatāvī Varnanā), Bishnu Bhārati (Dhrūva Caritra, Bhāgavata Ratna) and Hridayananda (Sri Rāma Kirtan).

A few poets took to the composition of some devotional songs in imitation of the precious hymns of Sāṅkara-deva and Mādhava-deva. They are Gopāl Ātā, Sīrī Rām Ātā, Rāmānanda Dvīja, Jadumani Deva, Purushottam Thākur, Rām Charan and Daityārī Thākur. These songs are made of deep devotion and powerful feelings, hence, they occupy an important position in the domain of Vaisnavite poetry.

The greatest merit of Vaisnavite poetry lies in the fact that it gave a firm-footing to Assamese poetry and secured for it an all-Indian affiliation. It established some definite norms of using language and diction and gave a definite shape to the rhetoric and metrics of Assamese poetry. Sāṅkara-deva introduced a new language for his dramas and poetry. This new language was Brajabuli, a mixed Maithili-Assamese language. "It should be noted here that Brajabuli, as a language had lesser uses of compound consonants, a preponderance of vowels and alliterative
expressions and these phonetic traits may be said to make it a more suitable medium for lyric compositions. In addition to this flexibility, some element of sacredness was associated with this artificial language, as it was traditionally considered to be the language of Vraja (Vrindavana) in which Krishna and the Gopis spoke. Brajabuli, in fact, was an artificial literary language adopted by the medieval Vaisnavite poets of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and it originated from the Maithili language. Brajabuli had local variations being mixed with the local languages. The type of Brajabuli adopted by Sankaradeva may be called the Assamese Brajabuli. This Assamese Brajabuli became the literary media for the Assamese Vaisnavite literature. This language was very simple and it was much easier than the Sanskrit language. Even the untaught villagers could relish the matters written in Brajabuli:

\begin{verbatim}
Pandite bujibe śloka karilā racan,
Gīta artha bujibeka dvija sabhyagaṇa.
Brajabāsi bhāsār bujibe grāmi loka,
Co-mukha dekhibeka ajna murha loka.
\end{verbatim}

**(In the dramas) he made use of the slokas for the scholars; the songs were meant for
the elite. The village-folk would understand the Brajabuli and the ignorant would see the masks and the dresses.

The Assamese Brajabuli, as Dr. Sukumar Sen observes, is an independent growth by the immediate contact with the Maithili language; but in Orissa, the Brajabuli grew up through influence from Bengal. Thus Sankaradeva was successful in the innovation of a new poetic language. A poet's creative genius is doubly proved, when he is ready to make a new poetic language. The popularity of Brajabuli is still continuing though in a very thin way. Ananda Barua a poet of the recent times has gained wide popularity with his Brajabuli poems. It is interesting to note that in Bengal also, the tradition of Brajabuli did not cease with the Vaisnavite poets, it continued upto recent times. "Its last great writer was the young Rabindranath Tagore. The most fruitful of his earliest attempts in lyric composition are the songs written in Brajabuli and bearing the signature 'Bhanusimha'.

In Vaisnavite poetry, some newness was introduced in the choice of the diction also. Not to speak of the great Sankaradeva, even the most minor poets of the
Vaisnavite age employed choice Sanskrit words to enrich their diction. In the dramas, Sanskrit passages were incorporated in toto to enhance the taste. The poetic conventions of the classical Sanskrit poetry were maintained to a great extent. Thus, we often find in Śaṅkaradeva, the comparison of the eye to the lotus (Cakṣu kamalara pāṣi), of separation to darkness (Kṛṣṇara Virāhe dekho āndhāra), of the thigh to the trunk of an elephant (Uru karikara sama), of the arm with a snake (Lalita balita bhuja bhujāṅgara prayā) etc.

To heighten the poetic embellishments the Assamese Vaiṣṇava poets used a large number of alamkārs (figures of speech) like, upamā, rūpaka, atisayokti, punaruktabadābhāsa, pratip, smaraṇ, bhṛantimāṇ, ullekh, utprekṣā, prativastupāmā, dṛṣṭānta and arthāntaranyāsa etc. We have reproduced here a few typical figures of speech drawn from the vast field of Vaisnavite poetry, which are sufficient to prove the superb craftsmanship of the Vaisnavite poets.

(a) Upamā

Īṣa svarupe Hari savaghate baiṭhaha
Vaicana gagana viyāpi.

— Śaṅkaradeva s Bargīt
Hari resides as the supreme Lord, in every quarter as the sky spreads itself on every corner.

(b) Atisayokti

Canda candana manda malaya samire
Kesava bine bisa barise sarire.

Pasikajapata ahita himabari,
Madhukara nikanar karaya mahamari.

— Sankaradova : Baryit

— The moon, sandal paste and the malaya breeze rain poison on us; for we are bereft of our beloved Krsna.

Lotus leaves and cold water turn harmful, bees come in cluster heaping great destruction upon us.

(c) Vyatireka

Ki kahaba ramapika rupa paracura,
Badanaka heri canda bhalo dura;
Nayanaka pekhi pai bata laja,
Jhampa karala kamala jalama.

— Sankaradova : Nikunajharana Nata
How shall I describe that excessive beauty of Bhumini? At the sight of her face, the moon fled away (out of shame) for its own inferiority. Viewing closely her eyes, the lotus out of shame jumped into the sinking-depth of water.

(d) Ānuprāsa

Jagajana jīvana ajana janārdana,
danujadamaṇa dukhahāri,
Mahādānanda kanda paramānanda,
nandanaṇandana vanacārī.

— Saṅkaradeva: Bargīt

He is the life of all people of the universe; having no personal shape, yet, deliverer of all people; submerger of demons and destroyer of pains. An abode of great pleasure, the source of all, He is none but the son of Nanda, who played in the forest.

The examples, cited above, are from Saṅkaradeva's poetry. He was the master-craftsman at rhetorics. He, however, excelled particularly in the use of ānuprāsa. His ānuprasas are free from the common flaws of aṣṭārthatva,
vaishalya and pratikula-vaishalya Sankaradeva, perhaps, like Bhojadeva believed that:

Yathā jyotena caṣārasanā yathā lāvanyasāganāṁ,
Amṛtasasthāṁ kavyamalaśkaratmayaṁ kṣamaḥ

As the moon is beautified by its rays, woman by her grace, so, a kavya’s beauty is also enhanced by the use of amṛtaśaśālaśākara.

"The cause in the formation of a kavya sampat by a poach," says Dandi, "is his natural (inborn) genius, enough study of various arts and sciences and constant practice and culture of these." In case of Sankaradeva all these conditions were fulfilled and his vast study of Sanskrit poetry helped him to work for a richer poetry in his own language.

Another important and interesting feature of Assamese Vaishnava poetry is the scope given to bhakti and vātsalya to develop as independent rasas. "Our religious leaders Sankaradeva, Madhavadeva and others though have not written any critical work discussing the claim of bhakti-bhāva to pause as an independent rasa, yet, they have often in their writings mentioned bhakti as a rasa. Madhavadeva, in his Nāṁghoṣa, even in the first sloka has admitted the claim of bhakti to the status of a rasa, with the words—"
"rasamayi sangho bhakati" (I seek that devotion full of rasa).

This bhakti again manifested itself in the form of dāśya,
sakhya, vātsalya etc., For Assamese poets, Kṛṣṇa's life as
a child in Vraja, and his sports and plays there, was
an un-ending source of poetry. "As for the Śakti poets,
Vidyāpati and Candita, Kṛṣṇa was an eternal lover; so,
for the Assamese poets of Bārgīts, Kāṅkheva and ṇar-dhara,
Kṛṣṇa was an eternal child."

The long-narrative poems which go by the name of
Vadhā-kavyas like the Ktaśura, Baghasura, Kulāchā,
Asvalīma, Kurāvalī and Jāghasura-vadhā could delight both
the Vaisnāvite devotees and the non-devotees alike. These
were heroic poems; and the heroic deeds and adventures
(including wars) of some heroes were depicted in these
dvās. The underlying idea of these kāvyas was to show the
rise of dharma and the downfall of adharma. Dr. B.K.Kakati
observes that these kāvyas were read in the then society
with the same zeal with which the people in the modern
society read the novels and short-stories.

In the sphere of metrics the Vaisnava poets used
abundantly the metres of pada, dulaṭi, chabi-locāni, śanā,
kusuma mālā, catihā and cempāe.
A precious gift of the Vaishnava poets to Assamese poetry is the devotional songs called the Bārgīts, composed mainly by Sānkaradeva and Madhavadeva. Apart from its poetic beauties, the musical seniority of the Bārgīts is superb. The Bārgīts till today form an independent and rich branch of Assamese classical music.

V. The Eighteenth Century Background

For Assamese poetry, the eighteenth century background was a peculiar one. The Vaisnavite tradition had receded by this time, Sākta poetry sprang forth; new streams of secular poetry developed and the echo of far distant Saffistic thought also began to be audible. In this century, the patronage of Ahom kings to poetry (as well as to other arts) was more promising. Though the Ahom kings had established royal government in Assam, few centuries back, still their patronage to Assamese poetry was only sporadic and temporary; but by this time, the royal family showed much more interest in poetry, like the Koch kings. Not only that, some illustrious kings, like Jayadeva Sigha, Sartra Sigha and Siva Sigha were promising poets themselves.
The poets who worked on the Vaishnavite stream in the eighteenth century and in the beginning part of the nineteenth century include Ramananda Dvija (Śākharadevar Carit), Bholaṇāth Dvija (Śailya-Parva), Dvija Ramananda (Udyoga Parva), Lakshmināth Dvija (Sānti Parva), Kabi Śekhar Bhattāchāryya (Harivamsa), Śri Kanta Sūryavipra (tr. of Tulsīdās's Ram Carit Mānas) and king Jayadhvaja Singhā (Songs). Assamese Vaishnavite poetry of the eighteenth century, though maintained loyalty in form to the Śākharadeva’s ideal, yet changed gradually in content. One such important change is the inclusion of Rādā. Formerly there was no Rādā in Assamese Vaishnavite poetry. Śākharadeva, the great precursor of Assamese Vaishnava poetry strictly followed the ‘non-dualistic’ (advaitavādī) path and in his teachings as well as in poetry left little room for the female principle (Prakṛti). Śākharadeva preached the motto of Maa Sarana (loyalty to one God) and in his Maa Sarana there was little scope for Rādā to come in. Moreover the bhakti of Śākharadeva’s cult was strictly of the dāsya type. The only example of poetry with Rādā theme prior to the eighteenth century was Dvija Kalāp Chandra’s Rādā Vijaya (Rādā Carita). But here the poet has made a nobler experiment. He has portrayed Rādā not as an ardent lover but as an ardent devotee. In eighteenth century Rādā’s fine physique
and amorous love for Kṛṣṇa became the subject matter of poetry. King Rūdrasimha in one of his songs sings of Radha's beauty in a pleasant manner. The lyrical harmony of the song increases its vision of beauty:

GITA (SONG)

Īṣata hasitā badana racitā
kankha-kamalā-kānti,
Dekhi manohara ratula adhara
daśāna mukūtā-pānti.
Dhani rādhe rupa-lavāṇī
Vesā banāvata madana-mohini.
Māni mukutāgana kari abharaṇā
-nilā bastra śāme paire
Sitthete sindure dekhībe rucira
nayane anjana dhare.
Rati rasa āse manata hariṣe
gamana gambhīra āti,
Rādhikāra rūpa bolaya anupa
rūdrasimha mahipati.

= With a mild smile, her (Radha's) face appeared like a golden lotus. Her red lips and white teeth (like the mukta jewels), were very fine to look at.
The damsel Rādhā was exquisitely beautiful.
With her make-up, she paused to charm
even Madana (the god of love).

She adorned herself with the rich jewels;
and she wore a blue body-cloth. She
adorned her forehead with sindura and
her eyes with anjana, and thus she
appeared all the more beautiful.

With a desire for love-making and with
a heart full of joy, she walked in
slow but majestic pause. King Rūdrasingha
says that Rādhikā's beauty has
ne parallel.

Srikanṭa Surya Vipra's translation of Ram Carit Manasa
deserves some special attention. It proves the contact
of Assamese with Hindi. Though Assamese language was
sufficiently rich, by that time, in Rāmāyana literature,
yet, the extreme popularity of Tulsidas's Rāmāyana, perhaps,
inspired the poet Sūrya Vipra to translate the work into
Assamese. Incidentally, it may be mentioned here, that
Raghunāth Mahanta also in this century wrote the Adbhuta
Rāmāyana, with a newer perspective. He tried to unite the
Vaisnava and the Sākta faiths in this particular work. He tried his best to show that essentially there was no difference between Rama (Viṣṇu) and Durgā.

The royal patrons of this time showed special favour to Sākta-poetry. As a result Sākta poetry was sanctified at the cost of Vaisnava poetry. The Sākta-poets advocated worship of goddess Durgā, and they derived materials from even the Sākta-Tantric texts. The royal family not only bestowed favours on Sākta poets, but they themselves composed songs of Sākta sentiments. Rūdra Singha and his brother Śiva Singha wrote some excellent pieces of Sākta poetry. Comparatively, however, Śiva Singha showed signs of better poetic genius as warranted by the following lines from one of his songs:

Sarada pūrṇimā himakara badanī,
Gaṅgala nila nalingidala nayanī.
Gaṅgala locana kājar raṅgī,
Bhābuka mane kuṭilatara bhaṅgī.
Prātarudita rabi sindura kānti,
Sajala mukutāphala dasana pānti.
Sajala jalada iba kundala jvala,
Parimala sōbhita mālatī male.
Her face appeared as bright as the snows illuminated by the rays of the autumn-full-moon. Her moving eyes were like the blue-lotus. On the eyes, moving frequently, the paste of kājal (collyrium) glowed, and in her thoughtful mind mixed feelings reigned. Her vermilion spot shone like the morning-sun. Her teeth shone like new muktā-jewels. Her ear-ring glowed like the lightning in clouds; and she decked herself with a garland of mālatī flowers.

Of other poets with Sākta leanings, mention may be made of Ananta Āchāryya (tr. of Śāṅkarāchāryya's Saundarya-Lahari with the title Ānanda Lahari), Rudrānāth Kandali (Markandeya Candi, Kalki Purāṇ) and Bām Chandra Barpatra (Jagni Tantra). Compared with the corpus of Vaisnava poetry, Sākta poetry is very small in number. Moreover, the absence of an organised approach to popularise the Sakti cult, hampered the growth of Sākta-poetry. The popular Assamese metres like, duladi, lechāri, cabi and pada candas were used enormously in these works. Along with Sakti, Śiva too received sufficient tributes from these poets.
Kaviraj Chakravarty’s Sakuntala Kavya is a nice specimen of the secular poetry done in the eighteenth century. It was a translation of Kalidasa’s Abhijñāna Sakuntalā. The grandeur of the original is rarely traced in this Assamese version. Ramananda Drija’s Mahāmoha Kavya, done in the same period, is the solitary example of allegorical poetry. Dr. B.K. Barua considers the kavya to be a free adaptation of the Prabodha Candrodaya, the most notable allegorical Sanskrit drama of Śrīkrishna Miśra, of the eleventh century. This kavya offers suggestions for high moral and spiritual attainments. The constructional loveliness of the kavya makes it splendid and astonishing. Sakuntala kavya and Mahāmoha kavya were the poetic rendering of dramas, which is somewhat novel in the poetry of this age. It proves that the popularity of kavya superseded the popularity of drama in eighteenth century. Moreover, with Sakuntala and Mahāmoha the dramatic rendering was not very easy. Because the stages meant for the anikiya plays were suitable for religious dramas alone, it would have been much more difficult to enact the secular Sakuntala or the philosophic Mahāmoha in the anikiya-stages. Moreover, as a drama the philosophic Mahāmoha would not
have been accessible to a large number of audience. The poetic rendering of a drama is a novel experiment and even in Sanskrit poetry it is a rare thing.

POETRY OF SUFISTIC ORIGIN

Two love epics Gahapari Upākhyāna and Madhumālati

Kaavyas, composed in the period under review, are recently discovered. While the former goes in the name of Dvijadīn, the authorship of the latter is not yet decided. Both these kaavyas exhibit sufistic thought and outlook. Assam had little contact with the Muslim countries and as such it is not possible that the materials or the spirit of these kaavyas were taken from Islamic poetry of any age. But these two kaavyas are ascertained to be the Assamese versions of the Hindi love epics Mrigāvatī and Madhumālatī, composed by Kutbān and Mañjhān respectively. Kutbān and Mañjhān were Muslim sufī poets of sixteenth century and they composed their kaavyas in Hindi. It is not known clearly, whether the Assamese poets collected materials from the original Hindi epics or had collected the stories from hearsay. Though the plots of both the kaavyas are drawn from distant sources, the poets have spared no pains to set the kaavyas in Assamese colour and environment.
The author of Madhu Malati has tried to set his work in epic environments and has begun the work with Lomas Nuni’s narration in Naimisaranya. Though set in Vaisnava ideal, the erotic essence is greater in these two kavyas. The metrical scheme of these kavyas is in parallel lines with the Vaisnava kavyas; but it is seen that both the poets had less attention to figurative expressions. Thus, we have so far received three major works done into Assamese from Hindi, namely, the Chrita Manasa, the Nrigavati and the Madhu Malati. We therefore, cannot deny the contact and influence of Hindi upon Assamese. It is interesting to note, that Hindi had some strong influence upon north-eastern India, from a distant past.

The last decade of the eighteenth and the beginning decade of the nineteenth century were not happy periods for Assamese poetry. Internal disturbances like the Naworiya rebellions and the Dumiya revolt followed by the Burmese invasion made the country weak. Such a politically disturbed atmosphere throughout the country, naturally, could not provide a happy augury for poetry or other useful arts. In the concluding decades of the Ahom rule, which obviously coincided with the beginning decades of the nineteenth century, no poetry grew up,
excepting some politically motivated folk-songs. The country was made free of the Burmese invaders in the year 1826, with the help of the Britishers. The disasters of civil war and foreign invasion were by now quelled but the country was now the victim of a foreign domination. For a nation with glorious historical past and long enjoyed freedom, foreign domination meant heavy pangs. The first two decades of the British rule, therefore, were a period of total inactivity, in the sphere of poetry as well as in the sphere of other arts. Assamese poetry had to wait for long twenty years from 1826 to begin a new life of grace and dignity under the new literary movement pioneered by the Orumodai, in the light of a new society and newer values.

The modern period of Assam history starts with the annexation of Assam in 1826. This, in fact, marks the end of medievalism in Assamese poetry, because, the Assamese people, and hence poetry too, were compelled to shed the medieval features and to get prepared for newer features, by this time. The modern period of Assamese poetry, as far as literary norms and forms are concerned, begins with the Nemtai in 1846. But the regeneration of Assamese literature in general and poetry in particular, took place, with the starting of the Orumodai in 1846 and virtually it
is the starting point of the modern period of Assamese poetry.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Μεγαλόπροσωπος: On the Sublime.


3. Huan-Tsang visiting ancient Assam (Kamarupa) in the seventh century noticed a considerable difference between the languages of Kamarupa (Kamolupo) and of mid-India. This difference was caused by the independent growth of the Assamese language, separated from the Magadhi Prakrit language of mid-India.

Vide - Samuel Beal's: Chinese Accounts of India; vol. IV, new edition 1958, S. Gupta Private Ltd; Calcutta; p.404.

4. Dr. B.K. Kakati: Aspects of Early Assamese Literature, Gauhati University, 1953; pp. 4-5

5. Ibid.
6. (a) Dr. B.K. Barua: *A Cultural History of Assam*, vol. I, Howgong, 1961; see the relevant chapters.

(b) Dr. B.K. Kakati, (ed.): *Aspects of Early Assamese Literature*, the relevant chapters.

(c) K.R. Medhi (ed.): *Ankāvalī*, Gauhati, 1949; see 'Introduction.'

(d) Dr. P. Goswami: *Assamese Drama*, Calcutta, 1960

(e) Dr. H.G. Bhattacharyya: *Origin and Development of the Assamese Drama and the Stage*, Gauhati, 1968; the relevant chapters.

(f) H.P. Neog (ed.): *Assamīya Sānskrīti*, Assam Sāhitya Sābhā and Lila Degoī music and temple-sculpture, 1966; see the chapters on, painting, music and temple-sculpture.

(g) Indian History Congress, 22nd session, Gauhati, 1960: *Aspects of the Heritage of Assam*; the relevant papers.
7. For example,

Vakul Kayastha's Kitāb Manjari; Subhānkara's work on arithmetic; Guḍāmāni's work on astronomy and the dhol-kholar mālitas composed by unknown poets.

8. The existence of Naraka, is in the borderland of history and mythology. Naraka's name and his heroic deeds are mentioned in the Harivamsa, Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Viṣṇu Purāṇa, Kālika Purāṇa, and the Rāmāyana. Thus he is a mythological hero, but the copper-plate inscriptions:

- of king Bhāskarvarman (Gīthānpur copper plate, verses 4-5)
- of king Banamāla Varman (Tampur copper plate, verses 3-6)
- of king Bala Barman (Nowgong copper plate, verses 3-7)
- of king Atina Pāla (Borgong copper plate, verses 3-7)
- of king Indra Pāla (Gauhati and Guākuchī copper plate inscriptions, verses 4-7)
- of king Dharmā Pāla (Subhānkar, verses 2-3 and Puspabhadrā, verses 1 and 2; copper plates)

speak in one voice; the historicity of Narakāsura. Naraka with his son Bhagadatta is referred to in the Harṣa-Carita also. The Assamese poets accept king Naraka as the brightest luminary of the Prājyotisha sky. In this context
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Lakshminath Bezbarah's poem Baragi Aru Bin may be taken as a typical example. See the chapter on 'Poems with Patriotic Fervour'.

9. Assam had a glorious participation in the freedom movements of the country; during 1942, a number of Assamese patriots sacrificed their lives for the country. See K. N. Dutta's: "The National Struggle for Freedom and Assam's Contribution to it", paper published in the Pragjyotiya, Souvenir, A.I.O.C., XXXII session, Guwhati, 1965, p 60.


(b) Detailed accounts of the Mughal invasions are found in the following sources:


11. Bhagadatta, is referred to thus, in the Nidhampur copper-plate of king Bhaskarvarman:

Tasmād ādṛta Narakād narakādjanisthe nypatirindrasakāh
Bhagadattah kṣyāt jayam vi jayam yuddhi yah saṁāhuṣyata.

(verse No. 5 in the inscription)
"From that Nagasakya, the non-visible of hell, Bhagadatta
the friend of Indra was born. He challenged with pride the
great conqueror Arjuna too, in battle."

Bhagadatta is often mentioned in the Mahabharata (Sahasra
Parvan 26/9; 31/15-16; Udyoga Parvan 4/11). Bhagadatta
displayed great heroicity in the Kuruksetra war (Mahā-
Mahāratha, Droga Parvan, 26th and 27th Adhyayas). For a
detailed discussion on the historicity of Bhagadatta, see
Sir E.A. Gait's: A History of Assam, p 14

10. Sir E.A. Gait: A History of Assam, pp. 16-17

13. (a) Ibid., pp. 22-23
   (b) Bana Bhatta: Harsha Carita, 7th chapter
   (c) The glory and greatness of King Bhaskarvarman are
      well-narrated in the Nidhanpur copper-plate,

Cf.

Saiva Śyāmādevī tasyaunajasājājātodayānānātha,
Sri Bhāskarvarmanā bhāskarāvinatejasā namayanā. (22)
Ekopah hi yah puṁśākṛdayaśvabhilakṣitaṁ svabhijñataṁ
suddheṣu darpanaśvive vahusūrasanam samuccihinsu. (23)
Yasyādhitamānubhāvābhāvābhāvābhāvābhāvābhāvāḥ
Uddhātyaśvivebhūrī simulā vilokhī bhāskarasyeṣu. (24)
Abhayaḥ svāroḥ kalpadrumavat sāydhjībhūrijphalāḥ,
Cayopasrita janatā parivēṣita pādamāle yah. (25)
and also the following prose passage therein.
14. Harakanta Barua: *Assam Buranjī*, preface 4-5, p54
15. (a) Sir E.A. Gait: *A History of Assam*, p 262
   (b) Dr. S.K. Shuyan: *Lasit Barphukan and his Times*
18. Ibid.,
20. Ibid., p 61
21. The present state of Assam had undergone many changes in the past. For detailed accounts, refer to:
   (a) Sir E.A. Gait: *A History of Assam*, pp. 1-35
   (b) K.L. Barua: *Early History of Kamarupa*, 1st edition, Shillong, 1933, pp. 1-60
   The book is written in metrical Assamese, and completed in 771 stanzas.
23. For example, the Kalibhārat and the Belimār Baranjī.
   For a detailed discussion see, chapter iv of the present work.
24. Historians are of one accord that the old Shān province was located somewhere on the north-eastern hills of upper Burma.

25. Dr. B.K. Kakati: Early Assamese Literature, p 2

26. Cf. "Siṭo caṇḍālaka gariṣṭha māni,
Yāra jihṣāgre thāke Hari-Vani.
Seṁse kulīna Vedaka buje,
Yāhāra mukhe Harināma si je.
Caṇḍāle Harināma lāve mātra,
Karive uḍīta yaṭṭāra pātra."


== I regard that caṇḍāla superior, whose tongue is ever busy in chanting the name of Hari. Him I regard to be of a noble caste and an expert in the Vedas, whose lips are constantly uttering the name of Hari. On the very recital of the name of Hari, the caṇḍāla turns worthy of performing the yaṭṭas.

27. Dr. M. Neog: Śrī Saṅkaradeva, Gauhati, 1952; pp. 30-35
28. (a) Dr. B.K. Kakati: *Aspects of Early Assamese Literature*, p 4

(b) D. Neog: *New Light on History of Assamīya Literature*, Guwahati, 1962; pp. 57-60


Dr. Sukumar Sen: *Gṛyāgiti Padāvalī*, Eastern Publishers, Calcutta, 9; 1956

30. Dr. M.M. Sharma: *'Durgā Durgatīnāśinī'*, *Vide - Milācal*, vol. iv, no. 2, October, 1966; pp. 7-8. For the traditional interpretation of the significance of the verse, see, M.M. Basu's *Gṛyā Pada*.


32. Kṛṣṇā first appears as a teen-aged girl and with the progress of the story, she develops to the full-bloom of her youth. The poet gives sensuous as well as sensual descriptions of her love with Kṛṣṇa. For the absence of Kṛṣṇā in Assamese poetry, during Śaṅkaradeva's time, see p 58 of the present work.

33. Dek-Carit, Bhattacharyya Agency, 1st edition, Dibrugarh, 1931
34. Ibid., pp. 26-27

—if a man possesses hira (diamond) and manik (pearl) in large numbers, but has no food; then his death is near at hand. A man's sole hope lies on the bullocks and the ploughs; one who does not possess them is doomed. When a man wastes the month of Jaistha without tilling lands, how can his cultivation prosper? Seeds sowed on the month of Sravana do not yield high-paddy, and planting of seedlings in Sivina is useless. In the months of Sivina and Kartika water should be preserved in the fields, with as much care as a king keeps his queen.

For further informations about Dak, see,

H.C. Goswami (ed.) : Assamya Sahityar Chunuk, vol. 1, University of Calcutta, 1929, pp. 121-133

Dr. B.C. Birkar : 'The sayings of Dak,' paper incorporated in the Souvenir, Pragjyotisha, xxii, A.I.O.C., Gauhati, 1965; pp. 20-23


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Han Barua: *Folk Songs of India*, Indian Council for Cultural Relations, New Delhi, 1963


H. C. Goswami: *Asamiya Sahityar Châneki*, vol. 1 pp. 1-133


36. "Sarute Îśvare mari nileheten
putithaleheten gatat,
Etiya Îśvaraie yatanâ bhûnjaicâ,
eiehen yauvanar dinat."

37. "tenejan Îśvare pîriti karile âmino nakarim kiya'.

38. 'tomâlai caote japana deote
vindhile aghaiyâ hule,
tomâr mano gale, moro mane gale
ki kariba kalîtar kule.'

The particular beauty of this stanza lies in its directness of expression, straight and clear-cut ideas, and positive
and direct appeal to the heart. The poem is greatly human.
To a lover the barriers of caste and anything is futile. The
similar established here is very appealing. The lover's feet
is pierced by a prickly thorn when he tries to cross a stile;
the inner meaning of these words indicate that a lover has
to suffer heavily during his preparation to obtain his cheri-
shed damsel.

39. 'āhate salābar pāt
    āhāre sāhāi bāraṇṭi salāle
    lale rāgā rihā gāt.'

40. 'hāti pānī khāle hoāṅge doāṅge
    ghorāi pānī khāle rai,
    dhane pānī khāle pīrīṭī mījārāt
    pārāte khopānī lai.'

41. Attempts at careful and detailed analysis of the Bihu
    Gāts are made in the following books:
    (a) Dr. P. D. Gosvami: Folk Literature of Assam, 1954
        ———
    (b) S. Biswas: Harvest Festival and the Bihu
        Songs of Assam, Gauhati, 1964
        ———
    (c) Lila Gogoi: Assamīya Lūkā Sāhityar Mēprekha,
        1967
42. The most popular theme of Śiva and Pārvatī, so intimately connected with the marriage songs, is modeled after the classical texts, like the Kumārasambhava of Kālidāsa. On the day of the marriage the bride is referred to as Uma or Pārvatī, and the bridegroom as Hara or Śiva by the singers. Hara-Pārvatī or (Uma-Śiva) are the principal personalities of Kumārasambhava. The description of Lord Śiva, adorned with snakes and ashes is very lively. Because of this peculiar appearance of Śiva, the singers are afraid, lest "Pārvatī would not be given to him".

Cf., Biya-Nām, by Annada Devi Borkataky, Barkataky Company, Jorhat, 1952, p 42

43. the batten of a loom
44. a weaver's quill
45. a cotton-gin
46. a spinning wheel
47. a spinning reel
48. a thread-winder

49. Translation adapted from Dr. P.B. Goswami's book, Folk-Literature of Assam, B.H.A.S., 1954; p 48. The article mentioned above belong to the aideo's loom. For the aideo her loom is as dear as her life itself. So, the mother is ready to give every weaving instrument to her
daughter as dowry. It might be mentioned here, that the Assamese women are adept weavers. From their early teens Assamese girls learn weaving and they retain this virtue life-long. Mahatma Gandhi on his first visit to Assam, was deeply impressed by the fineness of Assamese cloths, shown to him. "Every Assamese woman knows weaving. For a girl, who is not trained in the art of weaving, marriage pauses a problem. Assamese women weave dreams in cloths. I was shown some specimen by Sri Tarun Ram Phookan. The beauty of these cloths is certainly unparalleled." Observed the Mahatma. Vide, Manohar Assam by Mahatma Gandhi, incorporated in the book Rāṣṭrabhāṣā Part II, A.R.P.S., Gauhati, 24th edition 1967.


51. Phulbiri was a Sākta centre, and its location is believed to be near present Nārāyanpur in Lakhimpur district.

52. The Āi-nāms were brought under a single collection by D.Neog in his book, Bhog-Jara, Gauhati, 1927.

53. The translation is adapted from Dr. P.D.Goswami's book Folk-Literature of Assam, 1954, p 41
54. The translation is adapted from D. Neog's book: New Light on History of Assamīya Literature, p. 51

55. "......... the Assamese prefer moving about in the little canoes to travelling by land; the watermen seem greatly to enjoy these boat-trips for they are always singing songs as they paddle along." Major John Butler: Travels and Adventures in the province of Assam, Smith, Elder and Co., London, 1856; pp. 18-19

56. The reference here is to the Rūpāvatara of Kalidāsa, which "is a highly poetical description of the six seasons into which classical Sanskrit poets usually divide the Indian year. With glowing descriptions of the beauties of Nature, in which erotic scenes are interspersed, the poet adroitly interweaves the expression of human emotions". A.A. Macdonell: A History of Sanskrit Literature, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1962; p. 284


58. "In the tale of Kamalā Kūvari, a king has a dream that unless he sacrifices his wife to the Water Goddess, water will not well up in a tank which is
being dug by his subjects. Kamalā Kūwarī steps into the tank and water begins to ooze. The king cries out to the victim in the tank:

O lady of my heart, Kamalā,
How much is the water?

Kamalā responds:

O lord of my heart, king,
To my ankle is the water.

Thus the drama goes on — asking and replying — till the queen is swallowed by the rising surge of water. In a variant the queen is carried away by the Water God on a golden barge. The tale has the peculiar evocativeness of a sad lyric. The motifs of sacrificing a queen in this manner and her being carried off by the Water God are also found in the East-Bengal folk-play Kamalā rānir Gān edited by Dr. D.C.Sen." Dr. P.D.Goswami : Ballads and Tales of Assam, p 243

59. Jogesh Chandra Tamuli (ed.) : Asamiyā Loka-Gīti Samgraha,
Asam Sāhitya Sabhā, 1960; pp. 124-137

60. Ibid., pp. 138-156

61. Ibid., pp. 64-86

62. Ibid., pp. 70-86

These Gīts have great metaphysical implications. The songs describe the body on the analogy of a building and explain
the eyes, ears etc., as the doors, reminding us of the conception of 'navadvārapura' of the Gītā, v, 13. Inside the construction Pūrnānanda Hari, the Supreme-self, which is all Bliss, resides.

63. Ibid., pp. 108-109
64. Ibid., pp. 87-90
65. During periods of drought Assamese village-people celebrate marriage of frogs, in a pompous manner, which, they believe, results in an immediate down-pour of rain.
68. The Assamese Vaisnava poet sings:

(a) Svabhāve Īśvara Kṛṣṇa deva sarbottama,
   nāhi āna dharma tāne bhaktika sama.
   Mādhavadeva, Ratnāvalī; 950

69. H.C.Goswami, (ed.): Asamīyā Sāhityar Chāneki,
   vol. 1, University of Calcutta, 1929, p 36
The folk-poets have described Kānāi's different roles, of a cow-herd boy, a boat-man, a dancer, a naughty boy, a killer of demons and a relief-giver to the needy and the oppressed.
70. Ghumaṭi yāyore are Kānāi,
    Hure Kānakhowā āse,
    Sakala śisura kāṇa khāi khāi
    Āṣay tomāra pāse.

Vide — Śridhar Kandali’s: Kānkhowā, Jorhat, 1950; p 7

71. Dr. S.K. Bhuyan (ed.): Badan Barphukanar Git, Gauhati, 1975

72. (a) Benudhar Sharma: Manirām Dewan, Assam Jyoti, Gauhati
    1965, pp. 182-183
    
    (b) Dr. P.D. Goswami: Ballads and Tales of Assam, pp. 27-28

73. Ballads and Tales of Assam, p 29

74. Ibid., pp. 26-27

75. Ibid., p 30

76. Ibid., p 55 Dr. Goswami is inclined to show Nāhar as
    a social rather than a historical figure.

77. Manirām Dewan, p 182

78. Syed Abdul Malik: (compiled by) Asamiya Zikir āru Zāri,
    Gauhati University, 1958

79. Ibid., p 43

80. Phāṭek-ghhar kāše kāše
    campā nāgeśvar,
    Sio campā hāli kare
    Gandhi namaskār.

J. C. Tamuli: Asamiya Loka-Gitī Samgraha, p 121

82. Vāmānaya, (the left hand procedure representing the Tantric way of worship as against the cult of pure devotion) is a term frequently met with, in Assamese literature. For details, see—'Naya āru Vāmānaya,' an article by S.N. Chaliha: *Asam Sahitya Sabha Patrika*, vol. xvii, 3rd issue, pp. 4-6

83. Dr. B.K. Barua and Dr. M. Neog (compiled by) *Vabrūvāhanar Yuddha*, Gauhati, 195?

84. Jaiminiyāsvamedhagrantha, Ganapat Krishna press edition, Saka era, 1826

85. Dr. M. Neog (ed.): *Lava Kusar Yuddha*, *Asam Sahitya Sabha*, Jorhat, 1955

86. The constant hunting at Jaiminiyāsvamedha for subject-material, shows the popularity of *Jaiminiyāsvamedha*, at that time. "The popularity of the *Jaiminiya Asvamedha* story was unabated at the courts of semi-independent rulers and zamindārs during the seventeenth and the early eighteenth century. Under the patronage of the Malla kings of Bishnupur and of other zamindārs on the borderlands of Bengal several persons wrote poems on the theme." Dr. S. Sen: *History of Bengali Literature*, Sahitya Akademi, 1960; pp. 115-116
87. Jayadratha Vadha is incorporated in the volume *Asamiyā Sāhityar Chāneki*, pp. 318-25


89. Ibid., p 112

90. *Aspects of Early Assamese Literature*, p 31

91. *Hasting's encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 11, p 412. This is obvious, that the Snake-worship grew up, as a result of primitive men's fear for snakes, but divinity was imposed upon the Snake-Goddess to bring her within the Hindu pantheon. Hence, the paternity of Siva has been imposed on her.

92. Dr. B.K. Barua and Dr. S.N. Sharma (ed.): *Manasā Kāvyā*, Gauhati, 1951; preface, v


93. *Manasā Kāvyā*, pp. 31-35; pp. 52-55

94. Collected by K.R. Medhi (edited by Dr. B.K. Barua and Dr. S.N. Sharma) incorporated in the volume *Manasā Kāvyā*.

95. Ibid.,

96. (ed.) Dr. M. Neog, Gauhati, 1952

97. (ed.) Dr. M. Neog, Gauhati, 1951

98. There are also different versions of the same song.
99. Tr. by Dr. M. Neog, vide, Aspects of Early Assamese
Literature, pp. 55-56

100. op. cit., p 47

101. Dr. B. K. Barua: Śaṅkaradēva Vaiṣṇava Saint of Assam,
Assam Academy, 1960; p 80

102. H. N. Dutta Barua (ed.): Śrī Śaṅkara Vākyāṁrta, 1953
p 191, verses 1429-1434

103. Tr. adapted from Dr. B. K. Barua's book — Śaṅkaradēva
Vaiṣṇava Saint of Assam, pp. 28-29

104. Śrī Śaṅkara Vākyāṁrta, p 145, verses 854-856

105. Śaṅkaradēva Vaiṣṇava Saint of Assam, pp. 26-27

106. Śrī Śaṅkara Vākyāṁrta, p 265

107. Tr. adapted from Śaṅkaradēva Vaiṣṇava Saint of Assam,
pp. 57-58

108. H. N. Dutta Barua (ed.): Barīt, 1953; p 111

109. Tr. adapted from New Light On History Of Assāṁyā Lītera-
ture, p 239

110. We have deliberately made our study on Vaiṣṇavite poetry
brief, because in the recent years a great number of
scholars have discussed Vaiṣṇavite poetry in detail.
For further details, see:

(a) H. C. Goswami: Assāṁyā Sāṁtyar Ānēkā, 1929

(b) D. N. Desbarua: Assāṁyā Bhasā āru Sāṁtyar Buraśī, Jorhat 1933
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(c) D. Neog: New Light On History Of Assamiya Literature, 1962

(d) Dr. B.K. Kakati: (ed.) Aspects of Early Assamese Literature, 1953

(e) Dr. B.K. Barua: Sankaradeva Vaisnava Saint of Assam, 1960

(f) Dr. M. Neog: Sri Sankaradeva, 1952

(g) Dr. S.N. Sharma: Assamiya Sahitya Itibritta, 1959

(h) Dr. S.K. Bhuyan: Studies in the Literature of Assam, 1956

(i) Kumud Chandra Mahanta: Yadunandidevar Git, 1954

(j) L.N. Bessbarua: Sri Sankaradeva aru Madhavadeva, Calcutta, 1928

(k) K.R. Medhi: Sankhavali, 1948

Mahanupur Sankaradeva Sani, Guwahati, 1949

111. Sankaradeva Vaisnava Saint Of Assam, pp. 54-55

112. Dr. S. Sen: History of Brajabuli Literature, Calcutta University, 1935; 1st Chapter.
113. Quoted in, B.M. Nath's introduction to his edition of Kāliya Daman Nāt, p 50. This verse proves that Śaṅkaradeva had equal love for all the different sections of his readers.


115. Janambhāmi, Bihu special, April, 1988

116. Dr. S.Sen : History of Bengali Literature, p 5

117. As in Mādhavadeva's Cēr-dharā and Pimparā Gucūvā.

118. S.P., II. 76

See, Dr. V. Raghavan : Bhoja's Śāṅgāra Prakāśa, Madras, 1963; p 367

119. Dandī : Kāvyādāsa, I. 103

120. H.N. Dutta Barua (ed.) : Kānągosā, Malbari, 1962, p 1

121. (a) Dr. S.N. Sharma : 'Mādhavadevar Rājunāt Bhakti Rasa', Prabandhāvalī, Gauhati University, 1960; p 166

(b) Dr. B.K. Kakati : 'Gra śīstu Rupa', Purani Assamīya Sahitya, 1980, pp. 44-45

122. Purani Assamīya Sahitya, p 44

123. Ibid., pp. 20-25

124. Ibid.,

125. Ibid., pp. 55-63
126. Radha, with her fine physique and passionate amours for Krishna, developed fully in the Brahma Vaivarta Purana, a composition of the sixteenth century. Hence, it is natural, that Assamese poets were influenced by it in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The amorous love of Radha-Krishna, of course, was recorded in earlier non-canonical texts like Kala's Gatha - Saptasati, (1/69) and in Prakrita Pingala (1/5).

Somadeva's Yaatilaka also refers to Radha. Radha-Krishna's love was however presented with due dignity by Jaydeva in his beautiful love lyrics of Gita-Govinda, written in the twelfth century.

127. Purani Assamayā Sahitya, p 42
128. Dr. M. Neog (ed.) : Saṅcayan, Sahitya Akademi, 1959; p124
129. Yadi Rāma Kāla, tumb Kāli jāme sāra, Amata kahibe mātrī, nālāgaya āra. (572)

See the introduction to Dr. B.K. Barua's (ed.) : Adbhuta Ramayana, Gauhati University, 1962; p 111
130. Saṅcayan, p 130
131. For details see,

132. (ed.) Dr. M. Neog, Gauhati, 1955
133. (ed.) Dr. B.K. Barua and Dr. S.N. Sharma, Gauhati, 1959
134. B.A. Gait: History of Assam, 1963; p 340